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Review of National Park Service Law Enforcement: To Conserve and Protect

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In National Park Service Law Enforcement, Luke Lukas conveys a message to current and future National Park Service (NPS) law enforcement rangers. These rangers are instructed to focus primarily on being educators, although they are also told to uphold the responsibility of someone with the authority of a law enforcement officer.

The book is mainly a discussion of issues that are applicable to any federal law enforcement agent and therefore it is not limited to park rangers. The general issues that Lukas addresses range from arrest procedures to courtroom testimony and liability issues. In addition, he discusses the laws that are relevant to these general topics, such as the 'exclusionary rule' and 'Miranda rights.' Due to their lack of depth, however, these discussions provide nothing more than a basic introduction to the issues. Since the focus of the book could have been profitably aimed at the unique qualities of law enforcement by park rangers, it would seem that Lukas could have left these discussions out and directed the reader to other sources of information. For example, a textbook that introduces the criminal justice system, such as Elements of Criminal Justice by James Inciardi (1998), may have been a suitable source for Lukas to recommend. Dispensing with a general discussion of criminal justice issues, which are already widely available, Lukas might have devoted more attention to the peculiarities of the NPS experience.

Aside from these discussions of a general nature, Lukas provides a nice overview of laws that are relevant to the NPS. This overview is mainly found in Chapter 4, which is titled, obviously enough, "Natural Resource Laws." This offering traces the historical evolution of natural resource and environmental laws and is a nice elaboration of the first chapter, which unveils a general history of the NPS. Lukas claims that natural resource laws have enabled the NPS to conserve and protect national parklands for all "creatures, plants, and resources which make up the park environment" (p. 59). The justification for this protection, however, is ultimately the enjoyment of human visitors, past, present and future. In addition, Lukas claims, based on the exploitative fashion with which people treated these areas before they were protected, that there would be no "back country" [1] at all if it weren't for these laws.

However, the strongest contribution of this book is in Part II, which consists of information obtained from personal interviews with park rangers about primary law violations and enforcement. Each of these areas of law violation receives a chapter of discussion, supplemented with real life situations. They are poaching, off-road vehicles, archeological resource depletion and defacing, serious criminal violations (i.e. those typically associated with urban [End page 95] areas), and drug use and production. For example, in "Serious Criminal Offenses," a ranger reports, "We get groups of 40 to 60 gangbangers at a time gathering in the park. It's a place for them to meet" (p. 165). Problems that have been traditionally associated with urban centers are now being presented as concerns in the great outdoors. The magnitude of criminal activity in National Parks is somewhat counterintuitive. These parklands are often thought of as places where people can go in order to get away from the city, but it's apparent that those labeled deviant within the city limits seek out the National Parks for their own purposes.

Another strength of the book, also displayed in the chapter titled "Serious Criminal Offenses," is Lukas's extension of 'social disorganization' theory [2] to the context of campgrounds. During the peak season, the traffic of campers coming into the park may escalate to unmanageable proportions. Since there is only a limited amount of space for the campers, some problems arise. Lukas explains that as the number of campers rapidly increases, the norms and rules of the campground begin to breakdown, and the level of crime tends to rise. This theoretical elaboration is perhaps the most original and creative notion presented by Lukas throughout the volume.

The major weakness of the book is the underlying assumption that Lukas has of humans as rational, calculating creatures. This assumption is evident since his solution to park crime is the same throughout the work. He views violators in one of two ways: the unintentional and the intentional. The unintentional violator is 'unaware' of what s/he is doing and simply requires proper education. Hence, the role of the park ranger should be to educate the uninitiated camper or, as Lukas apparently prefers, to interpret the existing rules for him/her. On the other hand, if violators are thought to be intentional in their actions, then logic dictates that the park ranger should enact deterrence measures for the prevention of any future disruptions. This may involve heavy penalties, such as fines or prison time, which increase with the number of repeat offenses. Of course, these proposed solutions are nothing new to the realm of the criminal justice system. They are, as it were, the rule more than the exception. However, Lukas offers nothing novel in the way of evidence to support the philosophies of education and deterrence; therefore, he makes a weak case for his assumption of human beings as rational calculating creatures.

It is important to realize that this book is written for park rangers, present and future. The author's goal for this work is quite explicitly "to teach how to enforce the law and maintain the traditional ranger image" (p. 20). But this pedagogical injunction also reveals an agenda. In spite of the current trend towards more of a policing- minded ranger, this is not what Lukas is calling for. He claims that park rangers are becoming too professionalized, which puts considerable distance between them and the visitors. The presentation of an intimidating image, which is consistent with the new [End page 96] policing style, makes the visitor feel more hesitant about approaching park rangers with questions regarding the rules and regulations of the NPS. This intimidation factor stands in the way of the role of educator, which Lukas so zealously advocates.

I found Lukas's agenda to be terribly romanticized. The reader gets the impression that Lukas is invoking the image of a ranger as can be found on Yogi Bear, the classic cartoon series. Such a traditional image of a park ranger can be called into question on a number of points, such as the sexist orientation this image champions. In other words, the traditional image of a park ranger is that of a man, who patrols the grounds educating the public on the proper conduct to be observed within the park. Additionally, Lukas neglects the current trend in "community policing" that has a similar aim of the de- professionalizing police officers. I pose the question: Is it necessary to revert back to a traditional park ranger image in order to take the professionalization out of park rangering?

Therefore, the overall assessment of this monograph is mixed. On the positive side, Lukas raises some important issues that are unique to NPS rangers. The interviews that were conducted offer insight into the main problems (i.e. poaching, off- road vehicles, archeological resource depletion and defacing, serious criminal violations, and drug use and production) with which the NPS is currently faced. On the negative side, Lukas makes the common assumption that humans are rationally calculating creatures. Much has been written on the various alternative ways to conceive of deviance. For example, this assumption neglects the possibility that people may commit criminal acts in the National Parks because they possess an evil disposition, rather than a lack of education, which cannot be deterred because it is a part of their make-up. There are several other ways to conceive of deviance. In fact, Lukas himself drifts into another perspective of deviance, which I found to be the most enlightening discussion of the entire monograph - that of social disorganization in overcrowded campgrounds. To aid in understanding the full range of possible frameworks of deviance, I recommend Pfohl (1994).

Finally, I recommend this book to anyone who is considering a career in rangering for the NPS. As for the general criminal justice community, I suggest a selective reading of the work. And finally, for the avid outdoors enthusiast, I recommend a reading of the historical chapters, which discuss the development of the NPS and the various laws that affect and are affected by its existence.

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Pfohl, S. (1994). Image of Deviance and Social Control: A Sociological History (2nd edition). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

ENDNOTES

[1] The section of a National Park which is not accessible by roads.

[2] For information on this theory, see Pfohl (1994).

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