

# Unsung Heroes of the Canyon Country #1

## PETE PARRY

*Pete quietly took on the D.O.E and the planned Canyonlands Nuclear Repository...*

*AND WON.*

Jim Stiles

When I was in my early 20s, the National Park Service hired me as a seasonal ranger at Arches National Park. I had virtually no qualifications for the job, other than an unbridled enthusiasm for the canyon country and a self-righteous desire, inflamed by my third reading, cover-to-cover, of Ed Abbey's "The Monkey Wrench Gang," to be the Protector and Guardian of my beloved red rocks.

I started my tour of duty at the Devils Garden campground and lived in a small rat-infested trailer that many tourists mistook for Abbey's; I once hung a sign that read, "This is NOT Edward Abbey's Trailer," but the gesture was futile. Tourists continued to knock on my door.

I managed to stay out of trouble for about six weeks. Then one day I got riled

about an article that appeared in the local weekly, The Moab Times-Independent, and immediately put pen-to-paper with a caustic reply. I can't recall the specifics but the issue of development and paving roads probably played a role in my passion. My fiery letter to the editor was so annoying that the editor and publisher, and to many the moral compass of Moab, Sam Taylor, devoted his entire editorial that week to respond. Sam whacked me about the ears for the better part of 500 words. He often referred to me as "this young ranger" who had only been living in Moab and Southeast Utah for the better part of four months, who was now taking time out from his busy schedule as a left-wing, bearded, hippie ranger to tell all the good residents of Grand County how to live their lives.

It was the first time I had ever been forced to consider my own mortality. I was sure someone would shoot me.

The day after the T-I hit the newsstands I wandered into the visitor center and could not help notice that most of my co-workers were avoiding eye contact. Not a good sign. Finally, the park's unit manager, Larry Reed, spotted me and called me into his office. He had a copy of the paper rolled up in his hand.

"You sort of went overboard don't you think?" he asked. I didn't know what to say and before anything came to mind, Larry shook his head and said, "Pete wants to see you."

rangers with big mouths. I expected the worst.

I was escorted into his office where I found Pete behind his desk, reading or re-reading my letter. He motioned me to sit down, studied my rant a bit longer and finally laid the newspaper aside. I looked hard for a hint of his mood but the man was inscrutable. He gave me that even gaze...

"Your letter to Sam is getting a lot of attention this week," he said. "Today, I went to the Chamber of Commerce luncheon, out at the Sundowner, and they even read your letter there. How can I put this...your letter was not well-received by the Moab business community. I think there might be one or two of them that would like to hang you...at least by your thumbs."

