

## History of the Park Ranger in Yellowstone National Park

### Introduction

To be a ranger is to protect and to serve and to do these things with a certain approach. When Yellowstone's bears were a roadside attraction, in the 1920's for instance, the perhaps too accommodating ranger might have consented to posing next to one, and having had his picture taken, might have been asked, "What else do you do?"

"Well, show folks where to camp, and how to keep on the right road, and answer questions, and see that people don't tease the animals, and keep things orderly, and put out forest fires, and give lectures on Nature, and rescue Dudes in danger, and most anything anybody wants done around here." (1)

Superintendent Horace Albright's 1928 description of a ranger's duties remains largely accurate in Yellowstone National Park in 1980. The current park brochure informs visitors that, "The men and women in uniforms and broad-brimmed hats are rangers. They are here to help you and to protect the park and its features. Their responsibilities include providing interpretive, police, and fire services." (2) While much has changed at Yellowstone during its 108 year history, much in the job of the ranger has also remained the same. The nature of the place and the status given it by Congress have ensured this continuity.

### The Superintendent and His Assistants: 1872 - 1886

When the Congress of the United States designated Yellowstone in 1872 for preservation as the first national park, it had little to suggest as to how this preservation might be accomplished or how such a park might be run. The Secretary of the Interior was to make rules protecting the park's features, providing against the "wanton destruction of the fish and game," and so on. No money was appropriated for doing these things, and the first superintendent and sole member of the first park staff, Nathaniel P. Langford, served without pay.

Yellowstone National Park quickly became a popular place, whose protection was hardly automatic. Edwin Stanley, a visitor in 1877, described the geyserite formations in the vicinity of Old Faithful as being, "... though so delicate in appearance, so solid that a hatchet is often necessary to obtain a choice piece for your cabinet." (3) Hunting, legal in the early years of the park, began to take on the proportions of "wanton slaughter," with little to be done about it. The park's staff was inadequate and legal machinery lacking to enforce the few rules that did exist.

Yellowstone's second superintendent, Philetus Norris, in 1877 appointed J.C. McCartney his assistant and assigned him these duties as Yellowstone's first "protection man," "... guard well ... against wanton slaughter of the game, spoilation of geyser cones and other curiosities, and especially against forest fires." (4) McCartney and later assistants proved ineffective. Their function was unclear, abilities inadequate, numbers too few, and legal support almost nonexistent. In his 1881 letter of resignation after one year of service as the park's first and only "Gamekeeper", Harry Yount suggested that the park might

best be protected by "officers stationed at different points of the park with authority to enforce the observance of the laws of the park." This is the pattern that was to develop in Yellowstone under army and National Park Service administration. (5)

#### The U.S. Cavalry and Its Scouts

Legislation in 1883 provided for more assistant superintendents, to a total of ten, and made hunting and trapping illegal. (6) Few of the assistant superintendents were effective at protecting the park, many being Secretarial appointments lacking the knowledge, skills, and often the interest required. The 1883 bill also permitted the Secretary of the Interior to call upon the Secretary of War for assistance in protecting Yellowstone. When the Congress appropriated no money for the park in 1886, the U.S. Cavalry was called to Yellowstone and stayed until 1918. It was largely the Cavalry which learned how to protect and, in general, administer the world's first national park.

Army regulations allowed one civilian scout to be hired for each troop of cavalry. These scouts became the principal model for Yellowstone's future park rangers. Jack Baronett, a widely travelled adventurer who had been an assistant superintendent, was retained as the first army scout in Yellowstone in 1886. In discussing the stationing of troops around the park in winter to prevent poaching, historian Aubrey Haines describes the scouts' role:

"While the (soldiers) on patrol usually did their best, they could seldom equal the frontiersmen in woodmanship or native craftiness. ... The solution, insofar as there was one, lay in the use of civilian scouts (who were the equal of the poachers in woodcraft and ability to travel and survive under any winter conditions) to instruct the soldiers, visit them in winter, and lead them on difficult patrols. The scouts passed along the lore of their way of life, the use of skis, how to dress and what to carry on patrols, where to travel and what to look for, and, occasionally, how to get out of a tight scrape." (7)

Summers the scouts continued to perform and supervise backcountry patrols while the soldiers concentrated more on checking wagons entering the park, protecting the geyser basins, and answering the many questions which visitors had. Soldiers gave "cone talks" at Old Faithful Geyser as early as 1887.

