

**A Portion of "Enos A. Mills, Nature Guide"
by Arthur Chapman, from
"Enos A. Mills: Author, Speaker, Nature Guide"**

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As your automobile follows the twists and undulations of one of the most entrancing roads in Colorado, near Rocky Mountain National Park, probably your attention will be attracted by signs reading:

"What do you want with an armful of wild flowers?"

The question perhaps never suggested itself to you before, but you will find yourself repeating it and making the only logical answer: "Nothing."

Thereupon Enos Mills, who has done more than any other man in the West to bring nature and human kind together, will have achieved a silent victory of the sort that he has been bringing about these many years. For Mills, even by the humblest personal means, never overlooks an opportunity for rousing individuals to the folly of destroying that which should be allowed to live in order that it may be more fully enjoyed. It is his philosophy that a live flower, a live bird, or a live tree will give much more general and lasting returns than a flower plucked, a tree cut down, or a bird that has been slain. Furthermore he has so succeeded in impressing a new regard for nature upon those with whom he comes in personal contact that he manages to run one of the most successful summer resorts in the West without having a flower picked on his place on a Colorado mountainside, or a bird or other wild thing hurt.

Still thinking about the wild flower sign, you draw up at the main building of the resort which is familiarly known in the region of Rocky Mountain National Park as "Enos Mills's place." It is an immense log cabin, with the trunks of tall, fire-killed trees towering at the porch corners, just as they stood for decades in their flame-swept graveyard on the mountain slopes. Back of the inn looms the awe-inspiring summit of Long's Peak, and

across a wonderful valley on the other side is the peak known as the Twin Sisters. It is here, within twenty-five miles of his home, that Enos Mills has done most of his studying and writing. From the inn one can see the little log cabin which he built when he first came to the Long's Peak country as a youth.

You are met by the naturalist, a medium sized, athletic man, whose springy walk testifies to the long hours he has spent on mountain trails. He seldom wears a hat, though he is inclined to baldness, and the mountain winds of winter and summer have burned him plentifully. His eyes are deeply set and keen, yet contemplative, and when the talk turns to nature, which it generally does when he is about, his features reflect his enthusiasm. Altogether you feel that you are in the presence of a most unusual character, an impression which is heightened when perhaps your host stoops and picks up a chipmunk which has darted toward him. As the chipmunk climbs over his shoulders you undoubtedly begin to ask questions, and, quite evidently getting as much pleasure out of giving the information as you experience in receiving it, the naturalist talks of animal lore in general.

Once privileged to walk along a mountain trail with Enos Mills, you find just what is meant by "nature guiding," a subject on which the Colorado naturalist is especially enthusiastic. Many years ago Enos Mills was convinced that there was a great need for real guides who could tell more of the mysteries and beauties of nature in one trip than could be learned by endless study of books. This need has increased as people have turned more and more to the National Parks and other natural playgrounds.

The "nature guide," as Enos Mills interprets it, is distinctive from the ordinary conception of a guide. It is not the cowboy, who rides ahead of the party in the wilderness, indulging in reminiscence which has chiefly to do with battle, murder, and sudden death. These guides are interesting and picturesque but they are not nature guides.

Early in his career Mr. Mills found the public athirst for information which only a trained mind could satisfy.

"I believe the development of nature guiding, and the founding of what might be

termed a 'Trail School,' are of the utmost importance," said Mr. Mills. "In my work as a guide on Long's Peak, I had ample opportunity to get acquainted with the average individual's relation to nature. I tried out little talks on trees, or might go off the trail at some point to show a growth of columbine four feet tall and in perfect bloom. Or perhaps I would talk on glaciers, and point out their work in forming moraines and scooping out lakes, and emphasize their relation to soil product. Then I began to take these talks into the hotel, at the end of a day's walk. It was not difficult to interest those who had seen with their own eyes the things that were being talked about. The only difficulty was to find a stopping place. Today I believe that there is a real need for trail guides, not only in every national park but in every state park, East or West, wherever people turn to nature. I believe such work should be made a school adjunct, but the instruction should always be by practical observation outdoors."

Another thing that Enos Mills has striven to accomplish in connection with the advancement of nature guiding, is the simplification of outing trips. Often he has made his hardest trips practically without equipment. Most of his work has been done at high altitudes, in a rough, sparsely populated country. Yet he has shown that, if one knows how, he can go through the most trying storms and be comfortable without elaborate camp equipment.

Once in Denver in 1903, when Mr. Mills was occupying the unique position of State Snow Observer, he was asked by L. G. Carpenter, then State Engineer, to ascertain the snow conditions around Leadville. Mr. Carpenter, who is an irrigation engineer by profession, believed that the farmers of the state could be given much valuable information concerning the possibilities of irrigating during the coming months of summer if it could be ascertained just how much of a snow reserve had been piled up in the mountain clefts at the headwaters of streams. So he appointed Mr. Mills as the observer to go out and find how much potential irrigation water was stored in Colorado's snow banks. Incidentally it proved to be a job which nobody else cared to fill, so Mr. Mills was the first and only one to occupy the position.

