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THE NATIONAL PARK ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND

By Beatrix Farrand

Illustrations from photographs by George R. King

MORE than three centuries ago Champlain wrote: "The same day we passed also near to an island about four or five leagues long, in the neighborhood of which we just escaped being lost on a little rock on a level with the water, which made an opening in our barque near the keel. . . . It is very high, and notched in places, so that there is the appearance to one at sea, as of seven or eight mountains extending along near each other. The summit of most of them is destitute of trees. . . . I named it Isle des Monts Déserts."

This description of the bold and grandly outlined mountains of the new reservation was written after Champlain's voyage of exploration down our eastern coast in 1604, under the orders of his friend and patron the Sieur de Monts, whose charter and grant had been given him by that picturesque and gallant gentleman, King Henry of Navarre. He was told to sail down the coast of Acadia, since in those early days the name of "Acadie" was given to the whole eastern coast of Maine, a tract of land vast in comparison with the little Nova Scotia district of Evangeline's day.

Champlain first saw the island after the fog had lifted on a morning in early September, and he refers more than once to its high mountains, then, as now, landmarks to every coastwise traveller by sea or land. He headed his boat up the broad sheet of water now called Frenchman's Bay, landed in a little cove near where the town of Bar Harbor now stands, and after talking to the friendly Indians, whom he found cooking their dinner, he fared farther westward under their guidance through the islands into Penobscot Bay. After some years the Jesuits, those courageous frontiersmen of the Faith, followed Champlain and started a settlement at the mouth of Somes Sound, and to-day the deep, cool spring, which still bears their name, flows down the grassy southern slope near where the huts of their short-lived colony are said to have stood.

A chain of round-topped mountains crosses the island from east to west, and the new national park includes the whole eastern part of the range. These high granite hills are the ice-worn survivors of a giant mountain thrust through the sea-laid rocks of the beginning of the geologic era. They are among the oldest rocks of the world and they still survive in places here and there along the shore; the strata are either twisted or level and bear witness to a time so infinitely remote that our minds are bewildered, and we fail to realize how many millions of years have passed since this gray-fissured stone was soft, clayey mud. Glacial fiords, deep cut into the granite mountain ranges, are the finest we have outside Alaska, and, unlike as the two places really are in almost every particular, there are points of view on the island which flash an instantaneous picture to one's memory of certain deep-sea and forest-grown inlets of our northwestern territory. It may be a certain mystery of clear water, deep forests and remoteness, a virginal freshness of the northern landscape in the silvery sunlight of the brief summer.

The ten mountains in the park are the highest land on our Atlantic coast-line, and known to every one who sails our eastern waters as they were long ago to Champlain. Their ice-modelling has been on such noble lines that they seem larger than their actual height, and the cliffs and rock formations are also on a big scale. The lakes in the heart of the reservation are deep and clear, and in one

or two instances their beds have been gouged out lower than the present sea-level by the tearing and grinding of the ice. Those who have had the good fortune to be familiar with the hills year after year and who have clambered over their desert tops, know their charm. The endless ocean lies to the southward; and westward is an intricate glistening design of sea meeting shore, with shining lakes and far-away blue mountains fading into a pale golden haze on the horizon.

In this fortunate place of mountains, sea, and forest, plant lovers have unequalled chances for study. On the wind-swept heights, clefts of the bare granite rocks give just the scanty soil needed for some of the species of far-northern plants. These settlers from the arctic come to their most southerly colonies on the Mount Desert hills and on a few of the higher tops of the White Mountains. The pale flowers of the Greenland sandwort are found in the glacial scores and cracks of the granite summits, waving agitatedly on their thin, wiry stems, which bend and twist in a wind that makes one shiver even in midsummer. Mats of the black crowberry grow on the hillsides and along the shore within reach of the spray, and

The high mountains are landmarks to every coastwise traveller by sea or land.—Page 484.

The granite shoulders of Jordan and Pemetic Mountains shelter the north end of Jordan's Pond, in the heart of the Reservation.

