



The author has a fascinated audience when a snake is found during a Washington nature walk. National Capital Parks photo.

Washingtonians Know Their Parks!

By W. Drew Chick, Jr.

Park Naturalist, National Capital Parks

For the past 13 years Washingtonians, and transients, too, have been learning about their parks and historic sites through the interpretive services of park naturalists and park historians of the National Capital Parks, a field office of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior.

The same methods of interpretation which are familiar to visitors to America's great national parks have been adapted to an urban situation. These include scheduled nature walks, historical tours, campfire programs, camera strolls, canal barge trips, hikes, all-day bus caravans, talks, outdoor leadership training, and attended exhibits. This is a year-around program, although the outdoor features are offered only from April to December because winter weather is too uncertain.

The activities are publicized through the annual *Outdoor Program* booklet which contains the schedule, a description of each type of service, and a brief notation on each event. More than 20,000 copies of this 38-page leaflet are distributed to a mailing list of 2,000 and to participants in the activities who learn of them through weekly press notices, radio announcements, and by word

of mouth. Attendance at a single event may exceed 1,500 people.

The demand for these services is reflected in an increase of permanent staff from one in 1935 to six in 1948. Likewise, the temporary summer personnel have increased from none in 1935 to 10 in 1948. During the fiscal year July 1, 1947 to June 30, 1948, the staff contacted 229,621 people on regular scheduled services. In addition, many thousands of contacts were made by interpretive personnel incidental to the organized record activities listed above. While it is impossible to record resident separate from transient participation, it is known that the latter is a significantly large figure indicating that many tourists have learned of the service before coming here. Undoubtedly many others are guided by friends who, through contact with the program, have learned interesting facts about the city in which they live.

During the winter illustrated assembly talks are available to schools. Because of the demand for this service, each school is limited to two talks. While the underlying philosophy centers about reduction of vandalism, students learn a great deal about local natural and human history,