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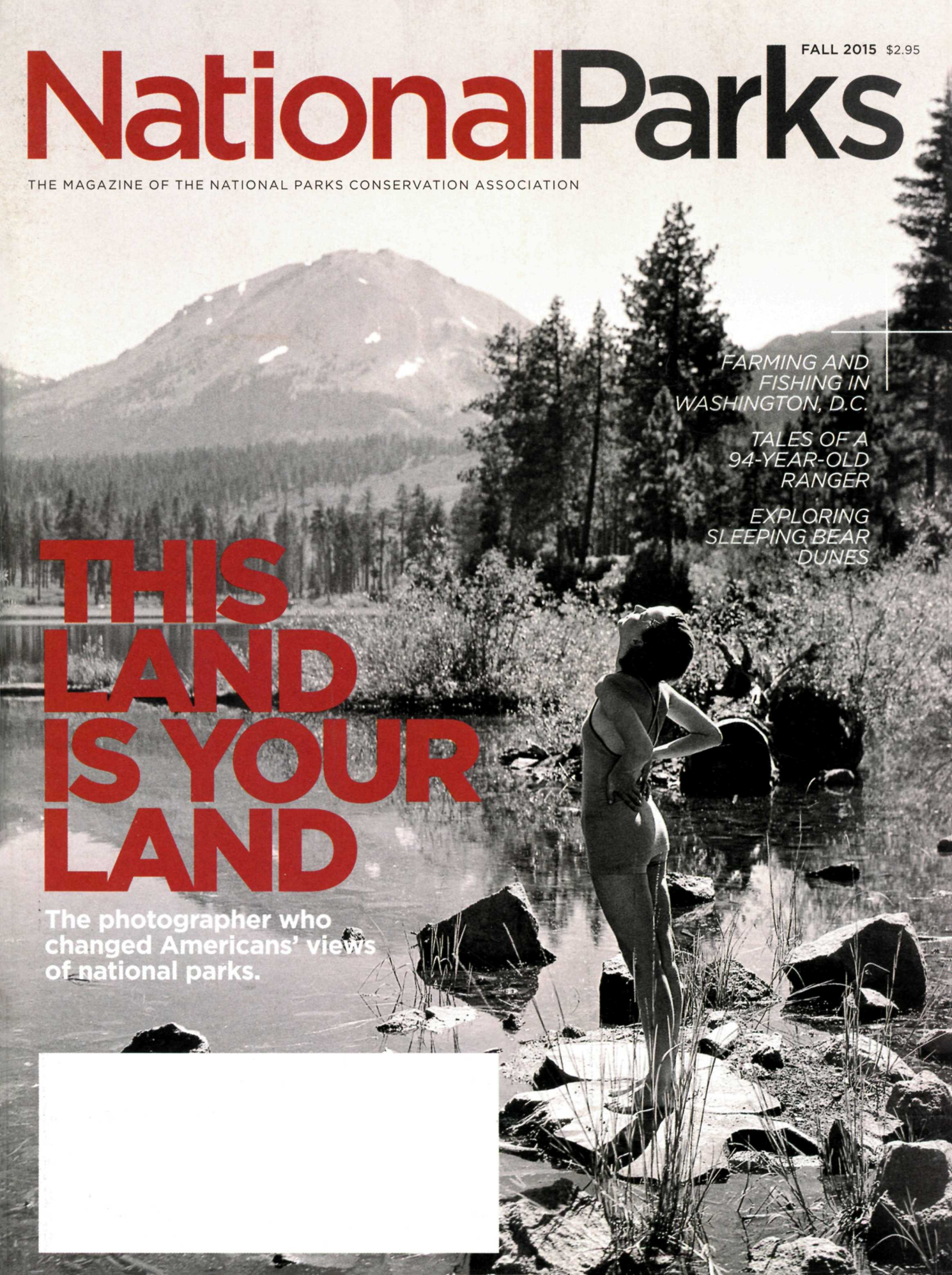
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National Parks

FALL 2015 / Vol. 89 No. 4

COVER IMAGE:

A 1934 GEORGE GRANT
photograph of Manzanita Lake in
Lassen Volcanic National Park.

NPS HPC

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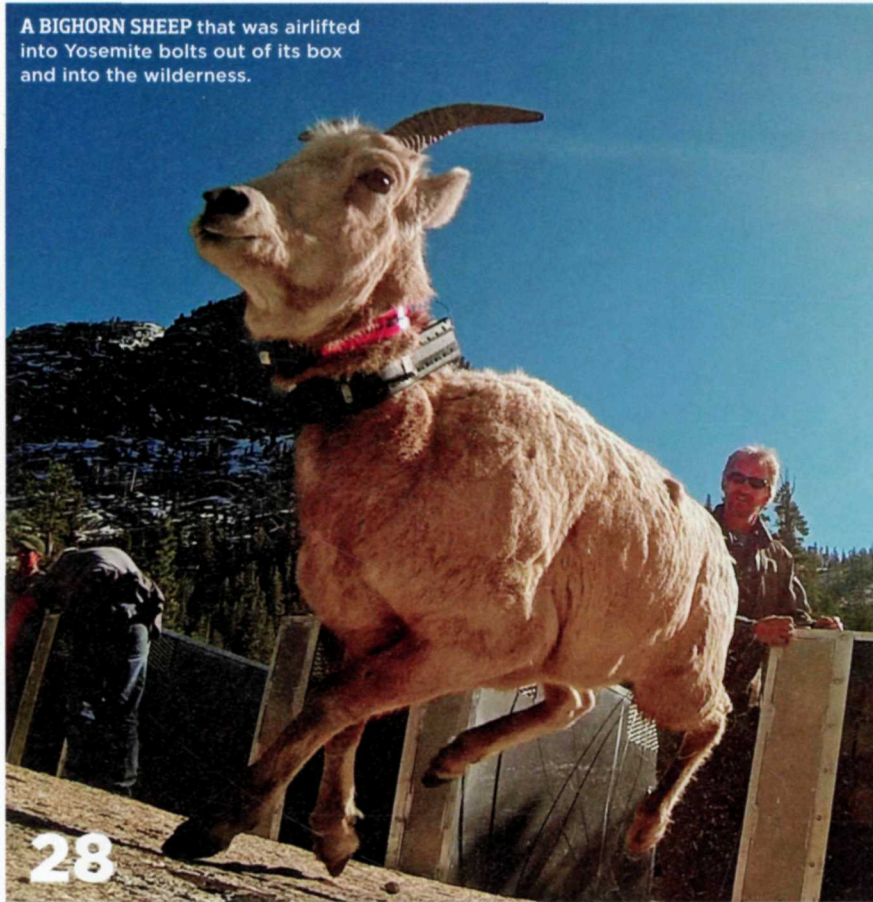
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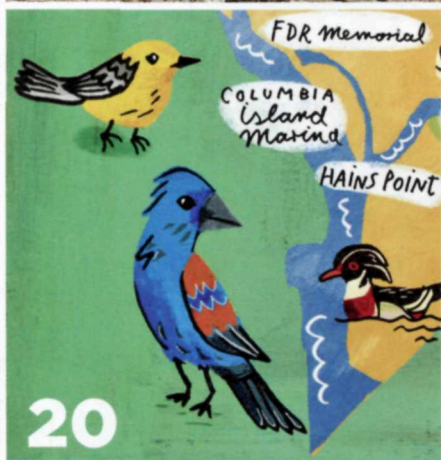
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THE GIFT SHOP

Who says you need to go on a vacation to get a souvenir? Visit NPCA's online gift shop for T-shirts, mugs, hats, and gear that show off your love of national parks: npca.org/giftshop.



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Connecting The Dots

Everything in the world is connected—you just may not know how. This, in short, is the “Daisy Chain Theory,” developed by well-known British author, science historian, and television personality James Burke. I’ve long admired Burke and the simplicity of this powerful idea.

So how does this relate to national parks?

The individual actions taken and decisions made decades ago are now, collectively, playing out across the country, including in our national parks. Just one example is air quality. National parks should have clean air, right?

Yet here are a few facts from our recently published report, *Polluted Parks: How Dirty Air Is Harming America's National Parks*: 75 percent of our iconic parks have air quality that is unhealthy at times. Haze pollution limits how far you can see at 100 percent of the national parks. Four parks—Joshua Tree, Sequoia, Kings Canyon, and Yosemite National Parks—regularly have air quality that’s unhealthy for most park rangers and visitors. Job seekers at Sequoia and Kings Canyon are warned that these parks “have poor air quality” and “may pose human health problems due to air pollution.”

Clean air isn’t just a parks issue, it’s a public health issue. Who’s most susceptible to severe health problems from air pollution? Folks with heart disease and lung disease, pregnant women, outdoor workers, children under the age of 14, and the elderly, to name a few. These are our parents, children, grandchildren, and friends.

Our parks weren’t polluted overnight. It was a web of events over years, as Burke might explain it, that altered and harmed the environment. But it’s not too late to reverse course. Through the hard work we are undertaking at NPCA, we are determined to create a new chain of connections that will lead our parks link by link to healthy air and a less hazy future.

Clark Bunting



Editor's Note



MAGAZINE EDITOR Rona Marech at the Grand Canyon in 1979.

Passing The Torch

I visited a national park for the first time when I was 7 years old. My parents were not particularly outdoorsy, but they were adventurous travelers, and over several summers, my family went to some amazing places: Bryce, Grand Canyon, Grand Teton, Petrified Forest, Yellowstone, and Zion.

Even now, I can picture parts of those trips in crystal-line detail. I remember watching an orange sun melt away behind snow-capped mountains. I remember seeing a moose. I remember the smell of pines and the heat of the desert. I remember a beloved Yellowstone t-shirt with rainbow stitching that I wore until it was threadbare.

Several decades later, my son is almost 7, and I'm the one carting him and his sister around to help them discover the landscape and history around them. They'll probably end up with bits and pieces of memories, too, but I hope they also come away with an expanded sense of their country, their world—even their universe. Just as I did.

And now my national parks adventure continues at this magazine. As the new editor of *National Parks*, I'm excited to continue exploring these remarkable places—all 408 of them—from the historic sites to the urban parks to those sweeping landscapes. In this issue, we travel from California to Michigan to Washington, D.C., telling stories about the Park Service's first staff photographer, a little-known urban oasis, and the nation's oldest ranger. My hope is that the stories in this and future issues will coax you to a new place or back to a familiar one, inspire you to volunteer or write a legislator, change your mind or introduce a new idea, and maybe even open up your world just a little bit more. I look forward to sharing this journey with you.

Rona Marech
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NationalParks

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Established in 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the U.S. National Park System.

WHAT WE DO

NPCA protects and enhances America's national parks for present and future generations by identifying problems and generating support to resolve them.

EDITORIAL MISSION

National Parks magazine fosters an appreciation of the natural and historic treasures found in the parks, educates readers about the need to preserve those resources, and illustrates how member contributions drive our organization's park-protection efforts. The magazine uses the power of imagery and language to forge a lasting bond between NPCA and its members, while inspiring new readers to join the cause. *National Parks* magazine is among a member's chief benefits. Of the \$25 membership dues, \$6 covers a one-year subscription to the magazine.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Members can help defend America's natural and cultural heritage. Activists alert Congress and the administration to park threats; comment on park planning and adjacent land-use decisions; assist NPCA in developing partnerships; and educate the public and the media. Please sign up to receive Park Notes, our monthly e-mail newsletter. Go to npca.org to sign up.

HOW TO DONATE

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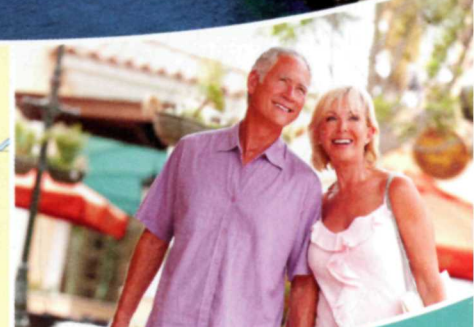
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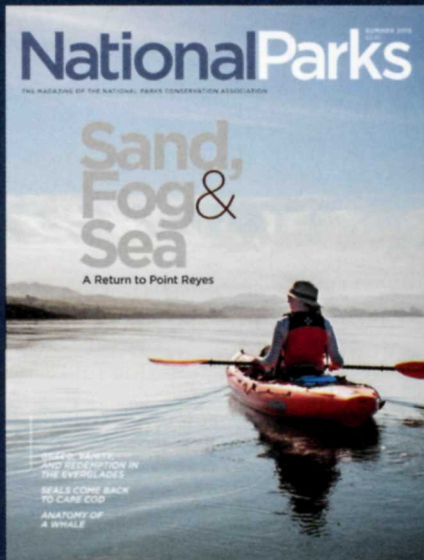


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POETRY OF THE SEALS

What a beautiful piece Elizabeth Bradfield wrote about the gray seals [“A Front-Row Seat”]. Why was I not surprised to discover that she is a poet? I will look for her other poems and essays and hope you print more by her. She's one more enhancement to your fine magazine.

JOAN FALCONER

Iowa City, IA

THE WAY IT WAS

Reading Elizabeth Bradfield's article, “A Front-Row Seat,” on the return of the gray seals to Cape Cod National Seashore brought back vivid memories for me. In 1975, I drove to Cape Cod to start a new life. It was a dreary November afternoon, and as I cruised along the empty lanes of Route 6 in my '69 Bug, I began to wonder if I had driven into some sort of Twilight Zone. When I finally stopped to inquire at a gas station, the owner laughed and pointed. “Just drive until you run out of road,” he told me.

So I did. At the very end of the road, I parked in an empty parking lot on the beach. There was something almost spiritual about this vast openness, with no sounds but the wind and the seagulls. As I crept closer to the water, I was delighted to discover a mother seal frolicking with her pup in the sand. I watched for several minutes before the mother noticed me, and they both vanished into the crashing waves.

At the time, I had no idea what a

rare event I had witnessed. In all the years I stayed in Provincetown, I never saw the likes of this again. But while I lived there, two fishing boats went down, with no survivors. I remember the enormous sadness that hung over the streets in the days that followed these tragedies, when you couldn't walk into a shop or restaurant without hearing someone talk about the lost fishermen. Their absence left a hole in our close-knit community.

And now the fishermen are all gone, and the seals are plentiful, and people in their SUVs clog the broadened lanes of Route 6. I can't help but feel excited for the seals, back on the beaches in all their glory. But I'm also sad for the lost way of life, for the men and women who risked their very existence to bring back the bounty.

There must be some happy medium somewhere, where the gains are not overwhelming and the losses so complete. Why can't we get it right?

BETH WELTON
Manchester, VT

FOG, SEA, AND NOSTALGIA

Thank you so much for carrying me back to Point Reyes [“The Land of Fog and Sea”]. I lived in the Bay Area from 1999 to 2002 and loved Point Reyes and its lighthouse. I have two small kids and can't imagine traveling from Europe to California with them. Maybe in a few years' time. Until then, I will keep your article in a safe place.

PÄIVI HAKULINEN

Helsinki, Finland

I very much enjoyed Rona Marech's cover story on Point Reyes National Seashore.

