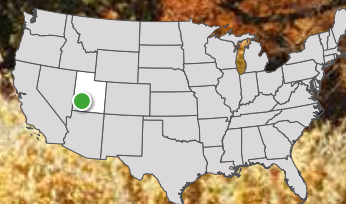


*'There is an elegance to their forms
which stirs the imagination with a
singular power ...'*

Clarence E Dutton

Zion National Park



Towers of the Virgin

Heaven on earth

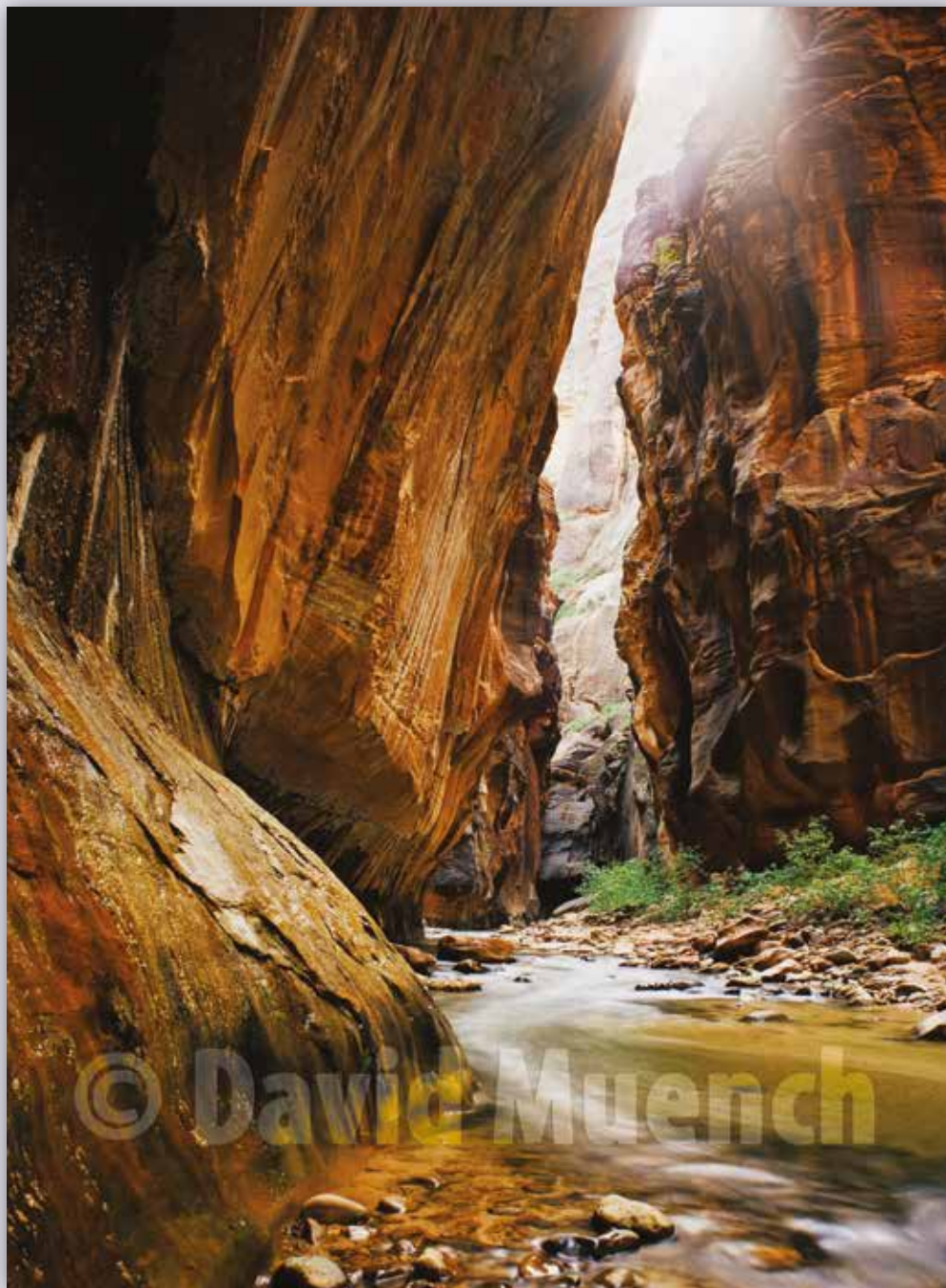
As we set out from Springdale, dawn was bathing the spires of the West Temple, The Sentinel and the Towers of the Virgin in a golden, glowing light. It augured well for a day when we were going to explore the inner sanctuaries of Zion, the 15-mile-long, half-mile-deep canyon cut into the Kayenta and Navajo sandstones of the Colorado Plateau.

Formed over millions of years by the uplift of the surrounding plateau, aided by the tremendous erosive power of the North Fork of the Virgin River, Zion Canyon was named by the first Mormon settler, Isaac Behunin in the mid-19th century. It was the nearest thing to heaven that he had seen, so he named it after the city of his God.

The exalted names given to the golden, red and white sandstone walls and bristling peaks reflect the reverential awe in which they were held by those first visitors: East and West Temples, Great White Throne, Altar of Sacrifice, Court of the Patriarchs, Organ, Pulpit and the vertiginous viewpoint of Angel's Landing.

The latter, a 5790-foot-high spur which hangs over the Upper Canyon, was given its celestial name by a Methodist minister, the Rev Frederick Vining Fisher on a day trip in 1916, after one of his companions had commented: 'only an angel could land on it'.