On receiving his orders concerning the Leadville reserves, Mr. Mills started immediately from Denver without equipment of any sort. He had on a business suit and an overcoat, and with some raisins as food, he spent several days and nights on the great peaks near Leadville. When he came in with his report, and told how he had "traveled light" to the final degree of lack of equipment, amazement and alarm were pictured on his chief's face.

For two winters, Mr. Mills followed this unique employment. He wandered up and down the main range of the Rocky Mountains where they are at their highest. He left snowshoe tracks on the shoulders of the big peaks from Long's to Sierra Blanca. He traveled alone among the precipitous San Juans, and had innumerable adventures with snowslides and wild animals. He camped without a fire in blizzards, and ran on to the lairs of wild animals which most men shun or seek only when heavily armed, and yet he found nothing to change his theory that an individual should take only the barest necessities in camp equipment, and should not carry a gun if he is going to learn anything really worthwhile about nature.

A chance meeting with John Muir on a certain strip of beach near San Francisco in 1889, decided Enos Mills to be a naturalist. Mills at that time was a youth of nineteen. He had worked as a ranch hand and a miner in Colorado and Montana. He had known only the hardest toil all his life. He had struggled as a "hard rock man" during the winters at Butte, where Marcus Daly's properties were just coming into their own. But always in the summers he managed to have enough saved so that he could take trips to the National Parks, or wherever he thought he might find some new and appealing manifestation of nature. Handicapped by lack of education, the youth had never tried to express what he had felt so keenly in contemplating nature. Then came the meeting with John Muir, which the Colorado naturalist should be allowed to tell in his own words.

"I had gone to California on one of my annual trips, and was wandering on the beach near San Francisco. I had picked up a strange sort of weed, and was puzzling about it. Always it was my desire to ask questions about the things of outdoors which I

did not understand. I saw an old man approaching. He looked kindly and intelligent, and I asked him about the weed. He told me all about it, in language which fascinated me. In turn he began to question me. We walked back to San Francisco together, over the sand dunes, and he asked me more questions about myself and my work and ambitions, and advised me to study nature at every opportunity and to learn to write and speak of what I saw. His advice gave me something definite to work toward. Incidentally that meeting proved to be the beginning of a long friendship between John Muir and myself."

He had a long, hard road ahead of him, however, before he carried out the resolve which John Muir had planted in his breast. Before he could do anything with his nature observations he must learn to write and to speak clearly. This was not easy, because Mills had little or no educational advantages. He was born in Fort Scott, Kansas, in 1870 and grew to small boyhood in that town. His remembrance of Kansas in those days is dim, except for the flowers that carpeted the virgin prairie about Fort Scott. His mother told him stories about Colorado which he never forgot. Her honeymoon had been spent near the mining camp of Breckenridge, on the Blue River in Colorado, and her stories of the mountains made a deep impression on the future naturalist. Fate threw the boy on his own resources long before he could finish school. He went to Kansas City, where he earned enough to take him to Colorado when he was fourteen. He lost no time in making his way into those beloved Rockies of his imagination. He built his own cabin in Estes Park in his fifteenth and sixteenth years, meantime working as a ranch hand, or at anything else which offered. His interest in outdoor things was greatly developed, though it was as yet formless. He mined some at Cripple Creek as well as at Butte, and when in California managed to squeeze in a little business college instruction. Even after his meeting with John Muir had given him a definite purpose in life, his progress was slow owing to the handicaps he had to overcome. There were long and painful wrestles with books, alone in his little log cabin in Estes Park. It was not until 1898 that he did his first nature writing and had the pleasure of seeing it in print.

He had taken a homestead in Estes Park, and saw that the public sooner or later

was going to take a deep interest in the wonderful scenery of that region. He determined that he would run an inn, and that there should be no destruction of wild flowers nor of wild game on his place, and that his guests should be asked not to give tips to employees, nor to play cards, dance, or hold religious services, unless the last be in their own rooms. He has steadily adhered to all these things, though Long's Peak Inn has many times outgrown its early limits. The summer season in Colorado is short. A scant two months will see most of the summer visitors come and gone, so there was plenty of opportunity for more trips in the hills and for writing, which was now in demand. His notebooks were called into play to supply articles to editors, and the articles were expanded into books. Today Enos Mills has ten volumes to his credit, dealing with the varied phases of wild life in the Rocky Mountain region.

