

Briggle Retrospective Covers 30 Years of Park Management

By Jean Matthews, *Park Science* Editor

"Let's kind of set a tone for this . . . I've gotten into the habit over the years of looking at things in perspective, and I'd like to start by taking you back to the early 1950's when I was a young ranger in Yellowstone National Park."

The scene was Mount Rainier Superintendent William J. Briggle's office in the new Park headquarters building — a structure that might have sprung up and grown out of indigenous materials on natural energy, so perfectly site-adapted as to be almost invisible in its leafy off-the-road setting.

The subject was the relationship of research and park management, and in addition to a probing reporter, Stan Schlegel, resource management specialist, and Joanne Michalovic, the new resource management specialist trainee out of the Denver Service Center, were present.

"In 1949 I was a young park ranger, stationed in Theodore Roosevelt National Mem. Park in North Dakota — trained under an extremely competent superintendent — Allyn Hanks. The mandate for Theodore Roosevelt, a new area in the System, was basically to establish our presence and start learning our responsibilities. We knew we had antelope and prairie dogs and burning underground coal mines, and our resources for finding out any more were limited to the observations and notes you made from the saddle of a horse, the seat of a pick-up truck, or your own two feet.

"The superintendent was always asking us 'What did you see? Where are your notes?' We weren't sure at first whether he was just checking up on us or if he really cared. Very shortly we found out he really cared."

The notes, it turned out, formed the "glue" for the superintendent's annual reports. And what kind of science did these reports reflect?

"There were no scientists in the park then — no research as such. But from careful, caring observation, done by the ranger and historian and recorded in their notebooks, we were able to put together a pretty good picture of the natural or cultural resources. The management decisions that grew out of this situation were extremely pragmatic. For instance, we did *not* reintroduce the buffalo that had once been part of the area. We didn't do it because such a move at the time would have created a whole bunch of problems



Bill Briggle in his chosen habitat, still believes in management that "touches the resources."

with surrounding ranchers, and we didn't need more problems."

Was this a typical slice of the National Park System in the Fifties?

"Not really. Yellowstone, where I went next, was staffed with biologists, most of whom were studying the elk. Park rangers had, in the past, been sent out to shoot

coyotes and mountain lions, the natural predators and pruners of elk populations. The biologists made a strong case against this tactic, but the early management errors had created an irreversible situation and the elk population explosion was inevitable."

Has research and management been able to catch up and overtake the results of early mistakes? Are we still behind, even with, or ahead of our problems these days?

"I think Yellowstone is pulling ahead. In the early days, the park's boundary was a firing line. With ranches surrounding the park, rangers were doing elk and buffalo reduction and that was pretty much it, so far as taking care of the game was concerned. Grizzly bear management was just starting to be discussed and didn't get much attention until the late Sixties and early Seventies. Then biologists started doing census studies. They got interested in the bears. The garbage dumps didn't get closed off until Jack Anderson (then superintendent) stopped that in the early Seventies.

"But I could see the beginning, in the early Fifties, of the coming together of research and management at Yellowstone. The interpreters and the rangers together began to see the need for more correct information about the resource. The superintendent needed that information for professional and political reasons—so he could move away from hip pocket decisions and start selling the management program in soundly based ways.

"The decision-making today is much more sophisticated. It's broader-based, and its sights are on today's problems with an educated eye on where a certain management course probably will put the park tomorrow and the day after. The proposal to kill mountain lions in Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains NP is a good example."

How useful is the experience gleaned from a stint at one park when it comes to being assigned to another area with a whole new set of problems?

"The specifics change, of course, but the System as a whole reflects a growing recognition of the usefulness of organized research in arriving at management decisions.

"I was struck with this steady growth in the role of science when I moved to Sequoia/Kings Canyon NP, where the problems were different but where management again was turning to research for viable alternatives. The problem at Sequoia/Kings Canyon was twofold: 1) the park's close proximity to Los Angeles, and 2) unregulated use of the back country.

"Lowell Sumner was the resident biologist at the time, primarily there to study deer. But increasingly Sumner's

research drifted toward the back country management problem, and together with two superintendents — first, Eivend Scoyen and then John Davis — research and back country management became a science/management thrust.

"By 1964-65 this effort had resulted in the first formal back country management plan the National Park Service ever had. It eventually became the prototype for the Service and is the basis for today's back country work."

Would you date the beginnings of a formalized research/management team approach at around that time then?

"The year would vary with the park area, but overall I would say that by the mid-60's, the whole System was pretty well into organized research as a recognized partner in the management operation. We had begun to set up monitoring programs in many places. No longer was it a matter of a ranger riding by once or twice a year and making a subjective observation. It was measured plots, and building enclosures, and photographic records. It was objective baseline measurements and monitoring. And yet, as good as all this is, and as necessary, still there is the need for what I call 'an eye for it.'

"By that I mean that there is more to scientific management of park resources than the learning that comes from textbooks. The new park scholars still need the old park hands. You can't find in science alone all the ingredients for a politically valid judgment."

