

NATURE NOTES

FROM

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

EDMUND B. ROGERS, Superintendent

--

DORR G. YEAGER, Editor

Volume V

JUNE 1932

Number VI

Spring in Wild Basin

HAROLD RATCLIFF, PERMANENT RANGER

The fine weather which we have experienced the past two weeks has brought about a transformation in the landscape.

The snowbanks have melted to such an extent that one can ride three miles above the ranger station on the Thunder Lake Trail and as far as Campers Creek on the Sandbeach Lake Trail. As a result of this melting, however, the creeks have become raging torrents in their mad rush to reach the lower levels.

The aspens and willows are assuming a greenish cast, and the last few days the leaves seem to have fairly burst out of their winter coats, flooding the hillsides with fresh color. This new growth is rapidly hiding the old fire scars, logs and other debris which would be so noticeable now that the snow is disappearing.

The flowers too seem to be doing their best to cloth the ground with spring finery. A few days ago we found a calypso lily lifting its delicately colored blossom along the path to the corral. The pasque flowers are forming a dark blue border on the road from the station to Copeland Lake Lodge.

A few days ago I saddled my horse and left for a ride to ascertain how far one could go up the Sandbeach Lake Trail. On every hand I found evidence that spring has arrived even in Wild Basin. Kinnikinnick was in bloom, and spring beauties were lifting their flowered heads. A sprig of larkspur was growing from under a rock and the bright yellow blossoms of golden banner were in evidence.

The Douglas firs were trying to outdo each other in the number and brilliance of the crimson cones which they could produce. Chipmunks and striped ground squirrels were everywhere, and marmots whistled their warnings and flattened themselves against rocks. The beaver too, were active for I found freshly cut and peeled willow twigs floating in the ponds.

The most conclusive evidence that spring has arrived came this week when a goodly number of picnicers and hikers appeared. Some came in cars: some on foot and others on horseback, but all of them came to enjoy a day out-of-doors away from the office and the grinding routine.

What Shall I Wear?

Some time ago a friend of mine inquired as to whether or not Nature Notes are read in the east. I replied that about half of our copies were sent east and I trusted that they were read.

"Then" said my friend "Write an article on what to wear in the mountains this summer."

Such an article seems apropos for this issue because within a short time visitors will begin to pour into the region equipped in various ways to hit the trails into the high country.

I am not a style critic nor an authority on clothes. Indeed, style need not enter into this article for on a mountain trip comfort is paramount and little thought is given to what the clerk in Abercrombie and Fitch said. More and more are tourists drifting away from the so-called sporting togs for mountain trips.

During my years in the Service I have seen costumes of every shape and hue, from pink beach pajamas to khaki knickers, used on trails. Often I have pondered the peculiar kink which prompts a woman to attempt a rocky trail in high-heeled slippers and silk stockings. And just as often I have wondered about the men who start out on a day's trip encumbered by enough equipment to supply a family on a month's canoe trip.

Everyone has different ideas as to what to wear and undoubtedly

there will be many who will disagree with me, but the following is my idea of the type of clothes which should be worn on a typical day when some strenuous climbing is to be encountered.

Footwear is most important. More misery can be given by faulty shoes than by anything else I know. Some prefer laced boots and many wear them. Personally I like an ordinary heavy shoe similar (but more comfortable) to the army shoe. Again some use hobnails. I like a rubber composition sole for rock work, I will admit it is slippery in wet weather.

Sox should be of wool and worn over a light weight pair. Wool socks are not as warm as you think and they take up the moisture. You'll find your feet in better condition at the end of the day.

Opinions differ again on trousers. I think everyone is agreed that they should be of some smooth material. Some like laced trousers while others prefer the straight type. I lean toward the latter choice. Ordinary blue jean trousers are good. They're light, inexpensive and fairly serviceable.

Shirts should be of some fairly light, smooth material. The light weight smooth finish army shirt is good. If you wear a heavy shirt you'll regret it. The high country is warm enough when you are traveling and while the sun is still up.

Most mountain travelers wear a coat or sweater of some kind. I say "wear" with reservation for usually they are carried or tied around the waist. This garment can be one of several kinds so long as it is a protection against the cold if one is caught in the high country after sundown. A light leather coat is good. So is a sweat shirt. Sweaters, as a whole, are not good at cutting the wind, and catch on brush. It is well if lightness and warmth can be coupled with the asset of being waterproof. The latter, however, is a minor detail, for there are always matted clumps of alpine fir that afford excellent shelter from the sudden showers.

