The Lure of the Parks

North Coast Limited in the Montana Rockies
Posters produced by western railroads (left and below) during the 1920s and 1930s lured visitors to national parks through colorful depictions of spectacular scenery. Dorothy Waugh painted the National Park Service poster (below left) about 1935 to remind potential park-goers of the excellent recreational opportunities afforded by state parks.

Cover illustration: Northern Pacific Railway poster (circa 1930) depicting Gustav Krollmann's painting *North Coast Limited in the Montana Rockies*
"There is no voice in all of the world so insistent to me as the wordless call of these mountains. I shall go back. Those who go once always hope to go back. The lure of the great free spaces is in their blood." So wrote Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876–1958), an American playwright, novelist, and mystery writer, describing her enchantment with Glacier National Park. In doing so, she eloquently summarized various promotional campaigns implemented to attract national park visitors during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Like many of her fellow enthusiasts, Rinehart believed that the park experience itself offered the most convincing argument for preserving America’s scenic wonderlands.

Today Glacier, Yellowstone, and other western national parks are crowded places. As the year 2000 approaches, over-use is a major problem facing the nation’s best-loved natural reserves. At the beginning of this century, however, just the opposite was true. Western parks were inaccessible to most Americans, both geographically and financially. To fulfill their potential as “public . . . pleasuring ground(s) for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” the parks had to attract visitors. The need for visitors in turn fueled the demand for park promotion.
Two entities—western railroads and the National Park Service—rose to this challenge, each for its own reason. From the turn of the century until America entered World War II in 1941, railroads and, after 1916, the park service mounted advertising campaigns designed to lure Americans west to experience firsthand the region's scenic wonders. In an age predating such contemporary marketing advantages as television and color-film photography, the promotional art produced for the campaigns introduced the wonders of western parks to many Americans. As the number of park tourists increased so did support for the park idea.

Western railroads commissioned artists like Thomas Moran and John Fery to provide visual proof of national park scenery and painters such as Winold Reiss to create vivid portrayals of Native Americans as an enticement to visit the West. With the coming of New Deal work relief programs during the Great Depression, the park service engaged artists like Dorothy Waugh to illustrate the value of parks as sources of recreation and renewal for a nation greatly in need of both.

These campaigns produced an amazing variety of promotional art, which today survives in a colorful legacy of posters, calendars, brochures, and guidebooks. Northern Pacific Railway advertisements depicting the wonders of Yellowstone National Park and Great Northern Railway promotional material detailing the glories of Glacier National Park combine with depression-era park service posters to serve as outstanding examples of a rich visual heritage.

National parks represent an idea that is truly American in origin. As early as 1833, the artist George Catlin, who devoted his career to chronicling the cultures of America’s indigenous peoples, proposed establishing in the West “a nation’s Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty!” The park, Catlin believed, would be “a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to . . . the world, in future ages!” Catlin’s dream was realized almost forty years later when, in 1872, Yellowstone became the world’s first national public park. Citizens of other countries readily adopted the American park idea and over the next one hundred years established more than twelve hundred public reserves around the globe.
Scenic preservation was a primary impetus behind establishing America’s first national parks. The majority of early preservation enthusiasts promoted the park idea as a way to save the western landscape’s most spectacular aspects—the highest mountains, the deepest canyons, and the most dramatic waterfalls—as well as the most extreme examples of natural oddity, such as the Yellowstone geysers. They sought to preserve this remarkable scenery so that it would remain unspoiled yet publicly accessible for future generations.

To accomplish this at a time when many Americans were not familiar with the more magnificent aspects of the western landscape, preservationists first had to convince people that the scenery was worth saving. From the beginning artists played an essential role in the effort. In 1871 Thomas Moran acompañied the Ferdinand V. Hayden survey, a government expedition sent to the Yellowstone region to verify or disprove the fantastic claims that had circulated since the days of the fur trade. Moran traveled on money provided by Northern Pacific railroad financier Jay Cooke. The paintings that he produced, most notably The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, were instrumental in convincing Americans that the rumors were true: Yellowstone did merit the protection of the United States government.

