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Glacier National Park

"Among these mountains, those that lie to the west of the river St. Pierre are called the Shining Mountains, from an infinite number of crystal stones of an amazing size, with which they are covered, and which, when the sun shines full upon them, sparkle so as to be seen at a very great distance. Probably in future ages they may be found to contain more riches in their bowels than those of Indostan and Malabar, or those found on the Golden Coast of Guinea; nor will I except even the Peruvian mines."

It was Jonathan Carver, soldier—explorer—writer, that wrote these words nearly two hundred years ago about the most spectacular chain of mountains in the whole Rocky Mountain system. And as I sat on the porch of my cozy little cabin under the pines, gazing with awe at mighty snow-capped peaks, precipices of immense height, and wide, heavily timbered valleys that gave shelter to all species of American big game, I was unaware that this imperishable beauty had been discovered nearly two centuries ago. The tilted, twisted, and folded layers of rock tell an incredible story about the thousands of years it took Nature to pattern this national playground. Senator I. H. Carter, Congressman Pray, and officials of the Great Northern Railroad led Congress and President Taft to feel the greatness of the region, and in May, 1910, this scenic wonderland known as Glacier National Park was set aside. It is now the duty of the National Park Service to keep it so well preserved that the generations to come may still behold the superlative beauty that caused Jonathan Carver to call it "The Land of Shining Mountains."

Glacier Park received its name from the sixty living glaciers that so strongly differentiate it from our other national reservations. Nowhere in this country are there so many glaciers in a like area, nor does the country surrounding the Park possess such ruggedness and sheer grandeur. To the north and south it falls away into less impressive mountainous masses. No doubt the innumerable glaciers create the primary attraction to all visitors. Let us visualize a trip to impressive Grinnell Glacier. From Many Glacier Hotel we take a seven mile trail to this interesting remnant of past ages. More people view this glacier than any other, for it is the most accessible and the best field for exploration and study of glacial action. Grinnell Glacier is not the largest to be found, but it has all the characteristics of the great prehistoric ice rivers that carved the beauty of the Park. Above Grinnell Glacier there is another smaller ice mass, and from this flows a turbu-
lent cascade that has cut a gorge two hundred and fifty feet in depth through Grinnell's wall. Our view from the Glacier over the lakes in the valley below is unforgettable. It is also a likely place for us to see mountain goats and big-horn sheep as they work their way along the rock ledges, feeding on alpine grass and mosses.

It is difficult to realize that these lofty sentinels and broad valleys were carved by water and ice. Geologists tell us that this region was created by a great internal pressure that caused the crust of the earth to crack and pushed rock masses upward in long, irregular, wave-like folds. When the rocks could no longer stand the strain, great cracks appeared, and one ledge was thrust upward and over the other. The crumbling of this edge, which was thousands of feet thick, formed the mountains and precipices, but it probably took several millions of years to cut and carve them as they are today. This carving was done by three ice packs which descended from the north, and intermittently by rainfall, frost and glacial action. The result of this is a land of enormous hollowed cirques separated from each other by knife-edged walls, many of which are nearly perpendicular. The interesting and spectacular lakes were formed by the ice masses that moved slowly down the valleys. Eventually these frozen rivers melted away. The mass of material they had been pushing forward formed a wall which held back the water that accumulated in the basins. This was formed in the days before man saw the natural phenomenon we now call Glacier National Park.

Let us again visualize a trip from Many Glaciers Hotel, the hub of miles of trail leading to nearby beauty spots. This time we shall choose Mt. Siyeh, whose lofty peak shelters Cracker Lake. It is seven miles by trail to the head of Cracker Canyon. On either side of the trail lodgepole pine, larch, and spruce form a heavy forest, and numerous shade-loving shrubs produce a dense undergrowth. Occasionally we pass the small, fragrant, flower-covered parks. We marvel at the great continuous sheets of bright yellow formed by the glacier lily, and later in the season bear grass will cause us to halt and investigate. This is doubtlessly the most conspicuous of over three hundred flowering plants to be found in the Park. Its waist-high stalks are covered with masses of small, pure white flowers. Cracker Lake lies bowled in a limestone cirque at the bottom of Mt. Siyeh, whose perpendicular wall towers four thousand feet above the cobalt blue waters. It is the superlative beauty that fascinates us and imprints an unforgettable picture in our mind.

Horace M. Albright, Director of the National Park Service, once said, "It will be noted that the term 'wild life' is used
in referring to the Park animals; they are never 'game' until they leave the Park." Glacier Park is a sanctuary for all game within its boundaries. No fire arms are allowed within the Park, unless granted by special permission from the Superintendent.

The plants and animals of the Park are distributed in a series of three horizontal zones, namely the Canadian, Hudsonian, and Arctic Alpine.
One day I was riding fire patrol from my station at Two Medicine to Dawson Pass. The trail had just opened and I was the first person to travel it that season. About two miles from camp the trail crossed a beaver dam. Dismounting, I crept quietly forward. There, on the calm mirror-like surface of the pond, a beaver was swimming. Eager for a better view I moved forward, a twig snapped, and in an instant the industrious animal had disappeared. As I left the well timbered valley and climbed into the Hudsonian or dwarf timber zone I was startled by several shrill whistles. Experience told me that in the near vicinity a marmot was watching my intrusion from behind a rock. Soon I climbed into the Arctic-Alpine region, which extends from seven thousand feet to the rocky summits of the majestic peaks. Just before I reached the pass three old ewes and their little lambs walked calmly along a ledge parallel to the trail. They gave me not the slightest heed, but sauntered along, occasionally munching tender grass shoots. "Topping out" is the thrilling experience of any mountain trip. What a view! At least twelve individually different, imposing masses of rock and ice, half as many crystal glaciers, and five cobalt blue lakes. The air itself, as rare as the very scenery, caused me to sit down and absorb the wonders of Nature, that I might always retain a mental picture of a playground of the gods. I was content to "just sit", and with my field glasses, pick out every nook and cranny of nearby peaks. I discovered two elk grazing unsuspectedly in a small park three thousand feet below. On a far away ledge I made out the form of a mountain goat reclining in the shade of a boulder. 'Twas with a supreme effort that I mounted my horse, and with back to the wall I followed the homeward trail.

This land of Shining Mountains, with all its wild life and flowers, its glistening glaciers and heavenly peaks, its beautiful valleys and innumerable lakes and streams, was created that all might explore and enjoy it. The season is from June 15 to September 15, three months to ride its wilderness trails and camp in its solitudes. I spent one summer in the shadows of its glaciers and now the call of the mountains surges through my blood. Using the words of Mary Roberts Rinehart I can best express my feeling for Glacier Park, "But there is no voice in all the world so insistent to me as the wordless call of these mountains. I shall go back. Those who go once always hope to go back. The lure of the great free spaces is in their blood."