

BANDER NATIONAL MONUMENT SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

August 8, 1940

Superintendent Hugh Miller
Southwestern National Monuments
Coolidge, Arizona

Dear Sir:

Reference is made to your letter of July, 1940 requesting comment on the Forest Protection Plan for Bandelier National Monument prepared by Mr. Yeager.

My impression is that the plan is carefully thought out and well prepared. I believe, however, that Mr. Yeager is not as personally familiar with the area as he should be in order to prepare a comprehensive plan. Hence, I wish to offer some criticism, which to me appear valid. I have marked in red pencil on the plan little errors and discrepancies which I will not comment further on.

I do not agree with Mr. Yeager in his statement on page 1, as to the easy accessibility of the northern portion of the Otowi Section of the Monument. Reference to Individual Fire Report #1 of the 1940 season will show that we had a rather large fire in that area due largely to the difficulty of crossing three canyons without benefit of a trail. I strongly recommend a three mile trail from Otowi Ruin to the most remote part of that portion of the monument and have justified and included it in the tentative CCC program for the present year. It takes at least two hours of exhaustive work climbing from canyon floor to mesa top, back into another canyon and up its side to reach this part of the monument at the present time. A good trail would materially reduce the travel time and effort in traversing this section.

A large section of the monument lying south of Capulin Canyon consists of high hazard because of its being almost entirely in the ponderosa pine belt. Mr. Yeager does not suggest any trails in that section. Two old Forest Service trails at present cover that area but are impassable because of neglect. I strongly recommend that they be cleaned out and repaired.

It seems to me that the idea of a truck trail into the southern part of the monument has come up for discussion several times before and I have made some suggestions and written a few letters, etc. Maybe a rehash of some of the old arguments would not be amiss.

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The Branch of Plans and Design has in the past been opposed to the proposition and the Branch of Forestry has pushed it. I'd like to have my say as the fellow who has to make the "gadget" (meaning the monument as a whole) work after the big shots get through putting it together and taking it apart. If I remember correctly, some of the following points have been mentioned either for or against the proposal. Whether mentioned or not, they pop into my mind.

For the road.

1. Curtailment of grazing has improved conditions for forest reproduction and richer undercover growth making for a situation of more serious fires and greater hazard.
2. The Horse Concession at the Lodge will encourage travel to the wilderness areas and increase probabilities of fires.
3. Construction of the road would make possible better administrative control and protection of wildlife.
4. A road is already built to our boundary at St. Pere's Dome.
5. The proposed road would expedite the building of the proposed patrol cabin.

Against the Proposal

1. The proposed road would open up a sacred area; break a promise.
2. If we yield to the demand for easy travel to fires, we will yield to the demand for easy travel of all kinds into the area and the little wilderness area we do have will become a back yard to filling stations.
3. The road would open up the area to such an extent that more damage would result from increasing numbers of fires than now can be done by occasional large fires which might result from difficult access.
4. Administrative control would be much more difficult with a road reaching the heads of three fishing streams than is now the case with access rather difficult even to the Upper Crossing of Frijoles.
5. Such a road is costly to build and is not necessary to proper protection.
6. If we carry the thing to its ultimate conclusion, lightning fires are a part of nature and have a place in a wilderness area. It is repeatedly stated that wild life in the parks must survive without artificial aid from man. Why not apply that reasoning to the trees in so far as lightning is considered.

[illegible]

What is the middle of the road course, then, that will allow a maximum of protection and minimum of use. Protection implies protection of the parks from fires, but if we want to lean to the extreme point, fires are undoubtedly natural to some extent. Lightning fires undoubtedly burned over these hills thousands of years before man ever set foot on this continent. An old Taos Indian once told me "Before the White man came to the mountains, bugs and disease seldom killed the forest, because when the bugs attacked the trees, a few (trees) died, and the gods seeing the dead trees sent the lightning to set them a fire. The fire burned up the dead trees and the bugs and no more trees were harmed for a long time" In a primitive area, then, we should put out only the fires started by man?

Few of us would ever appreciate art if we never had the opportunity of seeing it, or classical music if we were denied the privilege of ever hearing it. The basis of use of an area should depend upon use for human need and enrichment of life for all, be they rich or poor, gifted with unusual appreciation or only the capacity for it!

Those individuals who rave about the good old times and think everything should be left as it was 50 years ago are the ones who rather than get about in oxcarts as people did 50 years ago are the ones who purchase the finest new cars and howl the loudest about the roads to drive them on. The old way of life has passed in Santa Fe - why should they demand that we take their child to wet nurse! Their real objection is that they no longer may gut a ruin unrestrained, picnic in a cave and use the old beams for their campfires (that's the gossip regarding the Ceremonial Cave) and have the run of the Canyon. It should be closed to others, by not building roads so the "two weeks vacationist" can not get in, but not to them.

Aside from the added danger of fire, the proposed road into this area would certainly increase the difficulty of administrative control. I believe that a road down Capulin Canyon from the Forest Service road into the San Miguel Lookout could be locked and kept under control, but control of a road from the Upper Crossing would be an impossibility without present crop of personnel.

With the exception noted above, I believe the plan to be valid and workable. I particularly like the suggestion of the patrol cabin and stabilization of the trails.

Chester A. Thomas
Acting Custodian

~~CC: Naturalist Files~~