CREATING A NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

In the early 1900s, national parks were under constant threat from private industry, which hoped to capitalize on those unique landscapes. Two charismatic members of the Boone and Crockett Club worked the halls of Congress to ensure management of those wonders fell to a new agency that would prioritize their protection.

By 1916, the U.S. was home to more than a dozen national parks. Thanks to the efforts of early members of the Boone and Crockett Club like Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, places like Grand Canyon, Glacier, and Denali were set aside as public land. These places, though, were far from protected. Private special interests in mining, logging, and the railroad industry worked to exploit the potential resources inside designated parks. Standing in their way were Boone and Crockett members like Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, who fought for years to establish what we now call the National Park Service. Here's how they pulled it off.

THE NEED FOR AN AGENCY

When the Yellowstone Act passed in 1872, there was much to celebrate, but the act merely designated Yellowstone; it did nothing to protect the park. Other parks established before 1916 were under similar threat. For more than a decade, John Muir and the Sierra Club fought to prevent the construction of a dam inside Yosemite National Park. After years of debate, the dam won approval, and a reservoir buried the Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Muir wasn't the only person to notice issues within the parks. When Stephen Mather, the man who would become the National Park Service's first director, visited Yosemite National Park, he found cattle grazing in the meadows. When his travels took him to Sequoia National Park, he found loggers eager to topple the giant sequoias. He was appalled at the dismal conditions of trails and facilities as well.

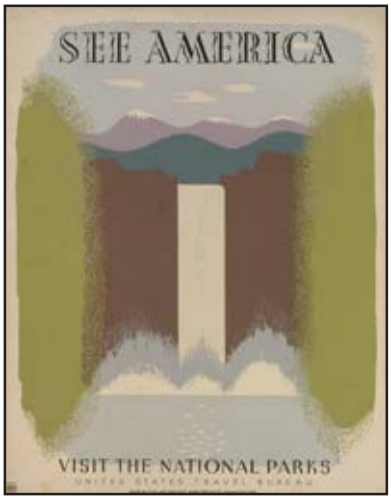
In the early 1900s, legislation gave lawmakers some power over these unique American landmarks. The Antiquities Act of 1906 was signed into law by Boone and Crockett founder and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. At the time, the law's purpose was to protect prehistoric cliff dwellings from plunder and looting by enterprising artifact hunters, which it still does. The act also gives the president the power to proclaim and set aside "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures and other objects of historic or scientific interest." Roosevelt used it 18 times to establish national monuments like the Grand Canyon in 1908.

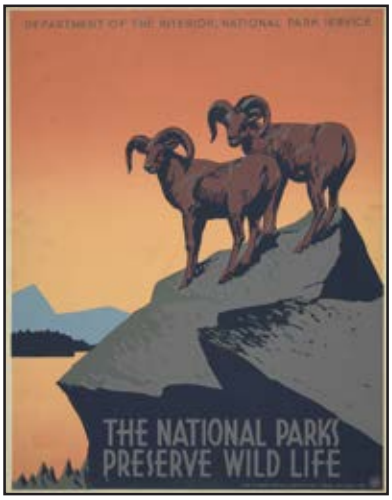
B&C Members Stephen Mather (left) and Horace Albright (right).

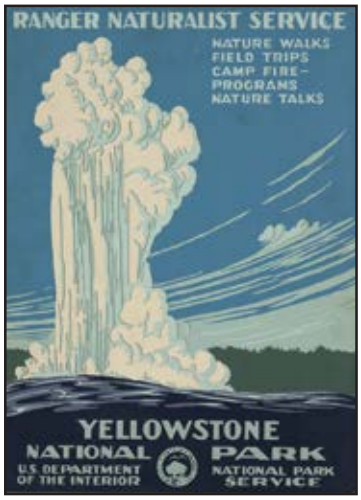
At the time, management of the national monuments fell to the agency that administered the land. In other words, a national monument located within a national forest would be managed by the U.S. Forest Service. "Over the years, several national parks and monuments were 'carved' from national forest land and often adjoined each other, as well as several established by donations of private land," writes Gerald Williams in *National Monuments and the Forest Service*.

