

THE NATIONAL PARK IDEA HOW TO INTEREST THE AFRICAN PUBLIC

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1. THE NATURE OF A NATIONAL PARK

The world's first National Park was the Yellowstone Park in the United States of America, established by the United States Congress in 1872 "as a pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people". This great Park, of over two million acres, was soon followed by others, first in America and then elsewhere, in a world-wide movement which has gradually been gaining impetus and which still continues, East and Central Africa being amongst the last and most tardy recruits to the field. Throughout, the emphasis has been on the preservation of wild land areas for public outdoor recreational and educational use. In 1933 the first move was made at international level to give tangible expression to this movement in the "Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa", held in London during that year and attended by delegates from all over the continent: other international meetings have followed.

The London Conference evolved the definition of the term "National Park" which is now universally accepted: in slightly shortened form it is as follows:—

The expression *National Park* shall denote an area (a) placed under *public control*, the boundaries of which shall not be altered except by competent legislative authority (b) set aside for the protection and preservation, for all time, of wild animal life and wild vegetation for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the general public (c) in which hunting of fauna or collection of flora is prohibited except under direction of the Park authorities.

2. THE PROBLEM AND THE EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Whilst this preamble is common knowledge to all those who will read this paper and may seem somewhat remote from its subject, it is very necessary to keep clearly in mind the words underlined in the London definition. Unless a Park is being run for the benefit of the general public it can hardly be said to be carrying out its primary function: the general public of Africa is, for the most part, of African race. Like most other people, Africans are often slow to appreciate the beauties of nature in their own countries (although, in fact, no slower than were the Swiss to appreciate the Alps in the first half of the last century),

and a basic duty thus rests upon the National Park authorities to seek the means of bringing about this appreciation. This should be the first educational objective and one cannot repeat too often that a National Park is created for the people, not the people for the Park.

It in fact follows from this that, for its very existence a National Park is dependent on the support of this same general public, if only because the competent legislative authority which alone can create, change or destroy a National Park, represents that public. That for the present such representation is indirect, is incidental to the argument, for this state of affairs will not remain very much longer, and it is essential to presume responsibility to a legislature representing the majority population: National Parks are planned for posterity. This, therefore, is the second educational objective and it is, of course, incomparably the most important, from the point of view of the parks authorities. It is essential that we assure general acceptance of our National Parks during the next few years, for without public confidence our Parks are doomed, so that every other concern is trivial by comparison. One cannot emphasize too strongly that there is absolutely nothing else of comparable importance to the ultimate objective of preserving our fauna. Discussion on such vital subjects as research, game management and land usage in relation to wild life are of purely academic interest unless the basic principle of preserving the parks gains public acceptance.

In discussing these points I have throughout emphasized the problems in relation to the National Park areas and not to the country at large as, certainly in Uganda and probably in other territories, it is not possible to foresee any long term future for wild life elsewhere. The best that we can hope for is that public acceptance of the National Park principle will be sufficiently general for a certain number of other areas to be declared before the wild life is eliminated from them altogether. Whilst this attitude is sometimes described as defeatist, and however much we may regret it, it is wishful thinking to imagine otherwise, except in relation to a few individual species, for the most part of minor nature, and perhaps a few specialized localities such as mountain forest areas. The pressure of a growing population, the demands of agriculture and industry as well as the urge to economic self-sufficiency make it inevitable. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the reasons, it is undoubtedly true that public opinion is showing every sign of hardening against the principle of game preservation outside the parks.

The third educational objective is more straightforward : it is that if the public is to get the maximum benefit from the preservation of wild life in the National Parks, these should be used as a training ground in natural history and, less directly, as places in which to train the youth of the country to develop powers of observation and self-sufficiency. This is an important and proper use for a National Park and one which can have a vital bearing on our second objective, for a public educated to understand nature and its phenomena will inevitably be more devoted to the principle of its preservation than one which does not. The young African of to-day shows a lamentable ignorance of the wild life which is perhaps the most priceless heritage of his country.

