

The Dedication of Shenandoah National Park

By President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

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The creation of this park is one part of our great program of husbandry — the joint husbandry of our human resources and our natural resources. In every part of the country, local and state and federal authorities are engaged in preserving and developing our heritage of natural resources; and in this work they are equally conserving our priceless heritage of human values ... In bygone years we have seen the terrible tragedy of the age — the tragedy of waste. Waste of our people, waste of our land. It was neither the will nor the destiny of our nation that this waste of human and material resources should continue. That was the compelling reason that led us to put out idle people to the task of ending the waste of our land.

The involuntary idleness of thousands of young men ended three years ago when they came here to the camps on the Blue Ridge. Since then they have not been idle; and today they have ended the idleness of the Shenandoah National Park. It will be a busy and useful place in the years to come, just as the work of these young men will, I am confident, lead them to busy and useful lives in the years to come.

Our country will need many other men as they come to manhood for work like this — for other Shenandoahs.

Is it a dream? Will I perhaps be accused of an exaggerated passion for planning if I paint for you a picture? You who here know of the great usefulness to humanity which this Skyline Drive achieves from now on ... All across the nation at this time of year people are starting out for their vacations in national and state parks. They will put up at roadside camps or pitch their tents under the stars, with an open fire to cook by, with the smell of the woods and the wind in the trees. They will forget the rush and the strain of all the other long weeks of the year, and for a short time at least, the days will be good for their bodies and good for their souls. Once more they will lay hold of the perspective that comes to men and women who every morning and every night can lift up their eyes to Mother Nature.

There is another merit for all of us in the ancient tale of the giant Antaeus, who, every time he touched his mother earth, arose with strength renewed a hundredfold.

This park, therefore, together with its many sisters which are coming to completion in every part of our land, is in the largest sense a work of conservation. Through all of them we are preserving the beauty and the wealth of the hills, and the mountains and the plains and the trees and the streams. Through all of them we are maintaining useful work for our young men. Through all of them we are enriching the character and the happiness of our people.

We seek to pass on to our children a richer land — a stronger nation.

I, therefore, dedicate Shenandoah National Park to this and succeeding generations of Americans for the recreation and for the re-creation which we shall find here.