

Child's view of ranger true, but needs certain additions

By LINDA LEA
Special to Batt
Park ranger. The child in everyone thinks of a smiling man of

average age, average height, average build and short brown hair in a green uniform who will tell you not to tease the bears or where the re-

stream is.
Lon Garrison, a smiling man of 71, tall and husky with long gray hair, denim jacket and beaded necklace who will tell you what a park ranger is. He will tell you about himself.

Garrison is a lecturer for TAMU. His office on the first floor of Goodwin Hall offers certificates of appreciation and achievement on bright yellow, close walls. (The printed, official-looking ones are addressed to Lemuel A. Garrison; the hand-tooled, home-made ones are to Lon.) There are pictures of grizzly bears, geysers and big-horn sheep scattered. His desk holds an obtrusive fiberglass mold of a grizzly paw print. There is one special picture of a bear with whom you feel a certain sense of intimacy—it is signed, "Gratefully, Yogi Bear."

When asked about his education, Garrison says, "It doesn't matter, because I've had all the wrong antecedents." He graduated from Stanford with a degree in psychology because like so many other college students, he hadn't decided what he really wanted to do. It took him 10 years to get through college. "In those days, we called it 'working your way through.'"

The summer before his junior year gave him his first chance to work in the field of recreation and parks; he got a job with the National Forest Service in Alaska. He stayed there through the winter, where he met and married his present wife, Inger, and taught school before returning to Stanford to finish his degree in 1927. Because of this experience, Garrison decided he wanted to be a park ranger.

A degree in psychology is not a recommendation for working for a national park, but Lon got a job in Sequoia National Park. He started in "season work" (essentially maintenance work) while studying to be a ranger. After four years, he became a ranger for Yosemite National Park in 1932.

In the following years, he and Inger moved to seven different national parks, including Big Bend, Yellowstone, Glacier and Grand Canyon. Sometimes Garrison would stay at an outpost, separated from other people by a day's ride on horseback. More often, he and his wife stayed in villages or communities with other families in the parks. Did he ever get lonely? "No, heavens no. There was always a lot of work to be done. Inger might have, but it never occurred to me to ask her."

As a forest ranger, he planted fish, trapped bad bears, fought forest fires and saved lost mountain climbers. When they lived in Yellowstone, Mrs. Garrison had to chase a friendly, but nosy, bear out of the second floor of their house. A bear called Lon's bluff one day when he was trying to scare the bear away from a hotel. Garrison stamped his feet and hooted at the bear, the bear stamped and hooted back and the ranger "got the hell out of there!"

His last assignment as director of training at Albright Training Academy at Grand Canyon in 1970 gave him a chance to lecture at many different universities, including Penn State, New York State, Colorado State and Texas A&M. When he retired, he saw this as a good way to continue to be associated with park affairs, and last year he became a lecturer for TAMU. He also wanted to work with students going into the field of recreation and parks and "extend my shadow." "I'm no longer involved in park affairs," he said, "but I can help the young people understand what they are getting into. I have found the job very rewarding."

Parks and recreation offers a very exciting and rewarding career according to Lon Garrison. "It is far more than going back to the woods. You deal with natural resources and you have an identification with motherhood, apple pie and low taxes," he said. "It has social relevance and meaning. It's an amelioration of conflicts in the inner city."



Lon Garrison

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