Most early park promoters adhered to romantic views of nature like those expressed by Frederick Law Olmstead, the nation’s leading, mid-nineteenth-century landscape architect. In 1865 he wrote:

The occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character, particularly if this contemplation occurs in connection with relief from the ordinary cares, change of air and change of habits, is favorable to the health and vigor of men and especially to the health and benefit of their intellect beyond any other conditions which can be offered them.7

Preservationists maintained that public reserves of untarnished nature would enable individuals to experience the kind of physical and spiritual renewal Olmstead envisioned. Ultimately, if enough people enjoyed such opportunities, the country as a whole would benefit. For park enthusiasts’ arguments to have credibility, however, a significant number of people had to benefit from visiting the parks.

Park supporters held that people who visited and enjoyed the reserves would become the preservation movement’s strongest allies. As Allen Chamberlain, a park activist with the Appalachian Mountain Club, explained about 1914, only if more people “could be induced to visit these scenic treasure houses” would Americans “come to appreciate their value and stand firmly in their defense.” Those who shared Chamberlain’s philosophy believed that strong public support would help them convince Congress to create and maintain parks as well as defend against those willing to sacrifice scenic marvels to commercial development.

Geography, however, posed a major impediment. America’s first national parks were located in the West, and the vast majority of the population resided in the East. Consequently, one concern for those seeking to increase park visitation was how to transport tourists to the parks and, more important, how to convince them the trip was worthwhile. Western railroads offered a solution to both aspects of the problem. Acknowledging that railroads were motivated more by profits than a sense of altruism, most preservationists nonetheless recognized the value of the railroads’ endorsement of the park cause and were eager to work with the railroads toward a common goal.

With completion of transcontinental railroad lines beginning in 1869, the West was opened to Americans as never before. Some railroads built transcontinental lines in exchange for land from the federal government. Because the railroads profited by selling this land to settlers, they were avid supporters of western development and agriculture. In addition, by helping to build a population base in sparsely settled areas, railroads were creating a built-in, permanent market for their freight and passenger services. The establishment of Yellowstone National Park and, after the turn of the century, Glacier National Park fit perfectly with the railroads’ promotional strategies. Tourist traffic promised additional profits, and the railroads were eager to join the preservation cause. As William Van Horne, president of the Canadian Pacific Railroad from 1888 to 1899, proclaimed, “If we can’t export the scenery, we’ll

2. *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 17 (1872), 32.
4. Although Yellowstone is the first national park in name, many historians argue that Yosemite is the first national park in spirit. See Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln, 1979), 29-32.
5. Ibid., 182.
The cover illustration for this 1915 Northern Pacific Railway brochure reflects the awe felt by early explorers upon Yellowstone’s natural phenomena for the first time. Many people regarded their tales of “hell bubbling up” to be myths until artists and photographers captured the region’s wonders on canvas and film.

Like its counterparts south of the border, the Canadian Pacific promoted the Canadian West as a haven for agricultural settlement and proclaimed the Canadian Rockies a perfect holiday destination.

As boosters of the West, railroads wielded powerful influences on public opinion. Until automobile travel boomed after World War I, railroads held a virtual monopoly on western tourism and consequently were without rival in their ability to promote western parks in the years preceding the war. In 1883 the Northern Pacific Railroad completed its line across Montana and designated Livingston, a small railroad town approximately fifty miles north of Yellowstone National Park, as the point of embarkation for park-bound tourists. With its subsequent sponsorship of “Wonderland,” as the park was dubbed, the Northern Pacific became the first railroad to ally itself closely with a specific park.

In doing so, the Northern Pacific set the course for other western railroads to follow. By 1910 the Southern Pacific had adopted Yosemite, the Santa Fe claimed the Grand Canyon (then a national monument), and the Great Northern was determined to secure Glacier’s reputation as the “Crown of the Continent.” No railroad was more enthusiastic in its efforts to promote a national park than was the Great Northern under the expert guidance of President Louis W. Hill, Sr. In 1912 The Saturday Evening Post labeled Hill, an avid outdoorsman and son of Great Northern Railroad founder James J. Hill, “the greatest press agent in the country.”

Railroads had not only the motivation—a quest for increased profits—to promote national parks during the early decades of this century, they also had the means. With substantial financial resources and considerable advertising acumen, railroads, unlike most preservation organizations, could mount elaborate campaigns promoting the West and its public reserves. Artists were instrumental in the success of the railroads’ efforts.

The Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads commissioned prominent painters such as John Fery, the Austrian-born artist who produced more than three hundred monumental landscapes for the Great Northern railroad between 1910 and 1930, to tour the West and paint its grandest attractions. Fery’s works and those of other artists were displayed in public buildings throughout America to entice would-be travelers with the possibilities of a western vacation. Massive oil paintings of glaciers, geysers, and mountain peaks were hung in ticket offices and railroad stations in communities across the country. Railroad art was also exhibited in hotels, bank lobbies, and other highly visible locations. Such paintings proved exceptionally powerful in communicating the drama of the western landscape and were highly effective in winning public support for the national park idea.

Although widely dispersed, original paintings could be viewed by only a relatively few potential tourists. To reach greater numbers of people railroads transformed these images into a variety of promotional formats. Commissioned paintings were reproduced on

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10. For Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads’ roles in establishment and development of Yellowstone and Glacier parks, respectively, see Runte, Trains of Discovery, 13-48.
12. In addition to artists, railroads relied on photographers like F. Jay Haynes in Yellowstone Park and Tomer J. Hileman in Glacier Park for publicity images. Such photographs also won public support for western parks.
postcards, souvenir playing cards, railroad timetables, and dining car menus. No use of these paintings, however, instilled wanderlust more effectively than did their reproduction as travel posters. The earliest railway flyers were typographical notices with simple illustrations. By the turn of the century, however, advances in printing technology made feasible the mass-production of large-scale, full-color posters. The monumental scenery of western parks was unsurpassed as subject matter for colorful posters, and railroad executives were quick to recognize the splendid marketing possibilities such images offered. Posters were easily displayed in depots and ticket offices, in numbers far greater than was ever possible with original paintings. Countless more passersby were now exposed to such scenes as Moran’s *The Grand Cañon of the Yellowstone* and informed that only the railroad could take them there.

While much of the railroad’s commissioned art was devoted to natural spectacles of the West, other paintings focused on its native cultures. Like the Santa Fe Railroad, which featured images of Navajo and Pueblo Indians in selling the Southwest, Louis Hill and the Great Northern relied heavily on depictions of Native Americans to foster interest in Glacier Park. As a Great Northern railroad brochure published about 1933 proclaimed: “Any presentation of Glacier [National Park] . . . would be inadequate and incomplete that did not have regard for the . . . tribesmen who live in the very shadows of the ‘Shining Mountains’ and whose traditions and history have so enriched [the area].”

Hill involved the Blackfeet Indians, whose traditional homeland included much of Glacier Park, in a variety of promotional efforts. Members of the tribe greeted visitors arriving by train, served as tour guides, and produced ledger paintings, which were used to decorate park hotels. Nothing better illustrates the importance of the Blackfeet Nation to Hill’s promotional success than the Great Northern calendars. For thirty years, beginning in 1928, the Great Northern produced and distributed calendars bearing bold portraits of Blackfeet Indians painted by the German-born artist Winold Reiss. At the railroad’s request, Reiss returned again and again to Glacier where he painted, conducted an art school, and learned to respect his Blackfeet subjects. As Blackfeet historian John Ewers writes:

The Indians readily recognized his unique ability to portray them truthfully and as individuals, not just as types. They gave Reiss the honored name of
Beaver Man because he worked so diligently . . . Reiss, in turn, learned to appreciate the Blackfeet as not only very picturesque human beings, but as men and women of great strength of character.14

While the railroads did commission such well-known artists as Thomas Moran and Winold Reiss, the majority of artists working for the railroads were not nationally recognized figures. Most were established, professional artists whose work appealed to railroad executives like Louis Hill. The paintings of Elsa Jennie, a Minneapolis studio artist classically trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, exemplify the high quality of work produced by these lesser-known artists. Although Jennie preceded Reiss to Glacier National Park by two years—working there during the summers of 1925 and 1926 in a studio provided by the Great Northern Railroad—she never achieved the recognition that Reiss did with his calendar art. Like Reiss, however, she produced stunning portraits of Blackfeet subjects, some of which were reproduced on Great Northern publications.15