For families with children on an excursion to that lovely stretch of coastline, check for Russ Leadabrand's *The Secret of Drake's Bay* (Ward Ritchie Press, 1969), a classic California children's book.

And, when next in California, explore the “condor coast” from Big Sur to San Simeon. There you'll find a landscape that rivals any national monument in the nation, replete with rugged beaches, two lighthouses, hundreds of elephant seals, a castle (Hearst San Simeon State Historical

Monument), and the newly reintroduced California condors.

ROBERT C. PAVLIK
San Luis Obispo, CA

A GREAT PLAINS PARK?

Bison need more space to roam beyond the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park ["Room to Roam"]. Surrounding Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota are about one million acres of grassland managed by the U.S. Forest Service—the largest contiguous federal grassland in the United States. This is a

Great Plains National Park just waiting to happen. By merging the grasslands with the park, the nation could have its own Serengeti, a large place for all Great Plains species to thrive: bison, elk, deer, bears, and other wildlife. The National Park Service's centennial year in 2016 may be the time to seek the missing link, a Great Plains National Park.

ROBERT BINNEWIES
Tubac, AZ

SAVING THE GRAND CANYON

I read the summer issue of *National Parks*

magazine from cover to cover, and it was just by luck that I found the small paragraph on the Grand Canyon in the lower left corner of page 8 ["Echoes"]. Why did you bury this? I am horrified that this matter has not been made a national concern.

Please publish the whole story. We need to know about this threat to the cherished and irreplaceable Grand Canyon.

SUZANNE HOUSTON
Shelburne, VT

You can learn more about the proposed development near the South Rim of the Grand Canyon at www.npca.org/canyonthreat/ and sign up to receive email alerts on park-related issues like this one at www.npca.org/join.

—Editors

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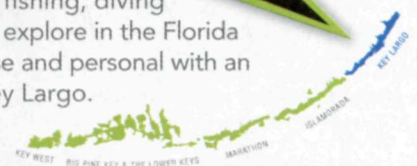


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Echoes

If the regional haze rule is not improved, in 50 years only 10 percent of our national parks that are required to have clean air will actually have it.

Ulla Reeves, NPCA's clean air campaign manager, quoted in the L.A. Times regarding NPCA's new analysis of the air pollution in 48 national parks. The report found that every one of those sites has been harmed by unhealthy air, hazy skies, or climate change and gave flunking grades in at least one of these categories to nine parks including Everglades, Joshua Tree, and Acadia.

You don't put up 17 towers as tall as the Statue of Liberty and not have an impact.

Theresa Pierno, NPCA's chief operating officer, commenting to the Washington Post about Dominion Virginia Power's plan to build a 7.4-mile power line that would span the stretch of river that English settlers navigated in 1607 before landing in Jamestown. NPCA forwarded 40,000 signatures to the Army Corps of Engineers in opposition to the project.

If Subaru can build cars without contributing to landfills, how might that translate to our national parks?

Clark Bunting, NPCA's chief executive officer, quoted in Men's Journal regarding NPCA's novel partnership with Subaru. The car company's leaders launched a pilot program focused on reducing landfill waste in Yosemite, Grand Teton, and Denali, and ultimately, they plan to bring their best practices to all national parks.





A MARINE RESERVE FOR BISCAYNE

National Park to Protect Coral Reefs, Bringing More Fish Back to Florida

Biscayne National Park is hiding a serious problem under its crystal waters, and the Park Service has decided to create a marine reserve to address it. An international destination for boaters, divers, and fishing enthusiasts, and a prime draw for locals, Biscayne has been stressed by overfishing, overuse, pollution, and warming seas for decades, and the park's renowned coral reefs continue to decline.

The new marine reserve will limit fishing and the extraction of resources in a part of the park's most fragile and important coral reefs to help them recover. In time, the move will help improve the health of the park's coral reefs and bring back more fish to South Florida, increasing fish size, diversity, and abundance.



MORE BOATS, MORE TECHNOLOGY = FEWER FISH

The number of recreational vessels in southern Florida grew by about

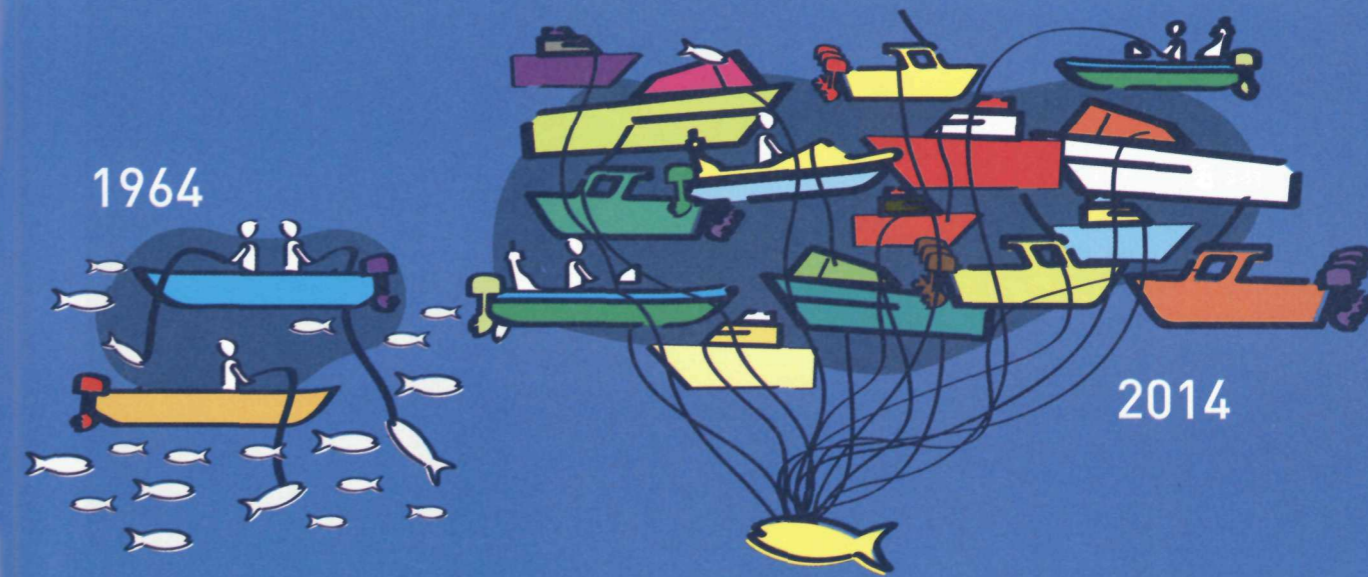
757%

from 1964-2014

Technology has quadrupled the efficiency of recreational anglers, and that's decimated local stocks of fish: For every

20 fish caught in 1964

1 fish is caught today



PROTECTING OUR PARKS

“If someone were chopping down redwood trees or giant sequoias in our national parks, there would be a public outcry. The same should be true here in Biscayne, where our iconic coral reefs and marine life are on the verge of collapse.”

— Caroline McLaughlin

NPCA's Biscayne Program Analyst



TREASURE UNDER THE SEA

More than

500,000

annual visitors who come to Biscayne National Park for fishing, diving, snorkeling, and boating support nearly

460 jobs and contribute

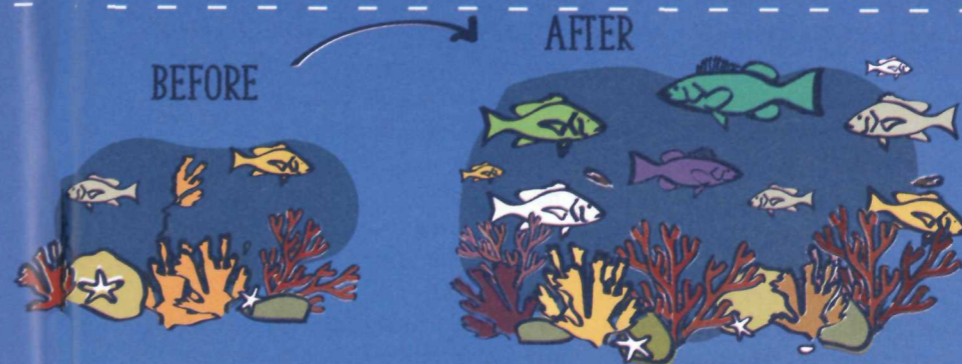
\$45 million

to the local economy



IT'S WORKED BEFORE

Five years after the creation of a marine reserve in the Dry Tortugas, just 70 miles from Key West, researchers saw significant increases in the size and abundance of once-overfished species, such as black and red grouper and mutton snapper.



#MoreFishInFL



THE OLDEST RANGER in the Park System, Betty Reid Soskin helped shape the historical site named for Rosie the Riveter, where she still gives talks several times a week.

© ED CALDWELL

Living History

Learning about the last century from the oldest ranger in the National Park System.

Several times a week, Betty Reid Soskin packs the theater at the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park. Trim and nimble, perched on a stool, the 94-year-old is a star attraction of this urban park in Richmond, California. After showing a short film about the city during the wartime boom, Soskin, who has a ballerina's erect bearing, spoke for more than 40 minutes without notes on a recent afternoon.

In 1942, she worked as a file clerk in the auxiliary of the Boilermakers, a shipyard labor union, she told the spellbound audience. Despite the Home Front campaign to unite Americans

against the enemy, the union was segregated in the era of Jim Crow laws and blacks were frequently slotted into menial jobs.

"If you'd asked me, I would have told you all the shipyard workers were black," said Soskin, showing flashes of wry humor but choosing her words with the precision of a judge.

Rosie the Riveter has become a symbol of American women entering the workforce and breaking social taboos. But it's largely the story of white women, explained Soskin, because black women have worked outside of the home since the days of slavery.

She also connected history to the present day, mentioning police shootings and hate crimes that have dominated the news. She ticked them off: "I can't breathe. Hands up, don't shoot. Charleston, South Carolina."

Despite their flawed social system, Americans fought off fascism, Soskin said. And now, despite their flawed social system, Americans will have to fight rising sea levels, global warming, and racial inequality. After she finished her talk, groupies descended to snap selfies with Soskin, who warmly, patiently answered questions for another half hour.

"Thank you for telling the truth," a fan told her.

"I'm going to bring my children and grandchildren here," another woman said.

It's just another Saturday for Soskin, who holds the distinction of being the oldest ranger in the National Park



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System. She never formally trained for the job, but she helped shape this historical park on the San Francisco Bay and by her own account, when she gets in the theater, “something magical happens.” The power of her story—the great-granddaughter of a slave, she has borne witness to many of the major social movements of the last century—helps account for the overflow crowds she routinely attracts and her recent turn as a media sensation, with interviews on NPR’s *Tell Me More*, NBC’s *Today Show*, and KQED’s *Forum* radio program. A caller to that show, which airs on the San

Francisco NPR affiliate, choked up while talking to Soskin. “I’m so happy to learn from you,” she said. “You are elderly and yet contemporary and evolving in your views. I would like to be like you.”

People are intrigued by her age, said Tom Leatherman, an acting deputy regional director at the National Park Service. “But when they meet Betty, it’s about what she’s able to do. The minute people hear her story, they want more. She speaks from the heart, and nothing can be more powerful.”

Soskin became a ranger in 2007, late in a long, remarkable life that began in 1921, in Detroit. Later, her family returned to Louisiana to their Cajun and Creole clans, and when she was 6, they moved to Oakland, joining her maternal grandfather. A waiter at the Oakland Athletic Club, he became her best friend, telling her stories while they gardened about the people left behind in Louisiana, including her great-grandmother, Leon-



© COURTESY OF ROSIE THE RIVETER/WWII HOME FRONT NHP, RORI SOZI

THE RICHMOND OFFICE of the Boilermakers, a shipyard labor union that employed Soskin as a clerk in 1942.

tine Breaux Allen, who lived to 102.

“My great-grandmother, I knew her well, but I didn’t meet her until I was a teenager,” Soskin said in an interview after her talk. “She was a part of every conversation. She was present in my life.”

Frustrated by segregation and racism during World War II, Soskin and her first husband, Mel Reid, decided to start their own business, according to her oral history collected by the University of California, Berkeley. Their “crazy little record shop” got its start out of the garage in their duplex. “I sold records through a window cut into a garage wall,” she said. Customers lined up to buy blues albums such as Wynonie Harris’ risqué “Around the Clock.”

“People couldn’t even find the place because it was so tiny ... but they would circle the block until they found it,” Soskin recounted. Her youngest son, David, still runs the shop, which now specializes in gospel music.

In 1952, they moved to Walnut Creek,

a suburb east of San Francisco, where they were the first black family in the area. Neighbors threatened them and their architect, warning that the lumber for the home would be set afire. When the local elementary school that her son Rick attended held a minstrel show, she complained to the principal. He argued, “What we are doing is we are showing black people or colored people as happy-go-lucky and—”

“Do I look happy-go-lucky to you?” Soskin asked.

In her mid-30s, she suffered a mental breakdown. The racism that tainted her everyday life was a factor. Also, her husband worked long hours at their shop and their marriage fell apart, leaving her to raise her three sons and developmentally disabled daughter on her own. To heal, she visited a psychiatrist and taught herself how to play the guitar. Music gave her an escape. “It was impossible to take flight except within myself,” she said.

Later, she became active in a progressive Unitarian group and connected to members of the Black Power movement. “I was a bag lady for the Black Panthers,” Soskin said with a smile. She collected and delivered money to leaders Kathleen Neal and Eldridge Cleaver, benefiting from her status as a middle-class African-American housewife.

“No one was going to hand power to a guy standing on the corner with a brick in his hand,” she recalled in her oral history.

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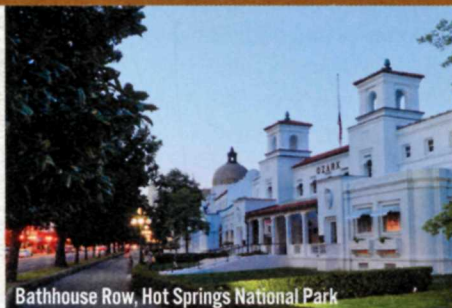
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“What gets remembered is a function of who’s in the room doing the remembering.”

“But I was choking on power. I could’ve parked my car in the middle of City Hall lawn and nobody would say anything, because I ... had a strong liberal community supporting me.” In 1972, she was elected to serve as a George McGovern delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Miami, a sign of how much residents had come to accept her.

With her children away at school and out of the house, she started working on a project to develop drug prevention programs for teenagers, where she met Bill Soskin, a prominent social psychologist at UC Berkeley. She married Soskin and joined a social circle involved in poetry and the counterculture’s human potential movement made famous at Esalen Institute in Big Sur.

When her first husband’s health began failing in the late 1970s, she ran Reid’s Records on what had become a blighted stretch of Sacramento Street in Berkeley. Determined to use the shop as a vehicle for social change, she tapped into the access to city leaders she had as a faculty wife. She became an aide to Berkeley councilman Don Jelinek and persuaded the city to build low-income housing across the street from the record shop, replacing a crack house and helping change the climate of the community.

