



A 1922 visitor to Yellowstone showing off her national parks stickers; two visiting nimrods at Crater Lake, 1940; young history buffs at Antietam National Battlefield, 1961 (photographer Jack E. Boucher); admiring the view from the Blue Ridge Parkway (photographer Abbie Rowe); NPS service rangers conduct a tour of the main cell block on Alcatraz Island in Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1980 (photographer Richard Frear); a raised boardwalk increased accessibility in 1974 at Fire Island National Seashore. National Park Service Historic Photo Collection.



# Passport to America's Past

By Lucy Hough '12 BA

Of the 401 units of the U.S. National Park System, NMU history professor Russell Magnaghi and his wife, retired art and design professor Diane Kordich, have seen all but 50. The two travel every summer to add more stamps to their National Parks Passport, and they've learned a thing or two about the parks and the best way to travel them over the years.

Asking Magnaghi to pick his favorite national park is like asking someone to pick their favorite color, movie or song.

"That's a question that a lot of people ask me. What's the best park?" Magnaghi says. "It sort of depends on the park, on the circumstance."

Magnaghi explains that experiences at the parks are so different that it's hard to lump them together. For instance, at Acadia National Park in Maine, after hiking all day and traveling

through the mountains, he and Diane came upon Jordan Pond, sat on some quintessentially New England Adirondack chairs and sipped tea. That experience is much different than one might have at Kalaupapa National Historical Park on the Hawaiian Island of Molokai, where visitors have to travel on horseback to the remote former leper colony.

"There's an experience for each park," Magnaghi says. He's not only a visitor, but an expert. He teaches a special topics history class at

Northern on the national parks. It was created at the urging of Jim Northrup, former superintendent of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, and offered in conjunction with the Ken Burns documentary on the parks. Each time he's taught it, the class fills with 20-30 students, even though it doesn't fulfill any liberal arts requirements. Essentially, the students are taking it because they want to.

Something that Magnaghi said his students are often surprised by is the variety of properties that the system operates. The national park units include 43,162 miles of shoreline, 2,461 national historic landmarks and historic homes, 49 national heritage areas, battlefields, archeological sites and natural areas.

"They're familiar with the grand parks such as Yosemite, Yellowstone and Grand Canyon," Magnaghi says, "but then when we get into some of the smaller parks and some of the things the government is doing to promote the education of the American public, they're surprised."

That's what Magnaghi appreciates the most about the parks—their commitment to educating visitors. That can include environmental, history or archaeological lessons. He said that he and his wife have gone to some of the parks that feature fossils and he's walked in thinking that he would be bored, but he was pleasantly surprised.

"When you go to the parks, they're set up in such a way that you

leave having a better appreciation, saying 'Gee I'm glad we went there.' A lot of time people tend to not even think about the education, but it becomes a very important part of what the park is doing and presenting to the public."

Magnaghi has also worked as a park ranger at Castillo De San Marcos in St. Augustine, Fla. As a child, his parents brought him and his siblings to parks like Yosemite and the Oregon Caves, so he has seen firsthand how some of the parks have changed over the years. He remembers that at Camp Curry in Yosemite, a park ranger used to stand on a bluff about 3,000 feet up and a ranger at their camp would shout, "Let the fire fall."

"Instead of a waterfall, you had this wall of fire coming down," Magnaghi recalls, adding that they made it so that it wouldn't burn anything. "Nothing like that exists today. The parks service ended that because they got rid of any unnatural activity in the park, but it was pretty spectacular and very different."

The evolution of the parks is part of what makes the parks so "organic," he says. Even today, properties are growing or being added to the system. As new parks emerge, Magnaghi and Kordich plan to welcome them and add a stamp to the book. ■

## Magnaghi's Park Tips:

Be informed. Buy the comprehensive books about the parks to learn more about their histories. And for people who are interested in hitting all of the national parks eventually, get a map that notes each park's location so you can group ones in a region together in a visit.

Plan ahead. It's often hard to make a hotel or even campsite reservation at or near the park weeks beforehand. Plan as much as a year in advance.

Get directions. Smaller park sites may be difficult to find because of limited or confusing signage. Look online or at maps ahead of time.

Embrace the whole experience. Stay at the park's lodges if you have the means to do so, because often they are original to the area, or at least have a meal at one of the lodges.

### Did you know?

In 1875, Mackinac Island was the second national park established by the federal government, following Yellowstone National Park. Twenty years later it was transferred to the state and remains a state park. Magnaghi says the NPS transferred it to the state because "it's beautiful, but not monumental or awe-inspiring."



Magnaghi's National Parks Passport



Russ Magnaghi in his days as a park ranger at Castillo de San Marco National Historic Monument, Fla., summer 1969.