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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service
Washington

October 5, 1936.

Memorandum for all Washington and Field Offices:

There is attached, for your information, a copy of a letter, dated September 22, from Mr. Gabriel Sovulewski, who recently retired on an annuity from his position as Park Supervisor in Yosemite National Park.

Mr. Sovulewski made an inspection trip studying trails and trail construction in several of the national parks before retiring and this letter reports conditions as he found them. It is an interesting document which you will enjoy reading. Mr. Sovulewski was one of the oldest employees in point of service in the National Park Service.

(Sgd) Arno B. Cammerer,

Director.

Enclosure 1003488

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service
Yosemite National Park
California

Office of the Superintendent

September 22, 1936

The Director
National Park Service
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Director:

I submit the following report in compliance with the spirit of your letter of June 6, with reference to the tour of inspection through several National Parks to inspect the trails and to report the best type suited for National Parks.

I hesitated for some time to undertake the trip, for the requirements set forth in your letter were clear, knowing as I do many of our technical men and their differences among themselves. Technical knowledge sometimes takes opposite views to practical experience. I hope that in this case everything that I have to say will be taken with the spirit of sincerity and good will; my only desire is to comply with the spirit of the letter of the Director of the National Park Service.

I started from Yosemite on July 18 and arrived at Mt. Rainier National Park at noon July 21. Col. Thomson's letter of July 16, addressed to Major Tomlinson, Superintendent of Mt. Rainier National Park, of which copies were sent to the other Parks included in my itinerary, made easy and pleasant my introduction. I was most cordially received in every park, both by Park Service people and concessioners. Major Tomlinson placed Ranger William J. Butler at my disposal.

Mr. Butler proved to be a man of wide experience and knowledge of the park, always ready and willing without regard to time, early or late. We wasted no time and covered as much ground as we could -- horseback and by car during my stay, July 21 to 24.

On the 22d I called at the park headquarters at Longvire and met Major Tomlinson's whole staff. Major Tomlinson is very fortunate in his selection of personnel. I believe there is a spirit and loyalty to their chief that encourages a comradeship that is without injury to discipline or authority. We discussed many problems besides the types of trails and I was conducted on a tour of inspection of the stores and offices.

Mt. Rainier has many very fine trails and a possibility and justification for many more. I would, however, suggest a change in the prevailing method of construction, and I am inclined to believe that Major Tomlinson and some of his staff agree with my views. I had no opportunity to discuss the matter with the Resident Engineer as he left with Chief Engineer Kittridge to some other section of the park.

In Mt. Rainier, and this criticism applies to some of the other parks, too much attention is devoted to grades and not enough to simple natural drainage. The trails are built with the outer edge of the trail very high in order to drain to the inner edge or toward the bank of the trail necessitating the construction and maintenance of drainage ditches along the inner edge. Through experience it will be found that this type of trail (especially if it is a trail along a steep bank) will be ugly and difficult to landscape; and in places where traffic is heavy and the trail is lacking in width as many of them are, stock will follow the drain ditch causing it to fill up--ditches cause maintenance. If our engineers would give less attention to grades they would discover a more practical way to solve the drainage problem.

Regularity of grade on trails should be avoided. There is nothing more monotonous to man and beast than a long constant grade. I will agree that they may appeal to the eye if one's eye has been trained to admire man-made structures, but this type of trail will not in the long run retain smooth surface and will be subject to more expensive washouts. The log or rock water breaks necessary to divert the ditch water to the outer edge of the trail are easily filled up by horses' feet and provide only temporary protection. It is necessary to deliberately break up the regular grade and to construct into the surface slight depressions from 15 to 25 feet in length, sloping slightly to the outer edge, and deep enough to provide natural drainage. The depressions, or "inclines" as I call them, should be constructed every two or three hundred feet, depending upon the grade. The balance of the trail surface should be level, never slope inward. Therefore, the perfectly flat trails with inclines sloping from the inner bank to the outside, spaced according to the grade, are the best.

