

BOOK REVIEWS

AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS AND THEIR KEEPERS. Edited by Ronald A. Foresta. (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future, 1984. 400 pp. \$45.00 cloth, \$11.95 paper.)

Ronald Foresta's book is certainly the best history of the National Park Service yet to appear. It is a sophisticated work that analyzes the service's inner dynamics as well as its complex relationships with Congress, the executive branch, and the public, especially environmental groups.

If there is a central theme to this book it is that of the Park Service as a modern bureaucracy. Foresta provides a concise, insightful analysis of the service during its early decades when its leaders fought to establish firm territory and recognition as a bureau with a distinct mission and *raison d'être*—all the while competing with its archrival, the Forest Service. The early directors of the Park Service were very successful in these efforts. The addition of numerous and spectacular natural areas, the "logical" extension of the system to embrace historic preservation, the service's involvement in the National Mall and other public areas in Washington (bringing high visibility with Congress), and its role as advisor to nascent state park systems all served to strengthen the service, give it a broad popular base, broaden its experience, and secure its future. By mid-century the service was a securely established new bureaucratic species.

Foresta has no special regard for Newton Drury, the director during and after World War II. Even though Drury had a strong conservation background, Foresta believes he was not aggressive enough to secure needed funding and political support in Washington. The Park Service was criticized in the early 1950s for not having met postwar tourism needs. During the subsequent directorship of Conrad Wirth, the service began to accommodate vastly increased numbers of park visitors through the Mission 66 program. By the time this project was in full swing, however, the environmental groups had become politically powerful and frequently opposed rather than supported park development as they had before. Furthermore, Secretary of the Interior Udall believed the service had failed to address additional mandates, such as recreation. These pressures helped bring Wirth's directorship to an end in 1964.

Despite the strong leadership of Wirth's successor, George Hartzog, the service's relationship with Congress began to change significantly. The rise to power of the congressional subcommittees, and the corresponding growth of congressional staff, allowed for much more oversight and control of the service than before. At the same time, the environmental groups developed greater influence in Congress and often successfully countered Park Service proposals. The assistant secretaries of the Department of the Interior also began taking a more active part in agency leadership, thereby

diminishing the role of the directors. Finally, in the 1970s, the service became more subject to "constituent benefit bills," i.e., pork barrel legislation creating new parks that the service did not necessarily want—adding family jewels to the crown jewels, and lowering (in fact often ignoring) the service's exclusionary standards for new park areas. So—welcome to the crossfire political world of the 1980s; the halcyon days of the 1920s, 1950s, and 1960s are long gone.

Foresta then discusses the service's policies for natural areas, historical areas, and the urban national parks. Overall he emphasizes natural areas over historical ones in describing the service's involvements. This is understandable because (1) the Park Service identifies most strongly with, and obtains most of its directorate-level staff from, natural area management; and (2) the natural areas of the system receive by far the greatest public attention, which is to say that, ironically, they "make more history" than does the preservation of historic or prehistoric sites.

However, having successfully analyzed changing Park Service policies for natural resource management, Foresta fails to analyze the evolution of policies applied in historic preservation (now called "cultural resources management," a term that *always* requires explanation). Instead he dwells at length on the 1972 plan for history and prehistory, designed to rationalize and encourage the addition of new parks. Although this plan was important, Foresta by far over emphasizes its role by making it the central focus of his chapter on "History Policy." Furthermore, in 1982 the service published another study of history and prehistory in the park system, which differs from the 1972 effort in several important respects (for one, it is not an expansionist document) and supersedes it. Foresta's book was published in 1984. Given the importance he assigned to the earlier plan, it would have been worthwhile for him to compare it to the 1982 document if he had had the time.

In any event, thorough discussion of the evolution of the service's management policies for historic preservation would have been more relevant and rewarding than focusing on the 1972 plan. Preservation policies, preservation politics, and the influence and bias of successive generations of Park Service managers have created a lasting tension, the analysis of which would have more clearly revealed the underlying preservation philosophies and political stress that have influenced the service's management of its historic properties. However,

where Foresta does attempt this kind of analysis with the Lyndon B. Johnson Birthplace, he incorrectly identifies the birthplace as LBJ's "boyhood home" and then fails to understand the crux of this complex and fascinating case. The structure is in fact a presidential birthplace reconstructed by an incumbent president.

Foresta's discussion of both urban parks and the concerns the Park Service has "Beyond Park Boundaries" shows how the service has changed since the golden days of managing mostly isolated crown jewels. Under Hartzog and his successors the service accepted a broader role in urban park development, in national recreation policy, and in historic preservation beyond park boundaries (Foresta does not discuss the short-lived Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service). These complex programs have put great pressure and responsibility on the Park Service, and Foresta gives a valuable presentation of these issues.

My criticism of this book, except for the section on historic preservation (my own specialty), is minimal. Overall, the book should be *top priority* reading for anyone seeking to understand the history of the National Park Service. Mr. Foresta, who teaches geography and public land policy at the University of Tennessee, writes very clearly. Even the footnotes are good reading. And anyone who cites *Wind in the Willows* in analyzing the National Park Service is certain to provide a healthy perspective.

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This review originally appeared in the previous issue of JFH but is reprinted here in its entirety in order to rectify major errors made during page makeup. The editors apologize to the reviewer, the author, and the publisher for these errors.