

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
HORACE M. ALBRIGHT TRAINING CENTER
Grand Canyon, Arizona

PI-14

NO JOKES, PLEASE

"RANGER, SPARE THAT FUN," IMPLORES
WEARY VISITOR TO NATIONAL PARKS

Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah

While the denizens of big-city nightclubs and coffee houses suffer through the current craze of "Tom Swifties"--the use and abuse of an overly appropriate adverb in the manner of that brave and pompous hero of the boyhood literature of yesteryear--pity the poor tourist. He is being snowed under by a summer blizzard of puns. Or as Tom himself might have said, lamely, "These puns really fracture me."

All this stems from the fact that this is the season when the helpless vacationist on a sightseeing tour deep in a cave or high on a mountain, is the target of a barrage of puns aimed at him by Uncle Sam's neatly uniformed park rangers.

In most cases, visitors or residents of a metropolis can escape from a standup or even a sitdown club comic with ease. However, it is difficult, nay, even unsafe, for a member of a trail tour clambering around Bryce, Zion, or the Grand Canyon country to flee a punning park ranger, precipitously.

Just yesterday, near Sunset Point in this quiet Federal sanctuary, a vacationist asked the ranger what an interesting balanced rock formation was called, and he was told:

"We call it Poison Rock, ma'am, one drop will kill you."

At Yellowstone National Park, as generations of long-suffering vacationists know, ranger-naturalists point to trees left leafless or dead by the action of thermal phenomena, and explain, "That's a flapper tree, bare limbs."

DEER ME

In the Grand Teton National Park, I've heard rangers point out buck deer, and in Southern accents tell visitors, "It is a salesman deer, goes from doe to doe."

Life underground brings out the worst in ranger guides. Whether at Carlsbad

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Caverns in New Mexico, Lehman Cave in Nevada, or Timpanogos Cave in Utah, an otherwise polite, well-informed, sane gentleman, in the khaki uniform of the National Park Service is certain to bring his party of a dozen or so paying visitors to a halt, point his flashlight towards the ceiling and proclaim: "Vagrant rock, no visible means of support."

Every cave is, of course, equipped with group after group of fancifully named formations. Admittedly, a ranger must be hard-put to maintain his sanity when he must call the attention of sightseers to the Indian Maiden, Elizabeth's Throne Room, the Ear and Lobe, Chocolate Falls, or Parade of the Elephants, a dozen times daily.

However, as one taxpayer told me, "Some form of civil service examination must be feasible to weed out, in advance, the rangers who tell each group 'duck or get quacked' when passing beneath dripping stalactites."

While I have never had that one inflicted on me, I wince at the memory of the ranger in Lehman Caves National Monument who explained some especially lovely formations called helicites. "They are female stalactites," he said--"they change their minds about going straight down."

NO OUT

"Is there any chance to escape?" a prospective National Park visitor may ask, cagily. Very little, if touring the parks in the summer season. Park supervisors explain that most rangers squiring captive audiences along nature trails are temporary employees, usually high school teachers from neighboring cities who "moonlight" during bright summer days, and who apparently use the time on the trail to prepare atrocious puns for autumn.

"We brief the ranger on wildlife, geology and plant life. His duty is to explain nature's workings and processes, but we don't bar rangers from interjecting their own humor into their talks," says Chief Park Naturalist Keith A. Trexler. "It's pretty hard to keep from being bored when you must repeat and repeat a guide talk. Besides, the majority of visitors seem to enjoy a pun or two."

However, things may not be too bad here in the West, even though rangers call Yellowstone a fine place to start a Chinese laundry (plenty of hot water) or call Kaibab squirrels dumb (one plays checkers with a naturalist but always loses).

Matters are worse down South, one is given to understand. At Everglades National Park, rangers tell tourists of the old-timer who decided to cross an abalone with a crocodile, to get an abadile, "but got a crock of baloney instead."

--JACK GOODMAN
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