#### The Idea of "Park Rangers"

The army's protection of Yellowstone was strict and successful, but not envisioned as a permanent solution to the administration of national parks. In 1905, the equivalent of scouts were first designated "park rangers" in Yosemite, where the army was present only in the summer.

In the Superintendent's Annual Report For 1907, General S.B.M. Young (ret.) suggested the creation of a "civilian guard", an idea in which President Roosevelt encouraged him. Young outlined his criteria for army scouts in Yellowstone, standards that could be applied in choosing rangers today. Young wrote:

"I am convinced that with a properly organized civil guard the administration of this park could be brought to a higher and better standard, in two or three years, than could

ever be attained by the successive changes of troops detailed by roster from the Army.

One of the two troop serving here is undisciplined, with a large percentage of drunkards in its ranks. Many of these soldiers are in sympathy with poachers.

Cost of protection by a civil guard would be less than one-third of the cost by the present method. ...

It is quite obvious that any man assigned to duty in any capacity in the park should possess special qualifications for the proper discharge of that duty, and he should be by natural inclination interested in the park and its purposes. In addition, every man should be an experienced woodsman, a speedy traveler on skis, and expert trailer, a good packer who with his horse and pack animal could carry supplies to subsist himself for a month alone in the mountains and forests, and besides he should with his rifle and pistol to enable him (sic) to find and overcome the wily trapper and the ugly large game head and teeth hunter. He should be well informed on the history of the park and thoroughly cognizant with all the curiosities (sic) and points of interest therein; he should also be qualified to pass a reasonable examination in zoology and ornithology. A visiting tourist should always be favored by an intelligent and courteous answer on any subject pertaining to the park from any guard interrogated. Inattention or discourtesy should subject the guard to proper discipline or dismissal from the park when in the judgement of the superintendent the discipline of the park service would thereby be promoted." (8)

Young wanted practical men, who would demonstrate diligence, interest, intelligence, and courtesy in their protection of the park and their service to the public.

In one of his first acts as Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior, Stephen Mather put into effect the "Regulations Governing Rangers in National Parks," largely written by Mark Daniels, who served as General Superintendent of National Parks before Mather's appointment. But the army remained in Yellowstone and lacking money or authority to hire park rangers, retained its scouts, the only civilians the army was authorized to employ. Ten national parks would precede Yellowstone in having ranger forces organized according to the 1915 plan.

#### The First Yellowstone Park Rangers: 1915 - 1918

With the army still guarding Yellowstone, the park's first employees with the title "park ranger" were hired with Department of Interior funds. In 1915, to control the use of automobiles first admitted into the park that year, four rangers were hired to operate entrance stations. (9) These men were John Delmar and Stephen Kilpatrick of California, Leo Huston of Minnesota, and George Dustman of Ohio. They were seasonal rangers. In the fall, two more were hired, Donald Stevenson and Cruse Black, to kill coyotes, cougars, and wolves. (10)

The army's withdrawal from Yellowstone National Park was scheduled for October 1916. Col. Lloyd Brett, the Acting Superintendent, cooperated

with Mather and Albright in selecting twenty-three men from the scouts and the army's Yellowstone Park Detachment to transfer to the Department of the Interior as park rangers. The Yellowstone Park Detachment represented an effort to assign cavalymen to Yellowstone who were particularly suited for the work, and it included likely candidates for conversion. Local and then Congressional opposition to closing the post forced the army to return in 1917 and postponed the creation of a permanent Yellowstone ranger force until November 1, 1918, the day after the formal abandonment of Fort Yellowstone. On that day there were twenty-one permanent rangers, including three Assistant Chief Rangers to head three districts, and James McBride, army scout since 1901, as Acting Chief Ranger. Other former scouts among the rangers were Raymond C. Little, who resigned in 1922, and Harry Trischman, one of Yellowstone's finest, who served as ranger and then chief buffalo keeper until 1946. This handful of rangers with plentiful esprit de corps replaced approximately 400 soldiers and took over the job of protecting the park. The Yellowstone park rangers had arrived at last.

