

Living In Paradise

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WHAT does the wife of a National Park Ranger do? From the number of times that I have been asked this question the consensus of opinion would seem to be that time must hang heavy on her hands. On the contrary, there is never a dull moment. The days aren't long enough in which to pursue all the fascinating possibilities, and often domestic duties go neglected.

I might quote from the opening entry in a journal which I kept this last summer:

"Paul and I are here at Paradise Valley in our little cabin on Alta Vista for our second summer in the National Park Service. Why do we come? I think of the rose bush in bloom at home and our garden with all its fresh vegetables, to say nothing of our two beloved cats left behind. But I am not homesick. The summer stretches ahead, lovely and long and unreal. A summer in Shangri-la! There will be inconveniences and discomforts, but there will also be great beauty and peace, and some of the petty details of life, so important down below, will lose all

significance. Perhaps it is the grandeur of The Mountain that does this to us, or the sheer loveliness of its park lands. Perhaps the happy confidence of our neighbors, the birds and animals, is contagious. We are set a little above all other men as we watch the stars from our high cabin, or climb above the fog to see the ruddy glow of sunset bathe the great mountain."

On many days I could "tag along" with Paul when he was making a scenic patrol trip, putting up trail signs, planting fish in one of the lakes, or going up to Anvil Lookout or Camp Muir to work on the cabins or shovel snow. Then there were always the pleasures of reading, writing or hiking on my own. A bird book, a flower book, and field glasses added interest to trail trips.

On a rainy Saturday morning I wrote: "Rain and fog! And even a heavy clatter of hail a few moments ago. It is cold and the wind comes in gusts, but the thrushes don't seem to mind the weather. The Varied thrush has been singing all morning and the Hermit thrushes gave their usual evening concert until after dark last night. Juncos are taking shelter in the trees at the porch, but they were probably here all winter and think this storm mild indeed. Field mice have dug out of the snow and are bothering the cooler.



TUCKALOO NEEDLE

by Dwight Watson

I came well equipped with bowl covers to protect all left-over food, but covers don't bother them. They seem to like the oiled silk just as well as the food and eat cover and all. No doubt the bears will find us next and tear the cooler right off the cabin." (This prophecy proved to be all too accurate.)

A few days later: "Paul's birthday dinner was eaten in the kitchen, mountain style, and climaxed by a lemon pie. Having forgotten to bring birthday candles, I rummaged through the pack and found a little stump of dirty, faded candle which had once been red, had been used for waxing skis, and no doubt had been carried around for four or five years. I stuck it in a little cereal bowl and bore the pie ceremoniously to the table, the lighted candle in one hand."

Two days later in the journal there was this entry: "How much happens in two days! Shall I begin with the Rangers' picnic, shall I tell about our day above the clouds at Camp Muir, or my bear story of today?"

"This morning was clear and cold with fog in the valley and only the tops of the Tatoosh range showing. We were both starved for breakfast. The kitchen was as cold as a winter's morning at home. Paul left for work and I was making the beds when I heard a dreadful noise, seemingly coming from the kitchen. Mystified, I dashed out, opened the back door, and an enormous bear looked around the corner of the cabin, interrupting his work of tearing the cooler to pieces to get the food inside. Having been told that shouting would cause a bear to run, I let out a great 'whoop' and waved my arms. But the bear hadn't received the same information! He lowered his head, glared at me and growled! I retreated, slammed the door, and ran for the telephone to summon Paul from the ranger station below. However, another loud ripping of boards from outside made me think of all my precious meat in jeopardy, and quickly hanging up the receiver, I grabbed the scrub mop and dashed out, prepared to do battle to the finish. The bear looked huge and wicked! I howled like a pack of coyotes and charged with the mop. He had a package of pork chops in his mouth and looked stubborn, but my blitz shook his poise and he slowly turned, ambled up over the snow bank and to my delight dropped the pork chops. I retrieved them, gathered some rocks for future ammunition and resumed my house work.

"In a short time he was back. Again the mop and my vocal chords went into action. He stood on the snow bank above the back door looking down on me as if to say, 'Your pork chops or your life.' Just then two tourists, hearing the commotion, arrived on the scene and helped me chase him up over the hill.

"Paul brought up nails, hammer and saw at noon and mended the cooler but not for long. I made my daily trip down to the Inn for mail after lunch, called on some friends in a cabin below, and started up the hill for home. En route I met three sailors who stopped to ask something about the mountain. One said, 'Were those bear tracks we saw in the snow up there?' So I told about the bear. They continued, 'About fifteen minutes ago when we went up the hill it sounded like that cabin (pointing to ours) was being torn to pieces.' 'My bear again!', said I and started for home, hoping to rescue the remains. Suddenly a thought struck me and I turned and shouted to the sailors. 'What if I find him inside?' 'We'll wait right here until you find out,' was the cautious reply! I rushed up the trail, mounted the steps to the porch, and looked through the window. Seeing no bear, I entered. He had tried to force his way into the living room, breaking a pane in the window, scattering dirt all over the window sill, and clawing deep scratches in the wood. The back was torn off the cooler but I had taken almost everything out of it before I left. After a glance into the bedroom and woodshed I gave the sailors an 'all clear' shout and they went on

down. No doubt they were disappointed that I didn't dash wildly out, chased by the bear. Calling Paul, I told him my tale of woe. So tonight the electric fence was brought up from Longmire and installed around our cabin.