Taking land away from the U.S. Forest Service did not sit well with some, including fellow Boone and Crockett members Gifford Pinchot (first chief of the Forest Service) and Henry Graves (the second chief). "In 1911, the bills for a national park bureau had not gone anywhere because the parks had few friends in Congress," writes Horace Albright in *The Birth of a National Park Service*. "Efforts to establish a National Park Service were opposed by the Forest Service, whose officials considered national parks a threat to the national forest domain, and blocked

PJ DELHOMME
CRAZY CANYON MEDIA







early attempts to pass Park Service legislation." The resistance wouldn't last long, as Walter Fisher replaced Pinchot. Fisher supported legislation to create a new agency to oversee the national parks.

MATHER'S MARKETING MAGIC

With Pinchot out of the way, the wealthy and passionate Stephen Mather worked his marketing magic to convince any holdouts of the need for a new agency. At his own expense, he orchestrated the Mather Mountain Party, which invited just about anyone who had influence and an interest in the outdoors on a camping trip.

Attendee Gilbert S. Grosvenor, director of the National Geographic Society and editor of its magazine, devoted the entire April 1916 issue of *National Geographic* to the national parks. This helped put the plight of the national parks in the public eye, and lawmakers took notice. It also helped that Mather's close personal friend was California Representative William Kent, who introduced HR 15522. While only two pages long, this legislation, known as the Organic Act of 1916, established the National Park Service (NPS) and placed all existing national parks and some monuments under its management.

It wasn't until 1917 that Mather officially became the agency's first director. And much like the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, the legislation establishing the NPS was simply a legislative formality. "It remained little more than a piece of paper for almost eight months, because it was April before Congress appropriated any funds at all to start the service," writes Albright. "Until we could get an appropriation from Congress, there was no way we could actually organize the new Park Service, and we would have to continue to operate essentially as we had before."

MATHER AND ALBRIGHT BUILD THE FOUNDATION

With Mather at the helm and the loyal Albright at his side, the two men worked tirelessly to create an entire agency from the ground up. They had to hire staff and even jockey for office space, desks, and chairs within the Department of the Interior. Albright traveled to Yellowstone to manage the transition from army oversight to this new civilian agency. As things heated up in Europe, the army, Albright recounts, "had for several years been increasingly interested in being relieved of the responsibility of taking care of Yellowstone." On the other hand, the Corps of Engineers wasn't as willing to part with control of the bridges and road maintenance.

As a team, Mather and Albright worked to expand the existing park system and

The Impact Series is dedicated to showing how sportsmen, members of the Boone and Crockett Club in particular, saved the wildlife and wild places of the United States. Early members of the Boone and Crockett Club comprised the movers, shakers, and initiators of the American conservation movement. They were hunters, anglers, explorers, lawmakers, soldiers, and above all conservationists. These members established laws that allowed our wildlife resources to flourish. They also protected landscape-scale geologic marvels and American icons like Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Denali, and many, many more. These members may no longer be with us, but their legacy remains. This series aims to honor their accomplishments and remind us of the good work still yet to do.

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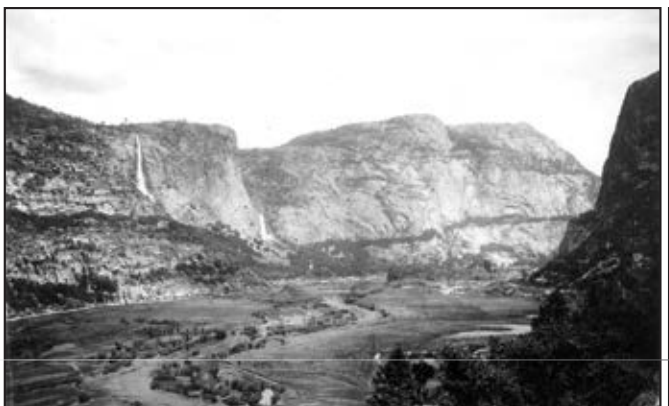