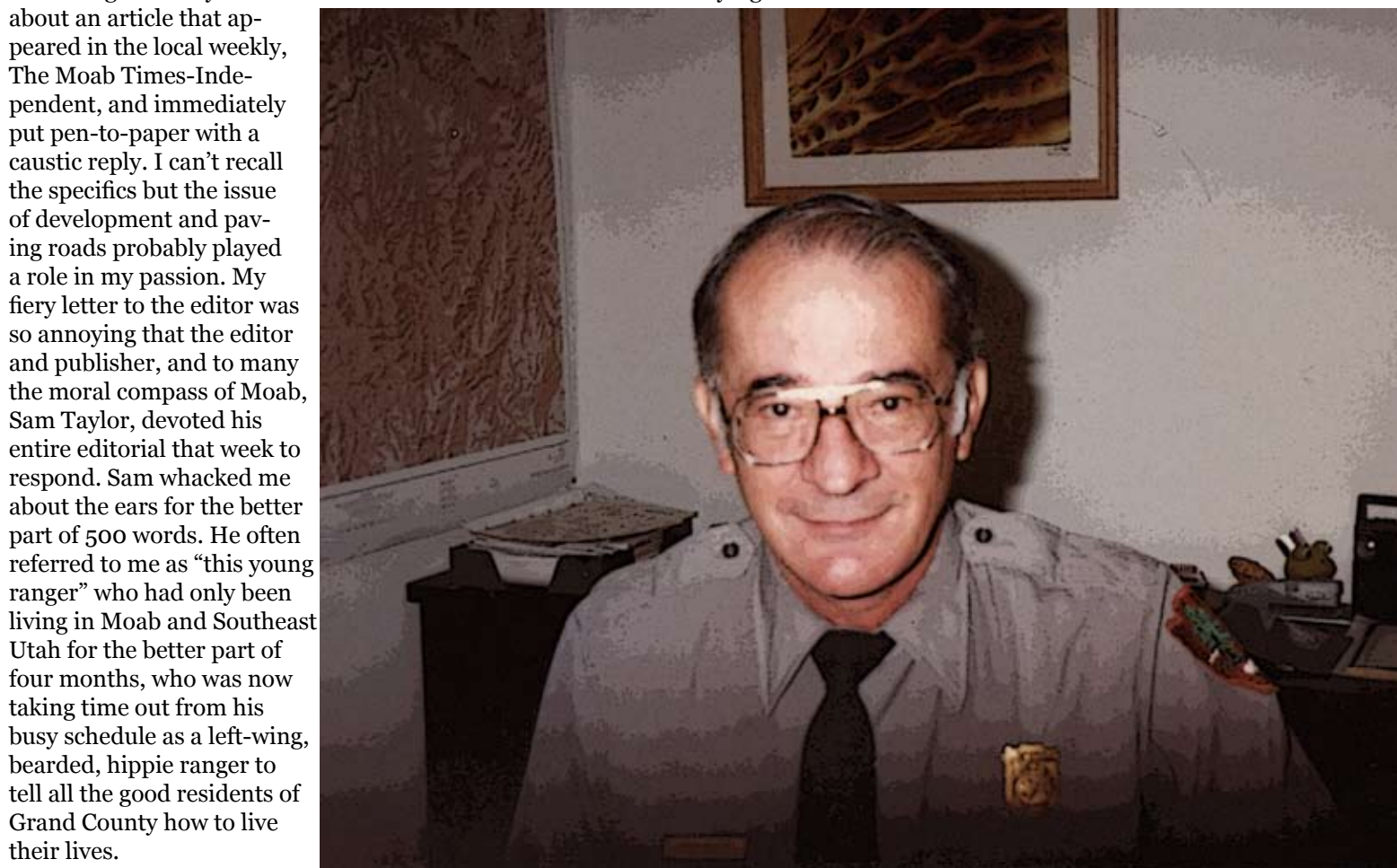
All I could do was grimace. At 22, I thought I might even start to cry and Pete sensed I was losing it. Pete measured me slowly. Had I suffered enough? Pete decided that I had. "Well," he said chuckling, "First of all we're not going to fire you. These kinds of things do make my job harder, but I'm not ever going to censor any of you when it comes to expressing an opinion."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"But I am going to give you some advice," he added. Pete leaned back in his chair. "I've been known to write a letter like this myself from time to time. Sometimes I know it's worth the effort and sometimes I know I'm just blowing off steam. So here's what I do—I write that letter, get it all off my chest. And then I take the letter and put it in a drawer for 24 hours. If, a day later, I still want to mail it, I do. But it helps to give yourself a

day to think things over, to let the cooler side of your own brain have a chance."

It was advice I'd remember and appreciate, if not always apply, for the next 30 years. And it was the first of many conversations I'd have with my fearless leader and the man I've been able to call my friend for the past 35 years. One afternoon last month, Pete and I got together to talk about his time at Canyonlands. Few realize how dramatically his leadership altered the future of the canyon country. Some, even today, still bitterly disagree with the direction Pete took the park. But for most of us, Pete was a visionary.



**Pete leaned back in his chair. "I've been known to write a letter like this myself from time to time.**

**Sometimes I know it's worth the effort and sometimes I know I'm just blowing off steam.**

**So here's what I do—I write that letter, get it all off my chest. And then I take the letter and put it in a drawer for 24 hours. If, a day later, I still want to mail it, I do. But it helps to give yourself a day to think things over, to let the cooler side of your own brain have a chance."**