#### The First Decade of the Yellowstone Rangers

During the decade following the army's departure, the ranger force moved rapidly closer to the organization we know today. "The Ninety-Day-Wonders" (seasonal rangers), Albright wrote, "are mostly college men, with enough love for the out-of-doors to enlist for a summer of hard work at long hours and low pay in the national parks. They are a keen and resourceful group of men and what they don't know about the great open spaces after a week in a national park they manage to hide behind an air of great sagacity. ... The Old-Timers (permanent rangers) are born men of the mountains, fitted with a working knowledge of woodcraft ... " (11) Gradually these descendants of the army scouts were replaced by college graduated seasonals who stayed on for a career in the parks.

Rangers first came under the Civil Service in 1927. Nine years earlier Mather had expressed his belief in the usefulness of an examination to determine whether an applicant had the "fundamental base" to build upon, though he admitted that a test could not measure what he considered most important; i.e., "temperament, tact, etc." While then as now the best rangers tended to be people of a practical bent, the idea appeared as early as the army days that the ranger had to be more than a woodsman, more than a policeman, with the emphasis on courteous and knowledgeable service to the park's visitors. Albright's famous 1926 "Dear Mr. Smith" letter to a prospective seasonal ranger was harsh in its description of the ranger's job and the near military discipline that went with it but also stressed the need for rangers to have a "pleasing personality". (12) In this letter, the things which seem unusual to us today ("Rangers must rise at 6:00 am... They may attend dances or other entertainment not more than two evenings a week.") can hide the fact that parts of the letter remain an accurate description of the ranger's job in Yellowstone today.

#### Growth in the Ranger Staff

The size of the Yellowstone ranger force has varied over the years. In the fall of 1918, when the force came into existence, there were 21 permanent rangers and perhaps a few seasonals the next summer. That year the park's visitation was 21,175. For the summer season of 1936, there



were 30 permanent rangers (and 4 vacancies) and 42 seasonals, including future President Gerald Ford, who worked in the Canyon District. Four additional permanents and two seasonals worked full-time in fire control. There were several rangers on special assignment; one supervising Emergency Conservation Work activities (better known today as the C.C.C.), one performing range studies with headquarters at the Game Ranch in the Lamar Valley, one running the Buffalo Show Corral on Antelope Creek, and one involved with fish planting (13). Visitation in 1936 was 432,570. (14)

In 1942, Yellowstone had 47 seasonal rangers, though eventually the constraints imposed by the war effort restricted the staff to 22 seasonals and a permanent staff cut by approximately one third. (15) Reflecting the nationwide decrease in travel during the war years, the park's 1942 visitation was 191,830.

Before a House committee hearing in 1952, Director Conrad Wirth pointed out that in 1951 Yellowstone had had four fifths as many man-hours of ranger service available as in 1931. Visitation in 1931 was 221,248 and in 1951, it reached 1,166,346. He warned that the rangers could not always be present, to stop the throwing of debris into Morning Glory Pool nor to prevent the scratching of graffiti on the geyserite formations. Bear jams and traffic bottlenecks at some of the entrances had become common summertime occurrences. (16)

Part of the park's response to growing visitation was the building of more accommodations. Sub-district Ranger Jim Brady stated in 1971, "The number of campsites has doubled in the last decade." (17) Two or three rangers were needed to direct traffic after an eruption of Old Faithful. In that year the park had 105 seasonal rangers and 2,120,487 visitors, approximately the same as the entire park system the year Albright wrote "Oh, Ranger!". In 1979, Yellowstone's visitation dropped 28% over the previous year to 1,895,169. The authorized ranger staff has 20 full-time permanent rangers, 12 subject to furlough, and 173 seasonal park technicians and aids. (18) (These figures are best seen as representing the 1979 summer staff size.) The ranger force has risen and fallen with the times, without remaining in the same proportion to visitation.

