

Short Chronology of the Education Role of the National Park Service

1906

Congress provided direction on educating the public on federal resources near the turn of the century with the Antiquities Act of 1906.

Permits for the examination of ruins, the excavation of archaeological sites, and the gathering of objects of antiquity upon the (federal lands) may be granted... provided that the examinations, excavations, and gatherings are undertaken for the benefit of educational institutions with a view to increasing the knowledge of such objects. 16 USC section 432

1916

Twenty-one years later the National Park Service became a federal agency, the responsibility for educating the public about the resources under its care was still clear. While education may not be explicitly stated in the mission statement of the agency, it is clearly implied in the legislative language.

The mission of the National Park Service is to promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as the national parks, monuments, and reservation...by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. NPS Organic Act, 16 USC 1

1917

From the beginning, Director Stephen Mather understood that in order for the newly established agency to survive, a campaign to educate the public about the parks was needed. As one of the first organizational developments in the agency, and "educational division" was established in 1917, and NPS employees began to look for ways to best tell the stories of the parks to the people.

1918

Drafted in 1918 by the National Parks Educational Committee to promote the educational opportunities in national parks, the following objectives are among the earliest expressions of the National Park Service's founding fathers on the pedagogical aspects of park management. The objectives were clear and bold and expansive.

- To educate the public in respect to the nature and quality of the national parks,
- To further the view of the national parks as classrooms and museums of nature,
- To use existing publicity and educational systems so as to produce a wide result,
- To combine in one interest the sympathy and activity of schools, colleges and citizen organizations in all parts of the country,
- To study the history and science of each national park and collect data for future use.

1929

“The purpose of educational work in parks is to interpret park phenomena and history and engender a desire in the visitor to think, read, and talk about the park offerings, both while he is in the park and after he has returned to his work-a-day routine.”

1932

In the development of an enlarged program of educational activities several general policies are followed:

- Simple, understandable interpretation of the major features of each park to the public by means of field trips, lectures, exhibits, and literature.
- Emphasis upon leading the visitor to study the real thing rather than to utilize second-hand information. Typical academic methods are avoided.
- Utilization of highly trained personnel with field experience, able to interpret to the public the laws of the universe as exemplified in the parks, and able to develop concepts of the laws of life useful to all.
- A research program, which will furnish a continuous supply of dependable facts suitable for use in connection with the educational program.

1935

By the middle of the century, the charge for developing educational opportunities for the public became more specific. Congress passed the Historical Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act in 1935, which explicitly directed the National Park Service to “develop an educational program and service.”

Develop and educational program and service for the purpose of making available to the public facts and information pertaining to American historic and archaeological sites, buildings, and properties of national significance. 16 USC Section 462 (j)

1969

On July 20, 1969 Neil Armstrong takes his historic walk on the moon. The pictures his mission returned to the earth startled many people regarding the polluted conditions around the globe.

1970

Earth Day fosters the idea that everything is connected to everything else and ushers in a new era of concern as the environment begins to indicate that it is straining under abuse.

1970

Environmental Education Act defines "environmental education" as the educational process dealing with man's relationship with his natural surroundings, and includes the relationship of population, pollution, resource allocation and depletion, conservation, transportation, technology, and urban and rural planning to the total environment. (P.L. 91-516, Sec 3(a)(2).

1970

The National Environmental Education Development Program (NEED) is established based on a thematic approach. Education materials are created and 100 environmental study areas are set up. The Strands program emphasized varieties and similarities, patterns, interaction and time, continuity, change, evolution and adaptation in programming.

1980

The Threats to the Parks Report points out a variety of internal and external threats to parks. The two fundamental thrusts of the NPS in the decade of the 80s are addressing the deteriorating conditions of facilities and to intensifying resources management efforts.

1991

- **Parks as Classrooms**
- Promote the parks as learning laboratories.
- Assist teachers in the development of more interactive lesson plans that incorporate park resources.
- Promote and provide NPS leadership nationally and internationally in education programs.
- Integrate research and interpretive programs of NPS into the broader educational goals of communities and schools through partnership approaches.

1997

- Promote personal connections to the many American experiences through objects, places, ideas, and values.
- Develop an informed citizenry committed to the stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- Establish the National Park System as a positive and distinctive resource for the educational community.

2001

The National Park Service should:

- Embrace its mission, as educator, to become a more significant part of America's educational system by providing formal and informal programs for student learners of all ages inside and outside of park boundaries.
- Encourage the study of the American past; developing programs based on current scholarship, linking specific places to the narrative of our history, and encouraging a public exploration and discussion of the American experience.
- Education should become a primary mission of the National Park Service. Budgets, policies, and organizational structure should reflect this commitment.
- Collaboration with organizations and scholars is essential to develop and expand the Service's educational capacity.

...from the National Park System Advisory Report "Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century."