"Pete?" I gulped. "Pete Parry?" I sank into a chair. Pete Parry was the group superintendent of Canyonlands National Park, Arches National Park and Natural Bridges National Monument. He had come to canyon country only a year earlier and so far, nobody really knew what to make of him. Pete was quiet, even taciturn, maybe a bit remote...very different from the first Canyonlands super, Bates Wilson, who had only retired a couple years earlier. Where Bates was gregarious and social, Parry tended to be the master of understatement, and from my lowly perspective, a man who most likely didn't care for skinny

Pete Parry came to Moab in 1975. His Park Service career had begun in the late 40s when he took a seasonal job at Grand Teton National Park. Pete recalls, "I never considered working anywhere else. I liked what the Park Service did. I liked who they were...and besides I met my wife in the Park Service." He and Joyce met at Natchez Trace in the mid-50s and married in 1957.. Less than twenty years later, they found themselves in this remote but controversial part of the Colorado Plateau.



The timing of his arrival could not have been more significant--- SE Utah's national parks were experiencing the most turbulent period in their history. On a wider scale, much of the rural west was in a near state of revolution—for millions of rural westerners, the Sagebrush Rebellion was a serious movement. No place was more divisive or more visibly in revolt than southeast Utah.

Until the 1960s, westerners had, to a great extent, a free run of the public lands that spread almost limitlessly across the west. Environmental restrictions were few and enforcement of what rules did exist was almost non-existent. But the 1964 Wilderness Act began to change all that. The new law called for the establishment of wilderness areas across the country. A decade later, in 1974, the Federal Land Management Policy Act (FLPMA) was introduced in Congress and enacted into law two years later. FLPMA created the mechanisms to find and designate wilderness. It also provided a new set of regulations and proposals for the management and use of federal lands across the country. These new laws were handed to the agency in charge, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In addition to a wilderness inventory, new mining and grazing rules were established, road rights-of-way were scrutinized. And for the first time, a serious effort to enforce these regulations was put in motion. The politics of the West would never be the same again.

At BLM's Moab office, district manager Gene Day attempted to steer the

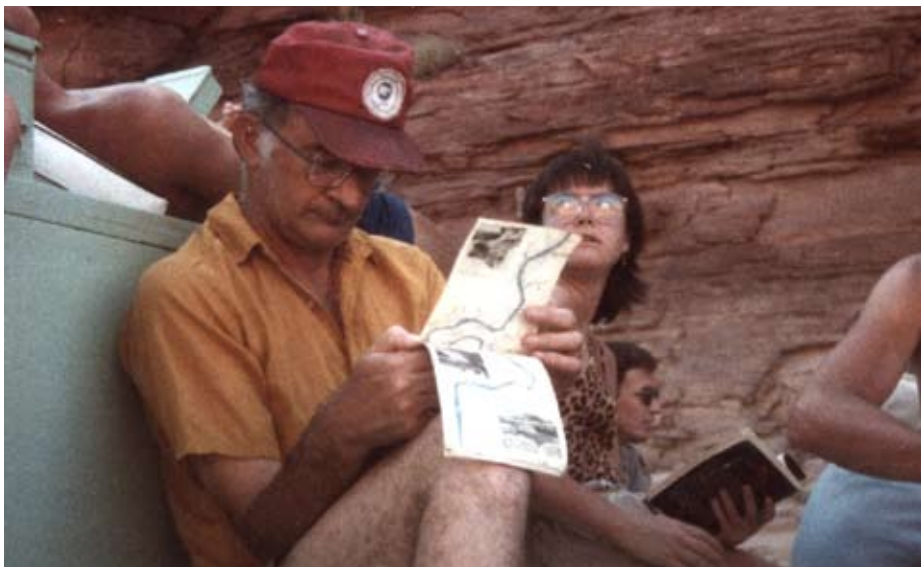
**The timing of his arrival could not have been more significant--- SE Utah's national parks were experiencing the most turbulent period in their history. ..for millions of rural westerners, the Sagebrush Rebellion was a serious movement. No place was more divisive or more visibly in revolt than southeast Utah.**

agency and rural Utah into this new age, but his efforts were doomed from the start. After a century of laissez-faire treatment from the feds, BLM's new high profile restrictions set poorly with the populace. Fighting back, the county commissioners in SE Utah, according to writer Ray Wheeler, "had a strategy that offered the elegant simplicity of a sumo wrestling match." When they didn't like a new rule, they simply disobeyed it, encouraging their constituents to do likewise. When a local canyon was closed to vehicular traffic in 1979, the county fired up its bulldozer and opened it back up again. The BLM got a court order, the county ignored it. On July 4, 1980, county commissioner Ray Tibbetts manned the D9 Cat himself and tore down the BLM blockade.