The same clothing is recommended for women as for men. Of course there are always some women who insist upon style even at the expense of comfort. These women are the ones who attempt tough trails in high heels. White linen riding trousers and riding boots have no place on a mountain trail. Better sacrifice style for comfort. Your traveling compan-

ions will think much more of you. Never mind the looks. Blistered heels and toes are bad things on a trail.

And now a word as to equipment. Why take any? The mountains are friendly and equipment is not only heavy but useless. Take a camera and a knife and a waterproof match box (an excellent one can be made of a small corked vial.) Many take water cups, but I find that water tastes better when drunk directly from a stream. Lie down on your stomach and get your nose wet. It's more fun than using a cup.

Come to the mountains this year with the idea that you are going to have a good time. Wear clothing that is comfortable even though not "snappy." You'll remember the blisters much longer than you'll remem'ber any satisfaction you will obtain out of being stylishly dressed on the trail.

Dress sensibly, travel lightly and enjoy the deliciously tired sensation that comes after a satisfactory mountain day.



The Black Hills Beetle

JOHN S. McLAUGHLIN, CHIEF RANGER

It appears that our unwelcome acquaintance of 1927 and 1928, the Black Hills Beetle, is again becoming active and, indeed, manifests signs of becoming epidemic. Reports have been coming to the park office of valuable Ponderosa pines dying, and then the reporter asks what can be done about it. Since this beetle, it seems, is to plague us locally for some time to come, every resident of this community should know something of its habits.

Rangers have been keeping an eye on the beetle ever since the big outbreak of 1927 and '28, when well over a thousand pine trees were killed in a summer. Our park beetle belongs to the genus *Dendroctonus* and is one of the 24 species in the genus. The word *Dendroctonus* means "killer of trees" and this name surely is well applied to a genus of beetles which Mr. A. D. Hopkins of the Bureau of Entomology estimates has killed over \$1,000,000,000 worth of standing timber in the last fifty years.

The Black Hills Beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) was first noted in the Black Hills, and it is now doing damage in the Black Hills region, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. In the adult stage, the beetle is a very dark brown or black, and is approximately one-quarter of an inch in length. It attacks the Ponderosa and Limber pines and has

been noted a few times in Lodgepole pine. Its life cycle is interesting. It spends practically all of its life, with the exception of a few hours in flight after it emerges from one tree and enters another, in two trees; and at times, one tree. A mature beetle will enter a tree during June or early July; it bores galleries in the living part of the tree and deposits eggs in these galleries. These eggs usually hatch into larvae in August and the larvae continue active until the beginning of hibernation in the fall. During the next spring, these larvae extend the galleries and are transformed into pupae, and then to adults, and the process repeats itself. It is the galleries the beetle bores in the cambium layer that kills the tree, for the extension of these galleries has the same effect as girdling the tree. Wherever the beetle enters a healthy tree, a small spot of pitch appears; and if the beetles become too numerous, the tree's needles become red and it is dead by the following spring.

About the only practical method of combating this beetle on a large scale is to cut the infested tree and peel the bark in the infested area, which is usually confined to the lower trunks. Several years ago a citizen of Estes Park, Mr. Edward J. Walsh, developed a method of fighting this beetle in his ornamental and shade trees, and it appeared to have been in

some instances at least, a successful check. It is a comparatively expensive process, but oftentimes a valuable tree near a summer home is more than worth the time and expense. Mr. Walsh cleaned the pitch from the holes where the beetle entered the tree, and then

injected carbon bi-sulphide into the galleries. When the gallery was full of the liquid, he sealed the hole with putty. Some authorities regard this method of treatment as useless, but it seems to have produced the results, in some instances, and is at least worth a try.



COURTESY NATURE MAGAZINE

MARMOT

Things I've Noticed Lately

Too often during the coming months we will encounter the following questions from a hurried visitor—"What can I see in half a day?" Too often we will not stop to explain that half a day is altogether too brief a time to really see anything. Such a visitor is not especially desirous of seeing anything. Which brings me to this conclusion. Man is able to see a great deal in a short time if he looks for it—or he can see nothing in a long time if he is so inclined.

A few days ago I left the office for a couple of hours for the expressed purpose of seeing what I could find in that length of time. Nothing startling, but I assured myself that Nature was still functioning as usual. I saw—:

My first Audubon Warbler of the season flitting about the willows with his mate in the vicinity of Mary's Lake.

Wonderful beds of Pasque flowers in full bloom from 7,000 to 9,500 feet. They are painting the roadsides blue up beyond Longs Peak Inn.

A Picket Pin pausing before his burrow with mouth full of nesting material. Within a short time the inquisitive babies will poke their heads out into the sunlight.