In addition to purchasing paintings for display and reproduction, railroad promoters relied heavily upon artists and photographers to illustrate the many pamphlets, brochures, and guidebooks they produced. Travel literature offered railroad promoters another venue through which they might proclaim the glories of western tourism. Lavishly illustrated, these public-
ations also relied upon the printed word to excite dreams of adventure. Many early visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone parks found themselves incapable of describing the beauty they encountered. In summer 1895 Frances Lynn Turpin, a St. Louis resident, kept a journal of her camping trip in Yellowstone. In describing her first view of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, she wrote, “In the distance the [Lower] falls could be seen. . . . There should be a language coined in which to express its magnificent splendor. . . . Those whose privilege it is to see this magnificent canyon will understand, none other can.” Railroad promoters sought to insure that eastern vacationers joined those privileged park visitors by exhorting readers in language as colorful as the artists’ illustrations. A 1927 Northern Pacific brochure described Yellowstone, for example, as

the real wonderland, embracing an aggregation of fantastic phenomena as weird as it is wild and remarkable. . . . Here are . . . crystal rivers, thundering cataracts, gorgeous canyons, [and] sparkling cascades . . . but of all its wonders none is so unusual, so startling . . . as the geysers, once seen, the memory and mystery of them will forever linger. 17

The railroads relied on more than just physical landscape to lure eastern visitors westward. They also drew upon the romance of the West. Americans had been fascinated with the West since the days of Lewis and Clark, but its appeal grew increasingly stronger during the early decades of the twentieth century as the harsher realities of the western experience faded from popular memory. Railroads assured potential visitors that the region remained one of high drama, and that nowhere in the West was an encounter with adventure more probable than in a national park. Cowboys, like Native Americans, became romanticized symbols commonly depicted in railroad advertising.

Although enthralled by the promise of romance and adventure, railroad patrons required a certain amount of comfort. Most tourists did not want their West too wild or their nature too natural. Transcontinental railroad lines made it quicker and easier for Americans to reach the West, but rail travel remained expensive, well beyond the means of an average American family. Indeed, paid vacations were unknown for most American workers. Consequently, railroads aimed their promotional efforts at upper-class travelers—those who could afford the time and money such trips required. Wealthy Americans, accustomed to certain amenities when they vacationed in Europe or at eastern spas, expected the same in the West, and the railroads were not only able but eager to provide such services. 19

To accommodate expectations, and increase profits, railroads offered patrons a complete experience, neatly packaged. As a result, park facilities and accommodations, as well as the trains themselves, were featured elements of railroad promotion. For visitors who arrived by train, as most did, depots served as their initial park encounter. Stations therefore were designed as impressive gateways to the park experience. Railroads, either directly or through subsidiary companies, built grand hotels designed along rustic western themes. Dining cars and hotel restaurants boasted of exceptional cuisine. The packaged experience included railroad-sponsored tours—by coach, lake launch, horseback, or motor bus—through Yellowstone and Glacier and largely dictated what guests saw and did.

If drama, romance, and luxury were insufficient to entice Americans to national parks, western railroads had one last appeal—a call to patriotism. By the second decade of the twentieth century, it was no longer

18. Great Northern Railway, Call of the Mountains (c. 1933), 4.
Glacier Park photographer Tomer J. Hileman created a composition on film when he recorded Elsa Jenne painting Peace Offering in Jenne's park studio in 1925 or 1926. Peace Offering was the wife of Curley Bear, a respected leader of the Blackfeet.

appropriate, according to park promoters, for Americans to spend their money visiting Europe's castles and cathedrals. As one railroad writer beckoned:

"Turn for a moment from the famous tourists' haunts of the Old World to the wonderland of the New—And behold a grandeur and majesty of natural beauty to challenge all of Europe—nay, all of the world! A scenic glory utterly beyond comparison."  

Americans, railroad marketers proclaimed, had not only the opportunity to see America's scenic wonders, but an obligation to do so. Emerson Hough, a prolific western writer and ardent park supporter, reiterated this viewpoint when he wrote that national parks "feed the spirit, the soul, the character of America. I know it [Yellowstone] and love it all. So will you love it when you know it. And you ought to know it. That is part of your education as an American."  

"See America First" permeated the rhetoric of western railroad promotion during the 1910s and 1920s. Louis Hill championed the phrase and used it widely on Great Northern pamphlets, brochures, stationery, and even train cars. Other railroads repeated the sentiment using similar slogans designed to appeal to national pride. More than just a catchy advertising motto, "See America First" campaigns strengthened the economic argument for tourism. By keeping at home American tourist dollars—estimated by park promoters in 1910 to be two hundred million dollars annually—there was now an unassailable justification for Congress to support the natural reserves of the West.