In 1987, the three men who helped shape her identity—her father and her two husbands—died within three months of each other. “After being lots of Betties, I had to reinvent myself again,” she said. She continued working with local politicians, focusing on the developmentally disabled, underserved, and low-income communities—“any field that had rel-

evance to the African-American story”—and eventually, she became a field representative for state assemblywoman Dion Aroner. In that capacity, she joined the planning process for the Rosie the Riveter park site in Richmond, where the population nearly quadrupled to 100,000 during WWII, with workers arriving from across the country to build battleships and manufacture Army Jeeps.

At the early meetings, she was the only person who recognized the historical sites as sites of segregation. “What gets remembered is a function of who’s in the room doing the remembering,” Soskin said.

The park, which opened in 2000, at first offered bus tours of the Rosie the Riveter monument and various historical sites. The visitor center opened in 2012.

When Soskin started giving ranger speeches, she would nervously call her cousin, Jesse Douglas Allen-Taylor, late the night before. She was worried people wouldn’t think her stories were important, but Soskin has a gift for providing context about economic conditions, social migrations, and other historical events, said Allen-Taylor, 67. “It allows you to understand all the things that were going on at the time as opposed to simply what she was doing. It gives you, the viewer, access to that, and then you can begin to see yourself there.”

In 2009, Soskin attended the inauguration of President Barack Obama. She sat in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial, and in her pocket, she carried a picture of her beloved great-grandmother. So much history, so much change in just four generations. “That’s how fast the time goes,” she said.



SOSKIN IN A PHOTO from 1942, choosing flowers for her wedding to her first husband, Mel Reid.

In late spring of this year, Soskin fell and woke up in an ambulance. Though she still suffers occasional vertigo, she returned after two weeks to the visitor center in the former oil house of the Ford Assembly Plant. Just outside, sunshine glitters on the water, gulls wheel overhead, and tugboats chug past the SS Red Oak Victory ship.

Soskin is very clear that she has no intention of slowing down. “I’m aware of being in my last decade,” she said. “I’m working against the clock. There’s a sense of urgency.”

—VANESSA HUA

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THE AUTHOR AND HIS FRIENDS found a yellow-throated vireo in Rock Creek Park, a national park site and the most popular birding destination in the city.



© DAVE WELLING

Early Birds & Night Owls

Could a trio of devoted birders break a Washington, D.C., bird-watching record set in 1989?

We started our day at 4:30 a.m. at Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens along the Anacostia River on the east side of Washington, D.C. Though the area had at one time been a landfill, it looked wild enough to us in the darkness, with the moonlight casting a silver edge onto silhouetted rows of trees and long-grass fields. The park didn't open officially until after dawn, so we parked outside the gate and took the pedestrian path, walking in silence so we could catch the slightest squawk or chirp. If we were going to set the record for finding the most birds in the District of Columbia in a single day, we couldn't let one peep get by us.

In birder lingo, it's called a Big Day.

Small teams have from midnight to midnight to identify—by sight or by sound, using the honor system—as many bird species in a given area as possible.

Our capital makes for a unique Big Day venue—because it's just 68 square miles, it's possible to visit all the best birding sites in a single day. Most Big Days are done at the state level, where a large chunk of precious daylight might be spent racing from one important spot to another. In Texas, for example, birders had to drive more than five hours across the state's southern peninsula to set the Big Day record of 294 species. The record-holders in Maine chartered a plane to fly between the state's forested

north and the beaches and marshes along the coast.

But the District's convenient size comes at the expense of bird diversity. Despite containing more than 7,000 acres of parkland and 23 national park sites, the District simply does not have the variety of habitat needed to get Big Day numbers you'd find in states with, say, shorelines and grasslands. The number we had to beat, set by a team of five in 1989, was 136 species.

I put out a call for like-minded souls willing to take a day off from work to make a run at the record, and two birders accepted. Adam had been a hardcore birder in his teens but had drifted away from the hobby after college. Now in his early 30s, he had recently caught the bug again and was eager for a tough challenge. Gerry, a veteran birder from Virginia, couldn't turn down a chance to set a record in the District, where he had worked for decades.

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Trail Mix

We chose to make our attempt on May 6th. Early May is the peak of spring migration in D.C., that glorious time when millions of birds make their way from their wintering grounds in Central or South America to their breeding grounds in the United States and Canada. When the birds stop during the day to rest and eat, local birders have a chance to see species that aren't found at any other time during the year. If the weather hit in our favor—we hoped for rain overnight that

would stop the northbound flight and drop tired birds into the District—early May was our best bet.

Not coincidentally, May 6th was also the same date that the 1989 record had been established. I exchanged emails with a couple members of the record-setting team, and they offered location advice and tips on where to find certain species (in birding, cooperation trumps competitiveness). Pray for rain, they said, and good luck. We planned our

route, did a bit of scouting in the days before, and got some sleep.

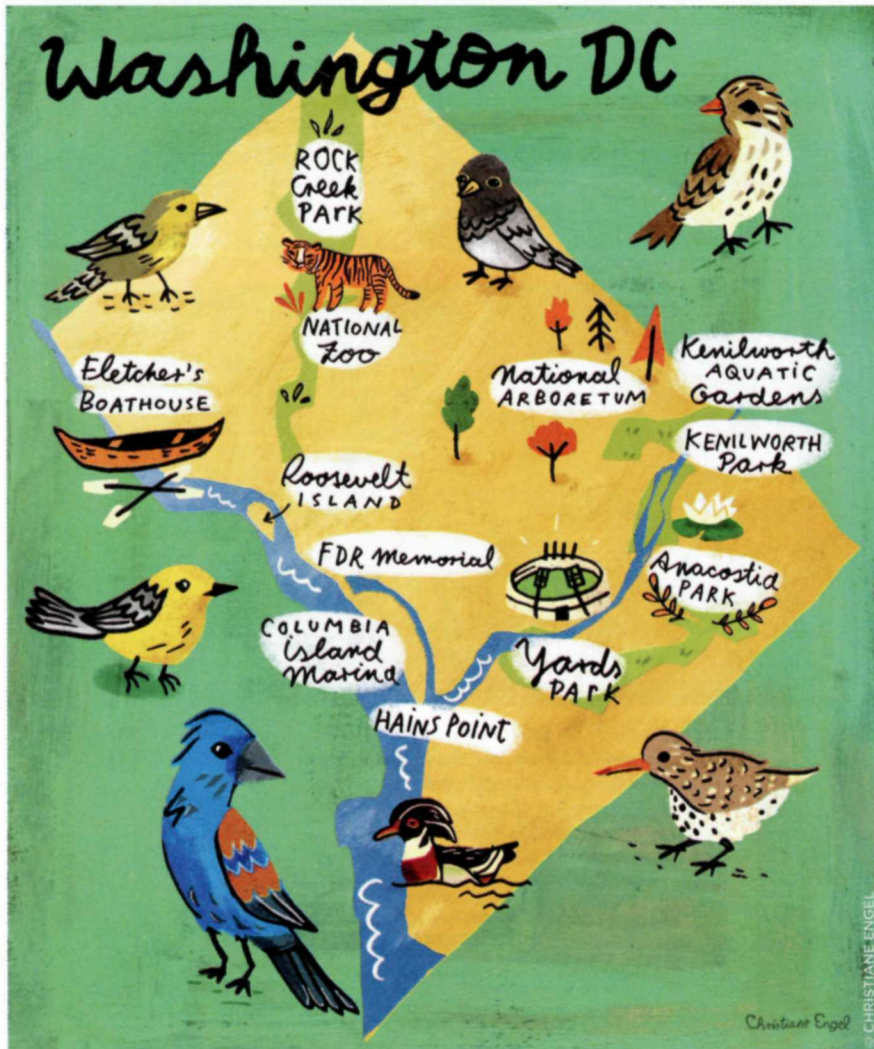
And then there we were, in the pre-dawn darkness at Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, part of the National Park System. Unfortunately, forecasted rains hadn't materialized, but there were still scattered puddles tucked into dips in the grass. Right away, we were able to pick out a small group of calling least sandpipers, our first sighting. The din of bird song rose along with the sun, and within minutes, we were surrounded by the raucous symphony of hundreds of birds beginning their day. Moving quickly, we picked out several birds at home in the short grasslands of the park—Eastern bluebirds, American robin, and the rare blue grosbeak. We were off and running.

We had arranged to meet Robert Steele, a ranger and fellow birder, when he arrived at the park at 6 a.m., and he let us into the Aquatic Gardens. We immediately found a little blue heron, an infrequent visitor to the District, and scampering around the park, we also caught sight of solitary and spotted sandpipers, lots of singing blackpoll warblers, and a swamp sparrow.

The day was brightening now, and we needed to hustle to locate migrant songbirds, including warblers, vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers. The easiest way to locate these creatures is to hear them singing, and they sing most reliably in the morning. If we wanted big numbers, we needed to be in a dense forest, where they find food and shade after a night's flight, no later than 8 a.m. Instead of trying to cross half the city to Rock Creek Park in the morning rush hour, we decided to try our luck at the nearby National Arboretum, and we showed up just as the gates were opening.

At the high point of Hickey Hill, we stepped out of the car into a swarm of singing birds. It was the kind of spring migration morning that birders dream of all winter. A Cape May warbler

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perched atop a pine tree, its orange cheek shining. American redstarts and black-throated blue warblers pecked around in the undergrowth. An eastern wood-pewee sang from the depths of the woods. We located the nest of an easy-to-miss brown thrasher. I followed the raucous sound of scolding crows to a major surprise: a young great horned

owl. Invigorated, we left the arboretum with our species count in the upper 80s.

As we ticked species off our mental lists one by one, we grew more sharply aware of the birds we were missing.

Despite our success at the arboretum, we hadn't found a pine warbler, and our search for a bald eagle was fruitless, though we'd taken special care to look for the pair that famously nests in the park. Somehow, we were even missing the ubiquitous house finch, one of the most common birds in the city.

But we still had most of the day ahead of us, and with rush hour over, we headed to Rock Creek Park, a National Park Service site and the most popular birding destination in the city. It was much quieter by then. Most migrants had stopped singing and were feeding in the treetops, out of view, but we still expected to catch a handful of species nesting along the park's wooded streams and in steep ravines. In short order, we found yellow-throated vireo, ovenbird, and Louisiana waterthrush, and then pushed on to our weirdest stop of the day: the National Zoo.

For whatever reason, large numbers

He sheepishly acknowledged that his eagle was in fact a rower in a distant crew boat.

of black-crowned night-herons nest at the zoo's aviary, along with a single pair of rare yellow-crowned night-herons. We ducked among dawdling tourists, feeling a bit absurd running through a zoo with binoculars and cameras jangling around our necks. We found the night-herons and a red-tailed hawk before diving back into the uncivilized wilds of D.C.

On to Fletcher's Boathouse, part of the C&O Canal National Historical Park on the Potomac River. The low floodplain there is unique habitat in D.C., and we crossed a few more species off our list, including warbling vireos, orchard orioles, a northern waterthrush, and sun-bright prothonotary warblers. Good stop for sure—but still no house finches.

We were pressing now. The wide Potomac River at Hains Point is as close to ocean as D.C. gets, and, accordingly, we

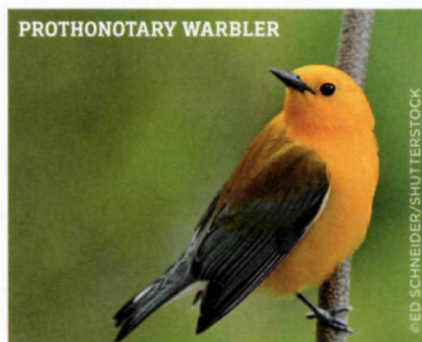
bonuses. Adam called out that he had spotted our long-absent bald eagle, but after a second look through his scope, he sheepishly acknowledged that his eagle was in fact a rower in a distant crew boat wearing a brown shirt and a white helmet. It had been a long day.

We hiked around the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial on the National Mall, picking up overdue Savannah sparrows, and headed back across the Anacostia as twilight fell, to Poplar Point. We figured 105 was a nice, round number, but the reliable field sparrows failed to materialize. We found an early willow flycatcher for 104, and sped back across the river to The Yards Park for a last-ditch effort at house finches. Until that moment, none of us had ever wished an invasive species to be more abundant, but we were out of luck. Exhausted and in the dark, we called it a day.

We double-checked our lists and lingered around the car, laughing about the wild day we'd had and cursing the birds that had eluded us. We didn't come close to the record, but none of us had ever seen 100 species in a single day in the District. Amid the frenetic searching, we watched the sun rise and set on the nation's capital, visited nine different national park units, and experienced just about every bit of nature the city has to offer. We'd had fun.

As I was walking my dog early the next morning, the first birds I saw were a pair of singing house finches. Unbelievable. At least we'd know where to find them next year.

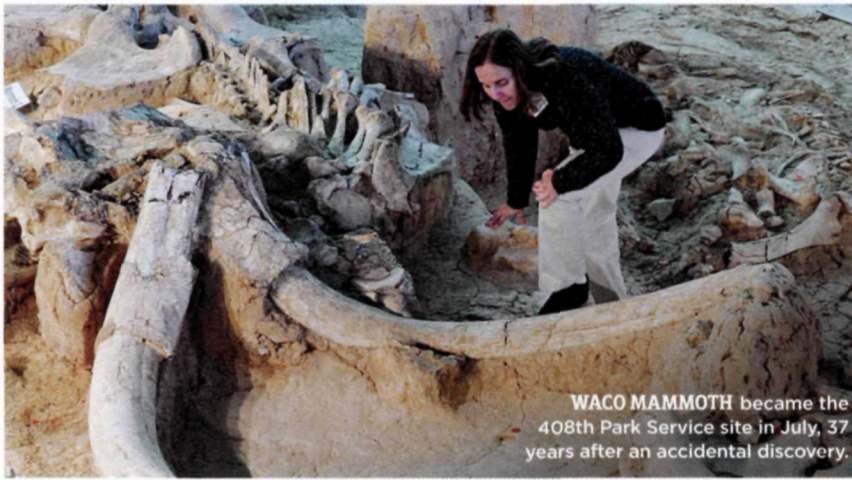
—NICHOLAS LUND



were looking for gulls. Adam had his huge spotting scope with him, and we quickly picked off herring and great black-backed gulls on buoys downriver. A common loon was our 100th species, and flyby Caspian tern and red-breasted merganser were



© AP PHOTO/WACO TRIBUNE HERALD, ROD AYDELOTTE



WACO MAMMOTH became the 408th Park Service site in July, 37 years after an accidental discovery.

A Mammoth Discovery

The lucky find that led to the creation of a monument.

In 1978, 21-year-old Paul Barron wasn't out to make a big discovery. He was looking for something small: snakes.

It had been a cold spring in Waco, Texas, and when he picked up a bundle of wood to make a fire, a copperhead darted from the pile, terrifying his sister. She asked Barron and his friend, Eddie Bufkin, to clear the family's house of snakes to protect her young sons.