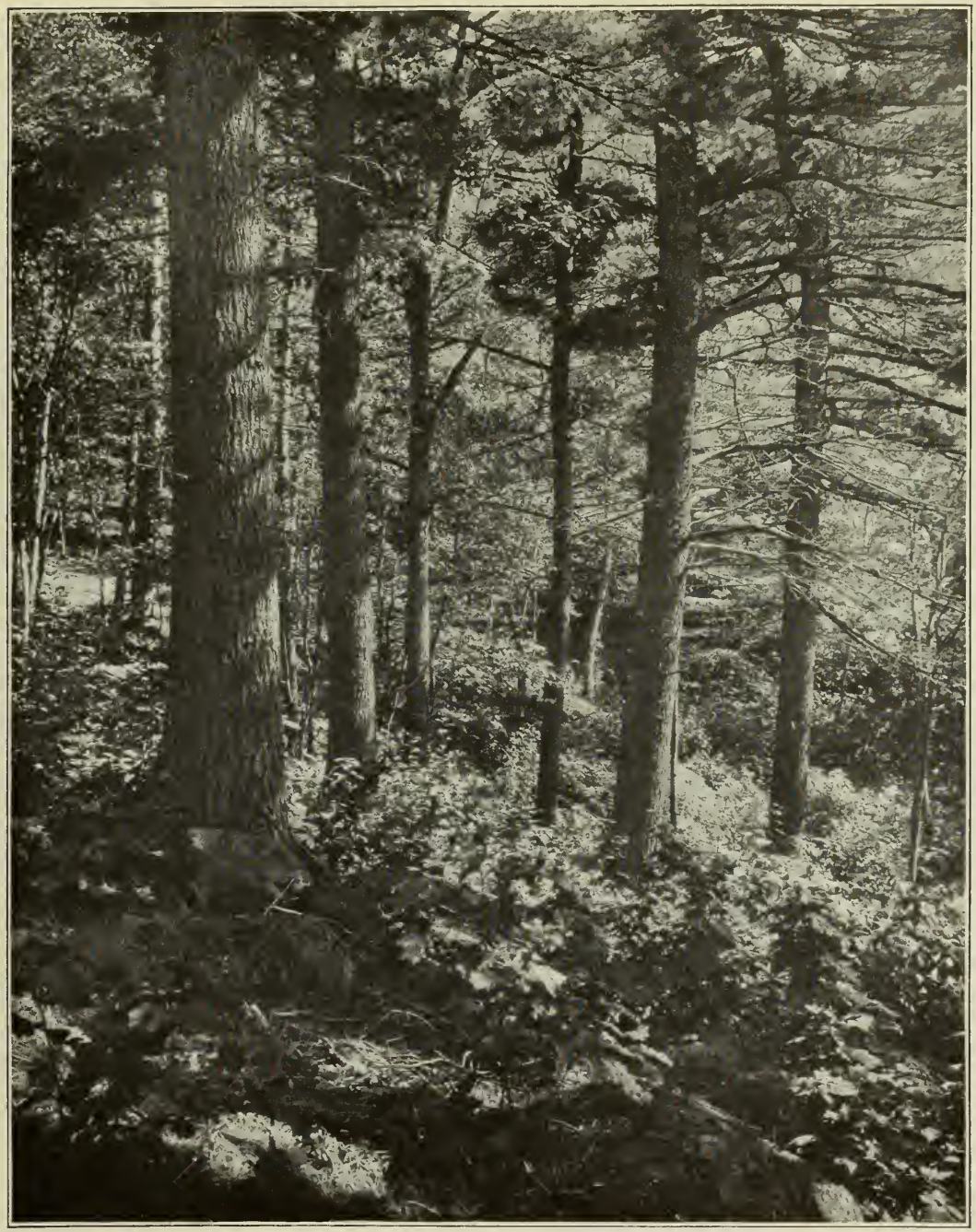
Westward from the top of Sargent Mountain an intricate glistening design of sea meeting shore fades into a golden haze.—Page 485.

this small plant seems as much at home in Maine, under conditions that would blast most green things, as it does in Siberia, Alaska, or Hudson's Bay.

The mountain tarns are surrounded by thickets of leather-leaf, and here and there a plant of Labrador tea shows its soft, white flowers among woolly-backed leaves, and one cannot help wondering if the tea which the early colonists are supposed to have brewed from them was not somewhat outlandish in flavor. The island is a meeting-ground for the black spruces from the northern muskeg swamps and the pitch-pines from the sand barrens to the south, while the scrub-oaks reach their northern limit in the United States, mingled with a flora that the jargon of the botanists calls subarctic.

The forests on the island are unusually varied in their leafage; they are really only comparable to the forests of Japan in complexity of texture, but a certain radiance and beauty of coloring is all their own. They have neither the majesty of the great forests of the Pacific slope, where great columnar boles spring a hundred feet skyward before the first limb breaks the upsoaring lines, nor have they the quiet charm of the English groves of oak and beech; but these northern woods have flashes of birch gleaming against dark spruce and wind-driven pine, and are carpeted with a ground cover of unrivalled beauty. Patches of the lustrous and pervasively flavored wintergreen yield to tangled mats of Linnæus's favorite twinflower, and long, pale runners of partridgeberry, with symmetrically paired and accurately spaced leaves, make prim sylvan processions toward sheets of scarlet bunchberries. The harsh leathery leaves of Mayflower huddle in tight clusters under the shelter of rocks, and in the aromatic depths enchanter's nightshade and goldthread cover the ground at the roots of tropically robust clumps of cinnamon-fern. There

The forest ground cover—Shin leaf, twisted stalk and fern.