Manager Day lashed back, attacking the local politicians and their followers in the local paper. The Washington Post wrote a piece about the uprising and identified gen day as "The Most Hated Man in Southern Utah." Eventually he was transferred .

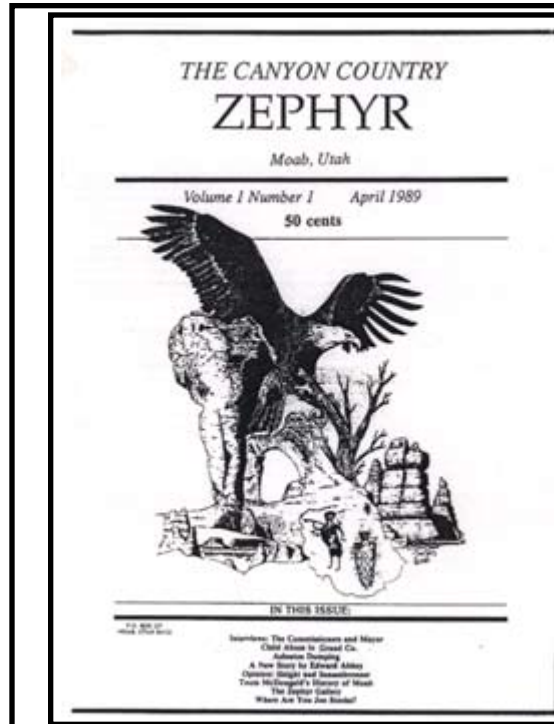
Into this fever-pitched battle came Pete Parry. As Pete says, "I had no idea what I was walking into." While much of the anger was aimed at the Park Service's federal cousins at the BLM, the NPS faced challenges of its own. Pete took the reins at Canyonlands in mid-1975. He arrived in Moab at a time when attitudes toward the parks and the environment were changing nationally.

National Parks had always been developed with an eye to accommodate the



greatest number of visitors. It was, for many park managers and for the agency, a measure of success. A park that failed to show steady annual increases in park visitation had a problem and efforts to boost tourism were encouraged. Parks became known more for their spectacular paved roads and lodges than their scenery. But in the 70s, as environmental issues became more prominent and as efforts to preserve parks in a more pristine state were embraced, the Park Service began to re-evaluate its objectives. At Canyonlands, that was a problem.

Canyonlands National Park had been established barely a decade earlier, in



The first issue of THE CANYON COUNTRY ZEPHYR went to press on March 14, 1989. It contained Ed Abbey's last original story.

We have a small cache of that first issue available for purchase.

\$55 including postage.

send a check or money order to:  
**THE ZEPHYR**  
PO BOX 271  
MONTICELLO, UT 84535

our pal  
**BILL BENGE**



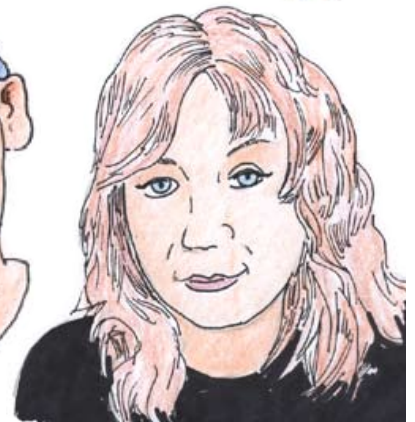
**GREG CAUDILL**  
Louisville, KY



**OMAR TATUM**  
Louisville, KY



**MATT ROBERTS**  
Austin, TX



**SUE GREEN**  
Flagstaff, AZ

**BILL STOKES**  
St Petersburg  
FL



**SAM CAMP**  
Big Bar, CA



**LEWIS PAISLEY**  
Lexington, KY



**Chris Carrier**  
Paonia, CO