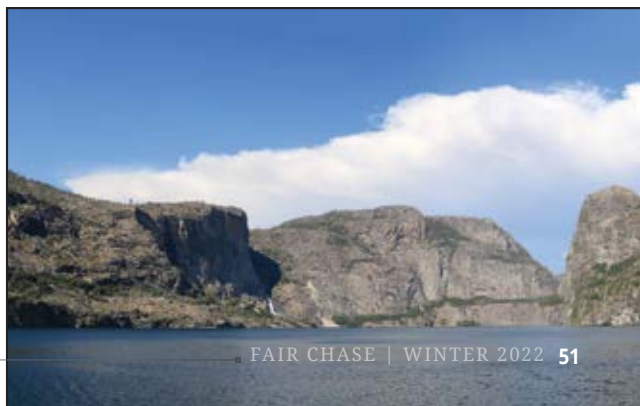

Hetch Hetchy Valley before and after the dam was constructed within Yosemite National Park.

defend the parks under their management. Mather dreamed of creating Redwoods National Park, and he toured the area with fellow Boone and Crockett member Madison Grant. On their tour, the men stopped at little towns along the way encouraging locals to support the idea of preserving the redwood groves, which wouldn't happen until 1968. A drought from 1919-1920 fueled efforts by western lawmakers to proceed with not one but four water projects inside Yellowstone, including constructing dams on Yellowstone Lake. It was Hetch Hetchy again, but the dams never happened.

The men worked to build cohesion within the newly-formed ranks of rangers and to reiterate the nature of service to the public. Mather told his superintendents that the chief rangers of all the parks should get together to build morale and talk about ideas. In January 1926, the first conference of chief rangers was held in Sequoia National Park. And it wasn't always about the boys, either.

One evening, Albright was walking through Mammoth Hotel in Yellowstone. He overheard Isobel Bassett, who was visiting with her parents, speak about Yellowstone's geysers and how they compared to geysers in New Zealand and Iceland. Albright invited her back the following summer and hired her as Yellowstone's first female ranger. It also was the genesis of the interpretive ranger program, which is still in place today.

By 1928, Mather's love for the parks was no match for his severe bipolar disorder. His failing health caused him to retire in 1929. Albright left his post as superintendent at Yellowstone National Park to serve as the agency's director. The marketing blitz under Albright's leadership wasn't as elaborate as his predecessor's. But what Albright's personality lacked in outward flare, it more than made up for in political savvy.

MORE PARKS, MORE BATTLEFIELDS

By 1930, there were 23 national parks under NPS management. And by 1932, there were 57 proposals for national parks waiting for review and 68 proposals for national monuments. That wasn't enough for a man like Albright. While serving as acting director in 1917 during one of Mather's extended manic episodes, Albright publicly expressed his desire for the National Park Service to oversee military parks and battlefields as well. When he became director in 1929, he once again took up the cause.

In April 1933, on an auto tour with President Franklin Roosevelt, Albright waited for the perfect moment to pitch the idea of transferring military parks from the War Department to the NPS. Albright chose an unassuming stretch of a backroad to point out to the president, a student of history, where the battle of Bull Run started. The president admitted he thought the battle started elsewhere, and Albright used the opportunity to pitch his idea of the NPS managing military parks and battlefields.

Two months later, President Roosevelt signed an executive order, which reorganized the executive branch and government administrative agencies. Because of the order, 64 national monuments, military parks, battlefields, cemeteries, and memorials were placed under NPS management. This order added millions of acres to the National Park Service.

Today, the National Park Service includes 423 areas covering more than 85 million acres. That's 10 million acres more than all of New Mexico. The largest area is Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, at 13.2 million acres. The smallest (0.02 acres) is the Pennsylvania home of Polish freedom fighter Thaddeus Kosciuszko, who served in the American Revolution. Also under NPS management are Theodore Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch in North Dakota, his home at Sagamore Hill on Long Island, and his birthplace at 28 E. 20th St. in Manhattan, New York. ■

Between 1920 and 1927, Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Horace M. Albright hired nine women as park rangers. Pictured above is Isobel Basset, circa 1920.

