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Electronic Green Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/747428tj>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(40)

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Publication Date

2017

DOI

10.5070/G314033518

Peer reviewed

Review: The Wonder of It All: 100 Stories from The National Park Service

Edited by The Yosemite Conservancy.

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

New York, NY, USA

Jarvis B. J., Duncan D. and Yosemite Conservancy. *The Wonder of It All: 100 Stories from The National Park Service*. San Francisco, CA: The Yosemite Conservancy. 2016. Xiv +306 pp., illus. ISBN 9781930238626. US \$18.95. Paperback; recycled paper and cover.

The Wonder of It All collects 100 inspiring stories from mostly National Park Service staff who have lived the dream of working at our National Parks. The stories were selected anonymously from 250 entries to a call for remembrances to honor the 100th anniversary of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). The National Park system formed under the leadership of Stephen Mather in 1916. Mather, a businessman and parks enthusiast, donated money and had a practical vision to protect our natural heritage. Other parks that already existed, including Yosemite and Yellowstone, were included in the new NPS which also sought to bring people to those famous, wondrous places in the west. A century later, we now have over 400 park sites comprising many nature reserves and national historic sites.

This exhaustive collection of inspired writing tells many personal tales of the park rangers who have defended this shared resource. The National Parks have a dual mission of defending these places and their wildlife as well as making them available to the public for recreation. The NPS has gone on to tell America's story and address social issues like racism, war, and environmentalism. The stories vary in subject with most being two to three pages long. There are also some great quotes included from famous environmentalists who wrote about the parks.

Reading all the entries is like being on a vacation with too many places to visit. One might better enjoy the book by not reading all one hundred entries at once. There are close to a dozen entries from Yosemite, and almost as many from Yellowstone. For fans of the parks, they are likely to find entries from places they have visited. The famous writers included in this book are Jon Jarvis, the 18th Director of the National Park Service, and author Dayton Duncan, who write the Preface and Forward. Some of these writers you may have seen and heard on the PBS documentary series: *The National Park: America's Best Idea*. Jarvis reminds us that "...we must speak for three entities that have no voice: the people of the past, the children of the future, and nature itself" (p. vii).

These are tales of the winners, mostly those who got and kept their jobs. Many applicants do not get selected and some rangers are not welcomed to return. Some are also not suited to be Park Rangers and others do not make the grade. There is also controversy in some National Parks where the Service cannot accommodate all desired

use. One might better enjoy reading about places they have visited. Some of the stories are moving, but some are not.

The Service does need to defend itself, decisions, locations, and resources, for all of us. Some of them are in fact paramilitary even if they have a sense of humor. As shown here the National Parks are one of the best things this country has to offer. We have amazing places to visit and commune with the wild. This book is a contribution to the field of preservation which rightfully shows that the interested party has a chance at this. The National Parks are a gift from the environmental movement and the government given to ordinary people. This book is an interesting resource for all those students, professors, visitors or staff who are interested in the national Parks. This book reminds of the need to protect the wonder and heritage that we all share.

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Electronic Green Journal, Issue 40, Winter 2017, ISSN: 1076-7975