

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

Santa Barbara, California
April 5, 1935

Dr. Haven Metcalf
Principal Pathologist in Charge
Division of Forest Pathology
Bureau of Plant Industry
Washington, D.C.

Dear Metcalf:

I enclose a carbon copy of a short paper entitled "The Trailer Menace" for your information and files. I am sending one original directly to the Director of the Park Service, in view of the real urgency of the matter, and I am asking Mr. S.B. Show to send another one to the Forester.

I am also sending a copy to the California State Park Commission.

Between ourselves, all the governmental agencies who deal extensively in recreational matters should have seen this development coming long ago and should have established a definite policy in good time to ward off the coming danger.

In fact, I have been waiting for more than a year for something of the kind. Now I think I should again start the ball rolling in the interest of forest protection and camp regulation.

Sincerely,

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E.P. MEINECKE
Principal Pathologist.

Enclosure

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April 1, 1935

The Trailer Menace

The public agencies such as the National Park Service, the Forest Service and State Park Commission which deal with tourism and recreation on a large scale have, within recent years, come to realize the necessity of planning campgrounds and regulating their use in the interest of protection of recreational assets and of preservation of public safety and good order. In consequence, camping has been restricted to specially designated areas, and these areas are in process of being laid out according to definite plans, making for the best utilization of space, for adequate protection of the vegetation, for convenience and safety of the campers and for the maintenance of the camp spirit as contrasted with city and town life. The decisive element was the fixation of individual camp sites and, within these, of the automobile. A definite piece of land was cut out of the camp site area and reserved for the parking of the automobile.

The automobile is the only feature in camp which is clearly still a part of city life. In itself it is an incongruous invasion of the wild. But, having become an indispensable necessity, it is to be considered as an unavoidable evil which, in the regulated camp, is made as inconspicuous as possible through screening. Frequently, the car is accompanied by a small trailer, containing accessories to camping, which finds its place in the spur provided for parking. Being of moderate dimensions and low in build it does not add materially to the unsightliness of the camp. But it does constitute, after the automobile, a second concession to convenience and comfort of the campers.

Within the last one or two years a new type of trailer has suddenly sprung up, of enormous proportions and outfitted luxuriously for actual living. No longer is the trailer merely a help to camping but it obviates camping altogether. It is truly a modern dwelling on wheels, a moving bungalow provided with beds, cooking stoves, sanitary equipment, running water, ice boxes and electric lights. Units costing as much as \$5,000.00 are in circulation. In size they completely dwarf the automobile they are attached to. In the summer of 1934 a church on wheels made its appearance in Yellowstone National Park, thirty-three feet in length with corresponding height. One single unit of this size in a camp dominates with its bulk the entire campground. It can no longer be overlooked as a familiar and not too large an object like the average automobile. When there are two or more, the effect is heightened until the campground truly gives the appearance of ill kept city slums in which cabins and huts, of all colors and all designs, are scattered without order or plan and completely destroy the last vestiges of camp intimacy in the wild. From an esthetic viewpoint nothing worse could be imagined.

The most serious objections must be made on the grounds of forest protection. The larger the unit the more difficult it is to handle and steer and the greater a menace it becomes to trees, shrubs and low vegetation. The obstacles which will effectively deter an automobile are of little hindrance to the large units. The crowding necessary to get a wheeled house into the restricted space of a camp site increases manifold the risks to the vegetation. Every increase in size of any of the main camp features, whether it be tables, tents, cooking places or car spurs, demands correspondingly deeper cutting into the forest. The large space needed for moving and parking of the house trailers makes necessary an inordinately heavy sacrifice of the wild vegetation.

In the planned camp sites the Service provides certain conveniences such as a place for cooking, table and tent space. Good economy indicates this best utilization of space. The wheeled house carries all these conveniences with it, thereby making useless the features offered without making them available to other campers since the parking spur is occupied. An element of serious waste of Government investment is introduced.