The delicate wax-like blooms

of Kinnikinnic showing themselves among the dark green foliage on the forest floor.

Pin-cushion Caeti in full bloom. This plant may be scorned by some but to me it bears one of the most beautiful flowers in the hills.

That the snowshoe Rabbits are rapidly turning from their white winter coat to the darker pelage of summer. Where did man get the idea that he invented the art of camouflage?

A few hardy Larkspurs putting forth their deep purple blossoms at the lower altitudes.

A marmot flattening himself to an almost unbelievable size on a pile of rocks in an attempt to escape my observation.

Scattered beds of Chiming Bells blooming on the south side of Moraine Park.

That the frogs are singing loudly all along the Thompson river above Tuxedo Park.

A Mourning Dove watching my approach from his station in a dead spruce, and then suddenly taking fright and wheeling away with that soft whirring sound.

That the cottagers in Moraine Park are going to arrive too late to enjoy the Capnoides and Chiming Bells which are now blooming profusely in their yards.



COURTESY NATURE MAGAZINE

COLORADO BLUE SPRUCE

Deer At Play

FRANCES B. YEAGER

It is no uncommon sight for those of us who live in Estes Park to see great herds of deer grazing in our backyards from early morning until late at night throughout the entire winter. Indeed, I doubt if many summer visitors leave the region without seeing at least one of these denizens of the wild. However, it is a rare sight to observe a herd in one of its lighter moods and one not soon forgotten by the watcher.

Here at Utility Group there is a deep ditch with a small stream of water in it running through the meadow south of the residences. The grass on the banks of this ditch is particularly lush and green, and even in winter the deer gather along the banks of this ditch. Summer has not returned with such force that the animals have felt impelled to retreat to the higher altitudes and in the evening they still come down to the meadow. One evening a few days ago a group of us gathered in the back yard when we were attracted by the movements of the little herd of animals near the ditch.

As we watched them it became apparent that we were observing a game of some sort. There were

about twenty animals in the group most of them last year's fawns. Suddenly one of them seemed seized by an uncontrollable impulse. She kicked up her heels, cavorted around for a few seconds, then bumped unceremoniously into a neighbor. The second followed the procedure of the first and it was not long until all of them were running about kicking up their heels and bumping into each other. This game of tag suddenly changed into "follow the leader" and with graceful bounds this long line of deer crossed and recrossed the ditch.

After a while a few of them tired and let their playmates continue the game while they returned to grazing. One by one they dropped out until the entire herd was quiet again. After a few minutes one of the youngsters with more energy than the rest started kicking up her heels and the game began all over. We watched the herd for about twenty minutes and left it still frisking and leaping about.

It was substantial proof to all of us who watched that animals have their gayer moods even as you and I.





The following explanation as to how the dogwood got its name appeared in the Service Letter of the Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters under date of March 3, 1932:

A very astringent concoction used to be steeped from the dogwood and used to wash mangy dogs. That is how the tree probably got its name. The bark of the flowering dogwood yields quinine.

On May 28th Harold Ratcliff reports pasque flowers and alpine forget-me-nots in bloom on the Boulder Field Trail at an altitude of 11,200 feet.

Bears are making their appearance. Mrs. Dings encountered one face to face while fishing on Cow Creek. A short time afterward a party of tourists reported one be-

tween Windriver Ranch and Baldpate Inn. The latest report is from Shep Husted who resents a bear coming to the back door and eating his dog's food.

On June 1st, at an altitude of approximately 11,500 feet, I found marmots carrying nesting material to the burrows.

During the last two weeks of May bucks have been seen with approximately 6 inches of antler in the velvet.

Several requests have come in during the past month for the name of the small canary-like bird with a yellow body, and black wings. The bird is the American Goldfinch, listed as a rare migrant in late summer. It is interesting to note that this is the first report of Goldfinches in spring.



The American Elk

The American Elk or Wapiti, a member of the deer family, is the largest mammal in Rocky Mountain National Park. It is as majestic as it is large. There are few sights finer in the wilderness than a great bull with his full set of antlers, and there are few sounds that thrill the listener more than the clear, challenging bugle of the males as it rings through the frosty air, inviting all those who doubt his supremacy to battle.

