



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S FRAME



*National Parks Can Improve Society
by Revealing Destructive Historical Conflicts*

**GARY E. DAVIS
DOROTHY A. DAVIS**



In this issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum*, historians return to topics of conflict about which they have previously written to assess how park stewardship activities, such as interpretation, have changed for better or worse—if at all.

Six of the eight essays focus on battlefields and other sites of conflict managed by the National Park Service: Gettysburg National Military Park, PA; Fort Monroe National Monument, VA; Minidoka National Historic Site, ID; Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial, VA; Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, CO; and Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, AL. We believe that, as the American historian John Hope Franklin phrased it, “The parallels of history are infinite and limitless.” With this in mind, here we investigate the potential of using experiential learning in the National Park System to mitigate the repetition of harmful societal practices, such as relying on destructive conflict to resolve differences of opinions and beliefs.

- **America’s Estate** The United States National Park System currently contains 425 sites that recognize the nation’s outstanding natural and cultural heritage. The culturally themed sites embrace over 100 places commemorating historic national conflicts, including at least 39 battlefields from the nation’s foreign and domestic wars, conflicts over citizens’ civil rights, and disputed colonization of Indigenous Peoples’ territories.
- **Conflict Reduction** Human strife is ancient, persistent, and universal. Whether originating in religious beliefs, or the pursuit of power, territory, or natural resources, evidence strongly suggests that failures to learn from historical experience doom societies and individuals to devastating repetitions of conflict.
- **Power of Place** Parks invoke the power of place with authenticity, genuine feelings, and immersive personal experiences. Parks are extraordinary classrooms and places of inspiration. They are timeless places, intergenerational places. Entering a park feels like finding a new world, yet it is our home.

overleaf ● Gettysburg National Military Park, PA: Detail of the giant cylindrical Gettysburg Cyclorama of 1870, which is 377 feet long, 42 feet high, and weighs 12.5 tons; the IMAX of its day
above ● Visitors experience a unique kind of immersion in the events of the battle when they visit the Cyclorama

How park-based learning opportunities can help prevent, mitigate, and resolve destructive human conflicts:



Avoid crises

Learn how ecosystems function and determine nature's limits to support humans.

The Florida Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Program is an intergovernmental (local, state, and federal), agency-funded, multi-billion-dollar, multiple-decade investment in understanding nature to reduce conflict and other societal costs. When Everglades National Park was first contemplated in the 1930s, people had been tinkering with South Florida's landscapes for more than a century, not recognizing that the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to "Save All of the Parts!" Nevertheless, because of the park, the most significant components of the "River of Grass" survive sufficiently to give hope that they can be reconstituted to function again despite dire existential threats.



Reduce existential threats
Learn to adapt and restore threatened resources.

In 1999, with a monumental engineering feat, Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina moved the historic brick masonry tower of the Cape Hatteras Light 2,900 feet in 23 days from its 1870 location (foreground stone ring); it now lies 1,500 feet from the seashore, its original distance from the sea, and thereby helped to reset the clock in a race against rising sea level.



Cooperate Seek common goals.

Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park is the union of Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada and Glacier National Park in the United States; UNESCO declares both parks as biosphere reserves and their union as a World Heritage site. Most summer days, a park tour boat leaves Waterton Park, Alberta, Canada, for Goat Haunt, Glacier National Park, Montana, USA, far down the Upper Waterton Lake, crossing the international border, revealing the integral cooperative management of these two “Crown of the Continent” parks in the Rocky Mountains.



Partner
Seek mutual benefits by co-locating.

Proximity gives parks in urban landscapes many opportunities to form partnerships. Three good examples of doing so are Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in the Los Angeles area, which partners with 11 California state parks; the 1,200-mile Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail that connects history, culture, and outdoor recreation from Nogales, Arizona, to the San Francisco Bay Area in California; and the Chumash Satwiwa Native American Indian Culture Center and Natural Area, also in California, which is a partnership between the National Park Service and the Friends of Satwiwa.