The attached photographs give but a feeble idea of the threatening situation. The units depicted show but the beginning of what a highly specialized industry will bring forth in the future. The trailer types of 1934 were merely feelers sent out. They were still in the experimental stage. But the marked difference in quality between the first clumsy trailers of 1933 and the already much improved types of 1934 makes it certain that 1935 will show enormous advances. In numbers the use of trailer houses has gained alarmingly in 1934 over 1933 and show what one must expect of 1935 and later.

More and more these trailers are developing into Pullman cars. There is no thinkable reason why the very near future should not bring commercial enterprises, school and University parties housed in the most comfortable style into the Parks and Forests. The beginnings have already been made and have caused serious embarrassment to the Services involved, at least locally. There is further no reason why the truck type of Fig. 6 [sic] should not be mounted with Pullman equipment. Already there are 7-axle oil truck units on the highways. Two or three units of this traveling together must inevitably destroy all camp character and turn the woods into an industrial truck yard.

There are important sociological and economic angles to the matter. Not only are the legitimate campers robbed of what they have a good right to consider their privilege in the enjoyment of unspoiled natural surroundings but the Park operators, Forest permittees and resort owners are seriously affected. The house trailer is naturally used over longer periods of time, during which its inhabitants live rent and tax free on Government land. [sic]. Not the least disadvantage introduced is the very serious road

hazard. Even on the highway the obstructions of view ahead and often the holding up of traffic by commercial trucks are felt as a nuisance. On mountain and winding roads the danger is a real one.

The whole development has come so quickly and is growing so rapidly that neither Park nor Forest administrations have had time to cope with it adequately. All attempts so far have been temporary adjustments. There is no accepted policy of dealing with the menace. In some places the attempt was made to enlarge the parking spurs, thereby upsetting the economic utilization of space. Since the tourist desires to use his car for excursions whilst leaving the trailer house in camp it is necessary to back the cumbersome structure into the spur, with great difficulty and almost unavoidable damage to trees, shrubs and the trailer itself. To obviate this, some campgrounds are providing a camp site with what really amounts to a short side road leading through the camp site, entailing a disproportionately great waste of space. A few administrators, sensing the incongruity of having these huge units placed in the grounds reserved for homely camping, have provided separate areas for them, an expedience which cuts further area out of the forest and which is applicable only where such space is available.

There can be no doubt that, unless some definite action, based on a sound policy, is taken in time, the very next years will bring about an intolerable situation which it will then be too late to mend. The policy of restricting camping to designated campgrounds was timely. It has paid for itself amply in fire protection alone. The regulation of campgrounds such as now practised came one or two decades too late. For the absence of a campground policy the Government has had to pay heavily and it is not yet through paying. The trailer house menace is still in its infancy. It is at least thinkable that it might be stopped if quick action is taken.

There are two possibilities:- either the trailer houses are tolerated and accommodated or they are prohibited.

In the first case the results are a definite abandonment of the truly American ideal of the free enjoyment of forest and wilderness in simplicity and an invitation to bring the city into the woods. Of preservation in the state of nature there can be little left where a new type of city slums or suburban village with a floating population is established. The entire road policy must be adjusted to meet the new traffic hazard. Since it is obviously out of the question to let the house trailers stop where they like it will be necessary to provide places for them. If this is done within established camps the waste of space entailed is hard to justify, leaving aside altogether the esthetic depreciation of the camps, the antagonism set up in the legitimate campers and the vast increase in supervisory liability. Few Parks or Forests will have space available for separate units out of sight and large enough to take care of

villages on wheels and few will like to contemplate the duplication of improvements such as water and sanitation. Large clearings will have to be made, a further cut into the forest.

There remains the question whether this is not the time to stop the evil before it becomes firmly established and grows to intolerable proportions. There is no doubt that with every year of toleration it will become increasingly difficult to restrict the evil. The justification for keeping a highly objectionable and dangerous feature cut [sic] of Forests and Parks is not far to seek.

