

Congress has designated 1972 as National Parks Centennial Year and established a National Parks Centennial Commission to celebrate the beginning of the national park idea with appropriate ceremonies, culminating in the Second World Conference on National Parks.

This international conference will be held in September 1972 in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Delegates representing many countries will examine the role of parks in a time of deepening environmental crisis and look for ways to strengthen and extend the national park idea throughout the world. Freeman Tilden, perhaps the most eloquent interpreter of the Nation's parks, discusses the concept behind the national park movement and what it means today.



**National Park
Service
U.S. Department
of the Interior**

**National
Parks
Centennial
1872-1972**



**Yellowstone
The Flowering
of an Idea**

Frontier cameraman William H. Jackson photographed painter Thomas Moran at Yellowstone's Mammoth Hot Springs in 1871. The pictures and paintings of these men did much to arouse public interest in the wonders of Yellowstone, and their works today give us a vivid account of Yellowstone's wildness at that time.

There can be magic in a word. The name "Yellowstone" has that quality.

On the first day of March 1872, President Grant signed into law an act creating Yellowstone National Park, more than 2 million acres of superlative scenery and natural wonders—the first national park in the world.

As we draw near the 100th anniversary of this pioneer adventure in human culture, it is time to consider what it has meant to our country and to the world. For when Congress decided to withdraw "from settlement, occupancy, or sale" and to dedicate and "set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people" a great region of its Federal lands,



The Hayden Survey of 1871, shown camped at Mirror Lake, made the first scientific study of the Yellowstone Country. Headed by F. V. Hayden of the U.S. Geological Survey, the party included several scientists, photographer William H. Jackson, and painters Thomas Moran and Henry Elliot. The accounts, photographs, and paintings from the survey helped publicize Yellowstone's uniqueness back East.

it was a declaration that man does not live by bread alone—that he has moral and spiritual needs, and that exploitation of the earth's resources, however necessary and admirable, must preserve islands of the natural scene where our kinship with all nature can be constantly renewed and understood.

Many and varied and precious are the national parks that have been established since that day in 1872. And when, in 1916, the National Park Service was established to administer these preserves, its duty was set forth:

"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."

Thus the Yellowstone act was amplified and given a wider statement of intent. But the idea was there. It was something that could grow as needs grew. It was a plant that could adapt to new conditions—and flower. Perhaps, in a fast-changing and mechanized world fraught with dangers to the body and soul of man, we have yet fully to test the quality and quantity of this flowering of the Yellowstone Idea.

For a moment, let us go back to 1872. Was that year one of great affluence, when we could afford to make a gesture of careless magnificence? On the contrary. It was a period of severe social and economic stress in our country, the aftermath of a terrible Civil War. To bolster the sagging welfare, it was normal that the chief thought would be upon a quickly renewed assault upon all natural resources for profit. Yet out of that very depression emerged Yellowstone—an adventure in the humanities based upon reverence for primitive landscape and beauty and all organic life. One voice in the Senate chamber, that of George Vest of Missouri, said that "we should show the world that they are wrong when



Yellowstone's early visitors lived off the land, scuffled with Indians, and came armed to the hilt, as shown in this 1872 Jackson photograph of N. P. Langford—one of the leaders of the famous Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition of 1870. From that journey and those men came suggestions for setting aside Yellowstone as a national reservation.

they say that Americans are interested only in the 'almighty dollar.' "

When the authors of the Yellowstone Act referred to that wilderness as a "pleasuring-ground" they were far from thinking of physical relaxation and restoration alone. They knew then, as well as we know now, that the most enduring pleasures are those adventures of the mind, in which man pursues his eternal quest for self-identity. To know one's self, to try to fathom the ever-recurring questions "Who am I? What am I doing in this amazing world? Where do I fit in the scheme of nature's ebb and flow? What is my just relation with other organic life, even of the humblest sort?"—we may resort to books, good books of the wisest philosophers. But this is not enough. Finally, in our search for identity, we must resort to the places kept most free from our own handiwork, from our astonishing technological achievement, from our marketplaces of noise and neuroses. We find that only man makes noise. The rest of nature has sounds. And if you think that there is no difference between these



two, ask yourself the question: "Have you ever heard of anyone made deaf by thunder?"

Yellowstone and the other great national parks that one by one have been added to the National Park System are indeed pleasuring grounds. In them you may choose for yourself the kind of pleasures you are seeking. You need indulge in neither study nor meditation. You may merely return to your mother earth for an implicit healing of the wounds that excessive material success inflicts. The Yellowstone Idea is many ideas in one. It is for every need, every mood.

Yes, Yellowstone is an Idea, an imperishable concept of equilibrium in the life of man who, with his strange capacity for



The Yellowstone Territory was a little-known wilderness a century ago when William H. Jackson made this picture of the Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River.

Top: Yellowstone's thermal features have fascinated explorers from the days of the fur trappers to the present. Here, Castle Geyser punctuates the landscape with its vapor plume.

intellectual and mechanical development, can so easily enmesh himself in a net of his own devices. As the centenary of Yellowstone comes closer, our country and the whole world stand far more in need of Yellowstone the Idea than was the case when the first national park was born.

Yellowstone children today are spread around the world. There are perhaps 90 nations that have a system of national parks. There are the expected variations in the administration of these parks of other lands, but the basic concept is inherited. During the Centennial Year at Yellowstone National Park not fewer than 500 delegates from foreign lands are expected to attend the Second World Conference on National Parks.

The anniversary of Yellowstone National Park may well be one of satisfaction to the American people. But the rejoicing should have a touch of humility, too. Among our forebears there were men of rare insight, who could look forward to our needs—and beyond. We have a duty not to fail them.

—Freeman Tilden