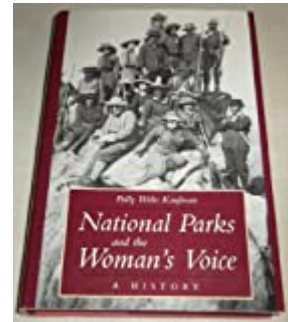


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Polly Welts Kaufman. *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: A History.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. xvi + 305 pp. \$42.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1706-3.



Reviewed by Stephen F. Austin (State University Sylvia W. McGrath)

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In the late 1800s women explorers visited Yosemite, Yellowstone, and other areas which became the national parks of the west, climbed mountains there, studied natural history, tried to interpret Indian culture, and helped create facilities for other visitors to those parks. Often riding sidesaddle and wearing long skirts, they participated with men in park pioneering. Beginning with a discussion of the early travelers and explorers, Kaufman's work is a comprehensive study of the role of women in relation to national parks from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-1990s.

Women were among the early activists working to preserve both scenic and cultural heritage areas, such as the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde; they used women's club networks to support the creation of the National Park Service and push for preservation of historic sites, hoping to represent American values and to teach and enrich future generations. Women also sought professional positions in the Park Service, where the male-defined culture influenced both opportunities for and expectations about women employees. Kaufman analyzes the development of the Park Service ethic coming from both a military tradition (early rangers were cavalrymen) and the communications efforts designed to educate visitors. For many decades, male ranger-naturalists saw professional women as a threat to traditional male roles in the parks

and welcomed women only as wives of rangers. Yet those wives helped break down the military culture of the Park Service and opened career possibilities for women.

In the early 1960s the Park Service began to hire women as interpreters or guides, roles men did not want, in historic parks. A decade later, in part because of equal opportunities legislation, executive orders, and a strong women's movement, women were becoming park rangers and administrators. Increasing emphasis on historic preservation also meant new opportunities for women whose sensitivity to social history enriched park programs. Women scientists became pioneers in developing park resource management policies. By the mid-1990s, though men still dominated top management, one-third of the park rangers and other Park Service employees were women. Outside the Park Service, women working in the environmental, feminist, and civil rights movements changed the nature of the parks by fighting for preservation of unique landscapes and historic sites, often in or near crowded urban areas or, as at Seneca Falls, New York, designed to show women's place in the nation's history.

Kaufman used extensive sources from women's, environmental, and national park history; she interviewed almost four hundred women, and used 140 additional recorded interviews which Dorothy Boyle Huyck had

conducted prior to her death in 1979. She analyzes effectively the ways in which various women dealt with the male-defined Park Service culture, contemporary patterns of service in which women are superintendents primarily in small to medium sized historic parks, problems of dual-career marriages, and ways in which women's perspectives and values, which often differ from those of men, helped shaped today's national parks. Though the organization within chapters is sometimes chronologically confusing, Kaufman's thoroughly researched book,

with excellent notes and bibliographic essay, provides an outstanding reference work detailing the roles of hundred of specific women who have shaped our national parks.

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