

Parks — and Homes in Snake River Valley

By J. G. CAMP



Headwaters of Snake river above Jackson lake, looking toward Yellowstone national park

It is a wise city, state, or nation, that provides parks as playgrounds for its people, but the first essential in any community is to develop its resources to their fullest extent in order that the citizens may be prosperous. Until the last few years there has been no question of there being sufficient farm land to supply all the necessary food and clothing for the people of the country, but to those who know the West and have had a part in its development, a serious problem is facing us which must be solved in the near future.

Our population is increasing rapidly, but the possibilities of increasing our farming and stock raising areas are limited. There are the swamp lands that may be drained and the arid lands that may be irrigated. It is the development of the latter that we wish to discuss, particularly the Snake river valley of Idaho.

This valley extends half way down the eastern side of the state and all the way across the south end. In the valley proper and its tributaries there has been two eras of development. First, that where it was easy to divert water for irrigation. These works were individual ditches, cooperative ditches of a few farmers or private com-

panies who sold water to the farmers. Second, the larger, more difficult projects, requiring large capital to construct dams, large carrying canals and reservoirs to supplement the short-water period. These were built partly by private capital under the Carey act, and partly by the United States Reclamation Service.

The third period will be the development of one large project of half a million acres, the adding of pumping units to several of our large projects and supplying water during the short-water period to projects that now do not have a full season's water.

It will necessitate the storing of all of the water of Snake river during the flood period and the non-irrigating time in reservoirs, and its distribution under an equitable and comprehensive plan that will permit the largest possible development of these lands. Even then there will be over a million acres of land left dry and valueless.

This development was anticipated 18 years ago by the United States Reclamation Service. In 1902 they sent a survey party, of which I was a member, to the headwaters of Snake river to make a reconnaissance survey of all possible reser-

voir sites. This work was continued in 1903 and 1904 under my charge.

For the information of our Eastern friends I will give a brief description of the headwaters of the Snake river. The North fork heads in Henry's lake, just west of the west line of Yellowstone national park and runs south a few miles west of this boundary until it passes the southwest corner of the park. The Middle or Fall river branch drains the southwestern part of the park and an area south of the south line of the park and then joins in the North fork. The South fork heads in Shoshone and Lewis lakes in the south-central part of the park, runs a little east of south until it passes over the south line, thence through Jackson lake and southwestward to its junction with the North fork.

The reclamation surveys showed three reservoir sites on the North fork outside of the park lines—one site at the Fall river meadows on the Fall river branch in the park, one at Lewis lake in the park and one at Jackson lake on the South fork outside of the park.

Realizing that there would be opposition to reservoirs in the park, a very thorough investigation was made of all possible sites outside of the park on the Middle and South forks, but while there are plenty of dam sites, there are no basins behind them of sufficient capacity to make them at all feasible. I am aware that writers in a prominent publication have asserted with much positiveness to the contrary, but my statements are based on actual surveys by competent engineers. Their assertions are laymen's guesses on a very deceiving country. To the average persons not familiar with surveying, when they stand on a steep hillside at a dam site, looking up these mountain valleys, it appears that a hundred-foot dam would back water up the valley for a long ways. If they were to look through an engineer's level, they would discover that the floor of the valley was almost like the roof of a house. If these persons wish to question these statements, the proper way to do is to prove by actual surveys and estimates that they are incorrect. Statements based on anything less are unfair.

The fact that there are no other possible sites to substitute for these in the park brings us fairly and squarely facing the problem. If we are permitted to use these sites, we can develop our lands to the fullest possible extent. If we are not allowed this privilege, we can only store one-third of the water and develop one-third of our land.

These writers assume that the Eastern people only are interested in the park as a pleasure ground and that those of the states adjoining the park are only interested in the park for its storage possibilities for their selfish financial profit. Both of these assumptions are wrong. Owing to the distance and expense of the trip, a

comparatively small per centage of the Eastern people outside of the wealthy ever visit the park. In the adjoining states of Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho, nearly every one who owns a Ford has visited it and repeats the visit. Each of these states have spent millions of dollars for roads to make it possible for their citizens and the Eastern people to visit the park in safety and comfort. They prize it very highly and would be the first to object to any encroachment that would destroy its beauty. But they are practical people and wish to develop their lands, and they cannot see that these reservoirs will destroy the beauty of the park, nor in any way injure the game.

