

National Parks Called University

General Science

Secretary of the Interior Describes Educational Work

THE U. S. National Park system as a great educational institution, a university in which anybody can enroll without entrance examinations, was pictured today in a radio talk by the Hon. Ray Lyman Wilbur, Secretary of the Interior. Dr. Wilbur spoke over the Columbia Broadcasting System, under the auspices of Science Service.

Dr. Wilbur said, in part:

"The United States is fortunate in possessing, in its matchless national parks and monuments, a system of outdoor museums which offer almost unlimited opportunities for enjoyment. I have been asked to talk especially about education in the national parks. The term sounds formidable, but as applied to the national parks education is but one form of the enjoyment to be derived from a park visit. Our Nation is still a young one, and like all young things is consumed with a curiosity as to the 'why' of things. It is that spirit which has made us successful in the development of the resources of our country and in science and invention. So it is but natural that it must be carried into our recreation.

"It is not enough for most of us to go to a national park, hurriedly view its highest mountain, greatest waterfall, or immense canyon, and then go on to something else. Except for the almost professional 'tripper,' most of us want to know something about the mountain, whether it was once a volcano, and if not what caused it. We want to know how the canyon came to be, and the cliff over which the falls tumble. So, for lack of a better word, we call the service which meets this demand for information educational."

As a specific example of the educational function of the National Parks, Dr. Wilbur selected one feature of the Yellowstone.

"It is said to be a dying volcanic region; that the geysers are the last gasps of the old volcanic forces," Dr. Wilbur continued. "This may be so, but after viewing one spot in the park known as specimen ridge, one wonders if the age in which we live is not merely an interlude between two great volcanic periods. Specimen Ridge is a 2,000-foot cliff where Nature in some way cut through a great

plateau. Imbedded in this cliff may be seen the remains of twelve fossil forests, one above the other. The scientific explanation is that the first forest was engulfed and buried under an irresistible flow of volcanic mud and ash. Then volcanism ceased and sufficient earth accumulated on top of the ash to support another forest. This later suffered the fate of the first forest. So for countless ages volcanic activity followed periods of quiescence during which forests thrived. Who knows but that Yellowstone's forests of today may be the thirteenth fossil forest of geology's tomorrow?

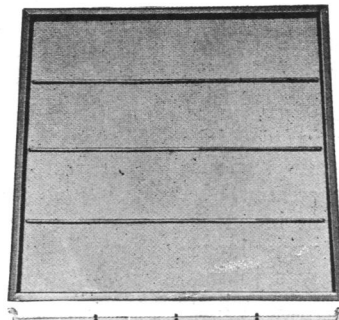
"Visitors to the region are particularly interested in the hot springs, and one of their frequent questions is, 'What happens to the hot springs in winter; do they freeze up?' Others, when told of the plants of the arctic zone to be found in the park, ask, 'How did arctic plants get to Yellowstone from the Arctic Circle?' Since asking such questions is one of the

amusements of park visitors, answering them has become one of the important duties of the park forces.

"The so-called educational work in the national park consists in explaining to those interested, in popular form, the peculiar formations which are the distinctive features of the park, and telling which of her powerful tools Nature used in forming them; and in giving information about other natural-history trips of the areas. This information is conveyed in three principal ways—through trips of varying duration conducted by ranger-naturalists; through lectures given by naturalists and visiting scientists at the hotels, lodges, and camp-fires in the public camps, and through the museums, which are fast becoming important tourist centers."

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