



Aren't the People Great!

By Mark Wade



Famous radio personality Paul Harvey once paid a visit to some of Utah's natural attractions and subsequently expressed his feelings about what he had experienced. To paraphrase, he said, "Yes, the land is majestic, but aren't the people great?" He then proceeded, on nationally syndicated radio, to laud the warmth, kindness, patience, and sincerity of the people he encountered on his visit.

Describing Beauty To The Blind

The booming words "Pull hard." echoed across the canyon. I scanned the terrain as two completely blind and five brain injured individuals—and their numerous escorts—trekked up a long, rocky slope toward the apex of the Cohab hiking trail in Capitol Reef National Park. The clarion call "Pull haaarrrrd." continued regularly with the strong rolling Rs of the accent of a lanky Irishman, blind from birth, who ardently encouraged us all on the difficult ascent.

This experience was the culmination of a yearlong planning effort by many people in Utah to bring a group from Ireland in order to draw attention and raise funds for the sight impaired and brain injured of that country. At regular intervals along our seventy-mile, eleven-day trek, our blind participants would stop and ask their escorts to describe what they saw. I frequently stood in awe at the attempts to describe the shapes, colors, and diversity of the terrain by which we were surrounded. These visually challenged individuals frequently reminded us to listen, smell, touch, and even taste elements of the surrounding environment. The thing that stood out was the sheer happiness each of these individuals expressed in their ability to circumvent their disability and experience, with the assistance of others, what might otherwise not be possible.

Memories of this have come back to me recently as I had the opportunity to hike in the outdoors with a friend who is losing his sight to diabetes. Despite the challenge, this accomplished landscape artist finds joy just being in the outdoors. The sun, the breezes, the aromas, and the sounds of the desert come alive for him. On the trail, all it takes from me is an occasional steady arm by his side and some stepping instructions through the rough spots, and he's good to go. Just being together in the outdoors is natural therapy for us both.



Enabling The Disabled

"May we help?" Those words came from Ben and Carolyn, just married and on their honeymoon from Washington, D.C., as we recently ventured up from the depths of the main amphitheater of Bryce Canyon National Park. Our team was taking turns pushing a wheelchair but not the kind you may be thinking of. Sam Durst has cerebral palsy, and with the assistance of a newly invented, non-motorized all-terrain vehicle, Sam is now able to go to places he never could experience otherwise. This trike, with large balloon-like tires, is capable of gliding over varying terrain and will even float in water. "It's amazing to see how it changes not only the wheelchair user's life, but also the lives of their family and friends," says Ryan Grassley the director of marketing for Extreme Motus, the company that created this device.

Hikers from around the world watched smilingly as Sam passed by; others spoke encouraging words or even cheered as we took our downward journey on the Wall Street Trail. One couple from Colorado and another from Florida offered helping hands when the wheelchair wouldn't fit through one narrow spot on the Queens Garden Trail, and later, others used nylon straps to pull the modified wheelchair on the uphill trek. A highlight came when a young woman descending the trail called out, "Is that Sam?" Sydney from Cincinnati, Ohio, gushed with enthusiasm as she said, "I thought that was him; I love him. I follow him on TikTok. He makes me so happy."

It's the People

The sheer joy and enthusiasm with which Sam was greeted along our journey was beyond heart-warming: It was indescribable. As the world continues to open up and return to normal after the pandemic, we can all take moments to reflect on Paul Harvey's statement: "Aren't the people great!"

Learn more about Sam and his wheelchair at ExtremeMotus.com.



About the Author

Mark Wade is active in hiking, writing, photography, and videography. He works as a tourism marketing consultant, for which he has won numerous awards. He is a weekly guest on the KSL Outdoors radio show. Mark is the former Director of Tourism for southwestern Utah and has served on the board of directors for various tourism associations.

Wade's Walkabout
Finding Meaning and Healing in the Outdoors

Follow Mark's outdoor escapades...
www.RoadTrippinWithBobAndMark.com

Also on Facebook and Instagram