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Note.—This is Dr. de La Tour's second contribution on the status and preservation of South American mammals. "The Guanaco" appeared in *Oryx*, volume 2, No. 5.

NATIONAL PARKS—THE CITIZEN'S RESPONSIBILITY

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America's magnificent system of national parks and monuments is a tribute to one of the salient characteristics of the American people—a consciousness of civic responsibility to each other. In a culture often accused of being dollar-mad, some twenty-four million acres of the finest primeval land available has been reserved at the insistence of the people, to be protected inviolate for the benefit of future generations. In addition, fourteen million acres in the national forests have been set aside as Wild and Wilderness Areas, where no roads may be built, seventeen and a half million acres are devoted to federal wildlife protection and management, and many millions of acres are protected as state parks and privately owned sanctuaries. This is a proud achievement, attained because the people as a whole recognize that the wisest use of these lands is the perpetuation of their aboriginal condition, as representative of the once vast wilderness that clothed the continent.

Although since colonial times a few voices had been crying that this wilderness was not inexhaustible, and that its resources were being ruthlessly diminished, it was not until the American Civil War that Abraham Lincoln officiated at the birth of American conservation, when he reserved what is now Yosemite National Park. During the following decades, the pattern of the robber barons was gradually superseded by the concept that the land and its resources were the common property of all of

the people, and that the people must actively accept responsibility for their care. In 1950 the Supreme Court of the United States wrote this principle into law when it declared that men do not own land to use or abuse as they see fit. Rather they hold but a life tenure in it, and have a moral and legal duty to ensure that they pass it on in good condition.

It is this concept that is the foundation of our national park system. It is not one that is easy to translate practically, especially in a vigorous economic environment that demands maximum comfort and fullness of life for its growing population. Even to-day, industry generally views lands and resources as wasted unless they are immediately converted into board feet of lumber, pounds of beef or spendable dollars. Fortunately those who think differently have been sufficiently powerful to have their viewpoint recognized.

Any national park must eventually be established by Act of Congress, but it starts with an idea in the minds of altruistic citizens, who first are viewed as wide-eyed fanatics, but who gradually build public opinion behind their programme. When the time is ripe legislation is introduced and the complex pattern of debate and public hearings is under way. Years, and even decades, may pass, the debate often evolving into a vigorous controversy between the sponsors of the park programme and those who see ways to wring profits from the land. It speaks well for the American Congress that almost invariably it decides that national park status is the highest use to which an area can be devoted. To-day the United States has a nearly complete system of 180 national parks and monuments. Frequently, the individual States have given vast acreages to the parks and provided millions of dollars for land acquisition, while substantial citizens have given valuable holdings to complete them. National monuments are identical with national parks in character and administration; but are usually established by Presidential proclamation. This is a faster process, but still requires active participation by the citizen.

Such progress is encouraging, but the permanence of the national park system depends on public vigilance. Congress can change its own laws, and constant efforts are made to induce it to relax the protection afforded one or another national park or monument. Lumber operators of the North-West have made repeated attempts to change the boundaries of Olympic National Park so that its incomparable rain forest, the last remnant of giant spruces, cedars, and firs on the continent, can be opened to clear felling. Livestockmen demand that the parks be subjected

to grazing, because they have overgrazed their own lands without restoration, and envy the lush park meadowlands used by wild life. Mining interests would like to prospect and extract ores everywhere in the national park system. The rise of public power programmes has brought agitation for huge dams and reservoirs in such national parks as Grand Canyon, Glacier, Kings Canyon and Yellowstone, and in Dinosaur National Monument. Motor clubs urge that the parks be converted into elaborate resorts, to attract the tourist dollar to their State's coffers. Skiers propose chairlifts and tramways that would devastate the natural beauty of the mountains and which are out of place in national parks. Only an alert, active public opinion has prevented the realization of these threats.

The National Park Service, which administers the national park system, is an agency of the federal government, and is prohibited by law from engaging in propaganda. It can report on proposed legislation, and its influence is great ; but it cannot arouse public opinion. Therefore there have been founded a number of independent citizens' organizations, including the National Parks Association, that carry the fights to the people. They are financed almost entirely from membership fees, and their funds are limited ; but they have the advantage that when they combat the wealthy industrial lobbies, they appear before Congress with clean hands ; for they have nothing to gain except the knowledge that they are performing civic service. Sometimes the battle seems hopeless and the dangers unsurmountable. But, by refusing to give up, these forces triumph. Since the National Park Service was established in 1916, not a single major attack on the national parks has succeeded.

