A scant eleven months ago I was at this spot, en route with family Volkswagen bus and gear, to the campgrounds at Tuolumne Meadows. I was innocent; I looked forward to the trip with pleasure, and I looked back upon it with satisfaction.

At that time I was only a traveler—a citizen squeezing national parks into a too-brief trip to the Democratic convention. The convention over, I was happy and relaxed as I came here, and I didn't dream that my next visit to such a beautiful place could be so different.

Tension mars this occasion, and I feel trepidation. I am in the middle of struggle and controversy, called upon to declare myself, as it were, between points of view which vary, even within my Department, from unalloyed pride to the expressed opinion that the road is an "egregious error".

I'm tempted here to treat my delicate task as did the politician called to comment upon the unlovely child. "Say," he exclaims, "that IS a baby!"

For it is a fact, for good or ill, that here there IS a road. Should it have been here? Should it have been this steep, this wide, this this, or this that? The answers will not alter the reality that here it is, as and where it is. We are here to dedicate it, not to break ground for it.

I've no desire to second guess, to review the various judgments made, to expound on what I might have done.

My mission, instead, is to try to blow the whistle on the still fired-up argument by asking the antagonists to consider the consequences of its prolongation. I do this fully conscious of the perils of peacemaking.

I sympathize with those whose sorrow and disappointment prompt them to suggest "Remember Tenaya!!" as a slogan. The inference of such a slogan can only be that the public interest was here betrayed. If it has been, well 'tis done. My question is, do we want Tenaya Lake's beautiful name and fame to be contributed to the gazetteer of symbol places—Pearl Harbor, Yalta, Hells Canyon, Dunkirk and Little Rock—where emotion blots out any thought of the place itself?

Of course, I have no right to ask anyone not to make Tenaya a symbol word of betrayal of park values if that conviction is truly held. But to those who feel this strongly enough to reject my plea that this is an unworthy use of the name of a place still so serene and lovely, I ask that you consider the human implications.
Roads don't build themselves; a betrayal requires a human betrayer. If you think that Tenaya is equivalent to Teapot Dome, if you think that the builder of this road is guilty of anything more venal than honest disagreement with you, then I respectfully offer a couple of alternative slogans which leave beautiful Tenaya Lake out of it. How about "Wirth Must Go!" or "Can Connie!"?

That's the human heart of the matter--Connie Wirth's reputation stands on a base of public service broader than this road. No one here or anywhere would or could suggest that he has ever been motivated by any but the highest aspirations for the Park Service. What this whole business has in rich abundance is the X-factor. The X-factor, which creeps into politics and pervades the conservation movement, is responsible for curious logic--we reserve our harshest invective, our most vigorous denunciations, our choicest epithets not for the enemy but for the slightest deviations from the true gospel by our friends.

When I assumed my present office, I undertook to supervise three of our major domestic programs. The management of the public domain has caused my predecessors much heartbreak and insomnia. One only has to remember Teapot Dome and Al Sarena (symbol-words) to know why that portion of the job looked dangerous, difficult and full of conflict. Looking after Indian affairs was, if anything, even less reassuring. Cabinet officers and their aides have been tomahawked on that front for nearly a century. With these prospects before me, therefore, responsibility for the Park Service seemed to be one of those happy compensations that one expects in order to balance out the bitter potions served in this life we lead.

And I still think that this impression should have been borne out. After all, the parks and recreation promotion people I had known were of a singularly high type--motivated by the finest of ideals, liberal in their contributions of personal time and funds, magnificently unselfish in their desire to serve future generations by conserving present resources. Yet, after four months in office, this nice parks function has been the forum of more contention, more complaints, more feeling bordering on bitterness than both of the other activities combined. I must confess that this experience has left me definitely chastened.

I can blame all this on the X-factor. The administration of the National Park Service is not devoid of room for honest men to disagree. Subjectivity is present, and subjective men must make judgments. Other men, equally subjective, will review these judgments, hailing points of agreement as evidence of priceless wisdom, but denouncing points of disagreement as evidence of heresy, stubbornness or stupidity.

