

Some Thoughts about

Caring For the Parks and the Land

George Wright believed there was no useful distinction to be drawn between the preservation of natural and cultural values in national parks—or anywhere else. He was right. We are here to reaffirm Wright's generous, practical, and inclusive view of our responsibilities as we reassert the primacy of what the Service calls "resource management," and the rest of America calls "protecting the parks." Protecting the parks supervenes all other values, even visitor convenience and income generation. We are the guardians of the places, and only secondarily of the facilities.

As Wright would desire, we're here to consider together how these professional responsibilities can reinforce a larger role as citizens of the American democracy. That role is to act with others to preserve the American land and the creatures inhabiting it, human and otherwise, and also to serve the American community through protecting those places where the experience of that community is most poignantly presented. Our obligations to land and community—to conservation and preservation—are the same. Nobody who knows anything about the *natural* history of this continent, as it has unfolded over the last twenty thousand years, thinks there is any significant portion unaffected by humans. Nobody who knows anything about American *culture* thinks it evolved in a sterile dish, unaffected by climate, soil, temperature, altitude, other animals, or changes in nature. American history is not that of a nation of astronauts, whirling about in uncontaminated space where nothing grows but boredom, cuticles, hair and mold. Ours has been a nation evolving upon a continent, accompanied by other living things—bison, bats, sala-manders, wolves, elk, chipmunks, eagles, salmon, lichen, moss, and plenty of bacilli. There is no history without natural history. History is unintelligible without science, just as science is mere mathematics

without being deployed to changing history.

Without action, these truisms lie dead upon the scene, mere carcasses of once living thoughts. And there is plenty of action within the Service, thanks to your commitment to a kinetic and not a passive role. We are all the beneficiaries of the work of the people who worked on the special task force on natural resource management, those who produced RMAP, and those working on CR MAP. They have left a legacy that will affect the way the National Park Service allocates its energies for decades to come, and the allocation of dollars and FTEs over the next two crucial years. And as those who worked at these tasks knew at the time, they were only asked to do part of the job. Their partial achievement, following that narrow mandate, did not trespass beyond the imaginary line between natural and cultural resource management. That line has grown up into a hedge of bureaucratic brush during the long years since George Wright's death. The best the "naturalists" could do was to plow the fields on their side of the hedge. But as they did so, they knew that there are plenty of holes in the hedge—that's one of the lessons of ecosystem management. And—as distracting as artificial bureaucratic categories are (artificial metaphors such as "hedge")—what appears as a

hedge to some appears to the scientist as a permeable membrane. Through that membrane, sheer seepage will do a lot of good for people who were trained in George Wrights' absence to think they are on the cultural side of the membrane-hedge.

At the park level, these distinctions are, as you know, already going away—it is *natural* that they should. And it will become *cultural* that they should as well before long—even in the Park Service culture. It's true that at the SSO and Field Office levels, there are specialized support functions which may just as well be divided along these lines for awhile. And in Washington, there is plenty of policy to be made, and plenty of tasks to be done in specialized fields ranging from research in adobe reconstruction and construction, through the financing of historic preservation, air and water quality, to brucellosis control to keep two associate directors busy. However, the two people occupying those posts are already fully aware that it is pure time allocation and specialized training which differentiate their functions, and neither science nor history.

Since you are all acquainted with Park Service culture, and what is natural in that culture, it may be wise to recognize what you already know: the necessity of getting ahead with that natural resource management task force required us to leave for the next bounce a balancing study by those whose affinities are for history and archaeology rather than biology. We are determined to place a renewed emphasis upon natural resource management, and we are also determined to protect those places and objects primarily important to understanding the evolution of the American community.

Within the Service, we'll work to advance it all; perhaps by the time we get CRMAP we'll be able to generate an ALLMAP.

As you know, we often make use

of a refrain—"places, people, and partnerships," to give primary emphasis to the protection of the parks—that is what the headline PLACES implies. It was and is important to sustain, only slightly behind, a renewed stress upon the PEOPLE who protect the places, their skills and the career opportunities, their insurance, retirement, pay, and housing.

Now we need, with equal intensity, to urge forward other matters George Wright believed crucial, matters he would have insisted be present in the agenda of a conference bearing his name. We have a larger responsibility to American society than defense of a bunker. We are advocates of community and continuity in American life and of a respectful relationship of this to other species.

