

# HUMAN HISTORY IN CONFLUENCE PARK



## Anasazi and Paiute Indians

More than a thousand years ago, an ancient people lived here. Today they are referred to as the Virgin Anasazi of southwestern Utah. The area offered them shelter, water, a nearby hot spring, and a habitat full of wildlife. They lived in and near small caves at the base of the south-facing cliffs where during an archeological excavation, evidence of their lifestyle revealed weapons, tools, and crude ropes made of hair and rawhide. Victor Hall, author of *History of LaVerkin*, wrote, *During the 1930s, a children's outing wasn't complete unless a couple of arrow or spear points were found. A metate, or*

*grinding stone, [could be] exposed when ploughing . . .*

Later inhabitants, the Southern Paiute, referred to as hunter-gatherers, lived along the banks of the streams. They practiced limited irrigation agriculture, raising corn, squash, melons, gourds, sunflowers, and more. Their traditional patterns were threatened when Anglo-European explorers and settlers began to arrive.



## Anglo-European Explorers

The Dominguez-Escalante Expedition was the first to document the location of this area. On October 15, 1776, while following Ash Creek, they recorded, . . . *Here we found a well made mat with a large supply of ears and husks of green corn which had been placed on it. Near it, in the small plain and on the bank of the river, there were three small corn patches with their very well made irrigation ditches...* . We continued south downstream (still on Ash Creek), and after going half a league swung to the southwest, getting away from the river; but a tall embankment without any [possible] descent made us backtrack . . . until we returned to the river, which here flows southwest. Here two other tiny rivers enter it, one which comes from the north-northeast (LaVerkin Creek), and the other from the east (Virgin River). The latter consists of hot and sulphurous waters, for which we named it Rio Sulfureo. Here there is a beautiful grove of black poplars, some willow trees, and rambling vines of wild grape. . . We crossed El Rio del Pilar (Ash Creek) and El Sulfureo (Virgin River) near where they join, and going south we climbed a low mesa between outcroppings of black and shiny rock. After climbing it we got onto good open country and crossed a brief plain which has a chain of very tall mesas to the east. . .



## Mormon Settlers at the Confluence in the 1800s

Parley P. Pratt, seeking developable land for Mormon settlement expansion, led an expedition to the confluence in 1849. Mormon pioneer John D. Lee led an exploring party through in the summer of 1853. One of Lee's party wrote:

*We then got some Indian guides, who brought us to the jerks (confluence) of the Virgin, Levier Skin (La Verkin), and Ash Creek where we found a number of Indians raising grain. Their corn was waist high; squashes, beans, potatoes, etc. looked well.*

Nearby Toquerville was settled in 1858. Its residents were the first pioneers to utilize the confluence property for large cultivation projects. Levi Savage Jr., who moved to Toquerville in the early 1870s, farmed in the confluence area where he grew corn, sugar cane and lucerne (alfalfa). He refers to this farm as the River Field in his journals and tells of hauling hay, planting carrots, bringing home wood, cutting lucern, and repairing fences. Two entries speak to both the trials and the delight of his "River Field."

*Dec, 24, 1889 Willie and Riley went to the River Field on horseback; found our ditch badly damaged by the late high waters, but no worse than it had by former floods.*

*May 6, 1891 The young folks had a picnic at the mouth of Ash Creek.*



The early inhabitants and visitors to this confluence saw it as home, a route of passage, a resource for hunting wildlife, or an opportunity to sustain life beyond the canyon rim. Through the next 100 years, the confluence canyons hosted a rudimentary power plant, a pecan orchard, fields for pasture and alfalfa, a dairy farm, multiple small crop fields, and numerous picnic sites.