



NPS Interagency Senior Pass

(This is the final installment in a series of posts celebrating the centennial anniversary of the National Park Service.)

A wag once observed: It's hell getting old, but it beats the alternative.

I can personally attest to the fact that it's not a lot of fun achieving senior citizen status. I can't run as far or as fast as I did in my prime, I no longer can get by on a week of 4-hour nights of sleep, etc. But, thanks to the largesse of the National Park Service, I am the beneficiary of one important benefit that's directly tied to my increasing decrepitude.

Indeed, the Park Service offers America's seniors the best environmental and economic bargain of which I'm aware.

Here's the deal: upon turning 62 years of age, any American can purchase a lifetime pass to access the entire national park system for the princely sum of ...(wait for it)...\$20.

Inasmuch as a one-day entrance pass to Yellowstone National Park currently costs \$30, you get a sense of what a terrific deal the lifetime Senior Pass really is. So if you haven't yet reached 62 years of age, my sympathy. (But you too can benefit, at least indirectly: a Senior Pass makes a terrific, inexpensive holiday or birthday gift to your favorite elderly parent, grandparent or law professor.)

But, if you act quickly, the National Park Service is offering you an even better bargain than I've received as a proud Senior Pass owner.

The Park Service recently announced that in celebration of its 100th birthday, it is offering **free admission** to all NPS sites that normally charge an entrance fee **through this Sunday, August 28th**. And even if you can't drop everything to rush off to your favorite national park this weekend, all is not lost. Later this year the Park Service is also offering free entrance days to the national parks on National Public Lands Day (September 24th) and Veterans Day (November 11th). Talk about bargains.

But it can be argued that the creation of the National Park Service and the 400+ units of the national park system represent an enormous economic, environmental and spiritual bargain for us all. Author Wallace Stegner called the national parks "the best idea we ever had."

And the Public Broadcasting System—to whom Americans are indebted for commissioning Ken Burns' superb documentary series, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea"—aptly notes on its website, "[N]o activity of the federal government engenders such universal support and public loyalty" as does operation of the national park system.

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt spent what he later described as a marvelous, blissful two weeks in Yellowstone, America's first national park. Most of that time he rode, hiked and camped in the Yellowstone backcountry, accompanied only by the park superintendent.

But just before he departed Yellowstone, Roosevelt formally dedicated a massive arch that was then still being constructed, at the northern entrance to Yellowstone. That monument, now known to all as the Roosevelt Arch, bears a simple but eloquent inscription that applies equally to the entire national park system Americans cherish so dearly: 'For the benefit and enjoyment of the people.'



The Roosevelt Arch, marking the northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park.