



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

For Release JUNE 26, 1960

FEATURE MATERIAL

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE OBSERVES 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF NATURE GUIDE SERVICE

The National Park Service this summer observes the 40th Anniversary of its nature guide interpretative program, the Department of the Interior announced today.

The inauguration of this program, said National Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth, was one of the most important events in the Service's long and colorful history--an event which enriched the Nation and untold millions of Americans and, in a sense, shaped the history of the Park System.

Forty years ago, Stephen T. Mather, father of the national parks and first director of the National Park Service, recognized the potential worth of nature walks and visitor guide service in the parks and he encouraged the pioneers in this field, Dr. Charles M. Goethe and his wife, to come to Yosemite and develop their concept of "indoctrination" of young and old in the beauty and wonders of their native land.

Dr. Goethe and his wife had made several trips to Europe and in Switzerland they had observed groups of school children, accompanied by their teachers, making excursions into the countryside. The Goethes learned that the Swiss Government was engaged in an extensive program of conducted outdoor excursions for the youth of the country, based on the philosophy that Switzerland--with many nationalistic, language and religious elements--needed the means to bind these elements together in a common purpose and a common experience.

A recreational program, based on nature study, appeared to furnish the only common ground by which these diverse interests could be brought together for the main purpose of instilling in the youth a common sense of pride and patriotism,

and a sense of belonging together within the same national pattern. The Goethes also found the same type of activities in other European countries which demonstrated to them that a recreational program based on nature study can provide a common ground, a common language, which can bind together in one purpose citizens of widely diverging background and experience.

It was this idea that the Goethes brought back with them to America, where they worked out a technique which--at their own expense--they put to work in their "laboratory," six Lake Tahoe resorts in California. The experiment was an amazing success and this led Mather to invite the Goethes to come to Yosemite in 1920 and continue their work--which soon led to the adoption of the naturalist program by the National Park Service. That program has grown through its 40-year-history to today's interpretive program of the Service--enriching the visitor's knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of their parks.

Dr. and Mrs. Goethe's original efforts, enthusiasm and unstinted financial support of the "nature guide" idea has become the present-day interpretive program, personified by the Service's uniformed ranger naturalists, historians, and archeologists who guide visitors in the national parks. This interpretive program, said Director Wirth, has made the park system a fascinating and unique educational institution.

From its small beginning in 1920, the National Park Service today has a total park staff of permanent interpreters, numbering over 300 and a seasonal staff of over 400--giving a total of over 700 men and women interpreting the parks and monuments. Last year alone, almost 10 million visitors heard talks by these interpreters or took conducted walks with them.

In recognition of his part in starting the Service's interpretation program of guided tours, talks, trail and roadside exhibits, publications, and colorful museum exhibits, the National Park Service elected Dr. Goethe Honorary Chief Park Naturalist in 1948, and this year--on the 40th anniversary of the nature guide service in Yosemite--the pioneer conservationist, who celebrated his own 86th birthday, received the Conservation Service Award of the Department of the Interior.

Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton, in his citation to Dr. Goethe, said that millions of Americans annually share in the benefits of the unique program of personal interpretive services in the national parks and monuments. "In large measure," the citation read, "we have you to thank for the inception and initial support of this potent force in America."

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