

The 'Roots' of Nature Notes

As the popularity of Mount Rainier National Park increased, its purpose expanded beyond recreation to include education, thus enabling visitors to have a broader knowledge about the natural history of the area. The first issue of Nature Notes in the park collection is titled Nature Bulletin for Paradise Valley, dated July 16, 1923. This issue told park visitors which flowers were blooming, gave them information about animals and where they could be seen and also listed the activities of the Nature Guide Service, known today as the Naturalist's or Interpretive Division. Other articles included road and trail conditions, park regulations, bear problems, safety cautions, historical notes, along with inspirational poems, illustrations and anecdotes. Visitors were encouraged to take the information home, as 'all who are interested may have a copy'. Nature notes were the sole responsibility of the park naturalist. During the summer there were two seasonal nature guides who also wrote articles for the bulletin. Occasionally articles were written by the Chief Ranger, Ranger-Naturalists and the Superintendent. At one time Nature Notes issues were well over 600 copies, and mailed to 35 states; also Alaska, Hawaii and the District of Columbia and other National Parks. In 1935 Nature Notes were published quarterly. In December 1936, the format was changed and they were published periodically through the year with emphasis being placed upon specific subjects. The last issue of Nature Notes was September-December 1939. These special issues of Nature Notes represented several years of field work and general observations relative to the area. Subjects included flora, park history, park bibliography, glacier recession and wildlife.

Who were these pioneering park employees with the 'spirit of investigation'? Today as in the past, the Naturalist staff, including long-time seasonals, were educators with specific interests in subjects such as geology, botany and ornithology. Most notable were the park naturalists. Floyd W. Schmoe was Park Naturalist at the time Nature Notes first were published. He supervised and developed the Nature Guide Department through to September 1928 when he resigned. C. Frank Brockman was an Information Ranger that summer, then following Mr. Schmoe's resignation was Acting Park Naturalist, and became Park Naturalist in July 1929. He remained in that position until 1941, during that time he brought recognition to the park's education department. The contributions of both of these gentlemen continue to be valuable to present park administration. Although Nature Notes were discontinued the collection of those early volumes represents authentic natural history information and the results of the first field research programs within Mount Rainier National Park.

1981 March / PLG