Beginning in 1916, moreover, railroads had a new ally, the National Park Service, in rallying Americans to "See America First." Before 1916 no single government agency had complete responsibility for the national parks. Rather, the Department of the Interior, the War Department, and the Department of Agriculture (through the Forest Service) each administered reserves under its jurisdiction. Problems resulted when the three departments adhered to differing or even conflicting philosophies for managing parks under their control. Additionally, operation of the reserves constituted only sidelines to the primary purposes of the three agencies. Park supporters had long argued that the parks could best be served by establishing a federal agency solely responsible for the parks and whose only function was their administration.

Preservationists won a major victory with the creation of the National Park Service. The new agency's mission was "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."  

Stephen Mather, assistant to the secretary of the interior in charge of national parks since 1915, became the first director of the National Park Service. Like many other park enthusiasts, Mather believed that increased park patronage was essential to the well-being and expansion of the park system.

Due in large part to efforts of the railroads, support for the national parks had grown significantly in the forty-four years since Yellowstone was established in 1872. There were still strong opponents to the park

22. National monuments and national battlefields were not transferred from the Departments of War and Agriculture to the Department of the Interior until 1933. See Harlan D. Unrau, Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s (Denver, 1983).
idea, however, who favored commercial development—
extraction of minerals, harvesting of timber, and con­
struction of dams—over scenic preservation. In Scenery
as a National Asset, park activist Allen Chamberlain
wrote, “the nation has in these parks a natural resource
of enormous value to its people, but it is not being . . .
utilized as it might be.” Instead, Chamberlain lamented,
commerical interests seeking to develop the natural
resources of the reserves threatened to “steal an im­
portant part of our birthright.”

To defend against commercial development, Mather
made park promotion a priority. In this endeavor he
was ably assisted by Robert Sterling Yard, a journalist
whom Mather hired in 1915 to assist in publicizing the
parks. Yard distributed hundreds of thousands of book­
lets and maps, issued a steady stream of press releases
to newspapers nationwide, and provided motion pic­
ture newsreels on the parks to youth clubs and outing
organizations. For his part, Mather traveled extensively,
selling the park idea wherever he went. John R. White,
a former military officer working for the park service,
said Mather “had a positive genius for bringing together
men and women from different walks of life and focusing
their interest on park work and promotion.”

In addition to the railroads, Mather foresaw great
potential for automobile travel to increase park patron­
age. The soaring popularity of automobiles after World
War I ended railroad domination of western tourism.
The open road called, and Americans eagerly re­
sponded. Automobiles eventually undermined the rail­
oroads’ support of the parks by usurping their ridership
and cutting severely into passenger profits. Initially,
however, national park enthusiasts perceived the ar­
rival of middle-class park-goers in unprecedented num­
bers as a great boon to achieving park stability through
increased visitation. By providing a more affordable and
less restrictive means of travel, automobiles ultimately
opened western reserves to middle-class Americans as
never before.

Although the desirability of allowing automobiles
inside parks was debated, no one in the park service
questioned their value in bringing visitors to the parks.
As one historian has argued, neither Mather nor Horace

24. Allen Chamberlain, quoted in Runte, National Parks: The
American Experience, 91.
25. Robert Shankland, Steve Mather of the National Parks (New
27. For the role of automobiles in the demise of railroad passe­
ger service see Carlos Schwantes, Railroad Signatures across the
Pacific Northwest (Seattle, 1993), 239-55.

M. Albright, who succeeded Mather in 1929, ever con­
sidered campaigns to increase park visitors “at odds
with the urge, which they shared in full measure, to
preserve the beauty of the parks.” The parks simply
needed to be “used.” “Unless and until the American
people started flooding to the national park reserva­
tions,” Albright’s biographer added, “Congress would
refuse to appropriate adequate funds for the adminis­
tration and protection of the parks.”

Because of railroad and park service promotional
efforts, popularity of automobiles, and expansion of the
park system, visitation for all national parks rose dra­
matically—from thirty thousand in 1916 to almost three
million in 1929. Despite the hard times that accompa­
nied the Great Depression, visitation to national parks
continued to rise steadily throughout the 1930s. More­
over, Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal ultimately ben­
efited the parks in many ways.