In his writing Mr. Mills has given particular attention to beaver, mountain sheep, and bears. He has studied them all at close range and from afar. He has had grizzly cubs for pets, and has had mountain sheep come down to his cabin door. He has watched innumerable colonies of beaver in many states, and there is no animal of which he has written more fully or more interestingly.

"I can't say that I have any particular system in nature study," said Mr. Mills in answer to a question. "It's just trying to make the most of what offers. Maybe I'll spend hours at a beaver colony, or it may be something else. I remember once in Alaska I climbed on an iceberg and spent the night there. There was wood which had been entangled in the glacier, of which the berg was a part, so I built a fire and was comfortable. I can't explain such things. It's just that you're constantly on the lookout for possibilities."

The national park idea fascinated the young naturalist from the first. He saw the time coming when private interests would take the choicest of the nation's scenic treasures unless a fight were made in behalf of the people, who should be privileged to enjoy those things. He was one of the first to urge the creation of a national park in the Mesa Verde region of Colorado, home of the cliff dwellers. Also he helped in the

creation of Glacier National Park, but his big work was in conceiving the idea of a national park in the Estes Park region. He fought seven years to bring about the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park, making many trips to Washington, D. C., and interesting not only Colorado legislators but those from other states. Today Rocky Mountain National Park is visited by more people than any other national playground, no less than 170,000 people having entered the region last year--a locality now dotted with wonderful hotels and expensive summer homes, whereas only three settlers "kept boarders" there when Enos Mills became a homesteader.

A sturdy fighting spirit has animated Enos Mills all during his career. He fought against poverty, ill health, and lack of education and won out. He fought a winning fight for national parks against strong public and private influences. He has fought personal and public interests that have tried to keep the public from the enjoyment of the scenic outdoors, and he has never been too busy to lend pen or voice in aid of some project for the conservation of scenery or the protection of wild life anywhere. He has helped various states in the establishment of parks. If any movement has appealed to him as for the public good, he has never failed to help in moving it along. He was appointed by Teddy Roosevelt as lecturer in the Forest Service, but he fought that service when he considered that it was trying to hamper the National Parks movement. He introduced the bill creating the National Park Service, and he has made many trips to Washington, D. C., in behalf of bills which he has considered meritorious in their relation to public playgrounds. Right now he is in the midst of a fight against transportation concessions in national parks, as he believes such concessions are monopolistic and in violation of American principles, and prevent people from enjoying the parks at least expense.

If he were left to his own inclinations, no doubt Enos Mills would bury himself in the wilderness and pursue his study of nature without any extraneous hindrance. But there is too much of the crusader in him for that. To see someone trying to exploit a scenic preserve which should be dedicated to the public stirs his ire, and the dreamer at the beaver colonies becomes a fighting man as hard as the proverbial nails and

astonishingly resourceful. The same Mills who has spent days tracking a grizzly or mountain sheep, just to observe the vagaries of the animal, and who has lain for hours under trees in apparently purposeless watching of birds, argues for some scenic preserve in so determined and straightforward a way that all the counter efforts of congressional lobbies go for naught. And he will fight for Niagara Falls just as readily as for one of Colorado's parks, or for the sand dunes of Illinois just as faithfully and unselfishly as for the Grand Canyon of Arizona. He has helped consistently in getting legislation passed for the preservation of game. He has persistently urged that closed seasons be established on bears, and on the grizzly in particular, as it is his contention that the bear is not destructive nor is it a menace to human life if let alone.

Apparently it is not enough for Mr. Mills to study nature at first hand and to set down in books the things he has found out. He would go farther and make it possible for everyone to have nearby places in which to acquire nature's secrets for himself.

His writings have done more to establish Colorado as a public playground than all the tons of railroad resort literature ever published. If the state had capitalized Enos Mills it would have realized many hundred percent on its investment. Yet there is not a note in his work that does not ring true. He has written spontaneously of the things which other men might have seen but could not.

In August, 1918, Mr. Mills married Miss Esther A. Burnell, and they have a baby daughter. Thousands of people call at the Mills home during the summer to shake hands with the naturalist. Wherever he goes, whether attending a convention of hotel men, or paying an official visit to Washington, D. C., on national park matters, he is a marked man. Some of the hotel men can't see why so successful and daring an innkeeper should be wasting his time writing nature books. Others who do not keep hotels cannot figure out why Enos Mills does anything but write. But he seems to have the rare faculty of maintaining detached interests and not letting them interfere with each other. There are long weeks and months in winter when he shuts himself up alone with his little family and an attendant or two at Long's Peak. Then the snowshoes come down, and it is Enos

Mills the naturalist who wanders among the pine forests.

Mr. Mills is still a young man. He admits that he is not equal to his strenuous trips of the days when he was Colorado's snow observer, but he is still active and hardy, and may be said to be only fairly launched upon his career.

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