Share

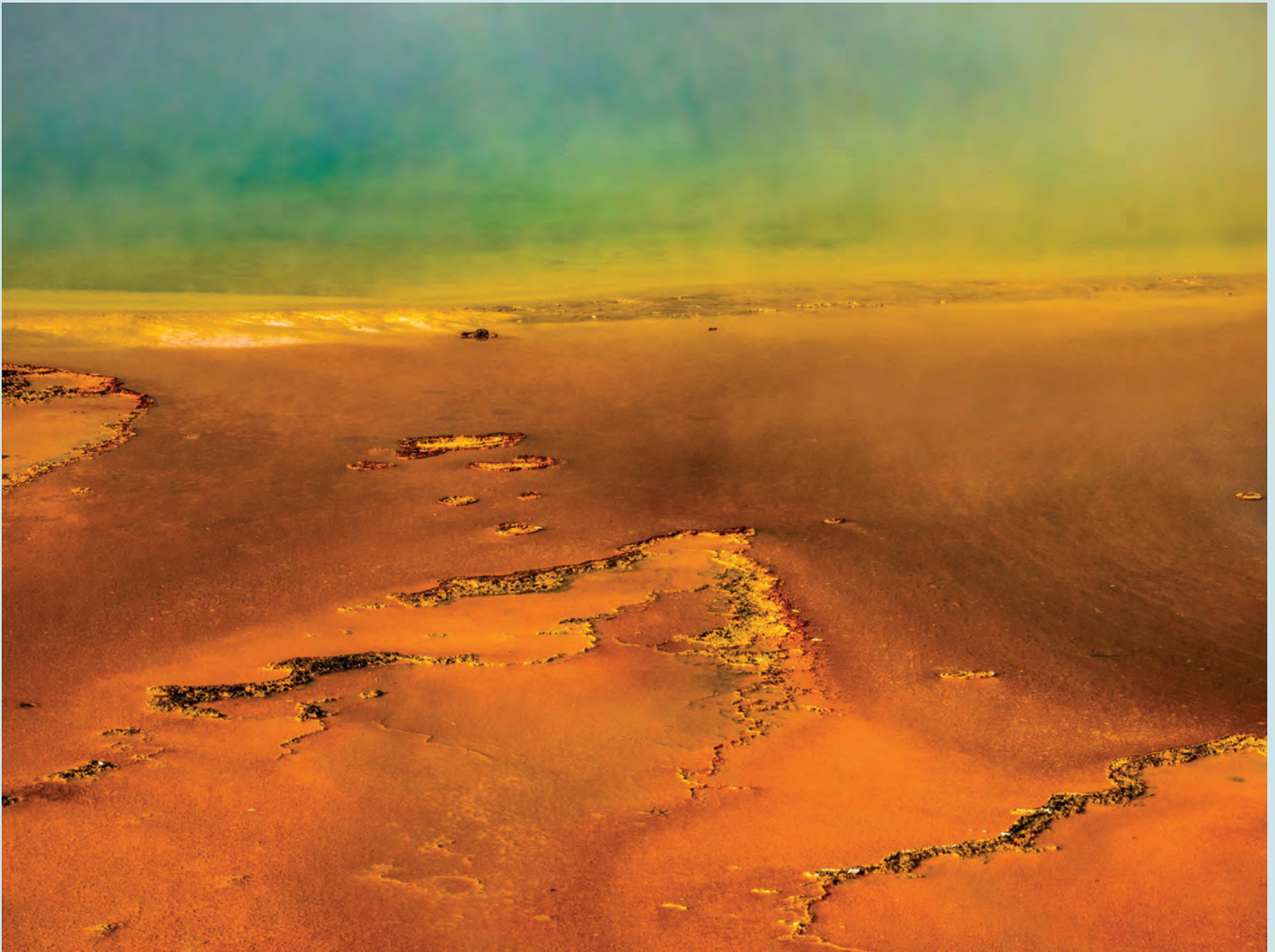
Give and receive as everyone's needs and capacities evolve.

Recently, in just two years, three wildfires killed nearly 20% of all giant sequoias in national parks, national forests, and state of California forestlands of the Sierra Range. The 85,952-acre KNP Complex fire alone required two massive Incident Management Teams to subdue. Conflicts and competition were reduced to acceptable levels by freely and formally sharing knowledge, equipment, personnel, and resources among affected parties to ensure timely, sustained success.



Exercise the Golden Rule
Treat others how you want to be treated.

A reconstructed guard tower overlooks the sagebrush flats of Owens Valley Paiute homelands below Mount Whitney east of California’s Sierra Range. A barbed wire fence serves as a reminder of the purpose of the Manzanar incarceration camp, which held 10,000 Japanese-Americans during World War II. Besides Manzanar, the National Park System commemorates this period at Minidoka National Historic Site in Idaho, Honouliuli National Historic Site in Hawaii, Amache National Historic Site in Colorado, Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial in Washington (administratively part of Minidoka), and Tule Lake National Monument in California. Immersion in such sites and knowledge of this fateful period of American history will hopefully reduce reoccurrences in future times of stress.



Reduce scarcities

Learn to produce more with less using science and technology.