Tourists visit "Mather Point" at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

STEPHEN MATHER

Even though he suffered from severe mental illness, early Boone and Crockett Club member Stephen Mather led a crusade to create the National Park Service, where he eventually served as the agency's first director. This is the abbreviated story of a most fascinating American.

Born on the fourth of July in San Francisco in 1867, Stephen Mather was a charismatic master of marketing. He also loved climbing peaks in the great outdoors. After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, he moved across the country to New York where he worked as a reporter for the New York Sun. Unable to support his growing family on a reporter's salary, he turned to household cleaners and marketing where he would make a fortune.

Thanks to his father's connections, Mather became the advertising and sales manager for the Pacific Coast Borax Company. Borax, used in laundry detergent and household cleaners, had been hauled out of the California desert first by mules, then by rail. Knowing this, Mather persuaded company officials to give their product more identity by adding the "20 Mule Team" slogan to the label. In addition, Mather wrote letters to the editors of various magazines posing as a housewife extolling the virtues of borax. As a result, sales took off.

In 1903, though, Mather's severe bipolar disorder (manic depression) forced him to miss an extended period of work, and his pay was withheld. He resigned and started his own borax company with a partner. Using his knack for marketing and business acumen, Mather was a multi-millionaire by 1914. Essentially retired at 47, Mather shifted his energy and expertise to protecting the landscapes he loved.

A GRAND IDEA

Long before Mather made his millions, he ventured afield. He climbed Mount Rainier in 1905 and traveled to what is now Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. He joined the Sierra Club of California where he was inspired by the preservationist John Muir.

In 1914, there were nine official national parks, many of which were managed by separate agencies with various priorities. When Mather visited Sequoia and Yosemite National Park, he found cattle grazing in the meadows and loggers eye-balling the giant sequoias. He was appalled at the dismal conditions of trails and facilities as well. Mather wrote to Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane.

In January 1915, Mather found himself in Washington in front of Secretary Lane who offered him the job of assistant to the Secretary of the Interior. At first, Mather wasn't thrilled with all the

Boone and Crockett Club members have come from a cross-section of famous accomplished people whose lives and careers have written and recorded the history of this country since the late 19th Century. They have been naturalists, scientists, explorers and sportsmen, writers and academicians, artists, statesmen and politicians, generals, bankers, financiers, philanthropists, and industrialists. Their diversity of ideas and activities during their careers have made the Boone and Crockett Club rich in its fellowship and achievements.

READ MORE MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS

A trip to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park in the early 1900s was a catalyst for Mather's journey to become the first director of the National Park Service.

NPS director Stephen Mather sits at the head of the table during his "Mather Mountain Party" to get support for the National Park Service in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park. Courtesy NPS.

rules and regulations inherent with government work. Lane understood and offered Mather the best assistant he could ever hope to have, a 24-year-old fellow Californian named Horace Albright.

Mather wanted one agency to oversee the parks, and he didn't want it to be the War Department or the Department of Agriculture. To rally support for his idea, Mather signed a personal blank check and threw a party at the Palace Hotel in Visalia, California. From there, the revelers traveled to some of California's most scenic, wild, and unprotected places. This elaborate 10-day camping trip is known as the Mather Mountain Party—and what a party it was.

THE MATHER MOUNTAIN PARTY

The party's guest list was packed with influencers of the day, including fellow Boone and Crockett member and president of the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Zoological Society Henry Fairlfied Osborn. There were attorneys, electrical engineers, newspaper reporters, physicians, and so many more. Two campers of note: Congressman Frederick H. Gillett of Massachusetts, ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Committee and Gilbert S. Grosvenor, director of the National Geographic Society and editor of its magazine.

