



In 1973, Doug Leen (below) saved an original WPA poster (left) promoting Jenny Lake Museum in Wyoming.

Mixing inks by hand, Doug (at right) matches the original Petrified Forest National Park poster colors that early artists like the WPA’s Don Powell (far right) used to create these masterpieces.



But before this could happen, Doug had to track down as many original prints as possible. With some detective work, he located a few originals, and then more started to surface. Two Mount Rainier posters turned up in a garage near Seattle. They’d been found under a park’s log cabin! A year later, a pristine Rainier poster turned up in an original frame, sandwiched between two others.

Although 42 originals have been recovered thanks to Doug’s tireless detective work, two posters continue to elude him: Wind Cave and Great Smoky Mountains. He hasn’t given up, though. He continues calling and searching in various chambers of commerce, antique stores and the like. Also, as an incentive to find these missing posters, he’s offering a reward. “I’ll offer a reward of up to \$3,000 for each of these two with the promise to donate them back to the National Park Service or Library of Congress. Keep your eyes sharp!”

Doug remains optimistic they’ll turn up one day. “Ironically, these posters usually find me, not the other way around,” he says. “Of the 42 found so far, about half are in the public domain (Library of Congress, National Park Service and various national parks).”

Fifteen to 20 others are private hands. “Note that it is illegal to own, buy or sell (original) WPA art,” Doug cautions. “It’s all in the public domain.” And he is adamant that it stay that way.

Numerous national parks have commissioned him to continue the original series with contemporary designs in the same style as the original posters. Doug sketches the new designs and even hand-mixes the inks to match the original poster colors. His WPA-inspired posters have



Doug travels in his renovated Airstream camper, giving talks about his mission at various national parks, including Grand Teton.

POWELL: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; ALL OTHERS: RANGER DOUG'S ENTERPRISES

Ranger of the Lost Art

This former National Park Service ranger turned a chance discovery into a mission to recover the past—one poster at a time.
By **Scott Schiller**, Art Director

It’s often been said that one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. This was true, literally, for Doug Leen. It was 1973 and the end of another busy summer season in Wyoming’s Grand Teton National Park, where he was stationed as a seasonal park ranger. While cleaning horse stalls, something caught his eye: a 1930s promotional park poster, tacked to a wall and laced with cobwebs, destined for the burn pile. He really liked the vintage style of the poster, so he asked if he could keep it to hang in his Seattle home. He had no idea that this event would completely change the course of his life.

The poster he saved that day turned out to be an original—the first in a series of 14 designs created for the National Park Service by artists working for the Works Progress Administration. Roughly 1,000 posters were produced in an effort to advertise the parks and encourage tourism; to date, 42 have been found.

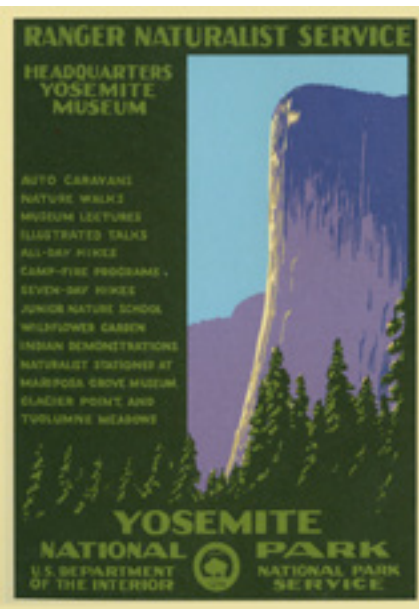
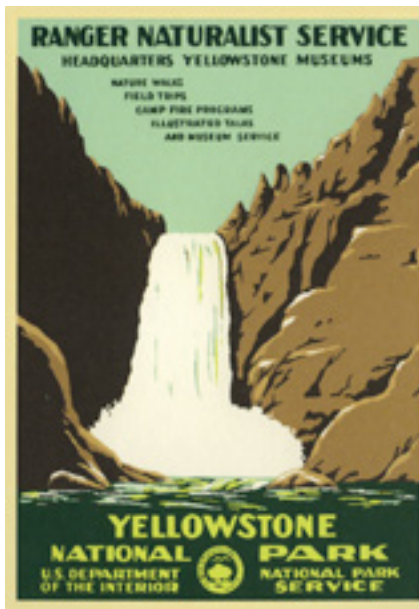
Each design was crafted with hand-cut stencils and reproduced using a relatively new printing process called serigraphy, or silk screen. The posters seemed to be everywhere in the 1930s and ’40s, but funding to keep produc-

ing them was cut off at the start of World War II.

Fast forward to 1993. Doug is retired from the park service and owns a dental practice. He hears that the Jenny Lake Museum in Grand Teton National Park is looking for poster ideas to commemorate the museum’s renovation and relocation. He thinks his Grand Teton poster would be perfect, so he reproduces the poster and has 600 copies made. To boost sales, he also creates a poster for Yellowstone in the same artistic style.

“As the wheels of production turned, I thought if Yellowstone had an original poster tucked away somewhere, it would behoove me to find it—otherwise I’d be sitting on a pile of Yellowstone faux posters I couldn’t sell.”

So Doug traveled to the National Park Service archives in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, where he was given crude black and white negatives of the other 13 original park posters. Within five years, Doug had restored those originals. In 1997, he sold his dental practice and launched Ranger Doug’s Enterprises (*rangerdoug.com*). He and his team color and reproduce these artworks as high-quality color silk-screened prints.



“We now publish over 45 park posters and hope to complete the major national parks and monuments before the National Park Service centennial in 2016.”



spawned dozens of copycat artists whose works are big sellers in park gift shops and show up on everything from postcards to refrigerator magnets to coffee mugs.

Ranger Doug’s Enterprises is the only source for faithful reproductions of serigraphed WPA park posters. He designs in collaboration with computer artists and his printer, and donates 1 percent of his sales to the national parks—the same percentage of the

WPA budget that went to the arts.

“We now publish over 45 park posters and hope to complete the major national parks and monuments before the National Park Service centennial in 2016,” Doug says.

He’s devoted his life to saving these treasures and others in our parks. Whether it’s a canyon, cave, or art poster, the inherent value is worth protecting for this generation and the next. 🌄

Share your stories!

Help us celebrate the **100th anniversary of the National Park Service**. We’re putting together a collection of reader stories about special times spent in any of the park service’s properties, which include lakeshores, rivers and national monuments. Learn how to submit your story and photo on **page 64**.