

This issue of *Park Science* is devoted to computers and parks. As guest editor, Anne Frondorf has done a Herculean job — collecting information from all corners of the National Park System on how the various areas are moving into the Computer Age.

What comes through on these pages is the over-arching principle of all systems: The System Self-Designs. There seems to be no other way. In spite of all the logic with which our linear minds tell us that these things should be planned and coordinated and orchestrated from above, the successful system stoutly refuses to grow that way. Instead, it begins in obscure corners and niches "all over the map" — adapting to a need here, an idea there — and then reaching out with tentative feelers for connections.

Computer technology and the uses to which it can and will be put had to arrive on the scene together. When that happened, the seed sprouted everywhere, like "emergent properties." Eventually, these filaments will inter-connect more firmly and become, instead of many systems, *a* system.

As a new, systemic way of accomplishing planning and work, this system comes with the full complement of new perils and problems. One of these — the potential tyranny of the computer — is discussed by Celia Walker, who urges users not to take "NO" for an answer. (The old, frustrating deadend that used to read "It is our *policy* not to . . ." is being replaced by a new arbitrary negative: "The computer will not allow it." Walker warns: "Make sure it's the computer and not just some lazy human being.")

Information Crossfile offers additional cautionary computer notes, ranging from dead serious to hilarious.

But overall, the message on these pages is one of a powerful new tool, emerging in concert with the needs it is suited to handle. The idea is to inform, through this issue, every corner of the Park System about what every other corner is up to in the use of computers. Every item has a contact name and address. Rubbing minds together can make sparks; this issue should start a fire.