Another wrong assumption must be corrected. This is not a part of a big money-making scheme. These reservoirs would be constructed and operated by the United States Reclamation Service. The land is mostly owned by the government and would be homesteaded. The individual land owners, who will be limited to not more than 160 acres, and the homesteaders, will form an irrigation district under the state laws, issue bonds to secure money to build their canal systems and to pay the government for the construction of the reservoirs under long-time payments.

Now, having cleared away false assumptions and misstatements, let us consider this problem. At Lewis lake we are told that a reservoir would cover a hot spring basin, destroy much timber, cover part of the park highway, and destroy the fish.

The hot springs consist of a group of no exceptional beauty, surrounded by one of the worst mosquito-infested swamps in the park. It is on the opposite side of the lake from the highway. Very few people visit it once and none twice. The raising of the lake surface would submerge about 2,000 acres of scrubby pine, cottonwood and willows. If after this is killed it were cleared off, it would be replaced by an overflow meadow that would not detract from the beauty of the lake. This reservoir would flood three miles of the park highway, but that could be easily rebuilt a little higher up on the mountain slope. The expense of this would, of course, be a part of the cost of the reservoir.

The assertion that the building of this reservoir would kill many fish is a puzzle. These fish are ordinary fish that live in water. Shoshone lake, in which they live part of the time, is reported to be many hundreds of feet deep. Just how adding a few feet to the depth could injure them is too deep for me.

Now as to the Fall river meadows, there has been so much published about this location that those who are not familiar with that locality may well be in doubt what to believe.

Fall river and its branches drain a triangular basin, about 25 miles wide, at the

south line of the park. It extends north in a point to Herring lake, the head of the river, on the southeast side of the Pitchstone plateau. There are ten branches, each with its valley made of some meadow and some swamp. In these are islands of trees and the trees crowd down from the intervening ridges into the flat in places. Most of these are typical mountain valleys, rather narrow and with from 30 to 50 feet fall to the mile, which unfits them for reservoirs. The Fall river meadow is an exception. Either an eruption or glacial action has formed a half circle of low ridges and hills from the ridge on the east of this valley to the ridge on the west, enclosing a basin of 8,000 acres. This has acted as a dam and in the ages has caused this basin to fill up until the bottom is nearly level.

The lower end of the basin is drained by two good-sized creek channels and by middle summer it is a dry meadow. Earlier in the season it is impassible. The upper part of the basin is swamp the year around, owing to numerous springs that come out of the foot of the mountain. From this it can be seen how one person would describe it as a swamp and another as a dry prairie.

One big indictment in regard to this site is that the turning of this meadow into a lake would deprive 500 moose of all their feed, thus compelling them to go out of the park where they would be killed. It is doubtful if there are over fifty moose in this portion of the park. Each of the nine other valleys of this basin are equally good pasture for moose, elk and deer. There is so much more feed than game to eat it that it is seldom one can see where they have grazed. Thousands of acres of grass grow up each year, mature, die and fall down unused. Under these circumstances it is absurd to make the above assertion.

It is equally absurd to state that we would destroy the fishing. Bechler creek, which passes through this basin, extends miles above the proposed reservoir site, leaving plenty of room for fish and fishermen.

In a recent article in a prominent publication the numerous water falls of this part of the park were described and the inference made that this reservoir would destroy them. It also tried to show that certain advocates of the reservoir were mistaken in stating that there was no fine scenery in this part of the park.

The writer was accurate in his descriptions, but a careful reading will show that even he was unable to tell of any scenic features actually in the basin or that would in any way be destroyed by the building of this reservoir. The building of it would not in any way mar any of the scenery, and it would enable thousands to visit it in comfort, where now only the most venturesome reach it by a difficult trail. To do this work it would be necessary to build a good road in from the railroad on the south. This writer intimates that the park officials may soon build such a road. In 1902 the settlers of Idaho had a fair wagon road cut in from Marysville and the park authorities were urged to improve it and keep it in repair, but they would not do so, nor permit the settlers to continue to care for it.

