

WOLFE RANCH

National Historic District



Trail Guide

Arches National Park, Utah

1. Parking Lot

Have you ever wished to be somebody else? Just for a little while, perhaps? Now is your chance. For a little while, you can be John Wesley Wolfe. You lived here--in 1888. You have come back for another look around.

You--John Wesley Wolfe--were a Civil War veteran. You came West because of health problems related to a war injury. You left your wife and three children in Etna, Ohio. Only your eldest son, Fred, was with you.

You were looking for a place to raise a few cows. You found good grass, some of it high enough to bale. But you needed something else--water. Water for the stock, and for you and Fred.

You found the needed water here, in Salt Wash. You noticed some bright green trees--willows. Willows grow only where there is abundant water. You investigated. There was plenty of water, all right, but do you remember the taste? Ugh! Good enough for the livestock, maybe, but not for people! Then you noticed another patch of lush greenery high up in the rocks, and you found the spring. Good, cool, sweet water. Water for you and Fred. You decided to stay.

It wasn't much of a ranch. You and Fred lived in a shanty cabin overlooking Salt Wash. You built a corral for your horses. And a root cellar to store your food. Supplies posed a problem. Staple groceries you could order from the Sears Roebuck Catalog to be shipped by rail freight from Chicago. Every three months you wagoned 30 miles to Thompson Springs to pick up your Sears order at the railroad station--and your Civil War pension check at the Post Office. Your pension was \$30.00 a month--a lot of money in 1888. It kept you in staples, with a little splurging money left over.

But you couldn't live on basic staples. You needed some fresh vegetables. A garden, perhaps. The sandy soil wasn't like the rich loam of Ohio, but grass and sagebrush seemed to thrive. If it just had water, it might grow a garden.

You solved that problem with a dam--a dirt and log fill across Salt Wash, just below your cabin, to capture water in a pond. You ran the water down a furrow to your garden site. What a garden that was! Root vegetables...pumpkins...melons.

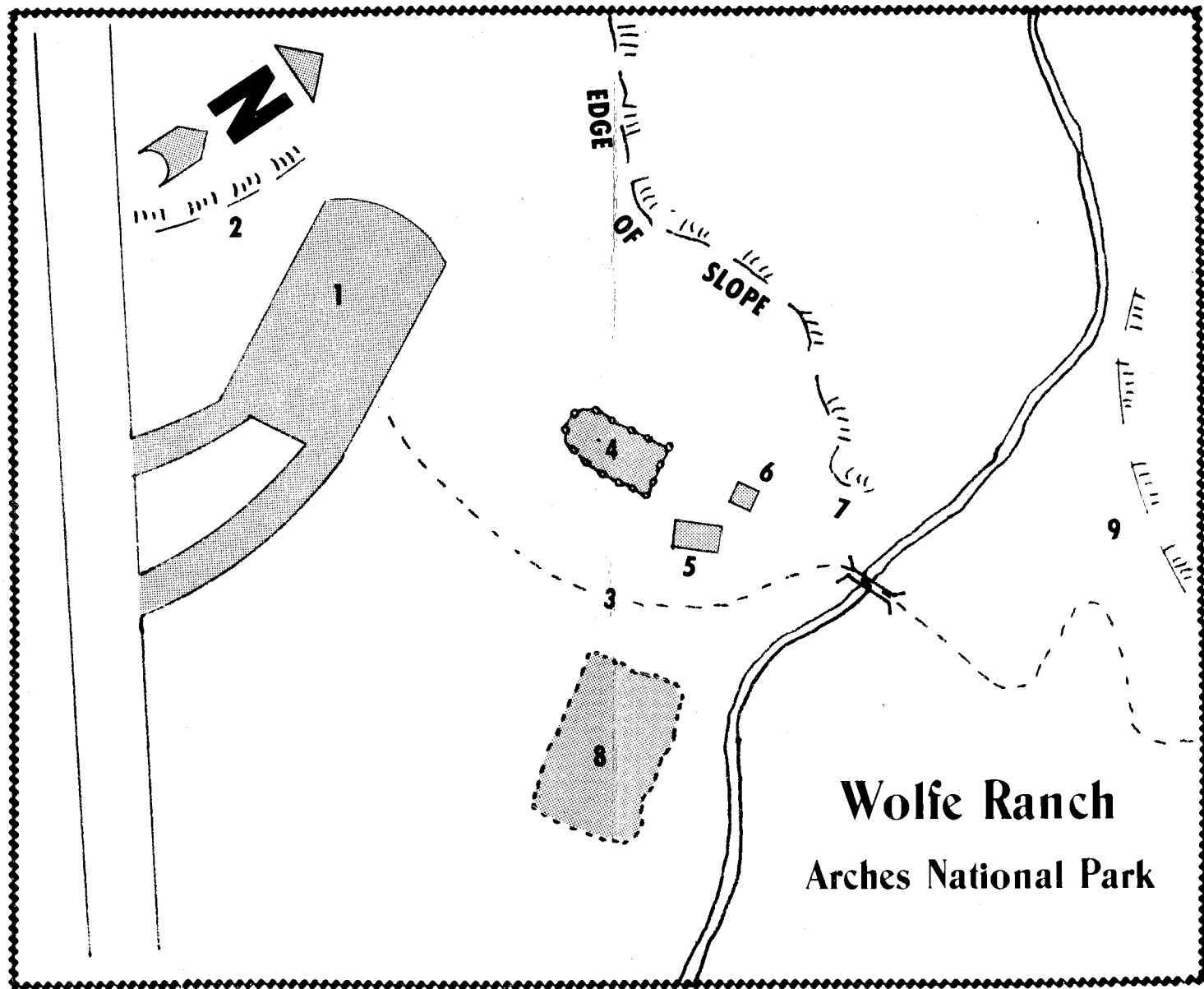
And that was your ranch--a cabin, a root cellar, a corral, a dam and a garden. And acres of free grass for your cattle to eat. Are you ready for another look? Come.