I left Tacoma, Washington on July 24 and arrived in Belton, Montana the next evening, July 25. Resident Engineer I. S. Stinson met me with a park car and took me to Lake McDonald Hotel for the night. I spent from July 26 to August 2, in Glacier, and I was very much impressed with this park, truly an outstanding park. I had no opportunity to meet Superintendent Scoyen's staff in a body, but met them individually before I left. Superintendent Scoyen and his Chief Ranger were very busy on account of a fire on the Canadian side and looking for a boy who had climbed Garden Wall and lost his life. All of my time was spent with Mr. Stinson, driving and riding horseback for two days.

Mr. Harry Hommon, Sanitary Engineer, drove with us, which gave me an opportunity to see their camping system, sanitation, etc. We also found Dr. Meinecke at St. Mary's Chalet and had a very interesting visit with him. Later we spent an evening together at Lake McDonald.

Glacier Park is really a trail park. They have some very fine trails especially from Glacier Hotel towards Swift Current Pass. For several miles their trails are perfect. All the trails within the vicinity of the hotels are well improved and well oiled. Trails over the passes are rather steep in spots and I understand some complaint is occasionally voiced about their steepness, but they should never be changed. Change would mean another scar over the wonderful foliage and flowers and the present trails are not too steep for people who really enjoy trail travel.

The scenery over Piegan Pass and Swift Current Pass, which I had the pleasure to see, cannot be described. I was told that they have many such views equal of that and even grander. I hope to live and have the opportunity to see them. One cannot help but feel sorry for those who have no opportunity to see these mountain scenes.

Superintendent Scoyen took me from Belton to Glacier Park Station on August 3, where I took the train for Billings, Montana. I arrived at Billings on August 4, at 7:30 a.m. and was met by Assistant Superintendent Emmert who drove me to Yellowstone National Park via the new highway by way of Cooke City, Montana. It was a long drive to Mammoth, but I was treated to most magnificent scenery and would suggest to everyone driving his own car not to miss it. We arrived at the park at 9:30 p.m.

I was in Yellowstone National Park from August 4 to 7, driving and walking, accompanied by Assistant Superintendent Emmert and Assistant Chief Ranger Curtis K. Skinner. Yellowstone is a very interesting and impressive park, but so far not extensively used by trails. The country is very easy to get over and there are many old trails that are used by people who love to pack. A good start has been made on the improvement of old trails and construction of new trails, supervised by Assistant Chief Ranger Skinner. What I saw of the new construction I found to be the same as that of Mt. Rainier National Park with the high outer bank, draining toward the inner bank with water breaks instead of inclines on grades. Mr. Skinner is very enthusiastic and knows the park well--just the type of man that the development of trails needs.

I had only a short visit with Superintendent Rogers, his time was taken up by Director Cammerer. Mr. Cammerer was very busy. I just stepped into the Superintendent's office and paid my respects before leaving. Assistant Superintendent Emmert introduced me to the whole staff. For the short time that I had to spend with them, I was very much impressed with their sincerity towards me and with the cordiality

of my reception. They are an enthusiastic lot and as fine a type of men as one wants to meet. I had a very interesting visit with Mr. Lord, Resident Engineer. In my conversation with Mr. Lord I found that Major Lord who was Chief Quartermaster of the Pacific Division in the 1890's and planted all the trees in the Presidio at San Francisco--which today is a big forest--was a relative of Mr. Lord. I also met Mr. Lindsley, one of the oldest retired park men, whom I have known through correspondence for many years but had never met him. Both of us served under the same chief for some years, Colonel H. C. Benson.

Assistant Superintendent Emmert drove me to Cody, Wyoming August 7. I left Cody at 7:30 a.m. August 8, and arrived in Denver, Colorado August 9, Sunday. After steady continuous travel I decided to rest at Denver Sunday, August 9.

I left Denver August 10 and arrived at Rocky Mountain National Park at 12:30 p.m.