Now, our friends in the East and Middle West, you have the facts. If we can construct reservoirs at these two sites in the park, we can transform 500,000 acres of worthless sagebrush into 10,000 farms that will have a population of 50,000 and produce \$25,000,000 of crops annually. Is this not sufficient recompense for the small damage it would do to the scenery at Lewis lake and none at the meadows?

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Reclamation and Reclamationists

By FRED R. REED, of Idaho

A document dated September 30, styled "Bulletin No. 11," and purporting to be issued by the "National Parks Association, 1512 H street, N. W., Washington, D. C.," headed "The War on the Yellowstone," has been before me for some time, but as the copy received bore no signature of any responsible individual and is full of misstatements, bias, and evidence of lack of knowledge as to facts, the contents were not given serious attention.

However, since the Literary Digest credits this article to Robert Sterling Yard, executive secretary of the above named association, and has dignified it by quoting therefrom at some length in its valuable columns, in the name of common justice and fair play to all, I take this opportunity of correcting some erroneous impressions that might have been made by certain paragraphs of this bulletin, upon the minds of those not thoroughly familiar with the facts.

In the first place, it seems incredible, at this day and date, that a man attempting to voice the sentiments of any considerable body of progressive and thoughtful citizens, should stultify his own remarks by referring in a disparaging manner to the class of men who, by their untiring devotion and labor, have made possible one of the brightest pages in American history, the reclamation of the once so-called Great American Desert.

Our government has established the United States Reclamation Service, which has made homes for 400,000 people—and they are real homes. A. P. Davis, the director in charge, is a big, broad, capable man, and the people of the West do not think that his motives are doubtful or that he is discriminating in favor of anybody. Why should not the writer of this bulletin go and thresh this matter out thoroughly with Mr. Davis and get some facts, instead of rushing into print in a manner that might arouse feeling between the East and West which would be very detrimental to all parts of the country?

But we have always with us a class of mind having zeal without knowledge, that sees ruin in every step of progress. Referring to the antagonism from the old states which ever attend the development of the new, N. J. Sinnott of Oregon has called our attention to the opposition brought forth in 1852 by Andrew Johnson's homestead law. The following quaint but authentic quotation is from the Record:

"This wholesale robbery of the old states for the benefit of the new should be denounced by every honest man the land over.

Will not the good sense of the senate strangle this political monstrosity? Besides the injury done to the old states by depriving them of their property in the public lands and draining off their population, the agrarian character of the bill is most objectionable. It is the most flagrant act of depredation on the public domain yet attempted by demagogues. . . . The people approve not such agrarian and Utopian schemes."

You smile at these words referring to those who developed the entire Mississippi valley, yet how strangely like they are to the words now being applied to the brave spirits who are giving the best of their lives to wrest another equally priceless empire from the wilds of nature for the glory and upbuilding of our United States!

If the writer of Bulletin No. 11 had a better understanding of our Western problems, he would not so readily malign the motives of those who bespeak a Western man for secretary of the interior. Anyone who has any conception of the value and magnitude of our other reclamation projects will readily recognize how far-fetched and untenable is the point Mr. Yard attempts to make by representing that any Western state would even secretly base the claim of a man's fitness for a cabinet post on the strength of his favoring one or two local project propositions, at the sacrifice and expense of the remainder of the United States. No state could afford to sponsor such an absurdity, and such a man would be as offensive to the West as he could possibly be to the East.

It is this very local view, this sectionalism, that we wish to steer clear of when we ask for a Western man to be secretary of the interior. We want a man who will see our country as a whole, not one who thinks the real United States is bounded by the Atlantic, the Gulf, the St. Lawrence and Mississippi rivers, and that all the remainder is frontier, except a few play-places for vacationing.

In his repeated allusions to the fact that some Mormon settlers would be benefited by the Fall river project, this gentleman also lays himself liable of being understood as taking the very un-American attitude of making covert appeal to the possible religious prejudices of his readers. Nor would we like to infer, from his great interest in the moose and his seeming indifference to the fate of the Mormons and their neighbors, that he is really more concerned for the welfare and preservation of the moose than he is for the crops and lives of the Mormon settlers; and this is not to be understood as implying that our moose and

other valuable animals should not be protected. We can do both, but could hardly afford to let sentimentality supplant true sentiment and American Christian justice.

