THE CAMPFIRE

Published monthly for members of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior

The campfire is interwoven into the fabric of America. Around it gathered the early explorers, the trappers, the fur traders and the soldiers. Today it connotes companionship, relaxation, and recreation in the out-of-doors. This monthly bulletin provides a figurative campfire about which we may exchange ideas that seem to us worth expressing and sharing.

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"Tuesday, September 20 -- * * * Last night, and also this morning in camp, the entire party had a rather unusual discussion. * * * Mr. Hedges then said * * * that there ought to be no private ownership of any portion of the region but that the whole of it ought to be set apart as a great national park * * *

From Nathaniel P. Langford's diary covering the 1870 exploration of the Yellowstone country.

It is around the campfire that men tend to grow thoughtful, and to share their thoughts with their companions. At the historic Yellowstone campfire, recorded by Nathaniel Langford, serious thought and earnest discussion among a group of far-sighted men resulted in a determination to work for the establishment of a world's first national park.

In The Campfire, we propose to supply our fellow workers --companions in the task to which we are all devoted--the best thought that comes to our attention related to that task and its objectives. We believe that such material, which often only a few of us see, will stimulate the thinking of all of us, to our own benefit and that of the public. It seems to us particularly fitting that our first issue should deal with the first Director, Stephen T. Mather, through extracts from Steve Mather of the National Parks, by Robert Shankland, just published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

We hope that all Service employees, as they come across material which may be suitable for use in The Campfire, will cooperate by submitting it to this Office.

Newton B. Drury

Director

STEVE MATHER OF THE NATIONAL PARKS

By Robert Shankland

Lane...got a letter of complaint--something about the national parks--one morning in the fall of 1914. He saw them every day. But this one was signed "Stephen T. Mather." Steve Mather. Lane had known him thirty years earlier in California...The Secretary replied: "Dear Steve, if you don't like the way the national parks are being run, come down to Washington and run them yourself."

MATHER AND PRIVATE LANDS IN THE PARKS

Before the Giant Forest purchase, high words had been hurled against the private holdings there for twenty-five years, but they had led to no action. Mather started from the gates, and went right through, repossessing not only sequoias but giant sugar pine, yellow pine, and fir. The program required altogether $175,000, of which the only public money was the $50,000 for the Giant Forest. Besides that and the National Geographic Society's $20,000, $50,000 came from Mather himself, $15,000 from George Eastman, $10,000 from the people of Tulare County, $6,000 from State Senator W. F. Chandler of Fresno, and the balance in smaller lumps from the blandished ("Wouldn't you like to come along with a thousand to help me clean this up?"). To be blandished by Mather was, in nine cases out of ten, to succumb. He rarely failed to crack anybody he really wanted to crack. And yet once in a while he did fail--for instance, in the course of his Sequoia drive, with a rich old man who owned forty park acres, fine material for a donation. A luncheon was arranged in Los Angeles for seventeen potential public benefactors, all of whom, like the old man, were marked up for something specific. As soon as the food had been dispatched, Mather buckled to business, passing around hortatory announcements and declaiming in his most compulsive style. The old man leaned back in his chair, scanned the handouts, listened to the oratory, and picked his teeth in self-possessed silence. His sixteen fellows did their duty, but not he. Desperately Mather stretched the party out for two extra hours, hoping to wear the venerable miser down. Nothing doing. Mather got the forty acres a couple of years later, but he bought them.

William Randolph Hearst was an important landholder at the Grand Canyon. He owned Grandview Point, sticking out over the Canyon, and a second property somewhat farther back. Mather, while fixing to bring the Grand Canyon into the national park system, heard some weighted words about the Hearst holdings; specifically, a polite warning to desist unless his plans included the protection of the Hearst view. So into the law went a clause prohibiting construction between the rim and any private property near the rim. Three or four years afterward, in the heat of an elimination-of-private-lands campaign, Mather was granted, thanks to his old friend, Arthur Brisbane, an audience with Hearst at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. He permitted himself certain hopes for Hearst's generosity, but the publisher, *** demurred. "My Grand Canyon proper-

ties," he said, "are as safe with me as they ever would be with the government." He intended to build a museum for his Indian collection at Grand View and he was sure it would be in architectural harmony with other park structures. On his second property, he said, he would build a home. He never got around to building either. All he built was a cabin, which as defense against condemnation proceedings, he hired a man to inhabit; Senator Walsh, who owned a place in Glacier, had made arrangements exempting from condemnation any private lands in the national parks containing occupied dwellings. Secretary Ickes finally had the Hearst properties bought with public-works money in the late thirties. By that time Hearst had lost interest.