Fifty years ago, no one knew what wonders lurked in Yellowstone's plethora of hydrothermal features until a vacationing microbiologist overheard a park ranger extolling the virtues of blue-green algae in the brilliantly rainbow-hued, boiling-hot thermal pools of the Firehole River watershed. Curiosity ensued, knowledge accrued, and scientists exclaimed, "Is there no upper-temperature limit of life?" Before the Yellowstone finding, analyzing life's basic building blocks, DNA molecules, was painfully slow: heat increased the speed of the experiment but damaged most molecules. That changed when it was discovered that using the thermophilic enzymes from Yellowstone's hot pool bacteria allowed quick, inexpensive, accurate analyses called PCR. This process made DNA analysis better, faster, and cheaper—and life better for people everywhere by improving medicine, forensic investigations, and techniques to track pollution, monitor ecosystem health, and conserve species. What other wonders lie hidden in nature?



Recognize and reward excellence Inspire and learn by emulating success.

Forty years ago, a new era of ocean stewardship began below the aptly named “Inspiration Point” on East Anacapa Island in Channel Islands National Park and National Marine Sanctuary of California. Private enterprises and public, non-profit organizations joined a consortium of state and federal agencies to demonstrate the efficacy of place-based conservation in the ocean by monitoring a series of 11 fully protected marine reserves created to restore and sustain ocean productivity and the ecological integrity of giant kelp forests, submarine canyons, and seagrass beds surrounding the five park islands. Encouraged by this success, California created a statewide system of 124 marine reserves along its 1,350-km coast. The Marine Conservation Institute recognized this pioneering Channel Islands collaboration in 2020 with its internationally renowned Blue Park Award using criteria seeking blueprints for effective marine conservation.



Seek and perpetuate knowledge

Engage diverse groups, encourage curiosity, learn, and share knowledge.

BioBlitz is an event where people collaborate to identify as many species as possible in a specific area over a short time, e.g., 24 hours. It can occur anywhere, but national parks typically are excellent locations for discovering biodiversity, as these brightly adorned people found on Elliot Key in Biscayne National Park in Florida during a BioBlitz organized by the National Geographic Society. Incorporating smartphone apps like iNaturalist in the activity makes data collection easy and contributes to a global database used by scientists and policymakers. The more people know, the more they care about history, nature, and themselves.



Protect heritage

People care more for what they know, so share your knowledge.

Commemoration of President Abraham Lincoln excites people of all ages and backgrounds to experience the dignity of this inspiring historic figure and his memorial, encouraging them to learn more about his legacy. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial depicts the detachment of the Stone of Hope from the Mountain of Despair and symbolizes victory borne from disappointment. Experiences with both memorials form enduring memories and imbue visitors with legitimate pride in citizenship.



Societies benefit from reduced destructive conflicts among individuals and groups.

These conflicts are widespread, expensive, and yet crucial. Geographic places are a common denominator for understanding human behavior since everyone must always be somewhere. Many of the nation’s most fascinating places are found in the National Park System as iconic landscapes and cultural legends. These exceptional places not only encourage recreation, personal bonding, and inspiring activities but also demonstrate the abilities to help avoid crises, reduce existential threats, encourage cooperation and partnerships, promote resource sharing, improve empathy, help reduce scarcity, model exemplary behaviors, engage in novel quests for knowledge, and protect the nation’s natural and cultural heritage. Learning through immersive experiences within the National Park System possesses the power to diminish negative societal interactions, such as resolving disputes and irreconcilable beliefs through destructive conflict. This form of learning has the potential to foster a society that is more enduring and positive.



Co-published by the [University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity](#), and the [George Wright Society](#).
ISSN 2688-187X



This article is published in Volume 39, Number 3 of *Parks Stewardship Forum*, 2023.

Parks Stewardship Forum explores innovative thinking and offers enduring perspectives on critical issues of place-based heritage management and stewardship. Interdisciplinary in nature, the journal gathers insights from all fields related to parks, protected/conserved areas, cultural sites, and other place-based forms of conservation. The scope of the journal is international. It is dedicated to the legacy of [George Meléndez Wright](#), a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and pioneer in conservation of national parks.

Parks Stewardship Forum is published online at <https://escholarship.org/uc/psf> through [eScholarship](#), an open-access publishing platform subsidized by the University of California and managed by the California Digital Library. Open-access publishing serves the missions of the Institute and GWS to share, freely and broadly, research and knowledge produced by and for those who manage parks, protected areas, and cultural sites throughout the world. A version of *Parks Stewardship Forum* designed for online reading is also available at <https://parks.berkeley.edu/psf>. For information about publishing in PSF, write to psf@georgewright.org.

Parks Stewardship Forum is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

The journal continues *The George Wright Forum*, published 1981–2018 by the George Wright Society.

PSF is designed by Laurie Frasier • lauriefrasier.com



On the cover of this issue

This viewpoint of a Union soldier facing Pickett's Charge reveals a pivotal moment at Gettysburg, foreshadowing the Civil War's outcome.

[GARY E. DAVIS](#)