The antlers are truly the crowning glory of this great animal. It is hard for many to realise that these large beams grow in a single year, but such is the case. In February, after all possible chance of combat is over, the antlers are broken or rubbed off at the base. Almost immediately the new growth begins, first as a red swelling which resembles a tomato, and later as a long protuberance which eventually branches. At this time the new antler is soft and tender and is richly supplied with nerves and blood vessels. It is covered with a thick coat of silky hair known as "the velvet." Long before fall the antlers harden, the velvet is rubbed off and the points are sharp and shiny for the fighting season. It is often said that the age of an elk can be told by the number of

points on his antlers. This is not always the case, for often, after seven or eight years the animal ceases to add points.

The elk is the most polygamous of all the deer. A large elk bull usually has a harem of cows during the mating season, and it is often necessary for him to fight in order to uphold his position among them. These wilderness battles often end in tragedy, for it is not uncommon to find the skeletons of two great bulls that have died of starvation as a result of the antlers becoming locked during such a fight.

The calves are born in May and are spindle-legged little creatures for the first few days. They are spotted like the fawns of the deer and are cared for in much the same way by the mother. Usually one calf is born, two being much more unusual than it is with the Mule Deer.

As was the case in so many other localities, the native elk were practically exterminated in this region. About 1912, however, a small herd of 25 animals was imported from Yellowstone Park. The following year another herd was brought in. Some died, but others drifted into the interior of the park and multiplied until in 1932 it is estimated that 446 elk range within the boundaries.



The 1932 Educational Program

This summer will see an enlarged educational program in Rocky Mountain National Park. With the addition to the staff of Mr. Dean Cornwall of the Geology Department of Oklahoma University, with two seasons of Yellowstone experience and Mr. Bert Frasier who will begin his fourth season in the park, our visitors are assured of a satisfactory and well rounded program.

At the present time 144 lectures, mostly illustrated are scheduled as well as 132 field trips. In addition to these, auto caravans,

long field trips, museum and self-guiding nature trails will augment the program.

Of special interest is the initiation of all-day Saturday trips and the four day trip beginning on August 6th which will be conducted through some of the most spectacular country in the park.

A complete schedule of trips will be furnished on request, or the week's schedule can be procured at the Museum. We cordially invite not only our readers, but all of our visitors to hit the trails with us this summer.

Growth of Antlers

It occurs to us that the following information relative to the growth of deer antlers will be of interest to our readers. The quotation is taken from a recent statement by Dr. Joseph Dixon, Field Naturalist for the National Park Service.

"Exact age can not be told by antlers in mule deer. The popular notion that a buck adds one prong or point to his antlers each year has been shown not to be true. In the Modoc region of California,

yearling mule deer bucks often have their first set of antlers forked-horn while in central and southern California the first antlers are spikes.

"In Yosemite, the following is the normal antler production:

1st year—spike.

2nd year—forked-horn.

3rd year—3-point (eye guard or brow tine acquired.)

4th to 8th years—normal 4-point.

8th to 10th years—extra points may or may not be added."



A PAGE OF COMMENT

BY D. G. Y.

From time to time the pages of Nature Notes have contained references to "abandoned fawns." So often has the word appeared that our readers have undoubtedly found monotony in it. But the monotony that they have experienced is incomparable to the monotony that members of the Park service feel each spring when the reports of these fawns begin to pour in. Not only reports but the fawns themselves appear:

The season has arrived when the deer will begin to give birth to young. In order to explain the "phenomonon" of "abandoned fawns" let us look for a moment into the life of the doe at this time of year. When the baby, or babies as the case may be, is dropped, it is hidden in some secluded thicket away from the regular thorofares. At this time the fawn wears a spotted coat which blends the animal into its surroundings and makes it extremely difficult to find. Furthermore, the theory that the babies give off no odor for the first few weeks has been generally accepted by naturalists. This, of course, adds to the scheme of protection and safeguards the fawn all the more from any coyote or wolf which might be skulking in the vicinity.

With this protection which nature has afforded the baby it would be inadvisable for the mother to deliberately reveal the hiding place of her offspring by hovering over it. For this reason she wanders away, feeding in the meadows, and gives no clue that a tiny fawn is securely hidden in the underbrush.

It is at this time that the visitor, unfamiliar with the habits of deer, wanders into the thicket and discovers the "abandoned fawn." Straightway he takes in the situation at face value, picks up the little animal and comes to us (as I said before) "with his heart full of compassion and his arms full of deer."

Many times the doe, believing that danger is lurking in the vicinity, will leave her baby alone for an entire day. I have known elk to stay away for nearly twenty four hours at a time, knowing that man was in the immediate region.

Animals know better how to raise their young than we do. The ages have taught them as they have taught them many other things vital to their welfare.

The next time you find a fawn or hear of one being found see that it is left undisturbed, for the mother will return when she knows that it is safe to do so.