Beyond the Service, we do have a larger calling. We have been trained in history and in the biological sciences—and with training comes obligation. As we converse about ecosystem management and endangered species, we must reason together about the *morality* embedded in these terms. I think it begins with ourselves, with each other, with the species of which we are members—the responsible species. Let us draw upon the humanistic tradition brought forward to us in the wisdom of a great seventeenth-century poet, John Donne, who gave Ernest Hemingway a book title and gave us all the first full powerful statement of the necessity for a broader and more capacious view of our interconnections, in and out of the parks. Here are the familiar words of John Donne:

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

We are here because we know that in whatever park may be our duty station, we are "involved" in

humankind. And looming beyond John Donne are the great figures of an older and broader tradition, Saints Patrick and Francis, and Buddha as examples, who remind us of other endangered species beyond our descendants: The tolling of the bell is for the death of any living thing; we are "involved" in all life.

Our "involvement" with other species of living things arises in part because we share with those species—indeed with earth, air, water and fire—a place in an intentional and not an accidental universe, in which all these, all animate species and all inanimate objects from stars to starfish, have a place.

We are diminished by the death of any living thing, wherever situated. That was the view of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson anticipated the Endangered Species Act in these words: "...if one link in nature's chain might be lost, another and another might be lost, till this whole system of things should vanish by piece-meal."

And so they might, friends, and so they might, one species after another. Unless we rally round each other, and join with all others who share with us the horrid sense that the bell is tolling constantly now, tolling all day and all night without surcease, as species after species dies, creation after creation, friend in the earth after friend in the earth.

We work in parks, with special responsibilities for parks, but, of course, park boundaries, county, state or national boundaries were created by humans and not by God.

Lines on a map are of no interest whatever to the creatures of the air, to perigrines or particulates, to acid rain or eagles, to songbirds, smog, or starlings.

As professionals we have special and severely limited assignments. Beyond those assignments, however, we are citizens as well as servants. It is quite natural for us to attend to matters as citizens beyond our tasks

narrowly defined. Whenever we may have come into this service, twenty or two years ago, we did not come as we might have entered into a cave or a bunker. We are not social spelunkers, but, instead, people who sought in the Service an opportunity to put to work their broader commitments, out upon the broad and sunny uplands, as citizens of the earth.

Some of that earth, some land now given over to our intensive care, is very sick—because of what was done to it by our species. If we humans had shown ourselves to be as sagacious, as skillful, and as omniscient as we—at our most truculent—sometimes profess ourselves to have been, the ravaged earth would not so harshly confront our conscience.

We have not been good enough stewards of this earth, and, in truth, we have not even been good enough stewards of the national parks. We have fought off many attacks upon those parks, and we are fighting off more, these days. But that is not the subject of our discourse today; today we are discussing us, not "them" the enemy. We are together to tend our obligations, not their predations. I shall be back in Washington, for duty on the defensive platoon, soon enough. Here we are talking together about each other as conservationists and preservationists. And let's be candid with each other, even if it hurts a little: we act too often as if we were with Henry the Fifth before the walls of Agincourt; our language lapses too often into "we few, we happy few," we sometimes smug few, smug, even sometimes, in our fewness, as if service among the saving remnant were the more glorious because the remnant is not larger.

We must strive to add to our number those who also care about land, who also care about parks, who also care about the created world beyond the boundaries. To do so we must embrace those concepts uniting us, and while we do right by

the parks we should also follow our natural instincts as members of the responsible species. Though the parks are our responsibility under the law, we look outward, as citizens, to value all the earth, all its species, all its mountains, waters, fields, and oceans. Human artifacts, such as historic buildings, sculpture, painting, music, orchards, farms and woodlots, have value, and so does wilderness, defined as that place where human artifacts are least obtrusive, backcountry where human artifacts are less obtrusive. And valuable too are those park places for intense visitation.

Parks are one subset of valuable places—not more valuable, just valuable in a particular way. Parks put on a map limits to human avarice and gluttony for real estate.

In the parks are beauties—and there are also mysteries—profound mysteries. Parks are more than a gene pool—they are funds of fathomless truths, of life in unexpected forms. When microbes new to us, but known to themselves for millions of years, appear in densely visited Yellowstone, it is not their monetary value which is most significant: embedded in them is the mystery of life, in its perpetually changing, infinitely various affirmations.