Less progress has been made in securing adequate financial support for the park system. The National Park Service operates entirely on the appropriations from Congress, for the revenue from car entrance fees (the only charge made for the use of the parks) is deposited directly into the Treasury. During the depression, when huge public works and relief programmes were undertaken, the appropriations were supplemented by millions of dollars of relief money, and the Civilian Conservation Corps contributed invaluable manpower to build trails, establish campgrounds, fight forest fires, rescue visitors, and perform many other duties. In 1940 these programmes ceased, and the Park Service has had to get along entirely on its appropriations. Although the parks were visited extensively during the war, funds dropped to about nine million dollars, woefully inadequate to protect the areas and maintain them. The end of the war

brought visitors to the parks in numbers beyond any expectation ; but as late as 1949 only thirteen million dollars was being provided for the Park Service.

Once again citizens' organizations supported the pleas of the Park Service for reasonable funds and since 1950 the appropriation has stood at about thirty million dollars. This may seem a large sum at first glance ; but it only amounts to about seventy cents per visitor, for forty-seven million people visited the national parks last year. Some of the parks are falling to pieces under this pressure. Vandalism has reached the crisis stage for the limited number of rangers which can be afforded cannot be everywhere to curb the minority of malicious or thoughtless people who do the damage. The visitor's accommodation, which is operated or owned by private enterprise, was not designed to handle such crowds, and needs renovation and expansion. Administrative buildings, ranger stations, and residences, museums, campgrounds, and sanitary facilities provided by the government, are deteriorating to ruin. The excellent roads in the parks are breaking down under the wheels of millions of cars—it is not a question of building new roads, but of preserving those already in place. Though legally on a 40-hour week, the rangers work many hours overtime without compensation, because they are dedicated to their jobs.

Congress is sympathetic to the problem ; but when it comes to deleting an unnecessary power dam from the federal budget so as to provide money for national parks the dam wins every time. Rather than squeeze the fat out of gigantic appropriations for construction work some Congressmen whittle a few dollars off urgent items in the Park Service budget. When one considers the contribution the national park system makes to the national economy, entirely apart from the more significant contributions it makes to the welfare of the people, such penny-pinching becomes absurd.

It is ill-advised to attempt to assess the value of national parks on an economic basis, because the fundamental values for which they are reserved are intangible. Undue emphasis on the number of people attracted to these areas and the amount of money they spend leads to an attitude that appraises national parks as tourist resorts, and to demands for artificial stimulation of the tourist trade there. Nevertheless, the national park system is probably the principal stimulus to travel in the United States and the tourist trade, by its support of innumerable major industries—car manufacture, oil production, sale of photographic equipment, hotels, and restaurants, etc.—has

been calculated to be the fourth largest enterprise in the nation. In fact it is big business and it is an axiom of financial operations not to expend capital, but to increase it. The national parks are a capital asset, and can produce their tremendous returns only if they are maintained in their proper state. At present they are not being given the financial aid they should have. It depends on the people of the nation to see that adequate funds are provided.

In this discussion, the problems confronting the national parks of the United States are presented as an example of how even a thriving system of reservations is directly dependent on the degree of active interest the individual citizen takes in its welfare. Many nations have national parks, wild life reserves, and other specially reserved areas, which require the same measure of public support. In far too many nations these areas amount to little more than categories, because the people have not exerted their influence to support the programme. Either they take a "let George do it" attitude, or they fail to accept the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy. It is the duty of every citizen to guide the decisions of his legislators and officials and so to determine the nature of the laws and policies under which he lives. He can do this only by expressing his views, and expressing them forcefully. No national park system, or any other altruistic endeavour, can survive effectively unless the people as a whole vigorously support it, and ensure that by it the highest good is served.



[D. F. V. FitzGerald]

HIPPOPOTAMUS IN THE RUKWA VALLEY, TANGANYIKA.