The aromatic depths of the pine and hemlock woods near Beachcroft path.

are acres of rhodora growing in the deep, peaty soil of the low-lying, moist meadows which now fill some of the preglacial lake basins. In earliest spring sheets of the pale reddish flowers, mingled with spray-like tufts of shadbush, are framed in rims of blackish evergreens, and although the much-praised flowers are dull in color compared with other azaleas, the very masses of them give the austere wintry landscape a flush of color as welcome as the song of the first robin.

The new government land will serve one of its most useful purposes as a refuge for birds. It is already known to be most favorably placed as a breeding-place for many of the arctic species which come to the island in their southernmost flights, and in the coming years the sanctuary of the reservation will shelter more and more birds safely within its limits. Sea and lake shores, high cliffs, deep forests, wide marshes and meadows give a variety of nesting-places which already draw more than a hundred and forty different species to the island. Ornithologists have long

Newport, Dry and Green Mountains from a hill-top in Bar Harbor.

known it as one of the best places in the Eastern States in which to study both sea and land birds, and as a favorite resting-place on the migrations. Many shy and rare species are found frequently, often in the beaver ponds still remain, and it is hoped before long to start a colony of them in one of the wild-life and plant sanctuaries which are to be established.

It is not surprising that the island

View from the pines of Huguenot Head across the gorge to Newport Mountain.

the near neighborhood of houses, while in most gardens humming-birds dart and chatter and play all through the summer days. For a long time an eyrie has been perched high above a cliff overlooking the sea, and not infrequently the great birds are seen sweeping over the valley hundreds of feet below.

Game used to be plentiful on the island and is again increasing; deer are multiplying and becoming quite tame, and the startling whirr of the ruffed grouse as he rises is heard on many an autumn walk. Mink were found until recently, and now and again a fine fox pelt was brought in by a trapper. In Champlain's time the Indians came to the island to hunt beaver, and although they and the beaver have both disappeared, here and there some of should have been known and loved for many years by the thousands of people who have come to find refreshment in its quickening air, blended from sea and forest. After winters spent in cities, men and women go to Mount Desert to play and work and roam in its forests or sail its waters, and live in its beauty till it becomes a part of their lives. The opalescent light which often covers the bay and islands in the early summer mornings appealed to John La Farge, whose sketches show his appreciation of its tenderness and charm, and he also delighted in the dark pines, holding fast to the granite rocks, above the deep-blue foam-streaked sea. Marion Crawford laid the scene of one of his shorter novels on the island, and was always interested in comparing

A forest pool at the foot of the Diedrich path.

its northern sea and shore with the Italian coast, which he knew so thoroughly. Mount Desert had another sympathetic admirer in Doctor Weir Mitchell, who loved it both wisely and well. He was often seen walking on the mountain trails, with springy step and eyes alert, keenly interested in all he saw and delighted to discover far-away recesses in the forests and hills. He eagerly spoke of possibilities for paths to give access either to the unknown canyon of a ferny brook or to a bluff headland from which a new point of view might be seen. His unfailing enthusiasm and wise counsel were of incalculable use in helping the development of the system of paths begun and carried on with unflagging energy by Waldron Bates. For many years Mr. Bates devoted a large part of his summers to indefatigable exploration of the hills and valleys. A tireless walker and fearless climber, he enjoyed nothing so much as working out a good path up an incredibly steep crag or finding a way between rock ledges to some quiet grove hidden in a fold of the mountain. His boyish excitement over a new trail swept his fellow workers along with him, and day after day he would go back to some particularly baffling cliff till he had found a way around or over or through it. He started the path system which has made the hills accessible to many a walker who would otherwise have found the dense forest growth a hopeless barrier. He gave much of his too-short life to studying the island and linking together mountains, shore, and hitherto unknown districts in a continuous series of trails which make it possible to tramp from one side of the island to the other on ways either level or steep, according to the walker's mood or choice.