For the park service, the most far-reaching New Deal
change was the introduction of work relief programs—
implemented to allay the nation’s crippling unemploy­
ment—which spurred construction of trails and facilities
in the parks and gave new life to park promotion. For

28. On the effect of highway development on leisure travel see
Warren J. Balasco, Americans on the Road: From Auto Camp to Motel,
1910-1945 (Cambridge, 1979); and John A. Jakle, The Tourist:
Travel in Twentieth Century North America (Lincoln, 1985).
29. Donald C. Swain, Wilderness Defender: Horace M. Albright
and Conservation (Chicago, 1970), 54.
tional Park Service, 1933-1942: An Administrative History (Wash­
example, Civilian Conservation Corps workers constructed or maintained more than 2,300 miles of hiking trails and built almost 5,000 "campstoves or fireplaces" in national parks between July 1935 and June 1941. Joblessness affected all classes of workers, therefore New Deal programs offered employment in a variety of fields. The CCC, through its conservation and construction projects, undoubtedly had the largest impact on the overall operations of the parks.

Inclusion of artists in work relief programs, however, represented the most significant benefit to park promotional efforts. Although artists comprised less than 1 percent of all New Deal relief workers, the contributions they made to the art scene of the 1930s were immense. Employed through a variety of relief programs, artists painted murals, circulated traveling exhibitions, conducted art classes for public schools, and established community art centers across the nation. In the park service, relief artists created diverse works ranging from museum dioramas to hand-painted slides for ranger presentations. In addition, one artist, Dorothy Waugh, helped publicize the national reserves by designing a series of posters that depicted the parks as sorely needed havens for physical and psychological renewal during the depression.

Documentation concerning the circumstances under which the Waugh posters were produced is lack-
Despite the absence of documentation about their production, the central message of the posters is clear. During the Great Depression America needed the physical and spiritual renewal that preservationists believed the parks offered, and the dynamic designs of Waugh's posters vividly illustrate the value that parks—as perceived by the park service—held for a depression-ridden nation. Her posters relied on four themes to convey the park service's message that reserves were significant. Waugh's art reflected the relationship between the National Park Service and the growing number of state parks established during the New Deal; they reinforced the idea of national and state parks as unified systems rather than as individual entities; they emphasized recreation as an important aspect of the park experience; and they illustrated the interest in things American that characterized much of the nation's cultural environment during the 1930s.

With implementation of New Deal programs the National Park Service intensified its efforts—begun with Stephen Mather—to assist states in developing state parks. Although several states operated reserves by the turn of the century, the state park movement did not mature as a national phenomenon until the 1920s. In 1921 only nineteen states operated parks; by 1942, at the close of the New Deal, the number had risen to forty-one.

Growing support for state parks resulted from changes in American society during the first decades of this century—more leisure time, greater mobility, and, as Henry Graves, chief forester for the United States Forest Service, observed, an increased "appreciation of outdoor recreation, a new impulse to seek the hills and forests and to refresh mind and body through the vigors of mountain and camp life." This interest in nature was due, at least in part, to the fact that ever increasing numbers of Americans lived in crowded urban areas removed from daily contact with nature that was once integral to the American pioneer experience. As Bernard DeVoto, journalist, historian, and novelist, described it: "Our civilization excludes steadily increasing numbers of Americans from firsthand knowledge of nature . . . and yet their need of it can never be extinguished."

The demand for outdoor diversion created a need for recreational areas that national parks alone could not meet. By the late 1910s the park service was increasingly pressured by politicians to accept parks Mather believed held regional or state-wide significance but did not merit national park status. To relieve this pressure Mather actively encouraged states to develop parks. In doing so, he set the precedent for park service promotion of the state park movement, which is vividly portrayed in the vibrant park service posters of the 1930s.

A second way Waugh's posters reinforced the park service's New Deal promotional message was by portraying the park idea in a broad sense rather than promoting individual parks. Earlier railroad advertisements boasted of the attractions of specific parks—Yellowstone's geysers or Glacier's "shining mountains"—to encourage ridership on their lines. In contrast, Waugh's posters depict common aspects of the park experience—winter sports, trail riding, and fishing—that link the reserves together, rather than the unique features that set them apart. Because it was cheaper to design one series of posters suitable for widespread distribution, practical considerations no doubt influenced the park service's selection of broad themes. More important, however, by choosing inclusive topics Waugh's posters underscored the benefit that inte-

32. Kirby Lambert, Dorothy Waugh research file, MHS Museum. One of Dorothy Waugh's brothers, Sidney, was a noted architectural sculptor and glass designer.
33. Henry S. Graves, "A Crisis in National Recreation," American Forestry, 26 (July 1920), quoted in Unrau, Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s, 106.
35. On the park service and state parks during the 1930s, see Unrau, Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s.
This WPA poster project poster produced for the park service circa 1937 lured visitors to parks by suggesting they would see wildlife in its natural habitat.

grated systems of state and national parks offered to those seeking to preserve scenery and enjoy nature.