The two men eventually wandered to the banks of a nearby creek, where Barron made a startling find. "As I was climbing, a piece of what appeared to be rock broke off in my hand. ... It turned out it was a ball joint from a hip," he said.

As Barron and Bufkin scanned the area, they spotted what appeared to be a femur, a tusk, and numerous other bone fragments lodged in the clay, covered with moss. "The tusk in particular was shot through with tiny little cracks," he said. "It looked to me like if you tried to pick it up, it would probably crumble."

Fortunately, Barron had spent significant time learning about the natural sciences with his Boy Scout troop and had even met the director of his local science museum as a teenager. He knew what he found at the creek was special enough to

pay the director a visit. Though it took some convincing, once experts examined the trove of fossils, they quickly realized the great scientific value.

"It was like I stepped into a time warp or something," Barron said.

He had discovered one of the richest Ice Age fossil beds in the world, and the only known nursery herd of Columbian mammoths. These animals died in a single event—probably a flood 70,000 years ago. In the decades since, researchers have found 23 mammoths, a tooth from a saber-toothed cat, and numerous other fossils, providing new insights into the behaviors of prehistoric animals. In July, President Barack Obama officially designated the site, now known as Waco Mammoth, as the country's newest National Park Service monument.

"I'm glad I did what I did and the site is now being recognized as a national treasure," Barron said, "because it is."

—JENNIFER ERRICK

For many years, NPCA and local partners in Texas advocated for the creation of Waco Mammoth National Monument. Find out more about the 408th national park site at parkb.it/w-wm.

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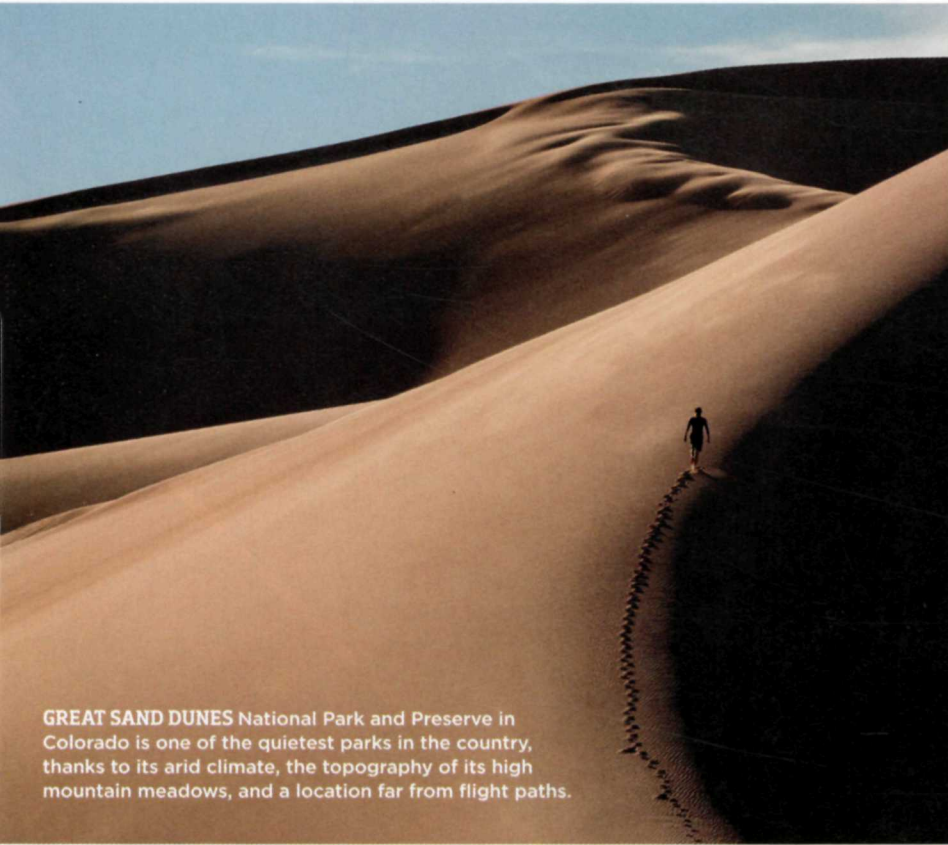
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GREAT SAND DUNES National Park and Preserve in Colorado is one of the quietest parks in the country, thanks to its arid climate, the topography of its high mountain meadows, and a location far from flight paths.

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If a Tree Falls, They'll Hear It

An innovative tool calculates the level of noise pollution across the country.

THE NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN A NATIONAL PARK, listen closely. As dusk arrives at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, insects trill, frogs croak, and cottonwood leaves rustle in the breeze. In Rocky Mountain National Park, rockfall clatters down granite cliffs, and on top of a quiet peak in Yosemite, you might hear the swoosh of an eagle's wings.

The National Park Service is charged with protecting soundscapes like these. Since the 1970s, however, car and plane traffic has skyrocketed, outpacing U.S. population growth and making almost all of our lives louder. The racket affects not only wildlife, from mating behavior to population counts, but can also harm humans, contributing to health problems such as cardiovascular disease. On the flip side, studies suggest that taking in

natural sounds can actually relieve stress. But amid the growing din, the task of protecting those sounds, from the song of a canyon wren to the ripple of a creek, has become more challenging.

Over the last three years, researchers at the Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division of the Park Service have developed a powerful new tool that could help: a series of maps that illustrate the predicted median sound levels across the United States on a typical summer day. The maps were created from about 1.5 million hours of recordings in parks, noise data from cities, and a machine-learning algorithm that can teach itself to find patterns in the data. The algorithm predicts sound based on factors such as topographic features, vegetation cover, hydrology, and population density. Unlike other tools, these maps illustrate both real noise and what the country would sound like without humans, offering a powerful benchmark for conservation efforts. The maps will also be useful for other researchers, including a team at the Harvard School of Public Health, which plans to investigate links between noise pollution and disease.

"When we first conceived the idea, we didn't know if it would work," said Kurt Fristrup, a senior scientist in the Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division. "Now, at some sites, the accuracy of our predictive model is beginning to approach the accuracy of our measurements."

The inspiration for the sound maps originated several decades ago, when visitors and park managers began to notice that the buzzing of planes in the Grand Canyon and the high-pitched whine of snowmobiles in Yellowstone spoiled the quietude. In 2000, the Park Service founded the natural sounds program to

study and regulate the mushrooming number of air tours in national parks and to preserve natural quiet from other intrusions. But the first step to protecting soundscapes, staff realized, was to understand them.

For many years, the division's acoustic scientists sloshed through wet meadows and shivered in minus-20-degree breezes to set up sound-level meters and audio recorders in remote areas of parks from Denali to the Everglades. "Compared with what we're doing now, that was the Dark Ages," said Frank Turina, the division's program manager. The process yielded many hours of recordings, but it was expensive, exhausting, and impossible to measure everywhere. Researchers began to brainstorm other ways to gain a comprehensive picture of sound in the parks.

Fristrup was the first to ask if they could use emerging technology to accomplish as much—or more—at their desks as they could schlepping over mountains. He wondered: "Could we take the massive data we had already and get enough leverage to begin to predict what the measurements would

"There's the potential for people's experience in parks to be dramatically enriched."

be in places we've never been?"

Dan Mennitt, a research scientist for Colorado State University and the Park Service, tested more than a dozen machine-learning algorithms, ultimately finding one, Random Forest, that could tease out links between certain climatic and topographic features and sound levels. He then used the algorithm to predict sound levels for the entire country, illustrating his findings with the maps.

"The maps have helped decrease our reliance on field work," said Mennitt. "More importantly, we now have a fairly good understanding of what existing conditions are, and natural conditions could be, in most places." This is allowing the division to switch from simply trying to understand the wealth of natural sounds in parks to protecting them, particularly in the quietest, most sensitive places, which are usually dry, remote, and barren. In these deserts, even the noise from one truck can travel over many miles.

"Some parks are uniquely quiet or have a certain interesting characteristic acoustically that they want to protect," said Turina. City of Rocks National Reserve, in Idaho, for example, is exceptionally quiet, with few overhead flight paths or plants

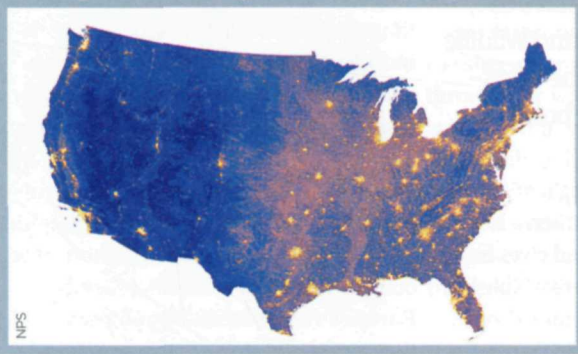
that rustle. Rocky Mountain National Park is known for its exceptional elk bugling, which draws visitors from across the country.

Already, the division has devised nifty tools to help reduce noise. Emma Brown, an acoustical resource specialist, is overseeing an educational pilot project in Crater Lake, Glacier, and Rocky Mountain National Parks and Devil's Tower National Monument that began in 2013. A thermometer-like exhibit displays the noise level of passing motorists, then staff share tips on how visitors can reduce their noise by obeying speed limits, traveling in groups, and avoiding drastic acceleration.

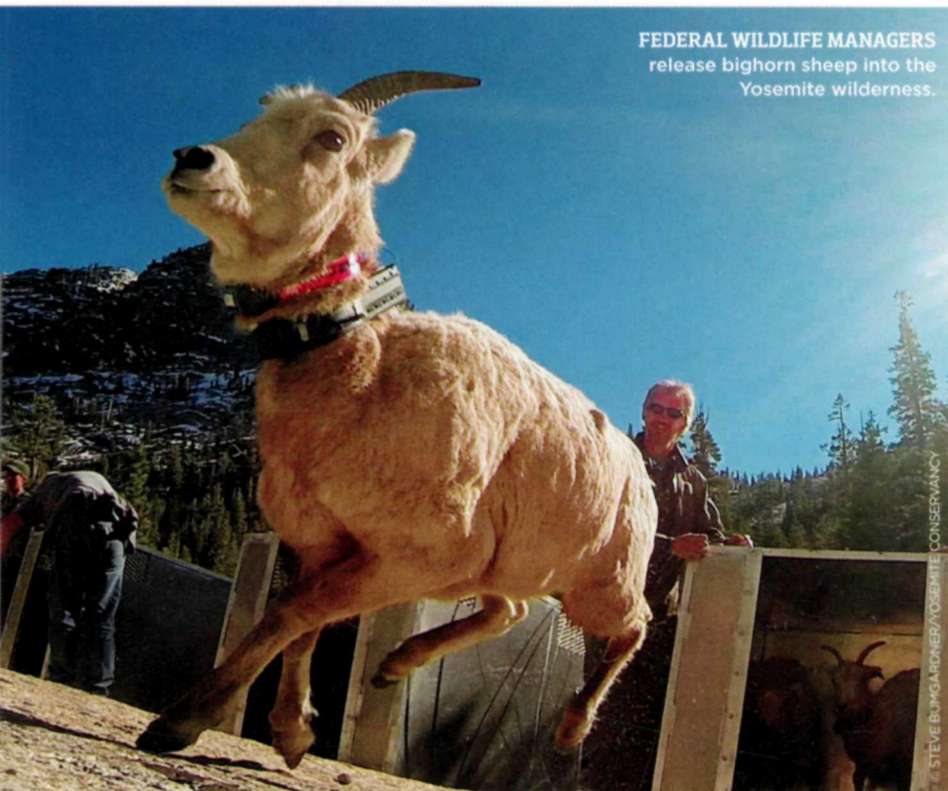
Other solutions are in the pipeline. The Park Service is considering using a type of asphalt known as quiet pavement, which can decrease road noise. The agency also has partnered with Erik Lindbergh, grandson of aviator Charles Lindbergh and an aviator himself, to develop an electric plane for air tours that would reduce noise pollution in parks such as the Grand Canyon.

"There's the potential for people's experience in parks to be dramatically enriched once they rediscover the capacity to hear the world as clearly as our ancestors did," said Fristrup. "If you listen that intently, the ecosystem around you becomes that much more complex and alive." **NP**

IN THIS MAP of existing noise conditions, cities and transportation corridors, illustrated in yellow, are loudest. Rural areas and the driest regions of the country, in shades of blue, are quietest.



KATE SIBER is a freelance writer based in Durango, Colorado, where she appreciates sounds ranging from mourning dove songs to the rustling of aspen leaves.



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Counting Sheep

Airlifting bighorn sheep back into the Sierra Nevada's national parks.

THIS MARCH, A LARGE HELICOPTER thrummed over the 13,000-foot-high pinnacles of Yosemite National Park's Cathedral Range with an aluminum box dangling from a long cable. Inside the box were sheep—four Sierra Nevada bighorns waiting (patiently, in fact) to touch down in their new home, a rocky slope nubbled with glacial scree and lodgepole pines. "That's the scariest part for me," said California Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Tom Stephenson, whose eyes were locked on the transport helicopter from a second helicopter. "Watching that box hang, and making sure it gets there safely."

Biologists and the conservation community have been working for decades to restore populations of this endangered paragon of the Sierra Nevada's rugged wilderness. Translocations—the transfer of rams and ewes from healthy herds to vacant habitat—have been their chief strategy to reestablish herds that once prospered along the Sierra crest. The March Yosemite drop, and another a few days later in Sequoia National Park, were the most complex

translocations conducted in the Sierras so far. They are also close to the last—the sheep, scientists predict, can mostly take it from here. Stephenson, who leads the recovery effort, said that the new managed herds are thriving. Within five years their numbers should support downlisting from endangered to threatened. Permanent delisting should follow.

"Over the decades, I've heard some pessimists say that we'll never delist Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep," said Kevin Hurley, conservation director of the Wild Sheep Foundation. "Well, we're getting closer all the time."

Historically, bighorn sheep were common in alpine areas from British Columbia to northern Mexico. There are three subspecies: Rocky Mountain bighorns along the Continental Divide, desert bighorns of the arid Southwest, and the most isolated subspecies, the Sierra Nevada bighorns. Two hundred years ago, as many as two million bighorn sheep lived in North America. But exploitation during westward expansion, as well as the installment of domestic sheep, which can host pathogens fatal to wild sheep, drastically reduced these numbers. By the 1950s, bighorn populations were patchy and thin—only 25,000 sheep remained.

Sierra Nevada bighorns were always the most vulnerable because they are the most geographically isolated subspecies with the smallest population. Genetically distinct from the other types, these sheep, with their unique wide-flaring horns, evolved to thrive in the Sierras' contiguous high-elevation crest, primarily on the drier eastern slopes. About 1,000 bighorn sheep occupied this mountain range before European settlement. By 1995, scientists could find only 100 Sierra Nevada

bighorns in the whole range.

Thanks to a sustained conservation effort among state and federal agencies, hunters, tribal commissions, and other entities, bighorn populations across North America have more than tripled from their 1950s low. That's largely a result of the relocation of 21,000 sheep since 1922. While the practice didn't really pick up until the 1940s and '50s, on average, that's nearly 20 airlifted sheep a month, said Hurley.

