

Douglas Leen was born in Bellingham, Washington, in 1946 and graduated from Lake Washington High School in 1964. He spent two years in Vietnam building airstrips with the Navy Seabees, before attending the University of Washington and graduating in 1970 with a degree in geology. He spent the next seven years working as a seasonal park ranger, in mountain rescue, at Grand Teton National Park. In 1975, he entered premedical studies and was accepted by the University of Washington School of Dentistry a year later, graduating as a doctor of dental surgery (DDS) in 1979. He ran a private practice in Seattle’s colorful Pike Place Market for 20 years before entering the public health sector in Alaska. There he worked in remote Native communities, beginning in Barrow and later serving Southeast Alaska on a restored 1899 tugboat. In 2004–5, he was the dentist for the US Antarctic Program at McMurdo Station and South Pole. Returning to Alaska, he moved onshore and restored a 10-acre waterfront homestead—the mythical South Kupreanof Yacht Club. He retired in 2014 and spent the next several years traveling around national parks in an antique Airstream, giving talks in NPS auditoriums and at campfire programs about the contents of this book. Never reticent, he has shaken many hands in both houses of Congress and in the Oval Office. He currently spends summers off-grid in Kupreanof, Alaska, and winters on-grid in Tucson, Arizona. He plays classical piano, has visited about 45 countries, and has learned five foreign languages, yet he still struggles with English.



National Parks, WPA-CCC Art, History



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.

—Douglas Brinkley, author and historian

WHEN DOUGLAS LEEN UNCOVERED an old Works Progress Administration poster of Grand Teton National Park fifty years ago, he knew he had stumbled across a great “lost” treasure—a work of art as well as a testament to the foresight of a New Deal program from the Great Depression. We all have him to thank for embarking on the long, tireless quest to find more of them and then re-create them in all their beauty. This book not only displays the results, but also tells the story behind them. This book is a national treasure itself.

—Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*

THE ABILITY OF ART TO INSPIRE IS AGELESS. And so it remains with our national parks. In no small measure, artists saved them by making them unforgettable. Their boundaries alone were never enough. Nor will today’s promises any better protect the parks without rejecting narcissism for unity. Art, Doug Leen reminds us, empowers unity, both of purpose and desire. This is no time, whatever the country’s failings, to let America the Beautiful die.

—Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*

PREPARE TO EMBARK with Ranger Doug on a treasure hunt through time, revealing our nation’s commitment to preserving the unique places that tell the story of our history, culture, and natural treasures for visitors to appreciate now and for generations to come. Nature has inspired art for as long as humans have walked this earth, and Doug Leen’s decades-long efforts honors the work of artists from the Great Depression, in partnership with contemporary artists, to capture the essence of these unique places, ignite our curiosity, and beckon us to visit.

—Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior (2013–17)

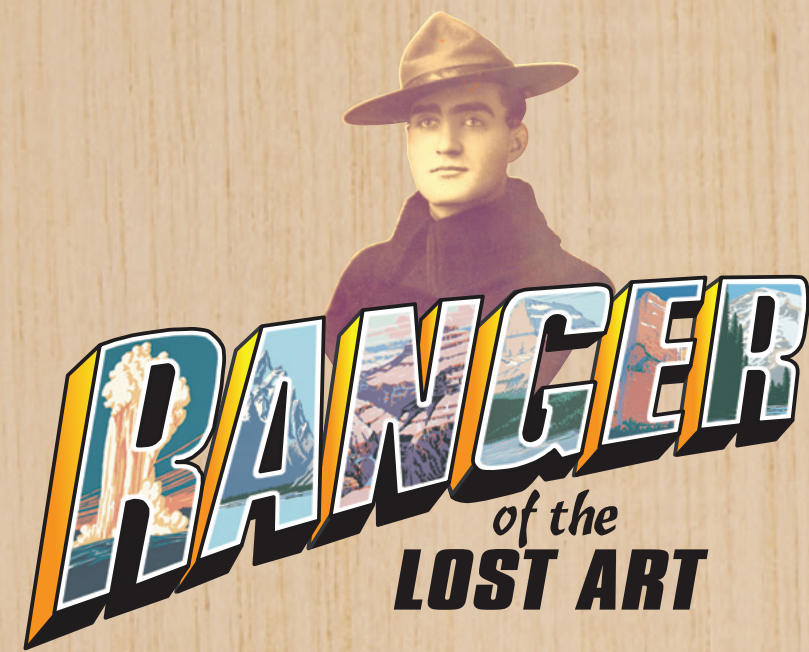
ART AND OUR NATIONAL PARKS HAVE A LONG HISTORY, starting when the landscape paintings by Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran were used to inspire a movement for their preservation. That relationship grew exponentially when the Works Progress Administration hired artists to illustrate the national parks in a series of popular posters. Unlike Moran’s famous *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, which hangs in the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the WPA posters were nearly lost until Doug Leen recognized their significance and saved them from disappearance and destruction. His new book brings them back to life, and through them, we can rekindle our relationship with our national parks.

—Jonathan B. Jarvis, Director of the National Park Service (2009–17)



Douglas Leen

RANGER OF THE LOST ART: REDISCOVERING THE WPA POSTER ART OF OUR NATIONAL PARKS



REDISCOVERING THE WPA POSTER ART OF OUR NATIONAL PARKS



Douglas Leen

with Foreword by Douglas Brinkley

Between 1938 and 1941, the National Park Service commissioned WPA artists to create a set of posters for the growing National Park System. These were not just ordinary posters but handcrafted prints using the silk screen method. The onset of WWII derailed the project, with only fourteen parks receiving their prints. After the war ended, these posters disappeared into the dustbin of history. In 1971, the author of this book, then a seasonal ranger in Grand Teton National Park, discovered one surviving print stashed in a park barn, thus beginning a lifelong search for others in this set. Only 1,400 prints were initially made, and today only forty copies have been found. Two park posters have never been located, although photos of them exist.

This book tells the story of the early history, rediscovery, and republication of this rare and unique art. The single surviving poster found in a barn served as the template, along with the chance discovery of thirteen black-and-white photographs in park archives, to laboriously reconstruct this unique set of national park poster art.

Once the historical reproductions reached the public, demand grew exponentially, and other parks sought WPA-style posters of their own parks. Today, more than sixty of our national parks now have handmade silk screen prints. The first half of this book focuses on the historic prints, and the remaining half shares how these modern designs were created.

This book also includes a miniature silk screen print of Grand Teton National Park—the first historic print in this series that inspired this book.

224 pages
Includes silk screen print
(Grand Teton National Park)
Over 400 illustrations
Includes index ribbon
Printed & bound in the USA