As John Donne, St. Francis, and Thomas Jefferson remind us, beyond the wilderness, beyond the parks, out *here*, there is also an American tradition of resource protection. As Abraham Lincoln reminded us: we are all heirs to a great estate, holding America in trust for everybody's children. For federal land managers it is quite natural to think that within a ring of lands of many uses is land set aside for fewer uses—in the parks. The parks are a geographical weekend as wilderness and Independence Hall are the geographical sabbath. In all park areas we can find surcease from the consequences of human deficiencies elsewhere, of what we have done to the world and to ourselves “during the rest of the week,”

so to speak.

But we have to be careful when we speak this way. There are two perils in this line of thought, in the notion of concentric circles or Chinese boxes, of nested intensifying responsibilities. One danger is that it may encourage a bunker mentality. That would be wrong. Park people should be active citizens deploying their special training to be useful beyond the parks. We are citizens *first*. The second danger is more subtle: This way of speaking may, unless carefully stated, reinforce the notion that parks are what is left over from a once “empty” continent—or, as the expression has gone, “virgin” continent. Worst of all, this would leave the impression that human intervention in landscape is always pernicious. That is nonsense. Otherwise, why garden?

Human intervention is appropriate and, so long as humans eat, necessary. Farming and ranching and orcharding and viticulture and gardening are honorable professions. That's obvious enough. But some people still talk as if the relative sanctity of parks arises from their unacquaintance with human presence.

History, real history, rebuts the oafish assertion that this is or was an “empty continent” into which Europeans came, and over which their “pioneers” established mastery. An “empty continent” ripe for mastery? The American continent was not empty in 1492; it was a populated land where humans, seven million people, lived north of the Rio Grande. Even those places that did not contain houses or farms had a history. Humans have been present at one time or another even in those areas we now call wilderness. This country is full of the evidence of past life. Anyone who has seen the grave-goods of the Hopewell Indians of Ohio knows that there among them are sculptures made of obsidian from what is now Yellowstone National Park. Anyone who has exam-

ined the sculpture of the Poverty Point people of northeastern Louisiana knows that while Rome was a village, and Stonehenge was under construction, the Louisianans were collecting steatite and jasper from mountain places north and east of them which are now parks. The people of Spiro, at the eastern edge of the great plains, possessed turquoise mined near Albuquerque at the western edge. And, in Maine, the Abenaki knew the Allagash "wilderness" very well.

We need pretend no longer that the Europeans and Africans found here an empty continent—seven million inhabitants north of the Rio Grande! People who had been exchanging things and travelling for thousands of miles, across all the great mountain ranges, along all the great rivers, for thousands of years.

And as great building programs of monumental architecture rose and fell, with intervals of quietude of a thousand years or more between them, people gathered together, built, lived, loved, died, and then great empty places have opened. They opened because humans did not maintain an adequately respectful relationship with their environment. In the central Mississippi Valley, from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, well before the onset of European and African explorers and diseases, there appeared what archaeologists call "the Vacant Quarter." The great metropolis now lying in ruins beneath modern St. Louis and Cahokia had held, during the preceding centuries, more hu-

mans than Rome or London. And in 1400, it was empty. And so was the site of Cincinnati, of Nashville, of Pittsburgh, where cities had thrived and throve no more. Perhaps their people thought recycling was enough—or that a spotted owl was the only endangered species. Good citizens, but not good enough—humans had exhausted the capacity of the American land to support them, and had contaminated it with their waste.

As we learn from cultural history and from natural history, the special responsibilities of the Park Service are accompanied by general responsibilities as citizens. We not only defend science applied in parks, we defend as well and science applied outside parks. As at once a rational and spiritual people, we insist that as humans act in the earth, as they operate on the earth, that we must keep science alive. We must keep the light on the operating table.

We know a little more about science than did the people of the thirteenth century in Cahokia. The light is on. We can see death and life where they occur. We have learned a little more about the links in Thomas Jefferson's "chain of nature." We are even more poignantly aware of the power of the words of John Donne: we seek not to know for whom the bell tolls, when it tolls for any living thing, anywhere. It tolls for us all. As each of us can, each in our own place, we must abate the tolling, lest it toll, finally, for each as well as for all.

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