The recovery story for Sierra Nevada sheep is even more remarkable, with populations rebounding to six times their 1995 numbers. The range's national parks—Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and Sequoia—have been critical to this success because of their nearly intact habitat. But although sheep translocations have been occurring in the Sierras since the 1980s, the targeted sites have straddled only the parks' eastern fringes.

This year's operations delivered sheep deep within the interiors of Sequoia and Yosemite. The Cathedral Range site was not even considered an option at first; biologists thought it

A RARE FOX SIGHTING

Another rare Sierra subspecies—the Sierra Nevada red fox—has been spotted in Yosemite for the first time in a century. Like Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, this creature resides only in the Sierras' high peaks. For unknown reasons, the foxes started to disappear in the early 1900s, and fewer than 50 remain today. A "camera trap" in Yosemite photographed one in December, raising hopes that this subspecies, too, is on the rise.

The biologists opened the doors and watched the sheep bolt for the cliffs.

too high, too snowy, and too forested for a herd to survive there year-round. Wildlife managers began taking it seriously after they analyzed data from sheep GPS collars and realized they were underestimating where these hardy climbers could thrive. Even more significant, evidence showed that sheep had been in the Cathedral Range previously. In 1933, the wizened body of a ram, by then a few hundred years old, thawed out of glacier ice in the region. And last fall, when Yosemite wildlife biologist Sarah Stock and her family were backpacking in the Cathedral Range, she discovered an old ram skull. "We started to understand that there's more of a diversity of habitats that the sheep could use," said Stephenson.

In September 2012, Stephenson, Stock, and colleagues hiked to the Cathedral Range's high cliffs to evaluate it as a possible release site. They saw very few deer tracks, which was good news—mountain lions would be less likely to hunt there. The buckwheat and grasses on the cliffs were also a reassuring sight—that meant the sheep were likely to stay healthy through the winter. Most important, it was far from domestic sheep operations, unlike the eastern edge of the park. "When Cathedral seemed to check out on all those fronts, we just got giddy," Stock said. Stephenson felt they couldn't meet the delisting goals without it.

Getting the sheep to the two

isolated park sites, though, required a web of logistics. For each translocation, biologists had to choose source herds with sufficient genetic diversity, then set up base camps near those animals. An operator in a small, nimble helicopter hovered 15 feet above selected sheep, then, like Spider-Man, fired a "net gun" that captured them. After checking their vitals and drawing blood for genetic evaluation—all while the sheep were blindfolded, which made them immediately docile—the team fastened tracking collars and loaded the animals into the aluminum boxes. A truck carted the boxes to a local airport, where the larger helicopter was waiting. After a 15-minute flight over Yosemite's high, rugged peaks, the operator gently deposited the three boxes. The biologists opened the doors and watched the sheep bolt for the cliffs. "It was almost like a parent having to let go," said Stock. "You put so much preparation into it and you just have to trust: OK they got this."

All signs say that they do. Nearly all of the translocated ewes were pregnant, and biologists are expecting to find a bunch of lambs at the new park sites when they complete their latest survey. "We need at least 305 adult and yearling females to be able to downlist and we are up to 275 females now," Stephenson said. "I have very high hopes." **NP**

LAURA ALLEN is a writer based in New York City.

Gift of the Glaciers

*Michigan's Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
offers visitors beaches, bluffs, clear waters, and
10,000-year-old hills of sand.*

BY LAURIE MCCLELLAN • PHOTOS BY IAN SHIVE

The crooked letters on the hand-painted sign stand a foot high, broadcasting a surprising message to everyone driving past the produce stall filled with ripe cherries. Instead of advertising pie or pints of fruit, they advise, "Live the Life You've Imagined." It's a sentiment off a coffee cup, but in this unexpected setting, it doesn't strike me as trite. Instead, it reminds me that I'm visiting a place that haunts my own imagination—the northern shores of the Great Lakes.

I'm driving toward Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in northern Michigan. I spent a season as a camp counselor in the woods nearby one distant summer, and ever since, I've dreamed about cackling loons, lighthouse beams winking over the water, and white bark peeling off birch trees—the sights and sounds that capture the spirit of the wild north for me. Thirty years ago, I only had time to drive through this park. This time around, I want to savor it. I pass cars with green canoes strapped to their roofs, reminding me of the fur traders and Native Americans who once paddled the lakes. In fact, it was the Anishinaabek Indians who gave the dunes their name.

THE POPULAR DUNE OVERLOOK at mile marker nine on the scenic loop.

Travel Essentials

Detroit Metro is the closest major airport, about 275 miles from the village of Empire, Michigan, the headquarters for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Stop at the visitor center in Empire to pay the park fee, pick up brochures, and see an extensive display of taxidermied animals representing species found in the area. Because the main park road passes through private land and trailheads and beaches are not always clearly marked, a park map is a must for getting around.

Manitou Island Transit sails from Leland, Michigan, and visits both North Manitou Island and South Manitou Island. The cost is \$35 for adults and \$20 for kids; reservations are recommended through manitoutransit.com. No food is available on either island, but the Cheese Shanty in Leland, just a few feet from the ferry dock, is a top choice for sack lunches and overstuffed sandwiches on pretzel bread. Both islands have campgrounds. Reservations are available only for the group campgrounds on South Manitou Island via www.recreation.gov.

Sleeping Bear is most popular in the summer, and insects decline noticeably after July 1. Parking lots on the scenic drive can fill up by noon, so go early or late to avoid the crowds and ensure the best light for taking pictures.

The town of Glen Arbor, sandwiched between two stretches of park land, makes a natural home base with its numerous hotels, restaurants, and a well-stocked grocery store. Food is also available near the park's visitor center in Empire, but it's most convenient to pack a lunch if you're spending the whole day outside.



THE LAKESHORE is a patchwork of park and private land, and the park's main road weaves in and out of villages. Right: When the glacier that carved out the Great Lakes melted, it left behind pulverized rock in the forms of hills and bluffs along the shores of Lake Michigan. Below: Dumping sand from a sneaker after climbing a dune and a rare Petoskey stone, a fossil found only in Northern Michigan.

According to their legend, a blazing forest fire on the shores of Lake Michigan once forced a mother bear and her two cubs into the water. When the mother bear reached the opposite shore, she looked back to discover that her cubs had drowned just before reaching land. The grieving mother was transformed into a giant sand dune, and her two cubs became the twin Manitou Islands.

Geologists tell a different story, one that's dominated by another towering figure: the glacier. More than 10,000 years ago, an ice sheet a mile thick made its way down a series of ancient river valleys, gouging out the Great Lakes. Then the bulldozer of ice melted away, leaving pulverized rock behind in the forms of hills and bluffs on the lakeshore. Winds blowing across Lake Michigan lifted the finest particles of rock to the top of these bluffs, creating perched sand dunes. Today, dunes like these are found in only a handful of places on the planet.



key stones on most beaches in the state. Even though the fossils inside the park are protected, I still wanted the thrill of winning my own scavenger hunt.

Arriving late in the day, I begin my quest for quiet at the short Pyramid Point Trail. When I pull in around dinnertime, the trail-

I arrive in mid-July, the height of vacation season, looking for two things I fear might be elusive at this time of year: some peace and quiet, and a Petoskey stone. The stones are fossils that can be found only in northern Michigan, the remains of a massive coral reef. The skeletons of six-sided coral polyps that lived 350 million years ago leave ghostly white lines on the smooth gray rocks. It's legal to collect Petos-

head is nearly empty, which seems like a good omen. The trail begins in a meadow of wildflowers but soon climbs through a maple and birch forest that reminds me of those mainstays of northern souvenir shops, maple syrup and birch bark canoes. I break through the trees to find myself on top of a dune that drops nearly straight down to the water below. I'm 400 feet above Lake Michigan on a sandy grandstand. The sun sparkles off a lake that stretches to the horizon, looking vast as an ocean, and a tiny Great Lakes freighter threads its way between the shore and the Manitou Islands, hazy green in the distance. This treacherous stretch of water, known as the Manitou Passage, has snared dozens of ships over the years. (The Maritime Museum in Glen Haven Historic Village, a few miles south of my lookout, holds daily demonstrations showing how locals once rescued the victims of Lake Michigan shipwrecks.)

I hadn't planned to linger for long, but with my toes burrowed into warm sand, I listen to the measured slap of waves hitting the beach below, punctuated by the bass notes of a foghorn. The

I listen to the measured slap of waves hitting the beach below, punctuated by the bass notes of a foghorn.

sounds lull me into watching the ship until it disappears into the blue—shipwreck safely avoided. Back on the path, three pileated woodpeckers, each a foot and a half tall, flash across the trail just a few yards away. I'd seen taxidermied versions in the visitor center and marveled at their size, and now I could tell that an enormous woodpecker doesn't actually flit—it seems to lumber through the air, like a duck wearing a backpack. Having sighted one cool bird, I check my birding brochure: that's one park species down, and 285 left to go.

The next morning, I head for the park's scenic drive to get an overview of the landscape. The drive is slotted into one of the widest sections of a mostly skinny park that hugs the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. When Sleeping Bear was established in 1970, it already had a long human history, starting with Native Americans tapping maple trees for sugar. French Jesuits arrived in canoes in 1675, then Europeans moved to the area to cut timber for steamships plying the Great Lakes. They were followed by farmers, and finally by nature lovers building vacation cottages and homes. As a result, the lakeshore is a patchwork of park and private land, and the



THE FERRY to the Manitou Islands departs from the historic fishing town of Leland. Top: The clear, blue waters of Lake Michigan.

SIDE TRIP

The Grand Traverse Lighthouse, built in 1858, still guides ships around the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula. (If you hold out your right palm to represent the mitten of Michigan, the tip of your pinky forms this peninsula.) The lighthouse, with its restored 1920s interior, is open for tours and climbs up the tower steps; it's located inside Leelanau State Park, 20 miles north of Leland. The lighthouse is said to harbor the ghost of Peter Nelson, a keeper who last tended the light in 1890. Admission to the park is \$8.40 per vehicle, and admission to the lighthouse and its museum is an additional \$4.





EVEN AT THE HEIGHT of vacation season, it's possible to find quiet, empty stretches of beach. Top right: An ice cream shop in the gateway town of Empire. Bottom right: The town of Leland is located on the lake just north of the national seashore.



park's main road weaves in and out of villages, meandering past old wooden barns and cherry orchards filled with fruit.

The scenic drive loops through the maple forest and emerges on top of four square miles of sand dunes, an expanse that connects to the body of the legend's sleeping bear. The Cottonwood Trail is the only path onto the dunes, and hiking along its weathered gray boardwalks, I discover that these dunes are no arid Sahara but an oasis of life. Cottonwood trees shade the path, their leaves rattling in the breeze off the lake. A hognose snake skitters through the coarse grass, leaving an S-shaped track in its wake,

and strangest of all, wide swaths of sand are blanketed by the tiny white flowers of baby's breath, the same plant that florists use in bouquets. I enjoy the sweet smell until I meet park ranger Peggy Berman, out on patrol. She tells me the flowers escaped from a nearby garden 30 years ago and have taken over wide sections of the dunes. The delicate blossoms are anchored by a gnarled root bigger than my forearm, which lodges them in place. These roots are harming the dunes by preventing them from naturally drifting over time. It's a reminder of the fragility of this rare ecosystem, which sits cheek by jowl with civilization and its gardens.

Although the dunes are fragile, there's something about a giant hill of sand that begs to be climbed. The park's Dune Climb, about five miles north of the village of Empire, scratches that itch with a 110-foot-high dune that kids, or anyone who can't resist the sight of all that sand, can climb up and then descend at top speed, yelling optional. The dune has actually shrunk over time, as visitors cart it away grain by grain in their shoes.

So far, my hikes have taken me to the tops of the dunes, high above Lake Michigan itself. But if I want to hunt for a Petoskey stone, I need to find a beach. A tip leads me to the Sleeping

Bear Point trailhead, where a path veers away from the parking lot toward the lake. I wind my way between two steep dunes, wondering if I'm lost, then suddenly emerge on a wide sweep of empty beach. In the distance, a figure hunches over in the surf, searching for something in the water. It takes five minutes of walking over the cool, damp sand to reach the man, who is peering through the clear water, picking up smooth beach stones and chucking them back in. A pile of his favorites rest nearby. "These are just pretty rocks," he explains, "except for this one." He pulls a gray stone out of the pile. "This one's a Petoskey. They're easier

Although the dunes are fragile, there's something about a giant hill of sand that begs to be climbed.



to spot if you look underwater.” It had taken him about an hour of searching, he said, to come across his find. One hour later, I don’t have a single fossil, but I’ve got my own pile of pretty rocks, wrinkly feet, and the kind of serenity that can be improved only by something even more blissful—like a slice of Michigan cherry pie from a local bakery.

I think I’ve found Sleeping Bear’s most out-of-the way beach, but I’m wrong. The next day my husband joins me, and we set out for one of the park’s jewels, isolated South Manitou Island, reachable only by an 80-minute ferry ride. The island has no permanent residents and no cars, but its former inhabitants left behind a tall white lighthouse, a one-room school, and a picturesque cemetery. I take the Manitou Island Transit ferry on a Friday morning with a few dozen weekend backpackers bound for the island’s campgrounds, but once they disappear into the woods, we seem to have the place to ourselves. We sit on the steps of the 1871 lighthouse, eating lunch and watching swallows swoop over the waves, snatching insects from the air. Once a minute, as if on schedule, a line of double-breasted cormorants

A BOARDWALK extends over a piece of coastline where there’s a steep drop to the water.

skims past. Perhaps they’re flying to the shipwreck we spot later, where roosting birds cover the rusting hulk of the *Francisco Morazán*. Five hours after we arrive, which seems far too soon, we hike back to the ferry dock.

While the boat motors into sight, I search the shoreline one last time for the flash of mottled gray that signals a Petoskey stone. I board the ferry with empty pockets but the realization that I have, after all, found an excellent prize: a reason to come back to Sleeping Bear next year.

LAURIE MCCLELLAN is a freelance writer who grew up on the southern shores of Lake Michigan. She loves maple syrup and anything made out of birch bark, and has hiked in more than 20 national parks.

IAN SHIVE is a photographer, author, film and television producer, and conservationist. His latest book, *Celebrating the National Park Centennial*, will be released in November.