Assistant Chief Ranger Finn met me, with instructions from Superintendent Thomas J. Allen, Jr., to be at my disposal during my stay. After lunch we called at Park headquarters and met the park staff. My reception was no less sincere or hearty than the other parks. I only wish that I could spend more time in each one of them. Superintendent Allen has a splendid lot of men on his staff, including the ladies who are of fine personality, attractive and have a good sense of humor. It is a relief to meet people that meet you with a smile. It makes our tasks in life much lighter. August 10 to 13, I spent driving and riding horseback with Assistant Chief Ranger Finn. Rocky Mountain National Park is a trail park from the appearance of horseback parties, the trails are well patronized and appreciated. They have some old trails, but the old trails are poorly located and the grades are bad. The new trails and improved trails are rather too fine; too much attention is paid to retaining walls and grade and not enough to drainage. During the short time that I have spent in Rocky Mt. National Park it appears to me that it has wonderful possibilities for fine trails. Across the continental divide to Grand Lake is one of the grandest views one wants to look at. It is too bad that Grand Lake is not in the park; it provides a wonderful view from the park hotel.

I am very sorry to see that the park headquarters are located outside the park. The whole plant is not in the best location and some day part of the cliff may break off and both the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent will be missing. I was wondering whether they enjoyed going through private property over muddy roads every day and besides they may forget to close the gate some day and be subject to reprimand! Lord Dunraven and all his kind should be bought out at any price and this wonderful natural scenery should be a national park. At present it is a combination of dude ranch and national park.

I left Rocky Mountain National Park August 13, and arrived in Elizabeth, New Jersey Sunday, August 16. August 17 and 18 was spent visiting historical sights in Morristown and New York City. I left Newark, New Jersey August 19, and arrived in Washington, D. C. at 5:00 p.m.

In Washington, D. C. I visited Park Service headquarters and went sightseeing on August 20 and 21. It was my first visit to Washington--which was promised to me by nearly every Secretary of the Interior since 1906. I am very much pleased to have had the opportunity to see the Capitol of my adopted country and nation which I have had the pleasure and honor to serve over 42 years. The beauty of the city and the location made an everlasting impression on me. Monuments and buildings are massive as becomes a great nation. Entering Lincoln Memorial, one is impressed with its massive construction. Facing his statue, one goes back to history that very few of us can contemplate without shedding tears. We get lost in thought and forget the massive monument--we only see a man--whose memory will be cherished, let's hope forever. I am very thankful Director Cammerer, and Mr. Demaray, Assistant Director, for the honor and privilege accorded to me.

I left Washington, D. C. with Chief Engineer of the Eastern Division O. G. Taylor, August 22; arrived at Shenandoah National Park at 6:00 p.m. August 23, was spent on trails, horseback and driving through the park. Shenandoah Park has many trails, and they are not bad, even the old, what may be called natural trails, with little brushing and improvement are very good trails. The new trails and the trail called Appalachian Trail are all that could be desired, well located and well constructed. I would not suggest changing the type, with the exception of abandoning too regular grade, having in view natural drainage instead of artificial water breaks. I have discussed these points with Mr. Lassiter, Superintendent of the park, and Mr. Taylor, and I am inclined to think that they agreed with me. Mr. J. R. Lassiter, the Superintendent, is a very fine and well balanced man and is certainly able to carry on successfully, considering the amount of improvements made in so short a time.

I left Shenandoah with Chief Engineer O. G. Taylor on August 23, and took the Southern R.R. at Orange for Knoxville, Tennessee; arrived at Knoxville on Monday, August 24; where I was met by Mr. John S. Cross and A. D. Carrodi, Engineers from Washington headquarters on a tour or inspection. Arrived at Smoky National Park at 11:00 a.m. August 24.

After meeting Superintendent J. R. Eakin and his staff I spent the balance of the day until 7:00 p.m. on a tour of inspection with Assistant Superintendent R. P. White accompanied by both engineers (mentioned above) from Washington. August 25; accompanied by Assistant

Superintendent R. P. White, I covered about 25 miles horseback over the trails, and considerable mileage in the car. We were treated to a wonderful storm, thunder and lightning. I was told it was nothing unusual, being an almost daily occurrence. I suspected as much when Mr. White would not start until a rain coat was tied on my saddle for me.