#### Ranger Naturalists

General Young's description of the ideal army scout or civilian guard for Yellowstone included "naturalist" qualifications as did Albright's description in Oh!, Ranger, yet at an early date the park developed a separate staff of "ranger naturalists". Superintendent Albright appointed Milton Skinner as a park ranger in October 1919 to be in charge of an organized educational program. In 1920, Skinner's title became "Park Naturalist". But even when additional ranger naturalists were added to the staff, at some locations in the park what Albright called "regular rangers," not hired specifically to present programs and answer questions on natural history, nevertheless performed this function. (19) Throughout the park's post-1919 history, the ranger naturalists and the "regular rangers" have worn the same uniform and been virtually indistinguishable to the visitors, who are unaware of the early and increasing specialization in park work. The latest park brochures do a service in not trying to make the distinction.

It is up to the rangers, be they "regulars" or "naturalists", to be able

to help the visitors whatever the need may be. This part of the ranger image has endured despite the great pressures put upon it. Feelings on this issue of identity apparently reached a high point in 1957, when Assistant Superintendent Hamilton issued a memorandum to all employees stating, "All uniformed members of the Protective and Interpretive Division personnel will be known as the Park Ranger force including Ranger Naturalists and rangers for protection," attempting to establish by fiat what in the eyes of the public was a matter of fact. (20). Current local usage in Yellowstone is for the ranger naturalists to simply be called "naturalists" and the protective rangers, "rangers". The high degree of friendly cooperation between the two staffs is matched on the part of both by an equally high standard of helpfulness towards the park's visitors.

#### Women as Yellowstone Rangers

The male-oriented language of official Yellowstone literature until the most recent pamphlets belies the fact that Superintendent Albright hired a woman, Isabelle Basset (Watson), in 1920 to do both interpretive and protective work. She was to guide "people about the geyser formations while performing duties relating to the protection of those formations." (21) Marguerite Lindsley Arnold was Yellowstone's first permanent woman employee, serving as a ranger naturalist from 1921 to 1931. Some women may have had "regular ranger" jobs as seasonals and some, such as Francis Pound, worked as uniformed rangers in the entrance stations at early dates. But it may well be that the first permanent female ranger to serve in a protective position in Yellowstone with the full complement of ranger responsibilities was Mary Jane McDowell. She served as sub-district ranger at Grant Village and then Snake River Ranger Station from 1976 to 1979. The Division of Protection currently includes two permanent and a larger number of seasonal female rangers.

#### The Ranger's Duties

Continuity and change, a favorite theme for National Park Service interpreters of natural history, well applies to the history of the Yellowstone ranger's duties. As has been mentioned above, we can find much that is familiar in any description of the duties of the scouts, soldiers, or rangers in the park. Some specific duties have changed, often in response to changes in ideas of resource management or in response to the role Yellowstone plays as an instrument of social change. Rangers' supervision of projects undertaken by C.C.C. enrollees in the 1930's is an example of the latter paralleled on a smaller scale today in the YACC program.

The impact of social changes outside the park has changed the park ranger's job in negative ways too. In the 1960's and 1970's serious crime rose at a higher rate in the parks than in the nation as a whole. Yellowstone, as other parks, has responded to this trend and legislation such as the 1976 act clarifying law enforcement authority in the park system (P.L. 94-458, 19/7/76) with increased professionalization of its rangers involved in law enforcement work. A number of articles in the Fall 1979 Trends ("Trends in Law Enforcement and the Park Mission") reflect the need for this increased sophistication in performing the traditional park ranger role as protector of the park's resources and visitors.

Yellowstone has seen great changes in how the rangers sought to protect

the park's resources. Until the 1970's, all fires were vigorously fought, despite evidence that fire had played a role in the park's ecosystem before the advent of people's ability to do anything about it. The firearms used by rangers in the 1930's were predominantly ones suitable for shooting coyotes, a full-time job for two or three rangers every winter. (22) In 1926, Chief Ranger Sam Woodring reported 243 coyotes killed that year. (23) Different ideas about predators and, in the 1960's, on the management of the northern elk herd led to the purchase of a different type of weapon and considerable controversy. As rangers shot elk to reduce the herd's size, some members of the public objected to the killing of animals in a national park, particularly by those whose image had always been that of protectors, at least of non-predators. Other critics hoped that the chance had come for opening Yellowstone to public hunting. And the rangers took on the task of traveling to towns and cities in the surrounding states to counteract the critics' own campaigns. (24)