But remember this! The National Park Service values the wilderness more than any other group of public officials in our land. Its mission is "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

You all know, as I do, that no other public agency has this mission spelled out so purely. Are you going to sacrifice the overall mission of the Park Service on the altar of disagreement over the way a particular project has been handled?
Shouldn't we instead take the X-factor out? Let us here resolve to look to the future. Since the road is now built, let the future make the final judgment. Today the fresh wound of a new road is raw and bleeding, through the forest, around the shoulders of the mountains, along Tenaya Lake. But how quickly nature starts the healing work. Already, Superintendent Preston tells me, marmots have taken up residence in the rockfill below the parking area. Native plants will soon clothe the banks of the cuts in the forest, and will grow to the very edges of the shoulders. Coyotes have been seen walking across the road and up the rock face above you. The wild things are no longer suspicious.

One judgment the Park Service has made which I think will stand the test of time is that the automobile is here to stay. If they are right, there will in the future have to be more roads--some of them will involve painful, hard choices.

So the issue is not really this or any particular road, but in a larger sense the ways and means of coping with the pressure of the American people to achieve an outdoor experience. Given the rate of population growth, the greater buying power of Americans, the additional leisure time they have, and the fantastic mobility they are achieving--four forces pushing in the same direction--we will have in four decades ten times the demand for outdoor recreation we had less than ten years ago.

Every park administrator--Federal, State, or local--knows that his task is not to stem this tide of people at his gates. In these terms, naught but failure awaits him. Visits to this park are up 20% over last year, and the increase which bursts the seams of our already cramped facilities cannot be turned away, turned back, dissuaded, or argued with. Each new visitor has as much right to be here as the next, or the last.

In Washington, Philadelphia, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles, even Boise--everywhere in our land--the freeways march across the tops of the buildings toward the open country.

Yosemite accommodates about one out of every four campers in the entire park system.

In our present framework of thinking, disputation will inevitably increase in pitch, volume and violence until we consume each other's morale and allow those who would despoil the wilderness to take over.

By now my message is clear to you. Whatever our well-intentioned differences may be, there is a course upon which we can all agree and thereby obey the injunction to conserve for future generations. Let us unite on the goal of making our park resources match the needs of our society. If you would preserve the right to enjoy the wilderness, you must expand wilderness reservations. If you do not want high density use of existing national parks, then you must provide more and varied kinds of parks, beaches, camping grounds and other outdoor recreation facilities for the exploding populace. This is no self-serving plea for expansion of our National Park Service alone. This expansion has a part to be played by State and local governments as well. As Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall put it recently:
"...America's families should have opportunities for outdoor recreation within easy reach of their homes. And, properly, they should rely for such recreation on their State and local governments. State and local action to set aside land for outdoor recreation would take pressure off the national parks, but more important would be the benefits which carefully developed open land would bring to the communities themselves and to their residents.

"In most areas of our country, enough land is still available if we act now. But in the heavily industrialized parts of America, the only hope of salvaging what remains lies in inspired, and inspiring, leadership from our governors and mayors."

Remember: to the extent that we give people a choice as to the kind of recreational facility they want to use, then they will be selective and the wilderness variety of park will be left to those who truly prefer it and want to preserve it. Under present conditions we are forcing people to use this type of facility because it is the only kind of park available to them--although they might well prefer a highly developed metropolitan open space.

Our world has changed. Whether we like it or not, our parks must change; if they do not, the public will force us to change them to meet its needs. A generation ago, Yosemite was remote from population centers--inaccessibly serene and majestic in its grandeur. Today it can be the objective of a weekend jaunt from the metropolis that is Coastal California. We cannot and will not hold back the flood. If you would slow down the inevitable rate of change then you must provide safety valves--Point Reyes and the Channel Islands in the national system and the many proposals your State and local authorities have proposed. I solicit your support for these facilities in order that we all may enjoy the full legacy left to us by the National Parks Act.

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