



Insider's Look at Grand Canyon

Webisode # – In Search of the four sisters Transcript

Emily: Well, hello there. My name is Ranger Emily Davis. This is a Webisode of Insider's Look at Grand Canyon. I'm here with Ranger Patrick Gamman today and we are looking for something called the Four Sisters. We are halfway out on the Hermit Road in order to try to find the Four Sisters. Now, Pat, what can you tell me about the Four Sisters? I've been here three years and have no idea what they are.

Patrick: Well, we're out on our way to Hermit's Rest, which is west of the Grand Canyon Village. What was going on almost 100 hundred years ago, was that there was some trouble. There was struggle to get into the canyon. To get visitors, to get guest, into there via the Bright Angel trail. And in response to that struggle this whole road was made. Through the Santa Fe Railway, the Fred Harvey Company, they had a development company and they built a road out to Hermit's Rest. Today, the road is a little shorter than it used to be, it's about seven miles out there, and out at Hermit's Rest- which we're going to go to and check out- that was sort of a way station and people did actually rest there, take it easy, and there was something out there to see called the Four Sisters. They used to actually hand out a pamphlet about it, but we're not even close to there. We've still got, like, four more miles to get out there. I wanted to show you right here is this rock wall. Is like I said, the Santa Fe Railway and the Fred Harvey company, to develop things out at Hermit's Rest, they needed to build a road. And so it's neat that we have a trail up there. It was just dirt until about a year ago. That's been paved- it's a part of our Greenway Trail. But this rock wall is almost 100 years old. And this is what they used to build up the road to get people out there by carriage or by early car. And the next stuff I'll save for when we're at Hermit's Rest.

Emily: Well, we've now stopped at Hermit's Rest. It was originally built by Mary Colter in 1914 and it has her unique flair for style here, using some of the local ingredients, if you will, that are found in the Grand Canyon. Now, Pat, why is it exactly that we are stopped here today?

Patrick: Well, this historically was important for our journey that we're on today. You know, looking for the Four Sisters when people would rest here, there was actually a little brochure about the Four Sisters. It's something I'm trying to track down now, we'll see if I actually do find it. But, with the Four Sisters, is that this brochure would say, "Hey. You're here, you're resting here. You know, you could go see these four arches or four natural bridges." But it's a little drainage with these arches, or natural bridges, as you will. And this was sort of the jump-off point because as we look over the edge, that's the journey, they're going to take down. They would first take that down by mule to Hermit Camp. And then as time would go on, in the 1920s, they built a cable down there and they would actually disassemble a Model T, reassemble it, and have it down there. People could go, you know, several hours by mule- like six or seven hours by mule- or 26 minutes in a cable car- in a bucket- down to Hermit Camp. So that was the big journey they were on, but while they were resting, if they were, like, "No. I'm pretty antsy. I could go out for a little walk," well, this right here, Hermit's Rest, is that jump-off point. It was a jump-off point 100 years ago for these visitors and today, it's the jump-off point for you and me.

Emily: Excellent, Pat. And one last question while we're here at Hermit's Rest: Why, exactly, is it called Hermit's Rest? Was there somebody called 'The Hermit'?

Patrick: That was his nickname. There was a guy named Louis Boucher and you know, before there was tourists a lot of folks that were coming out here looking at this place was actually miners back in the 1880s, 1890s. And Louis Boucher was one of those. He had an encampment, if we look across over into the drainage over there, what is now called Dripping Spring. He had a little encampment there and he'd even developed what is called the Silver Bell Trail, which was another way into the canyon. And then what he had called Long Canyon and we now call Boucher Canyon. It was an area where he used to brag that he would have, you know, tomatoes in the summer and the winter. Why is he called the Hermit? Well, it's not that he didn't like people, it's that he was a bachelor. And he lived in the canyon on his own and that's why they called him the Hermit. But he did end up helping a lot of folks get access to this part of the canyon.

Emily: So, Pat, we've descended into the canyon on the Hermit Trail. Now we're about a quarter mile into the canyon, but we've stopped in this side drainage. Is this a stop on our way to find the elusive Four Sisters?