In both the National Parks and Forests as well as in State Parks the preservation of the Government's assets comes first. Without it there is neither Park nor Forest. Both are open to the public for its enjoyment, not as abstract things but as part of the Nation's heritage, rich in spiritual and emotional values. As far as the admission of the public does not impair or destroy these values it is welcome, and ample provisions are made for its convenience and comfort as well as for its safety. Any element which does not conform to the postulate of preservation of the Nation's assets is inimical and must be kept out. That part of the public which conforms to the principle of preservation of the Nation's assets has a right to enjoy them unimpaired and has a right to protection of this enjoyment.

The difficulty in drawing the dividing line between one group of the public and another is only an apparent one. People who visit Forests and Parks must have shelter and food. Obviously, those who can live so simply that the assets are not, or little, impaired, conform most closely to the ideal for which both Parks and Forests are created, that of sound conservation. And they are the ones who go to the wilds as campers, satisfied with the simplest life and goad for the opportunity to live it.

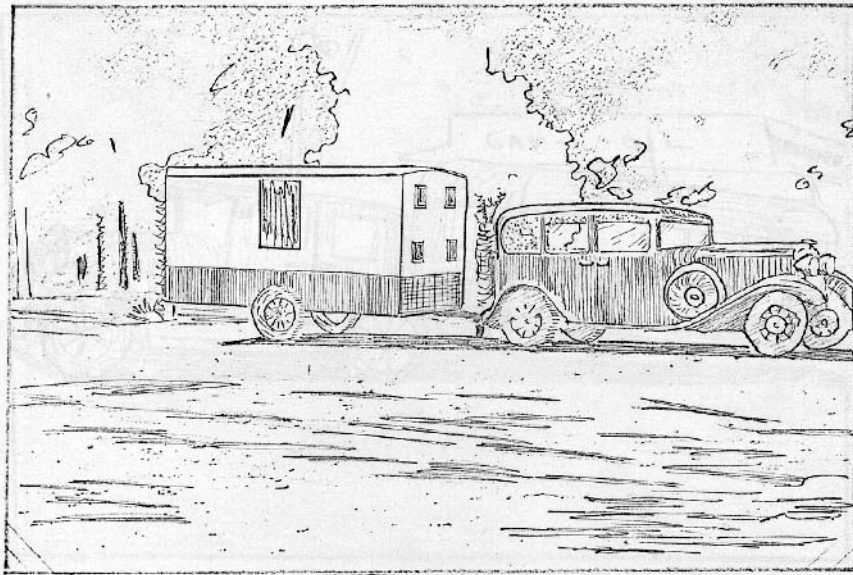
On this basis a sharp line may be drawn between genuine campers and those who prefer city comforts. For the latter there is ample provision made in hotels, resorts and privately owned auto camps. Under this grouping an automobile with a trailer which contains merely accessories for camping would be admitted. The trailer in this case will never be unduly large. Trailers and units actually used for living and not for camping would be excluded.

Another line of division might be made on the basis of size of the trailer. One could think of restricting entrance to trailers smaller in all dimensions but width than the automobile itself. This would still leave untouched the possible development of one piece units into large living and cooking quarters.