Do you think that superintendents and rangers and resource management people are staying in one area long enough to learn the ropes and do the optimum job?

"Up to 1976 I think the answer was No. We were expanding too fast and we were jumping all over the map trying to cover all the new bases with the same number of players.

"But now that the growth of new areas is restricted, field personnel aren't moving as fast as they had to prior to 1976."

Schlegel: *"The first resource management specialists came into the parks just 10 or 12 years ago, and that was the time when the rangers began to drift away from the resource management field. Rangers were moving into implementing what the resource specialists were reporting as needed to be done. The visitation boom pushed rangers more heavily into the visitor management area."*

"That's right, Stan, and at the same time universities were getting active in park resources. Take the fire research in the redwoods. Through the work done by university scientists, we found we should be letting fires run, to clear out the undergrowth and prevent the build-up of ground fuel that could catch and kill the giant trees. We had had the best intentions, but our fire prevention efforts — like our elk predator kills — had been wrong.

"Good research put management back



Joanne Michalovic, resource management specialist trainee, was selected from the Denver Service Center to be stationed at Mount Rainier NP for the two-year training stint. Michalovic is a Long Islander (NY) with an interdisciplinary degree within the natural sciences and a master's degree from Washington State University.

on the right track, but initially it was tough on management in general. They were skeptical and they had to overcome this skepticism before a mutual confidence could take root.

"I think we've made that step now. Management does have confidence in research, and we're showing it all over the System — not just in the acquiring of new knowledge (such as involves the elk herds here in Mount Rainier), but in beach dynamics on the Eastern seaboard, exotic goat management in Hawaii, the water management system in the Everglades, and other similar problem areas where old notions and decisions have had to turn 180 degrees around. That's where it's been toughest."

Would you characterize this turnaround as a Servicewide phenomenon?

"It probably was, basically, but without any real formalization. There wasn't much good communication in those days — no

coordination of effort or information exchange.

"We didn't have RMPs then. Sure, we had fire and back country management plans, but they weren't overall resource management plans. The plans were in people's heads, but they weren't tied to manpower and budget and they weren't on track.

"Today's RMP is directly tied to budget. And in 1976-77 when I was Deputy Director of the Service there was no management oriented research funded unless it was identified in the RMP. I've heard it called 'Briggle's Law.'

What do you see as the current status of park management?

"People with experience in the field, who know the resource, are not as evident today in policy positions. Therefore, they need educating. If you get a 'no' to your request, then sharpen your pencil and your presentation. Try to gain understanding. Fix your sights all the way to OMB and the Appropriations Committee. We have to be more articulate, do our homework better, be more convincing."

Do you have any advice as to how to do that?

"One of the most important ways is to educate your public. And do it *before* they get to the parks. Unfortunately, the outreach program has been cut. For years we've concentrated our interpretive efforts on describing the flora and fauna of the parks. Our captive audiences haven't been advised of the problems and opportunities in parks . . . only their glories. Mitigation of *people* impacts *must* be handled.

"Politics and resource management are inextricably interwoven. We must have better communication with people in the political arena so they can help advise management about direction and ways of operating. Going blindly about our mission without regard to the sociological and political effects can bring all resource management to a screeching halt and everyone can come unglued. Managers must be politically astute if they want to accomplish their mission, even to survive. Management can be awfully right and, at the same time, awfully wrong."

Can sociological research help management tread this delicate path?

"Sociological research will help management get over the idea that people can be *regulated*. Compliance comes from convincing people that it's *the thing to do* . . . not something they have to do so long as Big Brother is watching them.

"But let me say one thing more — to the managers. Never let the absence of science-based answers stand between you and what common sense advises you to do. Remember that as a manager *you* are ultimately responsible for the resource. Three imperatives for this task are experience, common sense, and the courage to take risks. When common

sense dictates 'move,' you must *move*!

"To the scientist, I say: 'You have to be sure of your findings, and willing to stand by your advice. If your superintendent is called into court to defend his decisions then you must be ready to march into court with him, and stand on your data.'

"There is no time to sit on past laurels. We must move inertia and then move beyond it — thinking *ahead* in an orderly planning process."

"Michalovic: the new RITS approach should help bridge the information gap between parks."

What must we do to improve resource management capability?

"You might ask around among the parks about what impact the publication *Park Science* is having. Is it a useful tool. Are the *rangers* using it? Do they see it as helping them do their jobs better?

"I see the park rangers today moving away from resource management — their early role — and into law enforcement, search and rescue, specialization skills. In ranger training, the large block of time is for law enforcement. Nothing like the same amount is devoted to resource management and resource appreciation.

"I can't blame the individual rangers. To them, that appears to be the glory road today. But if the park rangers are allowed to lose interest in the resource, and thus the confidence of the park manager, then the parks are in for difficult times in the years ahead. Let's get back to the basics! It's the only way if we want to be successful and survive!