Angel's Landing on the north western rim of the canyon was our destination, and we set off from the site of Behunin's log cabin at Zion Lodge along the river to The Grotto, and over the sturdy metal footbridge across the rushing waters of the Virgin River.



Virgin River Narrows

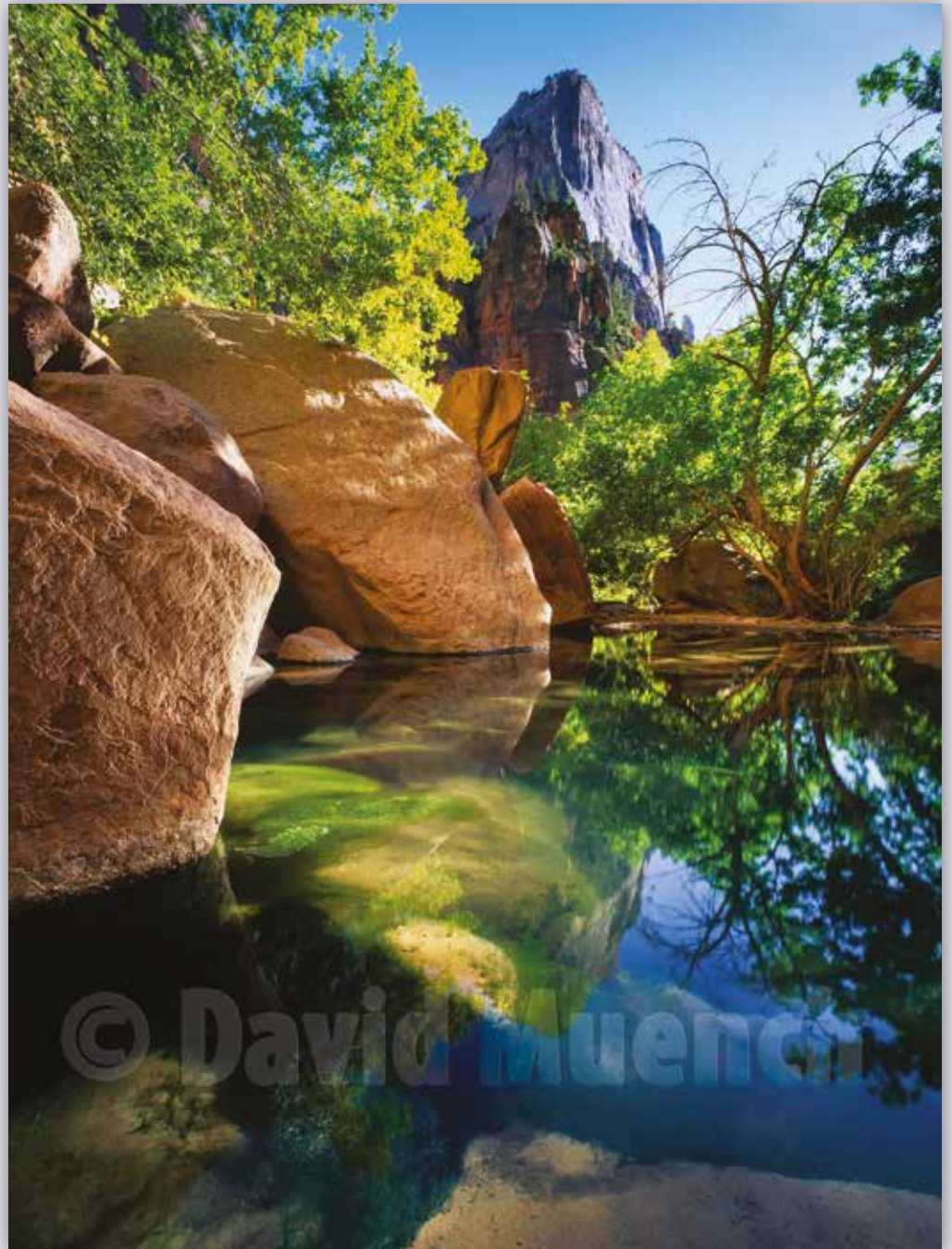
The West Rim Trail climbed gently through the cottonwoods, with impressive views of the towering 6744-ft-monolith of The Great White Throne (also named by Fisher) on the opposite wall, and the winding course of the Big Bend in the Virgin River below.

The trail now steepened between the steep, overhanging walls of the appropriately-chilly Refrigerator Canyon to reach the 21 symmetrical, 60° switchbacks affectionately known as Walter's Wriggles. This magnificent piece of footpath engineering was named after former park superintendent Walter Ruesch, who oversaw its construction in 1924.

Reaching the junction of trails at Scout's Landing, some of us were relieved to find that the east fork to Angel's Landing was closed due to rockfalls. The park literature warned that this 'strenuous' knife-edge ridge had long drop-offs, and should not be attempted by anyone fearful of heights. The warning sign provided confirmation, welcome to some, that we could go no further.

But the views from Scout's Landing were reward enough, extending down on the dramatic fin known as The Organ and across to winding Echo Canyon to the north and over the awesome void to the white-capped Great White Throne.

The Great White Throne, perhaps Zion's most impressive and photographed monolith, provides an instant geology lesson about the sedimentary nature of the Zion's sandstones. Topped by a



Weeping Rock Pool, Great White Throne