

Editorial

"Against our will comes wisdom." Aeschylus

Ignorance can be casual, lazy, deliberate, or so close to knowledge as to be almost one and the same. It depends upon the individual or the organization that practices it.

Someone once compared the "I don't know" of an Einstein with those of a loutish ignoramus. The oaf merely shrugs his shoulders over the simplest question and replies with an offhand "I don't know." An Einstein spends a lifetime of strenuous, inspired effort – learning everything his brains and intuition can tell him – and in the end whispers "I don't know." How can those two phrases be related?

The National Park Service, under the leadership of Director Mott, has opted strongly for the Einsteinian end of the "I don't know" range. In the January/February issue of *National Parks* magazine, Mott praises the Park Service's various recent efforts to broaden its knowledge of "the basic structure of plants and animals" and "of the world around us." He gives strong support to continued pursuit of such knowledge and the vastly improved management and interpretation of the National Park System that it makes possible.

The Director specifically cites Margery Oldfield's basic reference, *The Value of Conserving Genetic Resources* (published by the NPS in 1984), and the 1982 conference on Application of Genetics to the Management of Wild Populations of Genetic Resources (sponsored by NPS and MAB), out of which came Christine Schonewald-Cox's *Genetics and Conservation* – the first volume of a reference series.

Mott also mentions the ethnobiology study now underway at Great Smoky Mountains NP, aimed at producing the first computerized data base on cultural uses of the flora and fauna of a U.S. Biosphere Reserve. (*Park Science* story will appear in the Summer issue). He includes praise for the cooperation of the National Park Service with Man and the Biosphere, Florida State University, the University of Colorado, and Yale University in preparing an inventory and geographic information system of large protected natural areas of the U.S.

Then, for good measure, the new Director turns his attention to interpretation – the spreading of information (the "upgrading of ignorance") to the public, which pays for and uses our Park System.

"We need to expand the horizons of our interpretive message," he wrote in a recent *Courier*, "... the role of the parks as gene pools, as places where natural processes have preserved species of plants and animals in forms that may be forever altered elsewhere."

In specific backup to these inspiring statements, the Director has instructed the NPS science program to call a March workshop (see p. 18) on genetic diversity and to organize an "outreach committee" (see p. 23) to see that interpretation becomes heavily laced with knowledge about the Park System that science is disclosing and that management is acting upon.

These are strong and positive moves from a new leadership that is dedicated to pushing our resource management and our interpretation to the highest pinnacles of knowledge we can achieve before we have to stop and say "Here we stand. On this basis we will make our decisions."

When we have reached this platform, *then* we can pause and say, with pardonable pride in the high quality of our ignorance, "I don't know."