In 1922, rangers performed mosquito control work at Old Faithful and Lake. For years they planted fish, including in park waters which had been barren, and herded and fed bison in the Lamar Valley, building up Yellowstone's herd with animals descended from different strains and imported into the park. In the coldest winters, the rangers scattered hay by the roadside for the deer, elk, and mountain sheep, and then shot elk when the herd seemed too large. At the direction of the park's biologists and managers, Yellowstone's rangers today have a more hands-off approach to dealing with the park's wildlife. Efforts are made to keep the bison from wandering across the northern boundary and into Gardiner and the long-traditional anti-poaching patrols are still vigorously made, but the animals are to the largest extent left to play their natural role in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The development of snowmobiles and growing popularity of cross-country skiing and winter camping helped make Yellowstone an all-year park in the 1970's. Snowmobile patrol of the park's roads was added to the ranger's responsibilities along with emergency medical care of victims of snow-machine accidents and cold weather injuries.

The creation of a backcountry permit system to manage use during the boom in hiking in the 1970's gave the ranger staff another new job, while the successful return of the bears into the backcountry mostly ended the work of breaking up bear jams and the frequent capture and removal of problem bears.

The permanent Yellowstone ranger today perhaps spends more time than ever before on paperwork; budgeting, hiring, and other supervisory functions, while other paperwork has been eliminated. The rangers no longer, for example, prepare monthly narrative reports.

Some traditional ranger activities have changed over the years in response to technology but remain part of the job. Soldiers, scouts, and then rangers did road patrol solely on horseback until 1919 when several motorcycles were purchased. The first patrol cars in Yellowstone appeared in 1936, four V-8 Ford convertibles, with a rumble seat and nickel-plated siren on the left running board. (25) For decades, before the advent of the two-way radio in Yellowstone, patrol rangers kept in touch with head-

quarters by calling in periodically from phones located along the roads.

The traditional function of search and rescue has been made more efficient by the availability of contract planes and helicopters but still requires covering the park on the ground too. Aircraft also help with fire management, though rangers watch more fires today than they fight, and Smokey the Bear advertising campaigns and park regulations have greatly decreased the early problems which Yellowstone had with unextinguished campfires.

Despite the changes, essential elements of the ranger's job remain. Among these are boundary patrol against poaching, prevention of vandalism to thermal features, protection of the park's roadside wildlife from harassment by people and protection in turn of people from the park's hazards, operation of entrance stations, counting of wildlife, taking of snow courses, use and maintenance of patrol cabins in the backcountry. In simplest terms, from the beginning and still today, the job of the Yellowstone ranger has been to protect the park and by courteous and knowledgeable service to help the visitors enjoy it.

#### The Future of the Yellowstone Park Ranger

These days in particular it is a risky business to predict the future of any institution, including the park ranger in Yellowstone National Park. But cautious extrapolation from the experience of the park's 108 years of existence does suggest a few things. The preeminent historian of Yellowstone, Aubrey Haines, in his Yellowstone Story emphasizes how much the ranger's job, both its circumstances and its duties, has changed. (26) As we read, we begin to think the Yellowstone ranger of old was a different creature altogether. As outlined above, many of the ranger's duties have changed, but key ones have remained the same, as have important goals of the job. Some of the experiences which Haines describes as typically those of the Yellowstone ranger still happen today with minimal differences. Rangers, for example, still patrol the north boundary out of Crevice Cabin for poachers each fall and "horn hunters" each spring. (27) The snow lies just as deep and the terrain is just as difficult. The cabin is even the same one used by the army before rangers existed. The ranger position at Thorofare, thirty-two miles from the nearest road, in Yellowstone's southeast corner, still exists, little changed in its duties in all these decades of the station's existence. Though rangers on snowmobiles patrol groomed roads in winter, the park's huge backcountry is still covered by rangers on skis going from cabin to cabin, as of old. The people who are rangers today have different backgrounds, are perhaps a more diverse group. Technological developments will continue to change the job in relatively superficial ways. And changes in the type and volume of visitation will also affect the type and intensity of the ranger's work.