2. Glauconite Hill

Here's the green stuff! You thought it was copper when you first saw it. It's only glauconite, of course. Mostly potassium and iron oxide. Too low grade to mine. But it's better than sand to cover a roof. Remember how your grandchildren, Esther and Ferol probed in the green shale hunting glauconite nodules for marble games in the sand?

3. Trail to Cabin

There it is! There is Wolfe Ranch! It doesn't look the same, does it? Everything is missing. There is no grass. Your old cabin is gone--washed away, perhaps. The dam is no longer there, either. **Nothing** grows where the garden was but clumps of desert sage. But **the corral** and the root cellar and the new cabin seem to be intact. Shall we go look around?



4. The Corral

How weathered and old it looks. This corral was an important feature of Wolfe Ranch. You kept your saddle horses here, and, herded the range cattle into the corral during fall roundups. Calves were branded here, and there was a butchering rack in the little branding corral. Hold your sides, John Wesley Wolfe. You are going to get a good laugh. Remember when Ed Stanley tied a wild range cow to a corral post and tried to milk her? Stubborn Scot, your son-in-law. Needless to say, the family was back on canned milk. Let's walk toward the cabin and meet the Stanleys.

5. The New Cabin

The new cabin was built in 1906 when your daughter and her family, the Ed Stanleys, came from Ohio to live on the ranch. Remember how your daughter, Flora, cried when she saw your old cabin? She didn't like the dirt floor. So you promised her a new house, with a wood floor. Anything to encourage her to stay. It was the first time you had seen her since she was a child.

The Stanleys' children, seven-year-old Esther and five-year-old Ferol, could have cared less about a floor. They were more interested in wading in Salt Wash. How you loved those grandchildren! They walked in your footsteps while they lived on Wolfe Ranch.

In spare time, between more pressing chores at the Ranch, Mr. Stanley and Fred located logs for the new cabin and dragged them, one by one, behind their horses to the building site. It took almost a year to complete the new cabin. See how they notched the logs so the corners would lock securely?

Come closer, John Wesley Wolfe. Examine the chinking between the logs. Remember how Esther's and Ferol's little fingerprints were imprinted in the dried mud? The roof frame is insulated with bark stripped from juniper trees. A top layer of green sand from the glauconite hill makes it weather proof.