This was a party in every sense of the word, and Mather seized upon every chance to show the men a good time. "After our midday meal, Mather suddenly jumped up, stripped, and leaped into the icy waters of a nearby stream," Albright wrote. "Challenging the party as 'chickens' and caroling out some appropriate 'Buc, Buc, Bucs,' he lured in a few brave souls…"

Mather spared no expense. The party enjoyed elaborate meals prepared by Chinese cooks of the U.S. Geological Survey, Ty Sing and his assistant Eugene. They went fishing, hiking, and soaking. "The previous day Congressman Gillett had discovered a wonderful hot spring," wrote Albright. "Here a suitable-size bathtub had been dug out of the ooze, allowing Gillett to soak for hours while the 115-degree water bubbled over him."

In short, Mather knew that words alone could not convince his audience to protect the wonder and beauty of the natural places he loved. Using his own money, Mather was able to show all those in attendance what might be lost if it wasn't saved. When Congressman Gillet became head of the House Appropriations Committee, he became a defender of the parks and Mather's desire for an agency to oversee them. Thanks to Grosvenor's position, National Geographic devoted an entire issue to the national parks in April 1916.

Then on May 10, Mather's close friend, Representative William Kent, introduced legislation to establish a National Park Service. It took a little more than four months for HR 15522 to land on the desk of President Woodrow Wilson. On August 25, President Wilson created a National Park Service, which would oversee 35 national parks and monuments already created, as well as those created in the future. Undoubtedly, as Albright notes, "The publicity about the mountain party, through newspapers and magazines, focused attention on the parks and the need for a national park service."

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

With the newly created agency, there was only one person to run it. Actually, there were two: Stephen Mather and his loyal assistant Albright. But before Mather and Albright could begin work on organizing the new agency, things would turn dark. At a conference in 1917, Mather's

U.S. Congressman William Kent (left) and Stephen T. Mather in Redwoods National & State Parks. The plaque on the rock reads: This tree is Dedicated to Gifford Pinchot.

behavior was erratic, according to an article in *Psychology Today*. As emcee for the conference, he would disappear entirely, only to reappear seemingly energized. By the end of the conference, Albright found Mather rocking back and forth in a room, moaning and crying. Eventually, he sprinted for the doors, yelling that he couldn't live this way any longer.

Mather received treatment for more than a year. During that period he twice attempted suicide. Wild places always seemed to calm him, and he sought the soothing waters of Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas, which became a national park during his tenure as director from 1917-1929. In his absence, Albright served as acting director of the agency.

When Mather returned to work, he did so with that same enthusiasm and energy as before. With a brimming bank account, he spent plenty of his own money to fulfill his vision of both protecting and marketing the parks. He spent $8,000 ($220,000 in 2022) for a chunk of land on which to build the headquarters of Glacier National Park. He bought a sequoia grove for $50,000 ($1 million in 2022) and then gave it to Sequoia National Park. At one public rally, he got so caught up in donating money that he offered up $15,000 of Representative Kent's money.

Mather desperately wanted to share his beloved parks with the masses. He understood that tourists needed both access to these places and suitable accommodations once they arrived. Mather orchestrated the Park-to-Park Highway project, a network of roads connecting numerous parks across the West and Northwest, including Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park. In addition, he dropped low-budget concessioners from park contracts, replacing them with others who had the financial backing to build grand hotels with more inviting rooms and dining.

By 1928, Mather had given all he could, and his health was on the decline. In November, he suffered a stroke, which paralyzed him, including his speech. In early 1929, Mather resigned. Horace Albright, who was the superintendent at Yellowstone National Park, took the reins as director. Later that year, Mather regained some motor function, and he was able to walk again. Then, in January 1930 he suffered a massive stroke and died. At the end of his tenure, Mather had grown the National Park Service system to include a total of 20 national parks and 32 national monuments. More importantly, he had given a purpose and an identity to the agency that would protect and propagate what is known as America's best idea. ■

Stephen Mather (left), the first director of the National Park Service, was photographed with his assistant, Horace Albright, at Yellowstone in the 1920s.

The famous Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park was just one leg of Mather's Park-to-Park Highway project.