In 1901, at the suggestion of President Eliot, whose son Charles Eliot, the distinguished landscape-architect, had conceived a like scheme for Massachusetts, Mr. George Bucknam Dorr assembled a group of people who saw clearly and acted wisely in organizing themselves into the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations. Two years later the legislature of Maine confirmed the incorporation of the organization. Its purposes were

"to receive, hold, and improve for public use the lands in Hancock County, which by reason of historic interest, scenic beauty, or any other cause were suitable for such an object." Seven years later the trustees received their first gift of land, a tract on Newport Mountain, including the Bowl and the Beehive, from Mrs. Charles D. Homans of Boston, one of the earliest of the summer settlers on the island. Later in the same year Mr. John Stewart Kennedy of New York bought the top of Green Mountain, the highest summit on our Atlantic coast, and gave it to the trustees to hold for the use of the nation. As the years passed, Dry Mountain, the whole of Newport, Pemetic Mountain (the only one still bearing its Indian name), Sargent, Jordan, and the Bubbles were given to the trustees, and they held an undivided tract, including all the highest land and the high-lying lakes of the eastern part of the island. Mr. Dorr had given nearly twenty years of unswerving and far-sighted devotion to the ultimate usefulness of the island, and he therefore realized that in order to keep it for the use of the people at large it should become one of the national parks under federal control. He, accordingly, went to Washington to consult Mr. Franklin K. Lane, the Secretary of the Interior, with regard to the acceptance of the tract by the government, under the Monuments Act, which allows the administration to set aside by presidential proclamation lands of "historic, prehistoric, or scientific interest," as national parks, either when previously owned by the government or when freely given it from some private source. Two more years' work on Mr. Dorr's part were spent in enlarging the boundaries of the park still farther, and in searching and perfecting the land titles of the reservation according to the high standard which the government requires. Mr. Dorr then returned to Washington in June, 1916, with the deeds of the property prepared for acceptance by the government, and with Mr. Lane's effective help and co-operation he was successful in obtaining the Presi-

The Kane path skirting the glacial basin of the Sieur de Monts Tarn.

dent's signature to the proclamation on the 8th of July.

The new federal land was named the Sieur de Monts National Monument in memory of Champlain's friend and companion whose courage and hope for the future made the voyage possible. The French expedition to Acadia failed after a gallant struggle, but the names of the Sieur de Monts and his associates will be kept in remembrance for all time in the name of the first national park on the Atlantic coast.

Although Mr. Dorr has given years of patient work to the creation of the new reservation, he feels that the future holds many chances for its further development. He looks forward confidently not only to the maintenance of the present system of paths, but to joining distant points by further communications. There are giant-rock slides and wide ocean views, bold cliffs and quiet meadows which can now be seen only after a painful struggle with matted underbrush. Roads should be built in the park which will be unequalled in their beauty of combined sea and mountain horizons, and while its wild charm should in no way be lessened, it is possible to make the different parts of the government land more accessible. The approaches to the Sieur de Monts Park and its surroundings are being studied under the wise guidance of Mr. Dorr, who is its first custodian. At his instance an offshoot corporation from the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations has recently been formed and named the "Wild Gardens of Acadia," and under its direction plans are being made to establish wild gardens and bird sanctuaries on lands adjacent to the reservation as well as elsewhere in the State and in Canada. The shady valley of a brook will be used to grow the great osmundas, trilliums, and other forest and moisture-loving plants; or a collection of rock-plants will be established on a slope where saxifrages and their tiny fellows will root deeply and bask in the sunshine, or a water garden at the edge of a pond will show water-lilies and arrowleaf and sheets of blue pickerel-weed, with arethusa and pitcher-plants growing alongside sundew in the bog near by.

Every one interested in any of the protean forms of gardening knows the extraordinary delight in the co-operation of the island climate. The cool nights followed by clear, sunny days give herbaceous plants a brilliance of color and vigor of growth which cannot be found except in the high Alpine meadows. As the wild-garden idea is developed everybody who wishes to see the northern plant and bird life at its best will come to study on the island. Already a fund for one wild garden has been given in memory of a member of a family who cared much for Mount Desert, and paths, now included in the reservation, have been made and named after others who spent many happy summers there.

The Sieur de Monts Park is the first to be set aside in the crowded Eastern States, and it should be the forerunner of a long series of reservations, to preserve for the public use their most interesting and varied types of scenery. Those who love Mount Desert call it affectionately "The Island," and they are happy in the knowledge that its hills are safe, that the forests will be protected from fire and mutilation, and that in the time to come generations will follow them in search of the peace and refreshment they have themselves found in the cool bracing air and sweet-scented woods. The great gray hills belong to the nation, and each year, as the winter snows yield and the brooks are released, the birds will come back to their sanctuaries, the flowers will begin another summer, and men and women will return to the reservation again and again to seek and to find rest and new strength in its beauty. And every one who comes, either now or in the future, should remember that he owes a large share of his enjoyment to the clear vision, the wise development, and the self-sacrificing enthusiasm of the first custodian of the park.