The theme for the history of rangers in Yellowstone has been continuity as much or more than it has been change; continuity not just in specific experiences but also in the philosophy of protection and service behind the work. What General Young expected of scouts in the first decade of the century is in significant ways what the public expects of rangers today. This park which early visitors called "Wonderland" is still the domain of the traditional park rangers, in both attitude and,



in many cases, duties. It can remain so for as long as there is a Yellowstone to be protected. This will continue to be true because the resources of the park, the things which the visitors come to see, will in their stability ensure this continuity in the ranger's job. The challenge is to keep the focus on service to the public while protecting those things which give Yellowstone its special status. Over the past century, through periods of turmoil both outside and inside the park's boundaries, the job of protection with service has been done by the Yellowstone Park Rangers. In this present period of uncertainty, no reason has appeared to say that the traditional Yellowstone Ranger has disappeared or is about to.

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## Footnotes

1. Horace M. Albright and Frank J. Taylor, "Oh, Ranger!", Stanford University Press, Stanford University, California, 1928, p.1 See also p.135 for more on Albright's idea of the ranger's job.
2. National Park Service, "Yellowstone", Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 281-353/67, Reprint 1979
3. Edwin J. Stanley, Rambles in Wonderland, D. Appleton and Co., 1880, p.101
4. John W. Henneberger, The History of the National Park Ranger, unpub. ms., 2/25/59, copy on file in Yellowstone National Park Library, p.14
5. Ibid., p.27. Contrary to the caption under Yount's photograph in the 1928 edition of "Oh, Ranger!" (frontispiece), Yount was not the "first national park ranger" in title or fact. In attempting to protect the park's wildlife, he performed some ranger duties, but, at least in Norris' eyes, he principally served as a hunter to provide Norris and his assistants with meat. His formal title, in addition, was not "park ranger". Yosemite, rather than Yellowstone, lays legitimate claim to the first "Park Ranger", in both title and function.
6. Aubrey L. Haines, The Yellowstone Story, Volume 2, Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, 1977, Appendix B, p.472
7. Ibid., p.191
8. Op. cit., Henneberger, pp.130 & 131
9. Op. cit., Haines, p.281
10. Ibid., pp.286 & 287 Killing of predators was a duty assumed by soldiers and scouts in Yellowstone and then by rangers into the 1930's.
11. Op. cit., Albright & Taylor, p.3
12. Horace M. Albright, letter reproduced in the National Park Courier, June 1977, p.7
13. In file "Circulars", box "Ranger Operating Procedures," Yellowstone National Park Archives
14. Op. cit., Haines, p.479
15. Joseph Joffe to Anna Pryor, 2/11/42, letter in file "Uniforms and Equipment," in box "Rangers - Miscellaneous Reports", Yellowstone National Park Archives. Also, op. cit., Haines, p.368
16. Conrad Wirth, in "Hearing before Committee on Interior & Insular Affairs, House of Representatives", Serial No. 12, 2/26/52, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., pp.7, 9, & 11
17. Michael D. McLean, "Nature's Chaperones," American Forests, Nov. 1971, p.33
18. Alice Carr, Yellowstone National Park Personnel Office, interview, 4/14/80
19. Op. cit., Albright, p.98
20. Warren F. Hamilton, Memorandum to All Employees, 6/20/57, in file "Memoranda from Superintendent. East Entrance," in box "Rangers - Miscellaneous Reports," Yellowstone National Park Archives
21. Heather Huyck, "Since 1918: Women in the NPS," 1979, copy in Yellowstone National Park Library, p.4
22. Lee L. Coleman, Memorandum, Mammoth Sub-District Ranger to Chief Park Naturalist, "Ranger Firearms of the Early 1930's," in box "Ranger Procedures," Yellowstone National Park Archives
23. Chester A. Lindsley, Chronology of Yellowstone National Park 1806 - 1937, unpub. ms., Yellowstone National Park Library, p.284
24. Author?, memorandum, Sub-District Ranger to Acting Chief Ranger, 12/20/62, re trip to Gallatin and Bozeman, in box "Rangers - Miscellaneous Reports," Yellowstone National Park Archives
25. Op. cit., Haines, p.300
26. Ibid., Chapter 19, pp.279 - 318
27. Ibid., pp.313 & 314