

Talk about a labor of love. As a historian of the National Park System and a trustee of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, I've kept tabs for thirty years on Ranger Doug's noble hunt to unearth original New Deal-era national park posters. He has done a miraculous job as a prowling detective and modern-day print designer to assemble this exquisite volume of "lost" WPA poster art. Once Ranger Doug had discovered twelve of the original fourteen posters, he and artists Mike Dupille and Brian Maebius were off to the races reproducing the originals and designing gallant new posters for scores of NPS units—following in the footsteps of the WPA and CCC artists before them. If you read this book and do not want to see the spouting geysers at Yellowstone or the gentle manatees at Biscayne, you are numb to the natural world.

Ranger Doug first got the bug to curate a full collection of the WPA-style posters when he was a seasonal ranger in the early 1970s at Grand Teton National Park. In preparation for an upcoming visit by then President Richard Nixon to Wyoming's drop-dead gorgeous 310,000-acre park, he and other park staff were tasked with removing unwanted clutter from various buildings. When cleaning out a storage barn, he stumbled upon a dusty poster that read: "Meet the Ranger Naturalist at Jenny Lake Museum." It was a vintage silk screen WPA poster that featured Jenny Lake with the jagged-peak Tetons as the dramatic backdrop. Blessed with a historian's curiosity, soon Ranger Doug decided to locate all of the original New Deal-era national park posters for posterity. And then with a giant leap, he began learning how to design new silk screens for other NPS units.

Because the Poster Division within the Federal Art Project printed one hundred copies of these fourteen colorful poster designs between 1938 and 1942, Ranger Doug understandably thought his hunt would be easy. After all, even before eBay or Amazon, it wasn't hard for collectors to find WPA field guides (even with dust jackets intact) for purchase. Word of mouth between various New Deal artifact collectors in the twentieth century was strong. Antiquarians could lead prospective buyers like Ranger Doug to the prizes sought. Furthermore, the NPS could, he falsely assumed, direct him to archival copies. Ranger Doug's hobbyist assumptions proved naive. Original WPA posters had been printed for quick advertisement, stapled to bulletin boards, and affixed to roadside restroom doors. Nothing about them pointed to the relics being coveted art items in

the twenty-first century. It took twenty-five years to recover and reproduce the original fourteen prints—two of which (Great Smoky Mountains and Wind Cave) have never been found.

Of all the posters, both the historical reproductions and contemporary designs, my personal favorite is Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. The poster, first designed in 2008, depicts the deepest freshwater lake in the United States. Carefully chosen shades of blue, lavender, white, and olive green enhance the perfect composition. If the purpose of Ranger Doug’s art is to convince citizens like me to “See America” by visiting the featured national park, then this Crater Lake set piece worked wonders on my intrepid soul.

Yet the Sequoia National Park print is the one I most covet, in part because right now I’m trying to save the Sierra’s sequoias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) from the ravages of climate change. In addition to the pitch-perfect color scheme, I also adore the 1940 Ford Woody station wagon pulling a teardrop trailer with the headlights shining on the 247-foot-tall General Sherman Tree. This 2007 poster transports me back to the days when Franklin D. Roosevelt, my all-time hero, was in the White House, and national park units like Mammoth Cave (Kentucky) and Isle Royale (Michigan) entered into the Interior Department system.

I hope readers will appreciate the grueling layman’s hours Ranger Doug has undertaken to produce this lavishly illustrated book of silk screen images. Decades of his commitment to the “lost art” has reaped bountiful fruits. This volume is the willful by-product of Ranger Doug the worker bee: a super-citizen and Alaskan naturalist, a lover of the New Deal, and an admirer of graphic art. In a world full of fleeting social media, this book shines like a beacon of integrity. Just looking at the majesty of the White Sands National Park poster—another personal favorite—presses me to fuel my Jeep, give GPS a directive order, and whisk my family to sunbaked New Mexico. Readers will agree that these posters have the transformative power to turn deskbound workers into national park explorers.

The incandescent magic of the national park posters included in *Ranger of the Lost Art* is enduring. Ranger Doug, gifted with a sharp curator’s eye, works to promote the beauty and preservation of America’s natural heirlooms. Not only is this a stunning coffee-table book, but the history and art presented in this hybrid volume are a source of inspiration. Check out the ten-color mix on the Hawaii Haleakala National Park poster and salute Ranger Doug from afar. This is his best-selling WPA poster innovation yet, and it’s easy to see why. Who wouldn’t want to hang a framed poster of Hawaii’s volcanic wonder, so extraordinary in color and detail, on their wall and have this incredible companion book in their personal library.

Douglas Brinkley  
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Austin, Texas



While the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench into most of our daily lives, it provided me a perfect opportunity to hunker down during the winter of 2020–21 in my isolated, one-room log cabin in Alaska and put down on paper everything I knew about this art. This winter lasted seventeen months in my case.

My search for original Works Progress Administration (WPA) posters has taken more than forty years and continues today. My quest for the story behind these prints has been even more elusive. In the late 1980s, the Library of Congress (LOC) had a paucity of information on WPA poster art. A decade later, the NPS History Collection (HFCA) provided me with a very sporadic history—perhaps a dozen monthly reports and half a dozen photos. These scarce records were the basis for my winter project.

That winter, however, word reached me at my cabin that a complete set of records likely existed in the San Bruno National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility near San Francisco. The facility was closed due to the pandemic, but it reopened a year later, and in November 2021 I received a four-day opportunity to comb through the archive. I wasn’t disappointed; here was the entire story.

The San Bruno discovery satisfied my curiosity. I found monthly and annual reports spanning more than a decade, and many new photographs and office records right down to the loan of a box of paperclips returned to the Western Regional Headquarters of the National Park Service in San Francisco. Fortunately for history, the Park Service kept good records, and everything—even the paperclips—was accounted for. It was details like this that helped put the pieces of this story together.