

"National Parks of the Midwest," 1968

The Midwest

Among the mountains and plains of the Midwest, where great rivers wind their way to the Mississippi, lie some of the most spectacular parklands of America. Everywhere the eye turns in this heartland of the nation, from the massive delicacy of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis to the green meadows of the geyser basins of Yellowstone, one sees elegant proof of America's fierce determination to protect the lands integrity - to preserve its heritage, its beauty, and its natural treasures.

If the Midwest had no trading posts, military forts, or Indian battlefields, it would still speak an incredible history of unchartable vastness and complexity. If its earth never revealed a single dinosaur fragment or fossilized plant, it would still be dominated by the Rocky Mountains, that great prehistoric upheaval of earth and rock that extends from the canyons of Colorado to the glaciers of Montana. And spread between this awesome barrier and the placid waters of the Mississippi is America's breadbasket - the broad plains of wheat and corn that testifies to man's ingenuity and industry. This amazing juxtaposition of ancient history and modern technology, barren lands and fertile fields, draws millions of visitors each year from the metropolitan centers to the Midwest and its increasingly popular vacationlands.

One of the most memorable sights in crossing the higher western plains from the east is the jagged unfolding of the snow crests of the Rockies on the horizon. Even today, as more and more tourists come to know these mountains, glaciers secretly continue their ancient role of endless carving - a process of geological evolution that has, through untold centuries, created surely one of the earth's most abundant refuges of scenic grandeur. Alpine forests and meadows, icy streams and waterfalls, silent stand of lodgepole pine and cottonwood, elk herds, solitary moose, sleek trout and foraging bears - these are but a few of the immeasurable wonders of Rocky Mountain, Grand Teton, and Glacier National Parks.

These uniquely Midwestern wonders were first discovered and reported by the early frontiersmen who made their living in the virgin wilderness. Perhaps more enthusiastic than articulate, they sent home stories of stupendous canyons, waterfalls higher than Niagara, and steaming geysers that belched tons of water into the air. The eastern press was incredulous and called the men "champion liars." One editor rejected the manuscript of an early Yellowstone visitor with the words, "thank you, but we do not print fiction!" The marvels had been revealed however, and soon the way was opened for exploration, settlement, and, ultimately, the beginnings of the conservation movement. The restless Americans who relentlessly pushed

westward in their search for new goals, new lands, and a new life, paused long enough to consider generations yet to come, for on March 1st 1782, Yellowstone National Park was officially established through a visionary concept of conservation and preservation, a concept of which the National Park Service is based.

And so man fought his way across the land as the new nation expanded westward. His trail can be found from the rivers of the east to the mountain passes of the Continental Divide. Monuments to his intrepid spirit stand in all 10 states of the midwest region, such as Fort Union Trading Post, which sits on the border of North Dakota and Montana, Bent's old fort in Colorado, Fort Laramie, Wyoming, on the Oregon Trail, Fort Larned, Kansas on the Santa Fe Trail. Today the ruts of wagon trails west remain clearly visible on the prairies, and the battlefields at Big Hole and Custer serve as constant reminders of the price paid for westward expansion and the growth of the nation.