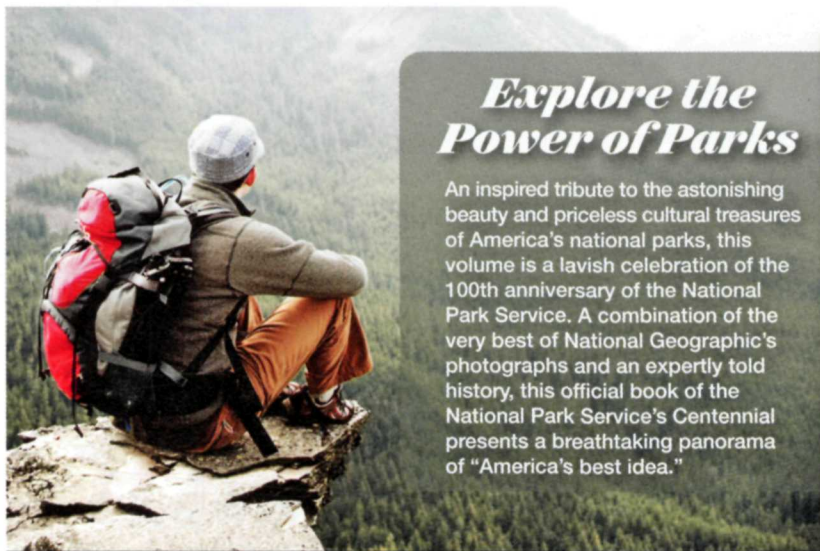
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
"The Most Beautiful Place in America"

- Good Morning America Viewers

four seasons of outdoor recreation | wine tasting
 microbreweries | Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
 dining | shopping | cozy lodging

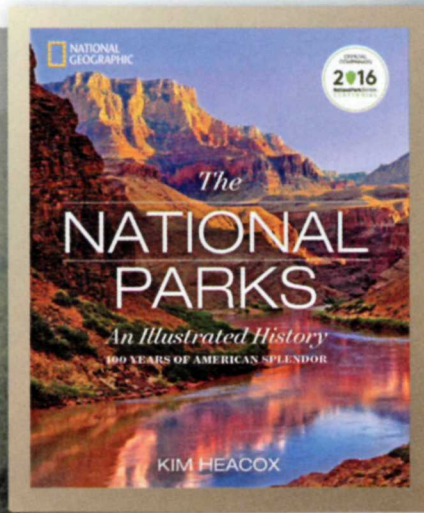


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JEREMY POLLARD tends to the animals at Oxon Hill Farm early in the morning before visitors arrive.

In front of a yellow sign warning of sewage overflows, Tony Carter dangled his rod into the flat waters of Oxon Cove. Around him was the flotsam of urban life—potato chip bags, a few soda cans, and other assorted junk. His son, Ronald, helped bait the hook. They waited, father and son, their water view giving way to highways and belching smokestacks. On a beautiful spring day, they were the only visitors fishing in the park.

Carter soon caught a catfish, and his son's face was alive with pride. The two have snagged bluegill, bass, and crappie here, too, but Carter always throws them back. He doesn't have to release them all, but he worries about toxins in the water. Those concerns, however, would never stop him from coming, he says. In a paved-over watershed, where else can he show his child foxes, snakes, and turkeys?

"I love it," he said, "because it gives me a chance to introduce my son to nature."

Oxon Cove and the adjacent Oxon Hill Farm make for a paradox park—near so many, but known to so few. The 500-acre property, which is part of the National Park System, is just off the busy Capital Beltway and only a few miles from the U.S. Capitol Building and the National Mall. For hikers and bikers, it provides trails shaded by beech, cherry, and oak trees. Birders routinely spot eagles and osprey and even orioles here. Children love to meet the tolerant pony mule and the goats and chickens at the 70-acre farm. History buffs enjoy touring the DeButts family farmhouse, which offered its residents an unforgettable view of the bloody

The National Park Next Door

BY RONA KOBELL · PHOTOS BY GASTON LACOMBE

Nearly six million people in the D.C. region live within a short drive of Oxon Cove.

Why aren't more of them visiting it?



PARK RANGER
Stephanie Marrone brings Minnie the cow into the barn for milking. Right: The park is an oasis of green surrounded by development.

battle of Bladensburg during the War of 1812.

But while nearly six million residents live within a short drive of the park, only 30,000 visitors find it every year. Most don't discover it themselves but are brought there on school field trips. And as more people have moved into the fast-growing area around the park, Oxon Cove has become even harder to find and, its advocates say, even more endangered. They worry that with construction booming at nearby National Harbor—a mega-project that will eventually house a billion-dollar casino, an outlet mall, condominiums, hotels, and restaurants—the park will be forgotten, or worse, will fall victim to the development encircling it. Already, construction is encroaching and Oxon Cove is suffering from neglect. Bike trails are rutted and in disrepair. Trash bobs in the waterway. Construction cranes loom over the walking paths. On one side of the park

is the outlet mall; on the other, one of the nation's largest sewage treatment plants.

"Right now, I'd say that development is the known threat. This is the only pocket cove of green space on the southern end of the Potomac River in D.C., and it's really important to preserve it," said Ed Stierli, NPCA's Chesapeake field representative. "They always say they're in the forever business at the National Park Service, and we want to make sure they mean it."

The visitors who discover the farm and walk down to the cove will be rewarded with a panorama of Northern Virginia's shiny office buildings, the area's many military bases, and an urban waterway that is by turns beautiful and utterly distressing. There are diving cormorants and gliding ducks, discarded cans, and an occasional foul smell.

Two hundred years ago, the area was wetlands and

farmland dotted with the early buildings of the nation's fledgling capital. The DeButts family owned the property, and the white farmhouse where they resided remains open for tours. Those who visit can look across the Potomac and imagine the view that Mary DeButts witnessed from her farmhouse during the War of 1812. Washington was burning, and the British would soon make their way to Baltimore, where they would underestimate the might of the port city and eventually lose the war.

"I cannot express to you the distress it has occasioned at the Battle of Bladensburg. We heard every fire. Our house was shook repeatedly by the firing upon forts and bridges, and illuminated by the fires in our Capital," Mary DeButts wrote to her sister, Millicent, in 1815.

In those days, Oxon Cove was a plantation where slaves worked the vast grounds. It remained a working farm until

the DeButts family sold the property to the U.S. government so it could establish a therapeutic farm there. The farm, called Godding Croft, was part of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Doctors hoped that being outside and among the animals would be therapeutic for the mentally ill patients, many of them members of the military.

In 1967, the Park Service acquired the property with a mandate to protect it from development. Today, activities at the park include tours of the historic plantation home, Mount Welby; bird-watching walks; and opportunities to milk the farm's cow.

But despite its central location, its miles of bike routes, its water views, and its moss-covered trails, Oxon Cove has attracted little investment and attention compared with other nearby national parks and landmarks, and it shows. Jim Hudnall, of the Oxon Hill Bicycle and Trail Club, once



CHILDREN TAKE TURNS taking Abe the goat for a walk. Top right: Visitors from the Meeting House Cooperative Preschool in Alexandria, Virginia, feed the chickens. A sign (middle right) invites the public to try milking the cow (bottom right).



commuted along the park's bike trail on his way to work at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory just north of the cove. Today, he said, some commuters he used to see are skipping the park and taking a different set of bike lanes to connect to downtown Washington. They are a little leery of veering into Southeast Washington, D.C., which has long been struggling with a high crime rate despite a lot of investment and the new Nationals ballpark. And navigating the trails in Oxon Cove can be challenging.

"There are some rough spots, and there are some places where the asphalt has crumbled," Hudnall said. "Some of the pavement is broken up."

Oxon Cove should be having a moment. Nationwide, urban areas are embracing the wildlife around them. Federal agencies are focused on acquiring urban parkland, making better uses of the spaces that the public already owns, or providing funds to clean up dump sites and old industrial lands to create suitable park space. In 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service named ten urban wildlife refuges as part of an Obama Administration initiative that aims to connect more Americans to nature. The Park Service also has a major urban agenda, which includes identifying nine "model cities" that have a system of parks residents can easily navigate. Washington, D.C., is one such model city.

City residents are taking to urban parks and waterways despite the pollution, and their presence in places that were once written off is developing a constituency to fight for clean water. In Chicago, paddlers amble along the city's namesake river and hike through its wilderness. In Pittsburgh, mountain bikers traverse trails that were once dumps for steel waste. Boston hosts a river swim every year in its once-fetid harbor. Even across from Oxon Cove, the Anacostia River's traffic has increased dramatically, and so has the clamor for reducing pollution in the area. Washington, D.C., passed a plastic-bag ban, and nearby Prince George's County has passed a ban on polystyrene

foam food containers and packing material.

But even with a motivated public, the Oxon Cove area seems forgotten.

"It gets left out a lot," said Julie Lawson, executive director of Trash Free Maryland. "It just doesn't get the investment it needs."

The park schedules regular cleanups, but staff say these events generally bring only a handful of volunteers. In contrast, a cleanup day at other local parks can bring in hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers. Funding is clearly also part of the problem: National Capital Parks-East, the group of national park sites that includes Oxon

Over the past three decades, both the federal government and local developers have hatched plans to turn part of the park into a women's prison, a golf course, and housing.

Cove, has seen its budget reduced repeatedly by Congress in the last five years.

Those who love the park see potential beyond what it is today. Don Briggs, superintendent for the Park Service's nearby Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, envisions Oxon Cove Park as a connector between the bike trails along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, which could take cyclists from Washington all the way out to Harper's Ferry in West Virginia. Oxon Cove, he said, could serve as a trailhead for multiple routes; it has parking, bathrooms, and activities for kids.

The Park Service and the next-door town of Forest Heights would like to open and extend the western part of the park next to the D.C. impound lot to provide visitors with more opportunities to enjoy the Potomac River. The Park Service requested public comment on the plan this past spring, but with tight funds, park advocates worry the agency will never implement the proposal.

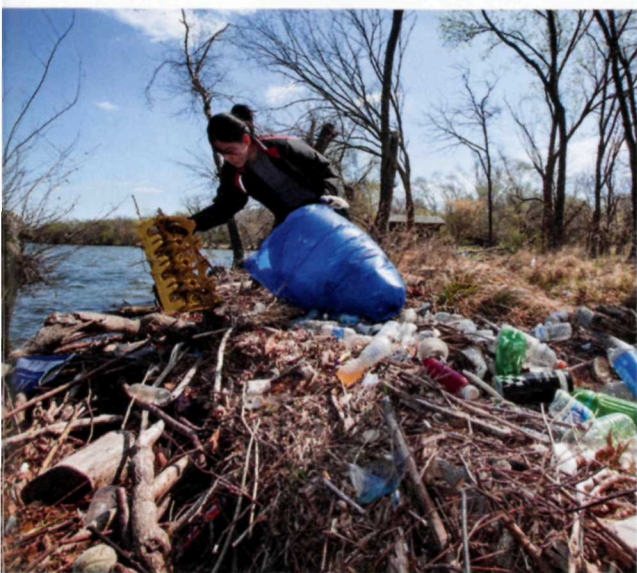
Meanwhile, just finding Oxon Cove can be tricky. Construction has rerouted traffic in such a way that many motorists miss the park's wooden sign, noted Oxon Cove Supervisory Park Ranger Adam Gresek. With the entrance poorly marked, visitors frequently end up making U-turns on the two main roads heading into the park. Mapquest, Google Maps, and other navigational tools aren't helpful, either.

"We're trying to figure out what authority to talk to so we can actually get an address," Gresek said.

In the longer term, the park's very existence may be threatened as developers covet the land and cash-strapped governments have a hard time saying no. Though the Park Service owns the property, which is split between Washington, D.C., and Maryland, that



MOUNT WELBY, the original home of the DeButts family, was built in the early 1800s and is the oldest structure on the property. Top right: Tony Carter and his son Ronald frequently fish in Oxon Cove, where they've caught bluegill, bass, crappie, and catfish. A clean-up event along the shore of the Potomac River in April (bottom left) and the construction site of the new casino resort just beyond the park's boundaries (bottom right).





alone doesn't guarantee it will remain a park. Indeed, over the past three decades, both the federal government and local developers have hatched plans to turn part of the park into a women's prison, a golf course, and housing.

None of those plans came to pass, but a dramatic overhaul isn't unthinkable given how quickly change has come to this once neglected stretch of southern Washington, D.C. Last year, Forest Heights "annexed" the park, a maneuver that raised eyebrows among conservationists. Forest Heights Mayor Jacqueline Goodall said the town did so to protect the park and that the annexation will allow it to make better future planning decisions about roads, trails, bike paths, and waterways. The town has neither the desire nor the intention to develop the park, she said, and she's aware that the town can't substantially modify the park without federal approval.

With major bike trail improvements, the park would likely see more visitors like Bo Bodniewicz, an environmental engineer from Alexandria, Virginia, who bikes through the park every day on his way to work in the District. On weekends, he brings his toddler, Diana, who loves the cows and sheep.

Bodniewicz said he dreamed of living in a city where he could bike to work, but never thought he'd be whizzing by a working farm every morning. Like the other park supporters, he worries

THE 70-ACRE working farm is home to a variety of animals including pigs, chickens, goats, and a tolerant pony mule that kids like to pet.

about the park's future—especially because in his line of work, he has seen many environmental treasures lost.

"This is a national park," Bodniewicz said, "but it's not out of the realm of possibility for deals to be made."

Neil Koch hopes that doesn't come to pass. The Park Service ranger, who usually works nearby at the National Mall, was leading a group through the cove to help the understaffed park on National Bird Migration Day. As they made their way along the hiker-biker trail to the cove, several cormorants and an oriole sailed overhead. For many in the group, it was their first sight of the bird outside of Camden Yards ballpark, where it is actually a man dressed in an orange and black costume.

Koch marveled at both the oriole and the Carters, the pair who were fishing that day. Though the bird-watching program and children's activities had been well advertised, very few visitors beyond this small cluster had found their way to the park. That, Koch said, would never happen at the National Mall.

"This is right on the doorstep of Washington, D.C.," Koch said. "Gosh almighty, father-son fishing. Why aren't we seeing more of that?"

RONA KOBELL is a staff writer for the *Chesapeake Bay Journal* and the producer of *Midday on the Bay* on WYPR radio in Baltimore.

GASTON LACOMBE, a photographer and filmmaker based in Washington, D.C., specializes in conservation and documentary projects.



