

Conservation Foundation's report to the National Park Service in 1972, which was part of the centennial celebration of Yellowstone National Park. Our purpose for presenting them is to give a historical perspective on advanced thinking about parks as expressed at that time, and to compare that with contemporary thoughts.

## **Insights from Stanley A. Cain**

In early 1972, Dr. Stanley A. Cain submitted several papers to George Hartzog, who was then the Director of the National Park Service. In his cover letter, Dr. Cain said: "The attached papers of mine are related to and written because of the Conservation Foundation study and the Centennial development. . . . I don't expect you to have time to read all this, but there is an occasional useful thought about values, research, etc. . . ."

Dr. Cain, a plant scientist and ecologist, has had a long career as an academician, researcher, and supporter of the national parks in many and varied ways. As early as 1929 and 1930, he did extensive work in the Great Smoky Mountains on heath balds, as well as other plant ecology studies. He chaired the Secretary's Advisory Board on National Parks, Monuments, and Historic Sites from 1960 to 1965, and was the only person to serve on both the "Leopold Committee" and the "Robbins Committee." In 1965, Dr. Cain was appointed by Secretary Udall to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. (This was the first time that parks were included with fish and wildlife—at Dr. Cain's insistence.)

The two papers that follow were used in deliberations leading to the

## **Of Museums, Parks, and the Many Interests of the Public**

*Stanley A. Cain*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC museums is essentially a phenomenon of the last hundred years in Western nations. Their development in the areas of art, archeology and anthropology, the natural sciences, historical artifacts, and engineering and technology are a vast departure from earlier centuries when the collections of paintings, sculptural pieces, and other art objects were the private occupation of the very wealthy and aristocratic, some of whom, fortunately, had taste that commands respect today.

What has come about comparatively recently is a social, cultural, political revolution—perhaps basically a democratization; a sharing. Whereas we are greatly indebted to the earlier collectors of art to enhance their private residences and palaces, we remain today indebted to them not only for the fact that they have cared for them, but that one way or another many collections have become public property—national treasures, whatever the country.

Public museums are expensive—the housing, custodial care, and research are all large continuing costs while the acquisition of individual pieces sometimes runs to six or even seven figures. The visiting public may contribute a small fraction of operating costs, and memberships somewhat more, but the burden (or opportunity) still falls largely on persons of wealth for sustaining and expanding museum collections and providing a public opportunity for pleasure and enhanced understanding, values, and taste.

Governments have also moved to develop and support museums of many kinds. In the United States this movement runs the gamut from towns and cities, counties and states, to Congress at the federal level. Even with such basic support, derived from taxes, there is a remaining need for the help of wealthy patrons and for the hundreds and thousands of persons who band together as "Friends of the Museum."

This historically recent democratic social phenomenon is still growing, not because everyone believes that museums meet a public need or that they are for everyone, but because of a conviction of many

that the "tone of society" can be improved and that it would somehow be good if it were. For a government to receive a gift in the public interest is one thing, but for it to appropriate public funds to support the array of museum needs is quite another matter. Cesar Graña, in his recent book *Fact and Symbol*, quotes William Cobbett's remarks made in the House of Commons in 1833: "Why should a tradesman or farmer be called upon to pay for the support of a place which was intended only for the amusement of the curious or the rich, and not for the benefit or instruction of the poor?" As Graña says in his sociological critique:

Museums . . . have ideologies. Some of them have been solemn, elegant, elitist; others evangelistically democratic or piously utilitarian. And, from the social scientists . . . one might conclude that museum-going is one of the rituals of contemporary, post-traditional civilization. These contentions and disparities, however, will become understandable if we look into the fabric of ambiguity and paradox which lies behind museums and their history.

These same hundred years are the time during which there have been created public botanical gardens, zoological parks, and wildlife reserves. They all represent the museum impulse. It is the same hundred years, of course, during which the Yellowstone idea has caught on and become a multinational development. The connection is not a loose one because many proponents and defenders of our national parks view them as living museums, where the National Park Service

strives to protect and exhibit what Starker Leopold once called vignettes of the American landscape—comparable, if one pushes the museum analogy hard enough, to the stuffed animal and plastic plants of museum habitat groups.

It is also clear that many units of our national park system have the same ambiguities and hence problems problems as those dead museums often housed in bastard gothic buildings. What are the public values to be protected and transmitted? How is the visiting public to find its pleasure? What can the visitor do or not be allowed to do? What are the solutions of management problems arising from sheer numbers of visitors? What is the responsibility to guide visitors so as to increase their understanding of what they see? How can the public participate in the opportunity from broadened experience? How can the boor be separated from the contemplative person? How can irrelevant actions be limited or prevented? In sum, how can the public interests and the visitor purposes be brought into congruence?

If one uses the word *re-creation*, the museum and the park purposes are broadly identical. When one uses the word *recreation*, however, park problems are very much more complex than museum problems.

You will find in the report of Task Force I, *Preservation of National Park Values*, that some of these questions have been commented on and, as we have made recommendations, answered to the best of our ability. This is not unique. The other Task Forces have encountered the same array of questions and their recommendations are not always the same as ours. So it goes. It

is the nature of social-cultural disparities which, in the long run, are to be welcomed in an egalitarian society. There is a caveat, however. The units of the National Park Service number nearly 300 and their diversity is great, as Congress in act after act has recognized not one but several public values, purposes, and needs of our society.

The residual problem is the one now so familiar to the U.S. Forest Service as its devotion to multiple-use has become statutory. Among the several proper uses of park properties, some are incompatible. Those that are must be separated in place and/or time if they are not to become mutually destructive. This is a central problem for the National Park Service that museums do not experience. At first blush, it would seem to be a planning and management problem. Behind this, however, is a basic research and educational challenge. The public must be helped to understand what are the purposes of the different units in the array, from the great wilderness and historical parks to the more recent urban-related recreation areas.

—Yosemite, April 13, 1972