"Paul and I went to bed hoping we'd hear the bear give a howl of rage in the night. But we are sound sleepers, and perhaps bears don't howl when they get an electric shock. Anyway we heard nothing but since nothing was disturbed, it's my belief that he was here and got his medicine."

Our cabin was our home, but a man's home is not alone his castle in a national park. Tourists sometimes have the most audacious disregard for one's privacy. Even the electric fence didn't bother them. While I was sweeping the living room one Sunday morning a man opened the door and walked in. Inquiring in what I considered my most inhospitable voice if he wanted something, he answered, unimpressed. "Oh, no, I was just looking around." He had come right over a "private" sign nailed on the steps, and "keep out" instructions on the door. Others came up to ask if this were a "cook shack," or a "power house," or if they could "go through the quaint old cabin." And on warm moonlight nights visiting service men with their girls found our porch a tempting location.

Wednesday was our day off. For us it meant a day on which we got up earlier and hiked farther than on other days. One Wednesday we remember in particular. We planned to go to Klapatchee Park, and had been asked to dispose of a possible bear in a bear trap. The men were hoping to catch the Big One. If they did, we were to hook bear and bear trap on behind the pick-up and to release the bear at Klapatchee Point.

The journal reads: "We were up at 5:00. The thrushes were singing and the Tatoosh was rosy in the dawn. After breakfast we were on our way. Investigation disclosed that The Bear was in the trap, and he was our responsibility until released at Klapatchee Point about fourteen miles around the West Side Highway from the Park entrance. The bear trap was hooked on and we were off, all in holiday spirits except the bear!

"It was beautiful driving down so early in the morning with everything fresh and cool, and we saw numerous deer and fawns along the road. Down just beyond the south fork of the Puyallup River we came upon a big tree which had fallen across the road in the night, completely blocking the car's passage. There was nothing to do but let the bear out, even though we were several miles from our, or rather his destination. Paul gathered up some rocks to throw at him and climbed up on the metal cylinder which is the trap. I stood on the coupling, pulled a lever, Paul raised the heavy door and out came the bear! He dashed up the road followed by our shouts and Paul's rocks.

"Leaving the car by the fallen tree, we covered the considerable distance to Klapatchee Park by 10:30. Continuing on to St. Andrews Park we found the lake still frozen over and everything under snow, as had been most of the trail from Klapatchee onward. The ridge leading up to Tuckaloo rose high and precipitous on our right, and at last we saw our objective, Tuckaloo Needle, a high, sheer rock taper, beautiful in formation and an unforgettable sight pointing high against the deep blue sky. From a vantage point on the peak above we could look down over the Needle's point to St. Andrews, Klapatchee and out over layers and layers of foothills to the distant peaks. But our eyes ever turned to The Mountain. From here the three summits stand out in sharp relief. The tremendous sweep of the Tahoma Glacier flowed to our right, while to the left the smooth white of the Puyallup Glacier was broken in great crevasses. We took pleasure in picking out such familiar landmarks as Mowich Lake, the Colonnades, Gobbler's Knob, and Spray Park, all reminiscent of enjoyable trips.



TATOOSH RANGE

by Dwight Watson

"A long snow slope permitted us to lose elevation quickly in a fast, thrilling glissade back to St. Andrews Park. At Klapatchee Lake we finished lunch while watching fluffy clouds drift in around Rainier. Peace and beauty! How priceless they seemed!

"Back at the Patrol cabin we were served chilled apple juice and given a ride to our pick-up. Soon we were clattering homeward, bear trap and all. It was nine o'clock when we had dinner, and once in bed we weren't troubled with insomnia. Best of all, the next day was a mere work day and we could sleep in until six-thirty."

One could go on and on with descriptions of such a summer. There were occasional shopping trips to Ashford when we were inclined to buy everything we saw. There were dinners at the Inn, picnics before the big fireplace in the Community House, and even a tea party at Longmire which made me regret not having included a coat and hat in my list of summer essentials. In fine weather, when not off hiking elsewhere, we ate lunches and dinners on the porch of our cabin, Paradise Valley and the Tatoosh range spread out before us. A caller once remarked, "You two are living in Heaven." We thought so, too.

Our last breakfast in the cabin was not gay. Paul was lost in dejection, and though I usually accept things more matter-of-factly even my spirits were low. After Paul went to work I took a last hike up the hill. One more look at Adams and St. Helens, and even a corner of Mt. Hood through the Pinnacle-Plummer Pass. One last good-bye to the deer and the fawn, the chipmunks and ground squirrels, to the blue gentians, and to all the hills and valleys, glaciers and beloved landmarks. We had seen them in the late snows of spring, in the vigorous flush of summer, and in the early harbingers of winter—all in a span of two short months.

"If only we could stay for another month," we said, knowing very well that we would then feel, "if only we could be here for a part of the winter"—for blizzards and skiing, for crystal clear mornings in a snow-covered universe, or the purple Alpine glow of evening down a long homeward ski trail. But it was no use; we had to return to livelihood and "civilization."