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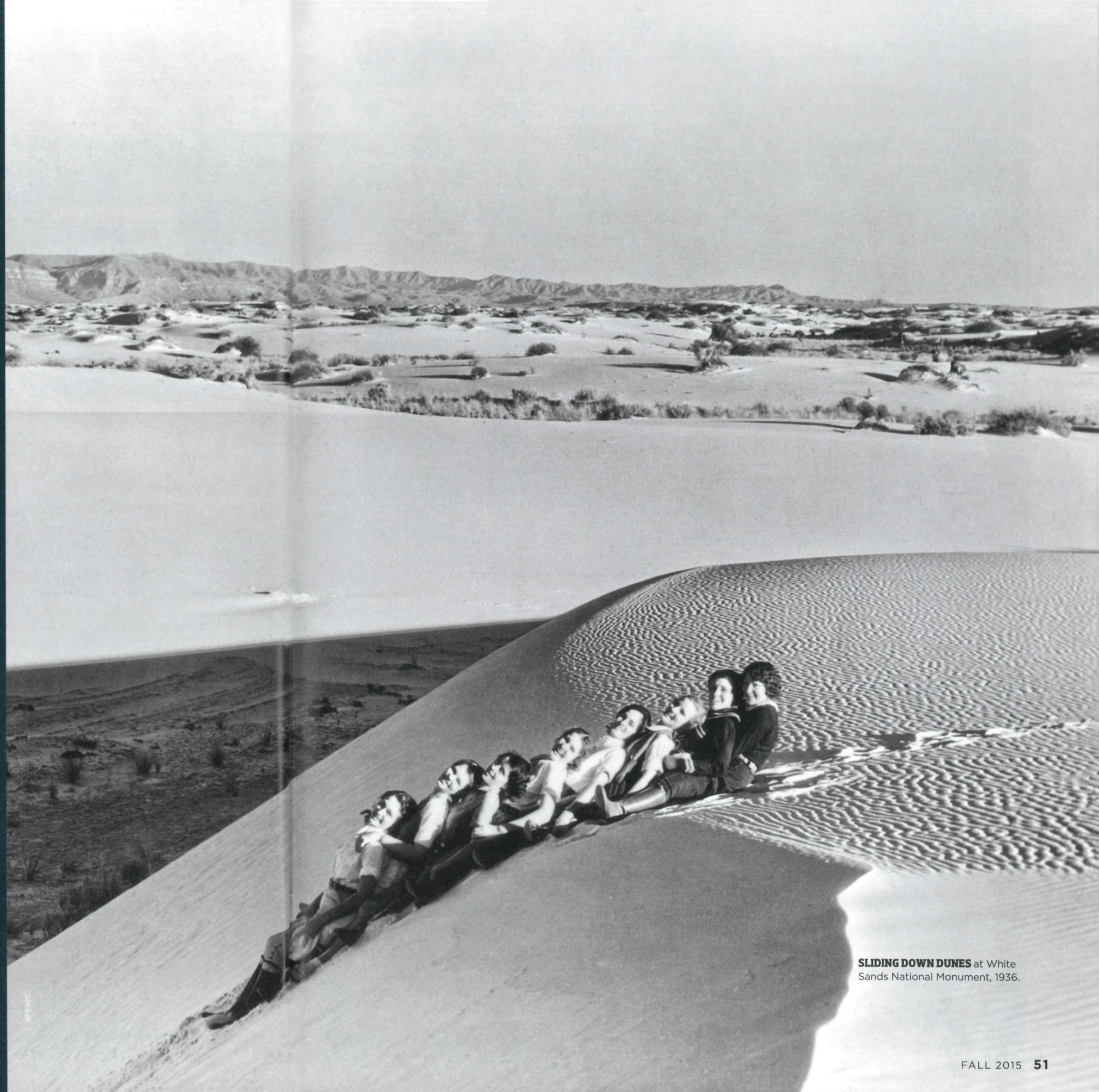


Landscapes for the People

Photographer George Grant has never been widely known, but his skillfully crafted work helped popularize the idea that the national parks belong to everyday Americans.

BY REN AND HELEN DAVIS

PHOTOS BY GEORGE ALEXANDER GRANT



SLIDING DOWN DUNES at White Sands National Monument, 1936.

“Of all the sciences, geography finds its origin in action, and, what is more, in adventurous action.”

In a conference room at the Saint Michaels, Maryland, public library, Mary Grant McMullen slowly removed an object from a brown paper wrapper. “This belonged to my uncle George,” she said, pulling out a gasoline-station map of the United States, yellowed with age and mounted on cardboard. On the map, George Alexander Grant, the first chief photographer of the National Park Service, had carefully traced the routes of his automobile travels between 1929 and 1962. In the border, below the thicket of tangled black lines, Grant had penned a quote from a Joseph Conrad essay: “Of all the sciences, geography finds its origin in action, and, what is more, in adventurous action.”

The old map is tangible evidence of the insatiable curiosity and thirst for adventure that consumed much of Grant’s adult life. During his quarter-century as the national parks’ principal staff photographer, he crisscrossed the country numerous times, traveling more than 140,000 miles to capture more than 30,000 images from nearly all the national parks, monuments, and historic sites that existed at the time. His virtuosic photographs appeared in publications around the world, graced the walls of congressional offices, and encouraged countless visitors to explore the parks.

But nearly all of Grant’s images were credited simply “National Park Service.” For decades, he has been all but unknown outside the agency.

During a 2006 visit to the Park Service photographic archives to research a book about the Civilian Conservation Corps—a New Deal

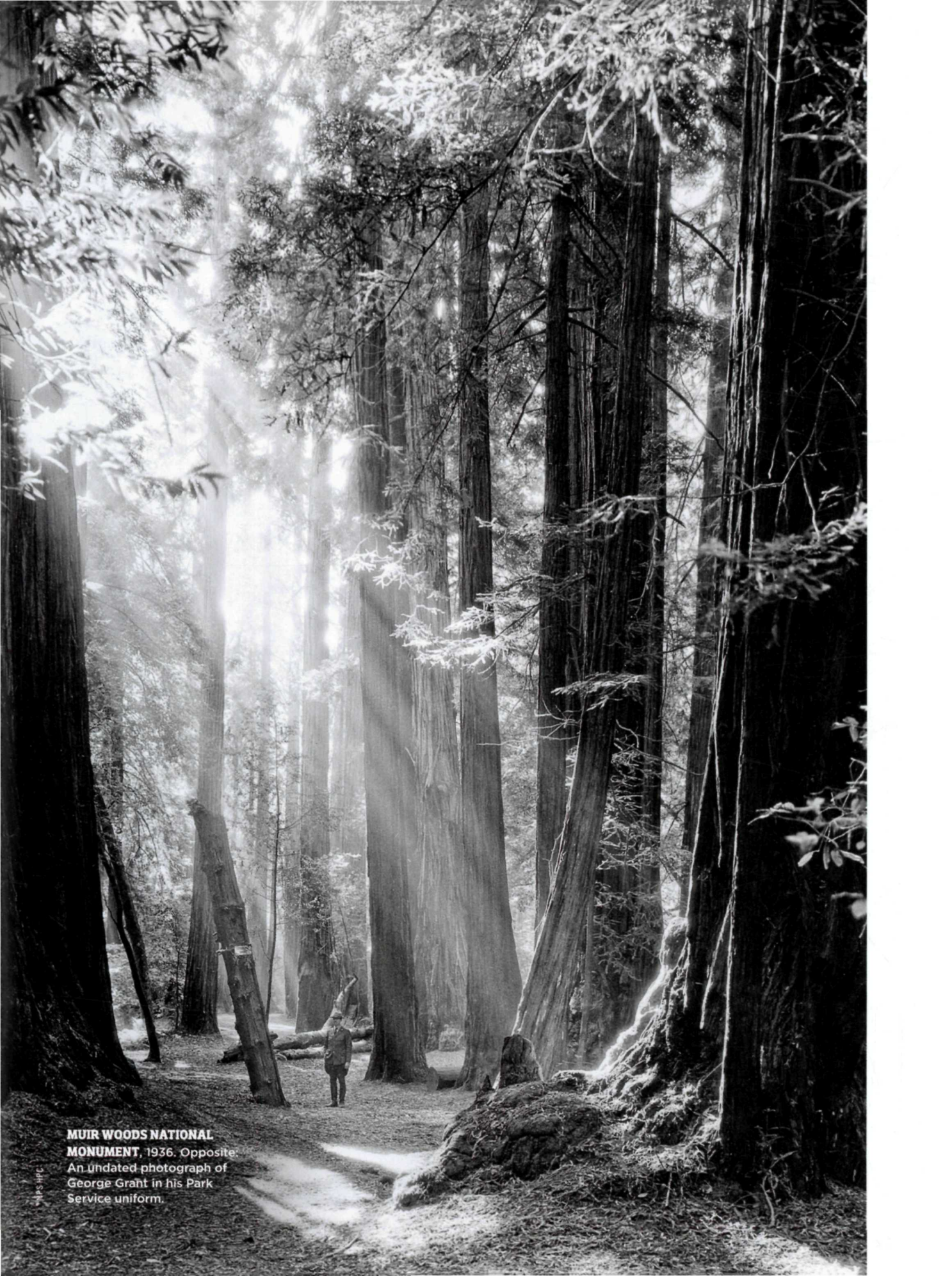


GRANT FAMILY

initiative—we came across several remarkable photographs of program enrollees in national parks. Struck by the artistry, we wondered if they were Ansel Adams images, but an archivist corrected us, explaining that Grant was the photographer. How was it possible that the author of these indelible photos and many thousands of others was completely unfamiliar to us? Fascinated, we set out soon after on a long journey to find out all we could about this unsung chronicler of the parks and the legacy he left behind.

GRANT WAS BORN IN MILTON, Pennsylvania, in 1891 and moved to nearby Sunbury soon after. Even then, he was a dreamer and an observer, a child who loved to watch trains roll through his town and boats travel along the Susquehanna River to faraway destinations. After high school and a series of factory jobs, he worked as a metalwork craftsman at the Roycroft Community in New York, a center of the early 20th-century Arts and Crafts movement. There, he began to develop the technical skills and artistic sensibility that would later define his photography.

After America’s entry into the Great War in 1917, Grant enlisted in the Army and was stationed at Fort Russell, Wyoming, for artillery training. In the West for the first time, he fell in love with the country’s



MUIR WOODS NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1936. Opposite: An undated photograph of George Grant in his Park Service uniform.

If you haven't already adopted photography as a hobby it is because there must be a screw loose somewhere."

grand landscapes. He returned home at the war's end, but the experience transformed him; he vowed to go back West someday.

In 1921, Grant wrote a letter to the chief ranger at Yellowstone National Park asking about possible employment. "I am sick and tired of inside work, of factories and industrial communities in general ... and almost wept when we left Cheyenne," he said. Nothing came of his query, but Grant was undeterred. He continued dashing off letters, and the following year, after one of his missives finally landed on the right desk, he was hired for a seasonal position at Yellowstone. Soon, Grant was balancing clerical and ranger duties with photography, snapping pictures when he could and spending evenings in the darkroom.

At the season's end, the superintendent, Horace Albright, offered him a coveted permanent ranger position, but Grant turned it down. He was concerned about the dearth of photographic work in the winter, and a backcountry horseback accident had convinced him that he was not suited for the job's physical demands. Reluctantly, Grant wrote a resignation letter, closing with his hope that one day, the Park Service budget would "go so far as to support a photographer, a profession that I have fully made up my mind to master." Unmentioned in his correspondence was that a broken heart from a failed summer romance may have played a part in his decision to leave.

Grant moved on. He briefly studied photography in New York City, then accepted a position as a photographer for Pennsylvania State University. But he continued a steady correspondence with Albright, and finally, in 1929, his persistence paid off, and he was appointed the first staff photographer for the Park Service.

The first field season set a pattern that Grant would



RICKSECKER POINT in Mount Rainier National Park, 1932.

NPS/HPC



THE RIM of the canyon near Artist's Point, Yellowstone National Park, 1933.

follow for most of the next decade. Loading a Park Service vehicle with camping gear and photography equipment (he would later name his assigned truck “the Hearse”), he set out on a 4,000-mile trip to visit 13 Southwestern parks, from the Grand Canyon to Zion. At each stop, Grant would meet park staff, then travel—by automobile or sometimes on horseback—to photo locations. For most of his assignments, Grant preferred a 5x7-inch view camera with heavy tripod and sheet film; for more remote destinations

requiring foot or horse travel, he often would pack a 120-roll film camera and lightweight tripod. His truck doubled as a rolling darkroom, where Grant spent countless evenings mixing chemicals and processing film from each day’s shoot.

Impressed with his work, Grant’s boss asked him to participate in the first Park Naturalists Conference in 1929. At his presentation on the principles of photography, Grant told the audience: “You fellows are living in the most beau-

tiful parts of the country. You have pictures almost anywhere you look. If you haven’t already adopted photography as a hobby it is because there must be a screw loose somewhere.”

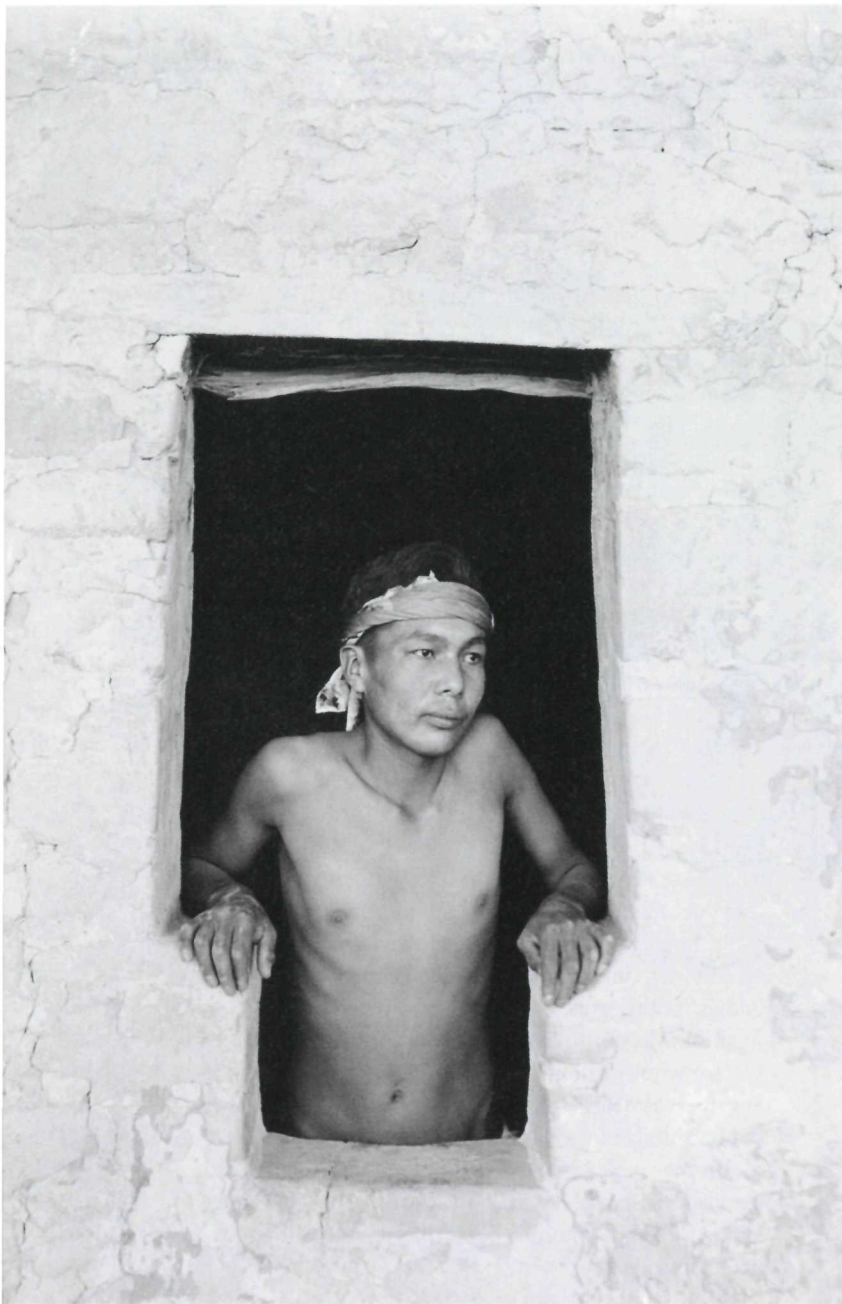
President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives to aid the nation’s recovery from the Great Depression had a profound effect on Grant’s work. In the 1930s, Roosevelt nearly doubled the size of the National Park System—adding national monuments, historic sites, and military parks—and created the popular Civilian Conservation Corps program to

put men to work in forestry, erosion control, and other park projects. Grant, who had been promoted to chief photographer, was heavily involved during this golden age for parks, documenting Conservation Corps activities and providing thousands of images of new and existing sites.