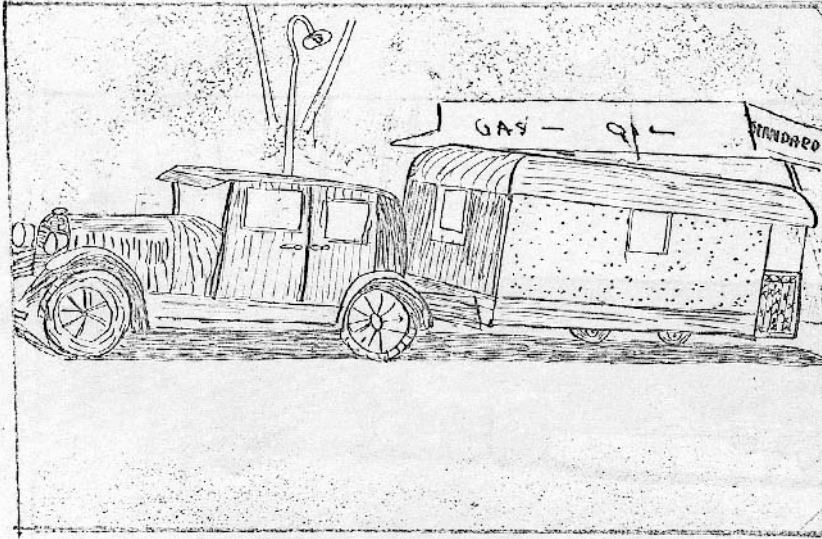
Whatever policy may be adopted, there is no doubt that speedy decision is necessary. The summer of 1935 is going to show an immense increase in numbers and in size of house trailers, and it may be an act of justice to their users to settle their status before it is too late.

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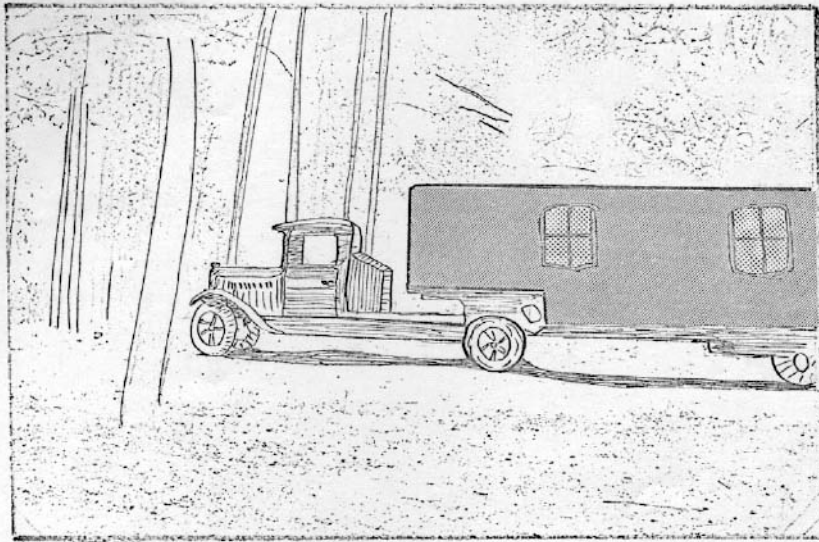
E.P. MEINECKE
Principal Pathologist



A MODEST HOUSETRAILER



A HOUSETRAILER OF MODEST SIZE



CHURCH ON WHEELS (33 FEET LONG)



Photo appeared in the May 1972 Journal of Forestry article, "The Trailer Menace - A Voice from the Past," by E.P. Meinecke (excerpted from the original article), p. 281.

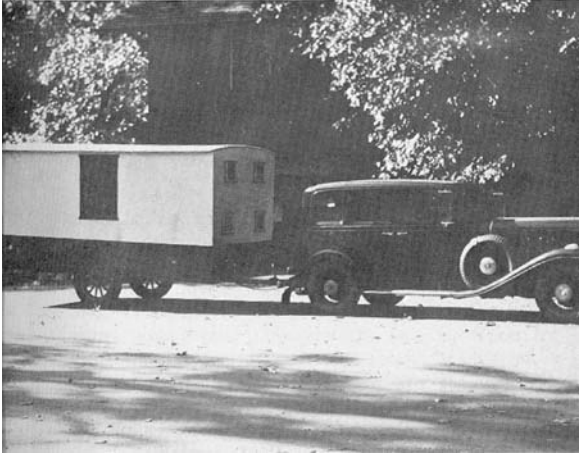


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