Let's peek in the door. Tiny, isn't it? Do you wonder how the Stanley family of four managed here for over two years? And you all cooked and ate in here. A black cast-iron Sears stove doubled for cooking and heat. Sometimes you took Esther and Ferol rabbit hunting and fried just the legs for them. Mrs. Stanley made rabbit potpie out of the rest. Good stuff, that potpie! Fred and Mr. Stanley could eat a whole potful when they came in from riding the range.

The wood floor is still here, polished smooth from your sand-covered shoes. You wagoned those boards all the way from Thompson Springs. Then you moved the stove from the old cabin to the new cabin, and the Stanley's new home was completed.

It wasn't always easy for Mrs. Stanley to accept your way of life. Two whole years without talking to another woman! Remember how she disliked eating on tin plates? That was why you dipped into your splurging fund and ordered her a 100-piece set of blue dishes from Sears. You gave the little butter plates to Esther, and she became the best mud pie chef in the West. Mrs. Stanley took the children's picture at a tea party in front of the new cabin. Poor Ferol. Esther's red sand fudge looked so real he really tasted it.

Mrs. Stanley's camera was another surprise from your splurging fund. You ordered it from Sears, complete with a developing kit. The photograph she took of Delicate Arch is one of the earliest known photographs of the now-famous arch.

6. The Root Cellar

A gourmet's nook. On the hottest summer day, it provided cool storage for the canned goods and staples you ordered from Sears. In the wintertime, the root cellar protected edibles from freezing. When you butchered in the fall, you stored dried jerky and corned beef. Root vegetables from your garden kept through the winter in the cellar. You stashed away a melon for a Christmas treat each year. Remember watching Esther and Ferol slip into the root cellar for a strip of chewy jerky to nibble on between meals? This root cellar was a vital part of the Wolfe Ranch operation.

7. The Old Cabin and the Dam

The land has changed. Sand dunes have blown in. The old cabin was here, on the bank of Salt Wash. The dam was just below. It's hard to visualize it now--the wash has moved. A channel change. Your little dam caused that--it interfered with the water flow of the meandering

stream and the water found a new route. The dam is gone--but it was always washing out. Remember how furious you were every time a gully washer came roaring down Salt Wash and swept away your dam? Still, those floods flushed the silt out of your pond.

8. The Garden

The garden was down yonder, south of the cabins. You spent a lot of time hoeing the weeds and keeping the water running down the furrows. Irrigating is difficult in sandy soil. Water saturates the sand, and it seems to melt away in chunks. You were continually repairing your little ditches. But what a garden that was! Mrs. Stanley photographed Esther sitting on a 50-pound pumpkin. Now the garden is filled with desert plants. All it took was some water and a lot of work to grow the garden. But think what it would take to restore it now! You would have to rebuild your dam, dig ditches, clear the land, plant the seeds, and once again hope the deer and the rabbits let you have your share.

So much for the garden. Let's move on, John Wesley Wolfe. Look! Someone has built a foot bridge!

9. Petroglyphs

These same Indian petroglyphs intrigued you while you were here. Who were these artists? You used to wonder--people still do. Like you, they were here. Just a few hundred years earlier.

Other men used this land, too. Remember the small bands of Ute Indians that came to camp and to trade hand-made blankets for garden produce and meat? And the prospectors, with their long strings of pack burros? You bought one of the burros for Esther and Ferol. They named their burro "Jenny," and from that time on, one or the other of the children could usually be seen on Jenny's back.

Men used the land after you left. Wolfe Ranch served as a line camp for cattlemen. The new cabin was used for storage of grain, salt and other supplies. Then sheep were brought in, and within two years, the grass was gone. In spite of its ruggedness, this land is extremely fragile. Had your demands upon it been heavier, it might not have sustained you for over twenty years.

Summary

It's time to start back now. You can see Wolfe Ranch from here. It was never much of a ranch, as ranches go. But it sustained you and Fred for over 20 years, and the Stanley family of four for two of those years. You could not live here, self-contained, today. Too much is missing. Still, what is left of your early-day ranch will provide insight into the causes and effects of man's demands upon nature. In time, perhaps we can learn to live in harmony with the land that supports us. Wolfe Ranch is a legacy. Because you were here.

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