Patrick: Yeah, it is. I mean, the thing is, this historic Hermit Trail that goes and you get these incredible views of the Canyon, of Hermit's Canyon, especially. But we've actually gotten off the trail, which is okay here. We're in sort of a mixed forest. This is called a Great Basin forest. It's got pinyon pines and junipers. We've gone down in the drainage. Now remember, we're looking for these things that are arches and they're in a drainage and its water that formed them. So, we're going to actually have to go up this drainage and start exploring the different side places to find this. That's why we've gotten off the trail and into the drainage. So, that's why we had to be very careful on this journey. You know, on the trail we were pretty safe, down here we're very safe.

Emily: Great. And let me just tell you I'm very excited to find the Four Sisters. Having been here almost three years now, I have no idea what these are and can't wait to see them.

Patrick: I think you're going to like this, Emily, I think you're really going to like it. Okay, let's keep going. You ready?

Emily: Absolutely!

Emily: Well, Pat, we finally made it to the Four Sisters, and let me tell you, I am impressed. Like I said before, I've been here about three years and had no idea these even existed. I'm blown away by where we are right now and what we're seeing. This is impressive, these four arches. Now, I know you have a background in geology, so can you tell us a little bit about how these arches got here and are they arches or are they natural bridges?

Patrick: That's an excellent question. First of all, this is limestone here. Our youngest rocks at the park, the Kaibab Formation, which is what we're sitting on now, about 270 million years old. And it's limestone, from when this was a shallow sea. So, limestone naturally under, you know, slightly acidic rainwater, easy to dissolve. That's why, surprisingly, some of our lower layers have more caves. People don't even know Grand Canyon has at least 400 caves. But right up here on the surface, I have a hard time whether I'm going to call the Four Sisters arches or natural bridges. A natural bridge means that water goes underneath them. This is a drainage. Water does go through here when snow is melting. So there's not a lot of water going through, but over time, it made all four of these sisters. And actually, there was a fifth sister. We can even see some remnants of when this used to be bigger. This could even have been sort of a cave at one point, but just the cracks got eroded away. So it's, geologically it was limestone. And right here, I even can see some fossils of sponges and of brachiopods. So that's what made this.

Patrick: So, Emily, even though you're the interviewer, I want to turn this around on you for a second. What are your impressions and what do you think about when people come here, what are they usually thinking about Grand Canyon as opposed to this?

Emily: It's been my experience that when people come to the Grand Canyon, they're waiting for a collection of rocky views from the rim. Maybe they're even looking for a place to buy a postcard, and a place like this is just evidence that there is more going on in the area than what the common impression of Grand Canyon is. And what's so interesting to me is that we're in this drainage right now. Water created this amazing place where we are, or helped create it, at any rate, and water is one reason why the Grand Canyon is so spectacular. So, it's all tied in to water and geology. And just being able to find something like this in our backyard here at the Grand Canyon is a really great experience.

Emily: So, to kind of wrap things up, Pat, why is it that you brought me here today and what is it that you would like people to know about the Four Sisters?

Patrick: Well, the Four Sisters is just a neat place to go. You know, it's not an easy journey. We've got to go through the forest. We've got to find our own way. There's not an easy trail here. It's a piece of the history. But the Four Sisters to me really represents...I always like to say Grand Canyon is full of treasures. They're hidden treasures. They're everywhere. You've got great, big commanding views, but if you look closely, there's a lot more than meets the eye here at Grand Canyon. If anything embodies that idea, it's the Four Sisters. So, when folks come here, what I'd like them to remember is keep your eyes open- not just when you look at the Canyon, but turn around. You might see elk, you know, you might get to see a condor, or if you walk off into the forest maybe you'll find something like the Four Sisters.

Emily: Thank you for joining us today on this Webisode of Insider's Look at Grand Canyon. This has been Ranger Emily...

Patrick: ...and Ranger Pat. We'll talk to you next time.

Emily: Have a great day!