One way state and national parks facilitated the enjoyment of nature for depression-era park-goers was to provide unmatched settings for outdoor sports and recreation. Promotional posters by Waugh and others colorfully emphasized this aspect of the park experience. Unlike Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroad posters that tempted vacationers with spectacular scenery, many of Dorothy Waugh's bold designs featured recreation to entice visitors to the reserves. From its inception in 1916 the park service promoted outdoor sports as an integral component of the park experience.

Outdoor recreation was especially important during the 1930s because it was free or inexpensive once visitors were inside the park. Unlike luxurious accommodations and handily packaged sight-seeing tours designed for wealthy railroad patrons, horseback riding, picnicking, boating, and swimming appealed to "sagebrushers," as motoring campers were called, for whom expense was a critical consideration.

In addition to enticing depression-era visitors with the lure of recreation, Dorothy Waugh's posters reflected renewed interest in American culture and history during the 1930s. In response to the depression, many artists and writers sought to reaffirm the positive aspects of the American experience. American history and literature gained new prominence as subjects for scholarly and popular study. Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists documented notable examples of traditional American crafts, and WPA writers produced detailed guidebooks to every state. Examining and celebrating the national heritage reaffirmed the national experience, providing both comfort for the present and hope for the future. 36

In the quest for a national inheritance nothing could be found that was more uniquely American than the national parks. Consequently, park posters extolled not only physical recreation but urged people to experience that which was good about America. In the national parks, gathered around a campfire or riding a mountain trail, Americans could still experience life at its best, and Waugh's posters effectively evoked the regenerative spirit that New Deal artists and writers

37. Christopher DeNoon, Posters of the WPA (Los Angeles, 1987), 81.
39. For railroads' efforts to retain passengers during the 1920s and 1930s see Schwantes, Railroad Signatures, 256-87.
40. Passenger service to the Grand Canyon from Douglas, Arizona, was restored in 1989.
Dorothy Waugh’s posters “The Lure of the National Parks” (above) and “Life at Its Best” (right) illustrate the regenerative spirit that promoters believed natural reserves held for park visitors during the Great Depression. Little is known about Waugh’s sources of inspiration for posters, although one titled “His Hunting Grounds of Yesterday” (opposite), provides a clue. It replicates a staged photograph of Blackfeet Indians in Glacier Park that appears in the park service publication, *The National Parks Portfolio* (1931).

sought. As WPA poster historian Christopher DeNoon writes, “the posters reaffirmed and exulted in America as a place of opportunity . . . as a land capable of providing sustenance and a rebirth of spirit. This spirit was a resource the nation badly needed.”

In addition to Waugh’s work, the park service also utilized the WPA poster project—another New Deal art program—to promote the reserves. Through the poster project, unemployed artists produced posters for any government agency that requested them. Like all New Deal work relief programs, the poster project provided work for the unemployed, but it also created a talented pool of professional artists that would otherwise have been unavailable to the park service.

While the park service hoped to lure motoring tourists to the national reserves through its New Deal posters, the railroads waged a losing battle against automobiles. Despite the railroads’ efforts, the percentage of national park patrons traveling by rail fell dramatically between 1918 and 1941. In 1915 for example, of the almost 52,000 visitors to Yellowstone National Park, roughly 44,000 came by train. In 1930 more than 194,000 visitors arrived at Yellowstone by automobile, compared to approximately 27,000 rail passengers. Railroad advertisements produced during this period boosting western tourism reflect the railroads’ attempts to retain ridership. The focus of many railroad post-
ers, for example, shifted from the traveler’s destination to the train itself. Because Glacier and Yellowstone national parks could now be reached by automobile, premiere passenger trains such as the Great Northern’s “Empire Builder” and the Northern Pacific’s “North Coast Limited,” increasingly served as selling points for railroad promotions highlighting speed and comfort of modern rail travel.

The Northern Pacific poster, “North Coast Limited in the Montana Rockies” (circa 1930), depicts this shift in focus. The locomotive in the poster dominates the dramatic western landscape through which it speeds. The poster, which is reproduced on the cover of this issue, incorporates a painting by Gustav Krollmann, an Austrian-born artist who immigrated to the United States in 1923.