I was pleasantly surprised at the amount of fine work that has been done in the park which has had only a short existence, on roads, trails and other numerous developments. The trails are equal to any I have seen in the other parks. The Appalachian Trail is a fine piece of work and with the exception that it should be widened in places and some protection provided along precipitous sides of the mountain, it cannot be improved upon. I have discussed with Mr. White points about inclines instead of artificial water breaks and many features that occurred to both of us as we were riding along the trail. I admit that I have learned many things about his park that could not be learned otherwise.

Smoky National Park is an outstanding and unknown quantity, a great big thing, rough, beautiful, inaccessible, hard to get through, and doubtful that it will ever be known in its entirety. The force of the present administration admits that they do not know the place except from the points of observation. It is not a discredit to them because I doubt very much if even the natives ever went through many of the untrailed portions.

From points of observation, one can see continuous beautiful ranges of mountains on North Carolina and Tennessee side. I was told that some of them are in the forest reserves - I hope that some day they may be included in the park. Smoky and Shenandoah National Parks should be extended without limits - they are wonderful national assets and the people of that section should take personal pride in them and insist upon their extension before it is too late.

I left Smoky National Park August 26, after inspection of some of the work done by CCC boys and reached Knoxville, Tennessee at 12:00 M. where I took the train for Fresno, California, going via New Orleans and Dallas, Texas, where I spent one day. Grand Canyon and Sequoia National Parks were omitted from my itinerary due to time limit for my retirement, August 31. I arrived at Fresno, California, on August 31, and was driven by Government car to my old park, where I have spent so many years, arriving at headquarters at 4:00 p.m. on the last afternoon of my official service.

Looking back over my tour of inspection, through my observation and personal experience, also from conversations with experienced Park Service men, I would summarize my impressions as follows:

We forget that trail construction is more common sense than engineering. Thorough knowledge of the country, love for that kind of work, good cool head with common sense, instinct of a dog to know which way to get home and last but not least, disregard for the time of day, are the principal requisites.

A man with tripod, transit and level has no business on trails. Personally I would consider him a nuisance. We put too much stress on technical knowledge in simple matters where only good common sense should prevail. In my experience in exploring, wild animals in many cases solved numerous difficult problems for me. Good experienced engineers will see the point and agree with me. We are handicapped so much by inexperienced technical knowledge that it takes some times ten men to decide whether a certain shrub or tree should be taken out where a dozen could be taken out without injury to the landscape or nature. But the trouble goes farther, we have a splendid lot of men in the Park Service, but their initiative is destroyed by details of a technical nature. Young technicians are sent to Parks and tie the hands of Superintendents on projects on which they probably spent many a sleepless night. Our single-track scientific men bring up so many subjects, I have no doubt they give headaches not only to Superintendents but reach as high as the Director. I admire very much the patience of the Superintendents and the Director's diplomacy. To know their positions you cannot help but sympathize with every Superintendent and every man that holds an executive position. They have to be technicians of diplomacy.

In conclusion, I want to thank you all in the Park Service in the field and all Park Service officials in Washington for your kind and sincere reception of me. The honor that you have accorded to me, compensate for many shortcomings and bitter things in life to which we are all subject no matter what paths we travel. I found all of you very sincere, enthusiastic, interested in your work, broad and human in your views. You are engaged in work of the greatest benefit to the nation - work that cannot be counted with dollars and cents. I regret to leave you because I love my work and have love and affection for you all. My contact with you all on my last trip increased my vision in your future, and made it harder for me to leave. You have great leaders in Washington and some of the best men and women in the nation to help you. Law must take its course and I am leaving the Service after 42 years of service to the nation, with good will towards you, praying and wishing that the providence of God may bless and guide you.

Very respectfully,

(Sgd) Gabriel Sovulewski,
Park Supervisor.