Through the decade, Grant’s schedule revolved around winter laboratory tasks at the agency’s Washington headquarters, summer travel in the West, periodic assignments in the East, and occasional participation in survey expeditions to planned or proposed national parks. Among these were visits to the Great Smoky Mountains (1931); the Natchez Trace Parkway (1934); Washington’s Olympic Mountains (1934) and North Cascades (1938); southern Arizona and Sonora, Mexico (1935); Big Bend in Texas (1936); and the Oregon coast (1938).

Grant’s last major assignment came in 1948, when he joined teams of archaeologists and historians from the Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution on the Missouri River Basin Project. Tasked with collecting artifacts and documenting sites before inundation by waters from irrigation dams then under construction, Grant spent months at a time in the field and darkroom. Each year, the budget for this work was reduced, however, and in 1954, his position was eliminated. For Grant, it was disappointing yet not wholly unexpected that his career with the Park Service was over. He traveled east to live with his brother in Maryland before returning to Santa Fe at the invitation of a former Park Service colleague. Suffering from chronic respiratory illness, possibly from a lifetime of smoking and exposure to photography chemicals, he died in Baltimore in October 1964.

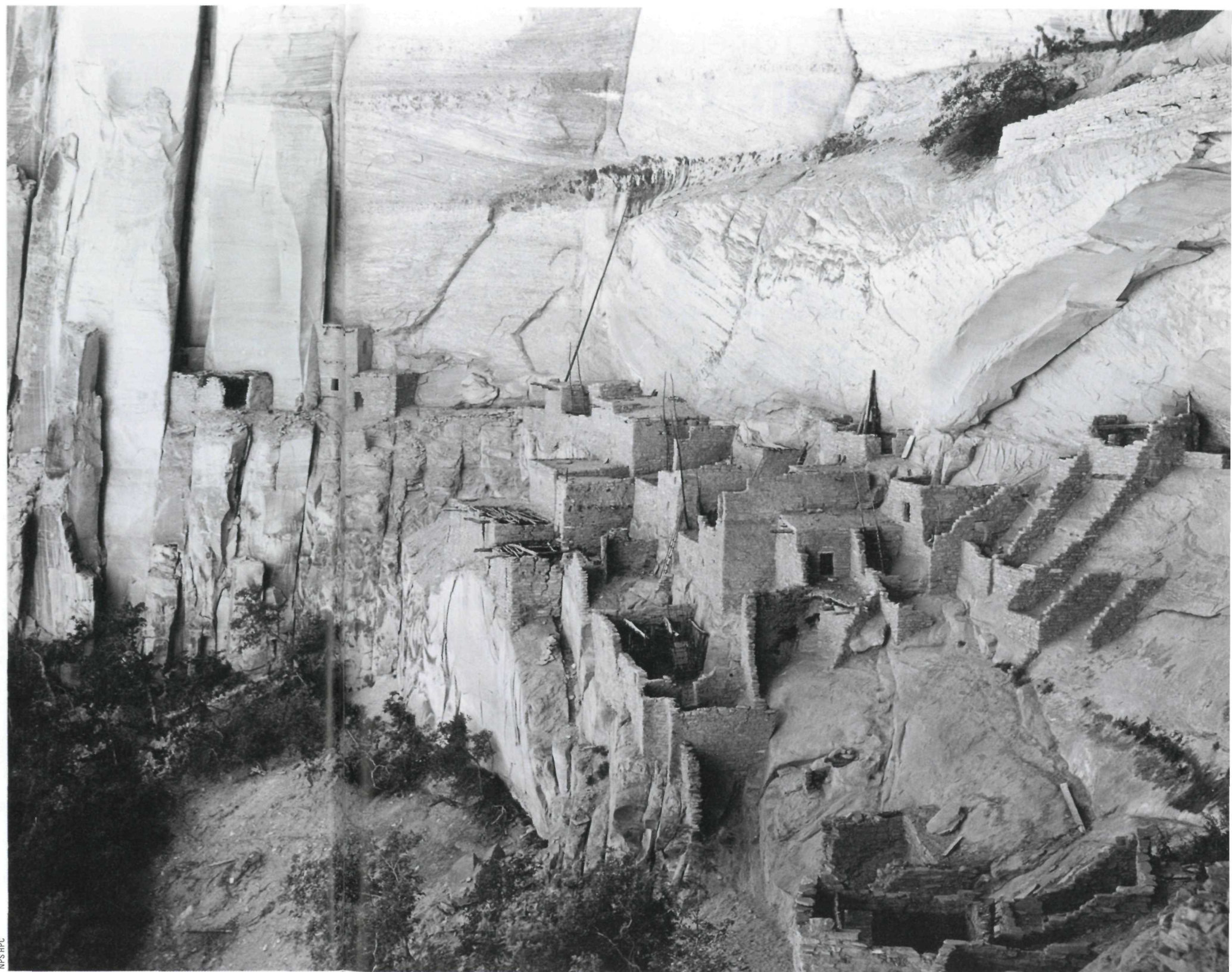
We are not the only ones who have mistaken Grant’s photographs for work by Ansel Adams. Comparisons are almost inevitable given that they often photographed the same subjects in a similar style. Both considered themselves “straight” photographers who sought to capture a subject’s natural beauty in sharp focus and vivid detail. But while Adams is most renowned for his pristine, empty landscapes, Grant’s assignments called for both scenic images and pictures depicting people at play in the outdoors. These photographs, capturing subjects from horseback parties in Yellowstone to campers near Mount Rainier and guided tours at Mesa Verde, were visual invitations to all Americans to explore and enjoy their national parks. The pictures reflect the simple pleasure and, at times, awe of visitors and were approachable enough to give viewers the idea that they could head out to the wild and produce similar images armed with their own Kodak Brownies or other inexpensive cameras.



NPS/HPC

As the Park Service nears its centennial, Grant's photographs haven't lost their relevance. They inspire wonder, still, and they offer a glimpse back to an important moment when national parks were shedding their image as remote enclaves available only to those with time and money and were truly becoming landscapes for the people.

REN AND HELEN DAVIS are the authors of numerous books including *Our Mark on This Land: A Guide to the Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps in America's Parks* and *Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery: An Illustrated History and Guide*. This essay was adapted from their new book, *Landscapes for the People: George Alexander Grant, First Chief Photographer of the National Park Service*, published by University of Georgia Press.



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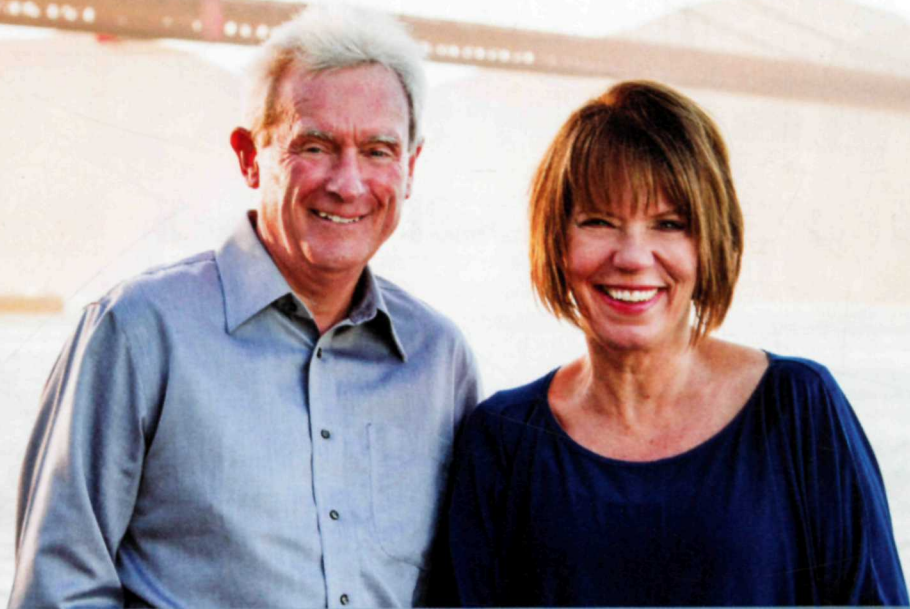
BETAKIN RUIN, Navajo National Monument, 1935. Left: Emmett Harryson, a Navajo, at Mesa Verde National Park, 1929.

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Crissy Field, The Presidio, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco, CA.
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Where They Cried

A historic trail marks the paths of thousands of Native Americans who endured a forced march in the 1830s.

AMONG THE CLIFFS AND GLADES of western Kentucky, a mile-long trail cuts across a patch of prairie. A sandstone arch called Mantle Rock looms in a nearby hollow, where thick carpets of moss soften the shapes of exposed rock. Along the trail, you might spot pockets of rare June grass or the bright bloom of a prickly pear cactus.

Mantle Rock Nature Preserve is a peaceful place these days, but the serene landscape belies a dark chapter in its history. Through the winter of 1838 to 1839, thousands of Cherokee people walked this trail and hunkered in these woods, enduring cold, hunger, and disease on a forced march from their homeland in the southern Appalachians to present-day Oklahoma. Survivors described the journey as “the place where they cried.” Today, much of the original trail is gone, but the National Park Service leads a collaborative effort to preserve traces of the paths and memories of those who made the trek. The Cherokee diaspora is memorialized at dozens of sites like Mantle Rock, across nine states and 5,000 miles, by the

Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

As the American frontier bulged westward in the early 19th century, settlers began to crowd into the Cherokee homeland in the southern Appalachians. Squatters carved illegal homesteads out of tribal lands while the government of Georgia passed laws stripping Cherokees of basic rights. In 1829, Andrew Jackson gained the White House on the promise of opening vast tracts of western lands to white settlement. “As Americans headed west, they wanted the Indians to go away, and they didn’t care how or where,” said Frank Norris, a historian with the Park Service’s National Trails Intermountain Region.

The Cherokees fought for their homeland all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in the Cherokees’ favor in 1832. Nevertheless, in 1835, a federal delegation met a rogue faction of Cherokees at their capital in New Echota, Georgia, and negotiated a treaty ceding all of the tribe’s land to the United States and setting a two-year deadline for

the tribe to move west of the Mississippi. Though 16,000 Cherokees—a vast majority of the tribe—signed a petition objecting to the Treaty of New Echota, Congress ratified it in 1836.

Across the Cherokee Nation in the spring of 1838, its farmers tilled their fields and planted rows of corn and beans in fertile Appalachian valleys as they had done for generations. Then the deadline passed. U.S. troops charged through Cherokee towns and homesteads, seizing everyone they found. Many were taken away wearing only the clothes on their backs, carrying whatever they could grab.

The army rounded up 16,000 Cherokees and imprisoned them in stockades, where some waited months to begin the 800-mile journey west. Once under way, they traveled without



WHEELS OF HISTORY

Each summer, students from the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina retrace the Trail of Tears by bike, visiting key sites and meeting groups involved with the trail. To prepare for their 950-mile trip, the riders train for three months and study their ancestors' experiences during the removal.

An estimated 1,000 Cherokees perished of disease, exposure, and famine.

adequate food or shelter over rough country as late-summer heat gave way to bitter winter storms. A white missionary traveling with the Cherokees wrote in his journal that they “were obliged to lie down on the naked ground, in the open air, exposed to wind and rain ... many are hastening to a premature grave.” An estimated 1,000 Cherokees perished of disease, exposure, and famine.

The Cherokees were just one of five tribes in the Southeast to suffer under Jackson’s removal policies. The Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole—likely more than 90,000 people in all—also were rounded up and moved to Indian Territory. “All went through their own versions of the Trail of Tears,” said Norris.

Since the establishment of the national historic trail in 1987, the Park Service has partnered with tribes, public agencies, nonprofits, landowners, scholars, and amateur historians to preserve and explain points along the various routes to Indian Territory. Most of the established stops relate to the Cherokees’ experiences, but increasingly, partners are working to tell a larger narrative about all five tribes. It’s an ongoing, collaborative project as new sites open to the public and more stories emerge.

Among these sites, Mantle Rock is a rarity: Most of the historic trail traverses private land or has been paved over by neighborhoods, downtowns, and highways, but here, visitors

can walk on the same dirt trail the Cherokees traveled that deadly winter. In 2010, the Park Service and The Nature Conservancy set up an exhibit along the trail about the Cherokees who camped here while waiting for the nearby Ohio River to thaw. And just this March, a series of signs was installed to mark the trail through downtown Chattanooga, a point of departure for thousands of Cherokees.

Many who survived the journey arrived in Indian Territory with nothing, and government-issued rations mostly failed to meet their needs. So from the unfamiliar soil of their new home, the Cherokees began to rebuild. Today, the survivors’ descendants make up the Cherokee Nation, a thriving cultural and political entity of more than 300,000 citizens in northeastern Oklahoma.

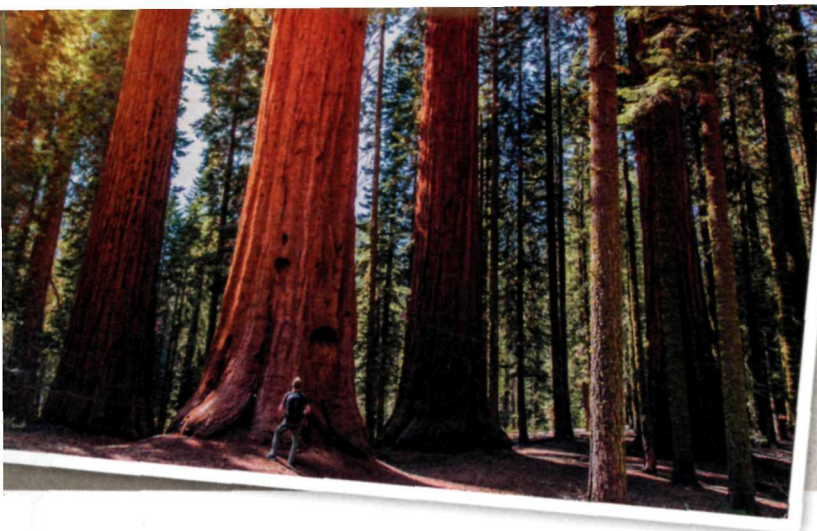
“We didn’t get involved in marking the trail because we wanted to perpetuate our ancestors as victims—though they were persecuted, no question—or to appropriate their victimization for ourselves,” said Troy Wayne Poteete, executive director of the Trail of Tears Association and chief justice of the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court. “We use it to celebrate our ancestors’ tenacity and resistance. Every time someone marks a new site along the trail, it’s an opportunity for Cherokees to tell the bigger story of our nation’s revival.” **NP**

JULIA BUSIEK has lived and worked in national parks in four states.



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