Throughout the 1930s the national park system was expanded while park service promotions and western railroad advertisements lured more tourists. On the eve of World War II, attendance at all national park sites had risen to almost twelve million people. As America’s entry into the war turned the nation’s attention abruptly away from recreation, however, the impact on the parks was dramatically different than that of the depression. World War II brought a permanent end to New Deal work relief programs as well as a temporary halt to leisure travel. No longer did the railroads and the park service implore Americans to see America first. Rather, true patriots were now encouraged to stay home unless traveling on behalf of the war effort. Trains transported troops, and gasoline and tire rationing curtailed recreational travel by automobile. The government’s promotional efforts were directed toward winning the war, at home and overseas.

Travel restrictions imposed by World War II were only temporary. After the war, Americans returned to the parks seeking recreation and renewal in numbers greater than ever before. The decades that followed the war held significant changes for the promoters and enthusiasts who had worked so diligently throughout the first four decades of the century to secure the national park idea in the American mind. For western railroads, the decline in ridership that began after World War I culminated in the end of virtually all passenger service to national parks. By the mid-1980s Glacier National Park and Denali National Park in Alaska were the only western reserves still serviced by rail.40

Lack of rail service, however, did not herald a dearth of park visitors. By the closing decades of the twentieth century over-use had become a critical concern for many national reserves. Almost five million people entered Yellowstone and Glacier parks in 1995. Despite the pressures created by such numbers, today’s park-goers remain indebted to earlier generations of enthusiasts who helped preserve these remarkable areas through colorful promotional campaigns. Due to their efforts, we, like readers in 1915, can still heed the advice of Mary Roberts Rinehart when she entreated:

“If you are normal and philosophical; if you love your country; if you like bacon, or will eat it anyhow; if you are willing to learn how little you count in the eternal scheme of things; if you are prepared for the first day or two to be able to locate every muscle in your body and a few extra ones that have crept in . . . go ride in the Rocky Mountains and save your soul.”

KIRBY LAMBERT is curator of collections for the Montana Historical Society Museum. This article is drawn from research conducted for the Society’s most recent temporary exhibit, “The Lure of the Parks.” Lambert has curated exhibits for the Montana Historical Society interpreting such diverse topics as the history of medicine in the state, the art of Blackfeet sculptor John L. Clarke, and the impact of horses on Montana’s material culture. Major support for this article came from Peter Voll Associates of Palo Alto, California, which is reintroducing rail park tours to Montana.
You haven't seen anything yet
• I'll show you fifty glaciers and a hundred peaks that try to reach the sun. I'll show you fossil beds from the bottom of an ancient ocean up on a mountain top. I'll show you Alpine lakes that outmode Switzerland. And I'll show you broiled trout that would tempt Mahatma Gandhi. Right here in Glacier Park

Reincke-Ellis-Younggreen & Finn, a Chicago advertising agency prepared this advertisement for the Great Northern Railway about 1925. The advertisement appeared in several magazines including the New Yorker, Time, and Nature Magazine.

The Lure of the Parks
An Exhibit of the Montana Historical Society

A special thank you to the following who provided assistance with “The Lure of the Parks” exhibition: Robert F. Morgan; Deirdre Shaw and Matthew Wilson, National Park Service; Arnold Olson and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; Tom Mulvaney; Don Beatty; Joan Peter; Roy Moline; Dorothy Bowman; Sarah Rouse, Library of Congress; Daniel Lombardo, the Jones Library, Inc.; Dixie Carlson, Betsy Clark, Diana Halverson, and Vicki Terbovich, Montana State Library; Pam Otto, Glenda Bradshaw, Kathryn Fehlig, and Marilyn Grant, Montana Historical Society Publications Office.

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PVA TRAVEL PLANNING

“The Lure of the Parks” originally appeared as an article in the Spring 1996 issue of Montana The Magazine of Western History.
Bold graphics and evocative messages characterized the promotional posters (right and lower right) produced by Dorothy Waugh for the National Park Service during the 1930s. The photograph (below) of unidentified Blackfeet Indians in Glacier National Park, which appeared in *The National Parks Portfolio* (1931), likely served as the model for Waugh’s poster, “His Hunting Ground of Yesterday,” which appears on the last text page of this catalog.

Back cover: Great Northern Railway brochure, circa 1920
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Glacier National Park, Montana

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