

Zion

Zion National Park, Utah, U.S.

—

September 19, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

After moving pretty fast for a few days we were ready for a break. While it's not exactly secluded, quiet or anything of things we generally like, the logical place to stop in this area is Zion National Park. I have some history in Zion, my family spent many a spring break camping here, hiking up the canyon walls. It, along with Canyonlands and Sequoia, are among the places I remember best.

The Zion of today is so different from the Zion I grew up with they may as well be entirely different places.



The view from the Hidden Valley trail.



When my family came here in the 1980s few other people did. We'd leave Los Angeles around noon on the Friday before spring break, drive all afternoon (in a 1969 truck and camper by the way) show up at Zion late in the evening and get a campsite no problem. No one went to Zion.

Today, everyone goes to Zion. Well, actually Americans don't from what I could tell, but everyone else does, especially impossibly hip European couples in rental vans. These days not only can you not just

show up on a Friday and get a campsite, you'll need to get in line at about 5:00 AM even in the off season to even think about getting a campsite. Which, after spending a night in the nearby hotel, I did. The longer I sat in line, the more irritated I got. About what I'm not sure — too many people? That's sort of a strange thing to be irritated about.



Sunrise from the campground line.

Perhaps it was the lines I thought. Lines are degrading to the human spirit, they ask that we do something totally counter to all of biology, which freely mingles, exchanges information and materials. Lines are a purely economic performance, an adherence to an outdated idea of how the world works, an idea that no longer matches the facts on the ground, so to speak. This is perhaps why the entire concept of waiting in line, or queueing as the British would have it, is a purely western phenomena. Travel anywhere in Asia and you find that things get done, tickets are sold, events entered into, all without anyone lining up.

Still, that's probably not what was irritating me. In the end I decided that what was irritating to me was that the Zion of my childhood is gone and no one can get it back. It's just gone. Forever. So for that matter are the bluffs along the bay where I grew up, the hills along the coast and myriad other things that don't really bother me, for whatever reason Zion does.



The last day we were there I took the bus up to the end of the canyon and speed hiked to the entrance to the narrows (3 miles round trip in 45 minutes, not bad for an old man). On the way back it finally hit me what irritates me about Zion — my kids will never get to experience the place as I did.



The narrows, just me and 300 of my closest friends.



It's too late for my kids to see the Zion I saw. That was then. That is gone. That is past. They will never get to hear the silences up on the rim of the canyon, listen to the strafing whines of Rufus hummingbirds, the wind in the junipers, the quiet thunk of boot soles on sandstone.. Silence in Zion is a thing of the past.

As Kurt Vonnegut would say, *and so it goes*.



Intrepid hikers

One afternoon Lilah and Elliott and I hiked part way up the Hidden Valley trail. I would guess that, in the mile and half or so that we hiked, we saw probably 80 people. A steady stream of people in fact, most of them seemingly startled to see a man in flipflops with a boy on his shoulders and girl holding his hand attempting the same trail none of them embarked on without half of REI adorning their persons. The looks made me laugh. As politely and discreetly as I could. I have never seen so much hiking gear in my life. All for people hiking on paved trails. Irony doesn't even begin to cover it. Several times in Zion I considered buying some stock in REI, before remembering that, as a co-op member, in effect, I already own it.

It's too bad Zion isn't a co-op. But alas, I do not own Zion. I have no more claim to it — or every bit as much depending on how you want to look at it — than anyone else. It's too bad it has become what it is, and let's face we're dancing around the real issue — overpopulation, but whew is that whole other post — but at this point Zion is what it is and it will probably continue to be that for my lifetime. Maybe in my next life, after the oil is used up and things settle back down I can follow some strange, half-remembered dream of red rock canyons and end up here again, alone, in silence and stillness.

The second day Corrinne's parents joined us and, despite what the above might sound like, we enjoyed the park. Crowded though it may be, Zion is still a beautiful place. After three nights though, we were definitely ready to move on.