Mather looked at the private lands as a weak brick that might some day collapse the whole national park structure. He was in New York with Gilbert Stanley Underwood one summer morning to see a man of national park property about a donation, but picked up only a telegram of regrets: his man had been detained out of town. Having a free day ahead, Mather turned to Underwood and asked him if he had ever been to Coney Island. Underwood never had. "Well, let's go, then. I'd like to show it to you as an object lesson." They spent the whole day out there. They wandered light-heartedly among the concessions, taking a little rifle practice, testing their throwing arms, trying to ring the bell with a swing of the sledge. They lunched on hot dogs, raw onions, and orange soda, and took an extended appreciative tour of the bathing beach. They had a whale of a time. "Now," said Mather, as they made ready to go back to New York, "this is exactly what we don't want in the national parks. Lots of people seem to like it, and if they do, they ought to have it, but not in the national parks. Our job in the Park Service is to keep the national parks as close to what God made them as possible and as far as we can"--with a sweep of the arm--"from a horror like this."

HOW MATHER FELT ABOUT SERVICE PEOPLE

In Mather's eyes, every name on the Service payroll was the name of a public benefactor, who ought to be treated as such. Gilbert Stanley Underwood saw evidence of that one day at Yosemite. Watching some road-building, Mather noticed a young woman riding beside the driver in a Park Service truck, and he wanted to know what she was doing up there. She was too scared to reply, but the driver spoke up: "She's my wife. I brought her up here to see the park. She's never seen it before." Mather told him: "That makes no difference. She can't ride in that truck. She'll have to get down." The girl climbed down, plainly on the verge of tears. "If you'd like to see the park, see it from my car," Mather said. "You know," smiling his famous smile, "you mean too much to your husband to get yourself hurt in a truck he's driving." He showed her around the valley himself and that evening had her and her husband as his dinner guests at the Ranger Club House.

On hot days, in the remoter reaches of the parks unfrequented

by females, Mather enjoyed birthday-suit swimming. Eivind Scoyen recalls one such gambol at the Grand Canyon when, as the swimmers were sitting in the sun drying off, a guide and two women suddenly materialized from a nearby cave. The Park Service men leaped for their clothes, and then, when suitably covered, Mather insisted on finding the ladies and apologizing. He came back all smiles. "It's all right, boys," he said, "they were war nurses." That impulse at the sight of a lonely swimming hole, to shuck his clothes and bound in, reflected "The Eternal Freshman."

ON DAMS IN YELLOWSTONE--AND OTHER NATIONAL PARKS

"...I contend that there can be no utilization of the lakes of the park, or of the Falls River Basin, for irrigation that will not bring with it desecration of the people's playground for the benefit of a few individuals or corporations. All of the lakes of the park are in heavily timbered districts. Great forests reach down to the water's edge. In some parts of the park, level tracts of land embracing thousands of acres lie at an elevation only a few feet above these lake shores. Raising these lakes would kill millions of feet of timber, wipe out miles of roads and trails, and create a scene of chaos and destruction that would be an eyesore for a thousand years.

"Is there not some place in this great nation of ours where lakes can be preserved in their natural state; where we and all generations to follow us can enjoy the beauty and charm of mountain waters in the midst of primeval forests? The country is large enough to spare a few such lakes and beauty spots. The nation has wisely set apart a few national parks where a state of nature is to be preserved. If the lakes and forests of these parks cannot be spared from the hand of commercialization, what hope can there be for the preservation of any scenic features of the mountains in the interest of posterity.

"Yellowstone National Park has been established for nearly half a century. Every plan to exploit it for private gain has failed to receive the consideration of Congress. Mighty railroad projects have even gone down to everlasting defeat. Must all the victories of the past now become hollow memories by the granting of reservoir rights that will desecrate its biggest and most beautiful lakes, and form the precedent for commercial exploitation of all of its scenic resources--its waterfalls, its forests, its herds of wild animals, its mineral waters? It is to be hoped the projects now being developed will meet the fate of the others that have come before Congress in the past."

A quotation from Mather's 1919 annual report, found on page 213 of *Steve Mather of the National Parks*.