I am not a Mormon, but like my friend, Franklin K. Lane of California, I know the value of the Mormon people. In the June number of the National Geographical Magazine, Mr. Lane says: "Never speak disrespectfully of the Mormon church. It has as law-abiding, steady, hard-working, kindly a group of people as will be found anywhere this round globe over. Brigham Young may not have been a prophet of Almighty God, but he worked a miracle when he crossed from the Missouri river over that desert, leading his band of a few hundred followers with their pushcarts going out into that unknown waste, and turned the land that lies around Salt Lake City into a garden."

I might add that these Mormon settlers referred to particularly by Mr. Yard gave their sons just as freely to the American expeditionary forces as did our people of the East, and among those Mormon boys were numbered heroes second to none, lest it be that son of the Southland, Alvin C. York, member also of another unfashionable religious body of good people.

We of the West now rejoice in the fact that we have a president-elect who has voiced the true vision of what we are seeking in these words (August 31):

"I undertake to say that there is no region in all the world whose resources could be developed to the utmost, with greater benefit to the world as a whole, and America in particular, than our mountain West.

We have come to the time when the problem of our Far West is one of wisely directed development . . . development that will constitute the wise form of conservation. . . . Conservation, it must always be kept in mind, does not consist in locking up the treasurehouse of our national resources. That would be the most objectionable form of waste. Conservation in its truest sense consists in the judicious use of the resources that are ours. . . . Coal we leave lying in the mine, remains for the use of those who may come later on, while the water which flows unused to the sea is lost beyond reclaim. We must make our mountain West a country of homes for people who need homes . . . and the work must be so done that it will inure most to the advantage of society and the development of the independent, self-sustaining family unit in our citizenship.

"Reclamation, as I have viewed it, means a good deal more than merely putting water on arid land. There are regions in which it means draining the water away from swamps. There are other regions in which it means restoring forests that have been thoughtlessly destroyed. There are still others in which it means frank recognition of the fact that forests have gone forever,

that stumps of cut-over lands must be removed and the soil utilized for agriculture."

To people living in sections of the country where water is so plentiful as often to be a nuisance, and sometimes a serious menace, it may seem nothing short of wantonness and vandalism even to suggest considering the use of a drop of national park water for either irrigation or water power. But each section of the United States has an individual topography, which must be studied carefully before righteous judgment can be rendered, and there is a fundamental law of necessity underlying all statute. For instance, you cannot buy the land around a man's farm and enclose it, leaving this man no roadway. So, in the Western country, where streams are few, to put a perpetual ban on using certain natural reservoir or power sites might in some instances forever close to development great valleys of priceless value to the nation. Each case where request is made for park reservoir or power sites must be tried and decided solely and absolutely on its inherent merits and the facts.

The government will protect its own property. From what I know of the character of Senator Harding and those he will associate himself with, it would be a very hard matter during the coming administration to put over any underhanded work and hurt a national park, be it East or West, North or South; and if any prominent Western reclamationists had ever entertained the thought of actually destroying or desecrating the real beauties of either of our national parks, the people of the West would be the first to repudiate the plan, as no one appreciates more than we that these parks are among our most valuable assets.

But in this great Westland, He who "bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds," has written to them this message on our sentinel peaks: "Thou shalt not pass." So the great breasts of our mountain ranges store up in snows what is literally the water of life for valleys great and small. Those of the Colorado, the Columbia, and the Snake are each an empire. That these valleys might have all the fertility of which earth is capable, the rains that have leached so much of the plant food from older soils have never fallen on these virgin acres. But, awaiting the day of the people's need, the same hand that laid the snow in the mountains, hollowed the vast reservoir sites no man could fashion.

Are we then, who have the vision of this providence, to be accused of blasphemy because we desire to use it to the full for the blessing of mankind? Must we sit idly by and be content to see this immeasurable talent wrapped in the dusty napkin of ignorance and buried under the mould of conservatism, or may we by the intelligent cooperation of our government seek the reward of diligent servants?