THE CAMPFIRE

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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 bimonthly bulletin provides a figurative campfire about which we may exchange ideas that seem to us worth expressing and sharing.

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THE PHILOSOPHY UNDERLYING NATIONAL PARK PRESERVATION

Underlying the protection of national parks and their use by the public is a philosophy of many facets that too frequently escapes the attention of national park users and of the public generally. That philosophy has been outlined with great insight, and with humor, in a book recently off the press entitled *The National Parks--What They Mean to You and to Me.* Written by Freeman Tilden, well-known author and national park enthusiast, it was published by Alfred A. Knopf. Indeed the idea for such a book was germinated when Mr. Knopf visited some of the western national parks and realized that although many national park books had been published, there was a need for a definitive book on the parks and on the national park concept. Quoted below is a brief chapter from this book that epitomizes the park idea.

L'ENVOI
SERENDIPITY

If you do not happen to be familiar with the word serendipity, let me save you the trouble of looking it up in the dictionary.

Horace Walpole invented it by one of those fortunate verbal inspirations. In spite of the half-million or more English words at our disposal, for most of which we have no need, this one filled a niche that had been left open. It is a noun that expresses an experience as old as human life itself, yet one that almost requires the experience itself to define.

In a letter to Sir Horace Mann, Walpole said that he had just been reading a "silly fairy tale" called *The Three Princes of Serendip,* in which the princes went journeying to find certain valuable

things and by "accidental sagacity" found, not those things they sought, but much better ones.

The "silly fairy tale" has gone the way of countless mayflies of literature. I have found no mention of the book in the vast Congressional Library. We do know that Serendip was really Serendib, the ancient name of Ceylon. It was on the island of Ceylon that Adam and Eve, expelled headlong from Paradise, landed. Of that, no possible doubt. The proof may be found there on a certain rock, where Adam's footprints are clearly seen.

So the dictionary, always open-minded about new words, defines serendipity as "the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for."

A friend of mine, a harried business man of large and vulnerable affairs, felt himself one day during the depression of the 1930's about to crack under the strain. He packed a bag one day in mid-April and went into the north country to fish down a brook he had known as a boy. The brook was a good one, but the water was high and icy cold, and he fished for several hours without a single strike. Suddenly he saw something gleaming brightly in still water along the roots of an overhanging tree. Curious about it, he rolled up a sleeve and went after it. It was only a piece of green tourmaline, one of the common silicate minerals in a granite-rock country. But what a piece of tourmaline it was! Better than mere gem quality, it was a perfectly formed crystal, such as any museum would be proud to display. My friend, with not the least idea of what the specimen was, took it to a lapidary, who immediately offered to buy it. Of course, it was not for sale. Instead it formed the nucleus of a private mineral collection that is now one of the best I know. It developed a fascinating hobby in a man who needed a hobby at that time more than anything else in the world. He got no fish out of his trip, but he acquired a life-preserving interest. That is serendipity.

A pioneer, hunting game, wounds a bear. The bear escapes into a cliffside and disappears among the rocks. After searching for some time, the hunter finds a hole into which the bear had gone and straightway goes in after him. He finds himself in a cave not hitherto known to exist. He has discovered, in fact, the cave now known as Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. Serendipity.

A chemist, plying his quest for a certain needed industrial substance, confesses his defeat after long days of experiment, and then discovers that he has stumbled upon something he had never sought at all--the basis of a drug that is later to prove a boon to suffering mankind. Serendipity.

A party of astronomers, with infinite attention to details, makes a long and expensive trip to a certain spot on the earth's surface where the eclipse of the sun will be very nearly total.

Everything is ready. The morning dawns clear. The clouds begin to gather. The sun vanishes. Nature turns surly, will have no spectators at that place and moment. But by "accidental sagacity" other phenomena are noted on that venture which are more revealing than the solar corona it was planned to watch. That is serendipity.

There is no need to multiply instances. Hardly one of us has not had this experience of seeking for a much-desired thing only to find that the undreamed-of fruit of the search was the truer good. Walpole was poking sly fun when he spoke of "accidental sagacity"; sagacity is no accident. The sagacity of the three princes of Serendip consisted in searching for things worth finding. The unexpected dividends were rewards for that.

At this point I surmise the shrewd reader will say: "I see where this talk about serendipity leads: we are now going to have Horace Walpole's word hitched to something about the national parks. The sermon is about to begin!"

Well, then, I am detected in my furtive design, except that there is no sermon. It will be just a leaf from a stout volume of personal experience.

When, many years ago, I made my first visit to a national park, if I had any definite ideas at all about it, it was "for to see and for to admire" those things which had been pictured and described to me, and in a general way for what I thought of as a holiday recreation. If I had anything faintly resembling an intellectual or spiritual approach, I certainly cannot recall it. And to this day I should suggest that one beware the intellectual and studied attitude. It is self-defeating and an enemy of joy. The first contact with the wilderness parks, at least in their wilderness aspects, should be as round-eyed as that of children. The deeper meanings of what is seen will come in their proper time. Those are the serendipities.

Yet, too, I remember that I came away from that park--it was Yellowstone--with a pleasurable restlessness of spirit. The park had done something to me, something challenging and vital. Unskilled as I was, I perceived that what I had seen, though fascinating and unforgettable, was not Yellowstone. It was only part. Behind the visual was the soul of the thing--a unity more beautiful that the falls, more mysterious than the geyser basins, more prodigious than the canyon.

In whatever national park I have since been, it has always been likewise. As for the beauty, it never palls; as for the sense of healing quietude, it is never lacking; as for the meanings, I am still at school; but the parks have provided me with much of the most refined satisfactions of my life. I owed it to them to say as much, and that is what in this volume I have tried to do.

There is no harm in going to the parks with the impression that they are places for recreation, in the ordinary sense of that word. A single trail trip through the unspoiled country, with glimpses of its manifold mysteries and marvels, and chance acquaintances with the creatures that live within it, will change the concept for all time. Your word will be re-creation after that. The plow will have turned up long-buried possibilities of higher enjoyment than the physical thrills that were sought. Recreation into re-creation: that is serendipity.

The more you come to know the national parks, the more the hidden assets begin to appear. You never come to the end of them. They are seldom the things the eye first sees; they are nearly never the things avowedly sought. To this very day I frequently go into an area with the definite view of spending my time on some certain thing, only to find that this purpose has given way before a new interest that charms me more. Thus I am a Prince of Serendip.

John Merriam was once saying: "For those who go down into the (Grand) Canyon to set their feet upon the strands of early time, or to lift with reverent fingers the trace of a fern that for years in untold millions has rested on the bank, there are places where history not mearly reveals itself, but for everyone seems waiting to tell its story . . . and the whole panorama represented in the Canyon wall becomes a thing of life."

For those who go down into the canyon! First you stand at the rim and view the grandest spectacle of its kind in all the world. But then you go down into the canyon. The story unfolds. The mysteries deepen. The meaning widens. The whole overpowering fact becomes a thing of life. You came to find one nugget: you have uncovered a treasury of gems. You, too, are a Prince of Serendip.

The national parks are preserved for all such adventuring princes; in this case, for you and me.

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