One may appropriately say, at this stage, that one cannot really expect wholesale acceptance of a National Park from those who live on its immediate border. Mundane local interests are too strong and the natural beauties taken too much for granted by those who live amongst them. Local opposition to parks in the British Isles has, in fact, been as strong as in Uganda and I believe that I am correct in saying that the Caernarvon County Council in North Wales has opposed the Snowdon National Park with continuous tenacity. The best that one can hope for is reasonably amicable relations and the support of a few enlightened individuals : this, however, makes it all the more important to educate the wider public.

3. THE TREATMENT

We are thus faced with a serious and difficult problem requiring for its solution trained staff and the most up to date mass education techniques, none of which are available. A start has been made, however, in a comparatively small way chiefly in the Queen Elizabeth Park and there follows a brief account of what is being done. In the Murchison Falls Park, as soon as the northern road to the Falls was opened, the administration began to send parties of school children, councillors and others for a short drive in the Park and a brief visit to the top of the Falls : in this schools and missions in the neighbouring districts co-operated so that we are gradually developing the idea of a day in the Park as the annual school treat or half-term holiday. We have throughout received a large measure of co-operation from the Department of Community Development.

In the Queen Elizabeth Park early in 1955 we built a special camp at Mweya to handle parties visiting the Park for an educational tour. It consists of five rondavels, with four beds

in each ; a central banda which can be used as a dining room as well as a class room and which is equipped with tables and benches, kitchen and latrines. Water is laid on and firewood provided, and we make an inclusive charge of one shilling per head per night : parties in occupation must bring their own food, or buy this locally, and do all their own cooking and chores. We attach an experienced Ranger to the party throughout its visit and the officials in charge, whether Europeans or Africans, either stay at the camp or in the nearby Mweya Safari Lodge. Twenty is a small number, but is convenient for our large launch, which we allow these educational parties to use for Shs. 10s. per hour (i.e. the bare cost of the fuel) and is suitable for class room work. For one night, more are often squeezed into the rondavels.

We have had a large variety of parties using this camp ; primary schools, secondary schools, Makerere graduates, parties of schoolmasters, co-operative societies, county and district councils, chiefs' training courses from Nsamizi (Local Government Training Centre), welfare clubs and boy scouts—Africans chiefly, but also parties of Asian and European boys. These parties have come from practically all areas in Uganda and few, if any, have gone away disappointed. One cannot educate directly the whole population, but one can produce widely spread cells of enlightenment, using the indirect method to reach the majority which by this means hears about the Park and the enjoyment that it can give to those who visit it. That they themselves should want to come in turn is itself perhaps the best hope one has for the future of the parks.

These parties come for anything from a few hours to five days, with two clear days as perhaps the average stay. They visit various parts of the Park, do one or more trips on the launch and are encouraged, if possible, to study tracks near Lake Kikorongo and to take a long, escorted, ridge walk in the crater area ; this is good for their souls and helps to develop an appreciation for wild country as well as for birds and beasts. I always include one talk on the National Park idea, usually near the end of the stay, when the audience is likely to be most receptive, and sometimes also another on some natural history subject such as birds, but there are great difficulties in this regard, which will be mentioned later. I give plenty of opportunity for questions after the talk and usually thereby produce the opportunity for impromptu discussion on such problems as disease control, grazing and the balance of nature. This is often a better approach than a set lecture on such subjects, provided that one is willing to take one's time and answer each inquiry carefully and fully.

It is obviously necessary to vary one's talks according to the age and educational standards of the audience and to a certain extent according to the tribal background, but generally in speaking of the National Park idea, I emphasize three main points as of particular application to a country such as Uganda, and stress the fact that a National Park is a public service which cannot ever be made to pay for itself. The three main points may be summarized as follows:—

- (a) That a National Park is created for the benefit, enjoyment and education of the people of the country: a brief history of the development of the National Park idea throughout the world is given to emphasize this.
- (b) That the preservation, before it is too late, of the wild animal life of the country, for the benefit of this and future generations, is not only ethically right but a public duty. The great game animals are a unique heritage of this country and with the march of progress, they have a right to somewhere in which to live out their lives undisturbed.
- (c) That the parks are an important economic asset, through the tourist industry and do a great deal to enhance Uganda's prestige in the eyes of the world. The parks are practically the only worthwhile tourist attraction in the country and overseas visitors just would not come to Uganda if they ceased to exist. As visitors to the parks see other parts of the country and something of the life of the people during the course of their travels, they are instrumental in gaining an enlightened and sympathetic world opinion in regard to the country's other problems.

The last point, which has rarely, if ever, been previously understood, is always extremely well received.

4. THE FUTURE NEEDS

This is only a beginning and a very small beginning at that, but there are signs that it is bearing fruit and assisting in the building up of a public opinion, which is the most sensitive of all animals, favourable to the parks. It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that without the backing of public opinion the Parks are doomed and that no other fauna problem is of comparable importance. Present arrangements are make-shift and are dependent for their success on the wardens or Director, both of whom have a sufficiency of other duties, having enough time to devote to these parties and the inclination to act as

part-time schoolmasters. The main future need is to get this work on to a more formalized and permanent basis, to arrange for its follow up and extension and to evolve practical means of giving natural history instruction to the visiting parties. My own personal ambition is to see the establishment of a small teaching institute in the Queen Elizabeth Park working in co-operation with an Outward Bound training centre on the Ruwenzori, so that parties from all walks of life could attend courses lasting for perhaps a month, spending part of the time in each. One would use the Park Institute to teach one's pupils something about nature, of which the modern African is woefully ignorant and then take them on to the mountain, where this training would of course continue, to develop the senses of leadership, self-sufficiency and responsibility. This is perhaps too ambitious a long term project to consider at the present stage.

At a more practical level, future needs may be summarized as follows :—

- (a) To establish a Visitors' Camp in the Murchison Falls Park so that the work in that area can be developed. It is in fact hoped that this can be done this year ;
- (b) to enlarge both this and other camps and put them on to a more permanent basis with, possibly, the provision of catering and other facilities ; this should be possible during the next few years ;
- (c) to appoint a training officer who could devote his whole time to this work if necessary ; ideally, there would be one for each Park. It is extremely unlikely that such an appointment including housing and general maintenance costs, will be possible from our own resources in the foreseeable future, vital as this is ;
- (d) initiate extension lectures to those schools and other organizations which send parties to the parks. These could be undertaken by the training officers ;
- (e) the provision of visual aids to natural history teaching, without which this is quite impracticable for anyone who is not a highly skilled blackboard artist. The cinema and film strips would help but suffer from various limitations and the most obvious aids would seem to be coloured charts or cards of the right birds and beasts : at the moment I am quite at a loss to discover how or where these can be obtained ;
- (f) literature (school books) of the right type definitely linking the natural history teaching, whether carried out in the Parks Institute, with the National Parks ;

(g) accommodation of the youth hostel type where young people can spend their own holidays inexpensively, thus giving those who first come to the parks in organized parties easy opportunity to return again on their holidays.

All this would tend to develop the positive side of the National Parks activities and this is certainly highly desirable whilst also helping to incorporate them into the general life of the community and its educational development.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would welcome criticism and suggestions, particularly in regard to future developments and the source of the various needs noted in the last section. The Uganda National Parks would also be most interested to learn what is being done in other territories in this matter, and how these various problems are being tackled elsewhere. In this way experience can be pooled for the basic problems, though different in degree, are in fact of general application throughout Africa.

Note.—The above paper was presented for discussion at the East and Central African Fauna Conference, Entebbe, 1956.

MANAGEMENT OF NATURE RESERVES IN THE U.S.A.

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In the United States there are the following principal categories of nature reserves: national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges and Taylor Grazing Act districts.

In national parks nature is left to her own devices, unless interference is essential, to control, for example, a superabundance of grazing animals which are ravaging their food supply. Trees are not cut, nor dead ones removed. Roads and buildings are made as inconspicuous as possible. Wildlife refuges are managed for the benefit of the species for which they have been established, usually upland or water birds. National forests were originally established for watershed protection and timber supply. They are now managed for many purposes; for example, timber supply, wildlife and recreation. These are attempted in most of the reserves, but this multiple use is difficult and usually one use or other predominates. Taylor Grazing Acts districts, established under the Act of that name, are managed so as to limit