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The Secret Valley

Ohio's Unknown National Park

THE SECRET VALLEY

Fathered by a stubborn congressman, adopted by a reluctant president and reared by leery bureaucrats, the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area has survived an unhappy childhood to finally come of age.

Fourteen years after a compliant Congress created it and a beleaguered president signed it into law, Ohio's national park is finally beginning to look a bit like a national park. It will never be another Yellowstone—it has no spectacular natural wonders on the same order—but at least there are now signs on the roads that pass through it, and officials of the National Park Service no longer seem embarrassed by this unwanted child that was thrust upon them by politicians.

They've learned to accept the reality of a national park that includes a Superfund dump site, a still-active landfill and a river so foul it poses a danger to humans. But, because this is a park born and suckled at the bosom of politics, it is tempting to see it with jaundiced eye—as just another dip into the bottomless pit of pork-barrel gifts in return for the promise of votes.

BY SUE GORISEK
Photos by Ian Adams

The U.S. Park Service feared their newest national park was little more than a large

That's certainly the way the Park Service and the Department of the Interior saw it when they testified against the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area Act of 1974. But the act was passed, despite the protests of those who said the Cuyahoga Valley was too common to be accepted on equal terms with the great western parks, with their monumental attractions of mountains and geysers. *This* land had no mountains or geysers to recommend it—only the monumental ambition of politicians.

The park encompasses 33,000 acres along the Cuyahoga River between Cleveland and Akron—a 22-mile-long stretch of glacial-cut gorges, steep wooded hillsides, upland meadows and old farmsteads; there are vestiges of Indian burial grounds, pioneer settlements, once-busy canal towns and old railroad junctions, for this was a hard-used valley that bore a steady stream of traffic. And that is the nature of its subtle beauty and its enduring message: So many have passed this way—some despoiling, some preserving—and when seen in that light, its transformation into a national park becomes a minor miracle.

Never mind the politics, or the absence of mountains, there are centuries of history in this valley and countless dramas played out on its well-traveled roads and waterways, for this has been a main thoroughfare since prehistoric times, and the avenue that the first white settlers used. It embraced the first section of the Ohio and Erie Canal in the 1820s and the Valley Railway in the 1880s.

In the past, the valley was used and abused for economic gain and the furthering of commerce. But now it will merely exist, for its own intrinsic merit, which is a fitting reward for a hard-working valley that deserves a rest, and that is what the legislation insures. By act of Congress, a portion of the Cuyahoga Valley is set aside forever, a piece of ground for the people, and safe *from* the people—a valley saved from the insidious sprawl of suburbia and the proliferation of industrial parks.

The achievement was a classic case of grass-roots effort and power politics—which is not to say it was easy. Sixty-four years ago, the famous landscape architectural firm The Olmsted Brothers urged preservation of the valley. Indeed, a few choice parcels were set aside quite early, under the management of Cleveland's and Akron's metropolitan park districts, but the vast middle stretch remained fair game for developers.

Some residents fought as best they could. In the 1940s, Fred Kelly was so outraged by the tacky billboards that cropped up on State Route 303 that he began packing an ax on his nightly walks. Others flexed their muscle in more civil ways. In the pretty canal-era town of Peninsula, people banded together to save a threatened church, and when they won that small battle, they enlarged their war from save-the-church to save-the-valley, gaining powerful new allies.

Environmental groups signed on, joined by boy scouts, girl scouts, garden clubs and local historical societies. Railroad buffs, aligning themselves with canal buffs, joined hands with hikers, bikers, genealogists, archaeologists and bird watchers. By whatever separate paths, their enthusiasms led them to the valley.

Throughout the Sixties, hundreds of meetings were convened, dozens of studies commissioned, thousands of man-hours spent gaining the support of politicians. They tried to get the land set aside as a state park, but the state said it was too big a job. Try the feds, they advised, and with that, John F. Seiberling took on the job and made it his own. Seiberling is often described as the father of the national park, but he is also a son of the valley, having lived there most of his life. Now in semi-retirement, he occupies a glass-sided house just inside the park's southwesterly boundary.

John Seiberling is tall, elegantly slim and still handsome at seventy, a man with the unmistakable air of old money and the polish of good schools (Stanton Military Academy in Virginia, Harvard and Columbia Law), a man who looks like a Rockefeller Republican but is, in fact, a populist Democrat of surprisingly liberal bent, which sometimes happens to kids who grow up as Seiberling did, a poor relation to a very rich family.

Seiberling is the grandson of the founder of Goodyear Tire and Rubber, and he lived his formative years literally in the shadow of wealth, for his family occupied the gatehouse of Grandfather Seiberling's great Tudor showplace,

A waterfall (above) on a Tinkers Creek tributary in Bedford Reservation, part of the Cleveland Metropark land. A great horned owl (right) shares the park with more than 250 homes. The idea of wilderness between Cleveland and Akron is still being assimilated. Overleaf: A beaver marsh (left) inside the National Recreation Area in Summit County. Tinkers Creek Gorge (right) in Bedford Reservation; abutting federal land in many places, the Cleveland Metroparks virtually circle the city, from Rocky River to North Chagrin.

Stan Hywet Hall.

John's father, however, was not successful in business, having tried his hand at a number of ventures that didn't pan out. During the Depression he was out of work with most of the rest of America. The family never went hungry, but there was no money either—even if they *did* live rent-free on one of the most famous estates in America—and the advantages young John enjoyed had to be earned. That was the implicit message when Grandfather Seiberling sent him off to the good schools. John studied harder than other upper-crust kids who could afford to fritter away time at parties.

His mother, who was active with a spiritual-growth organization known as the Oxford Group, raised her son to be self-reliant and introspective, more concerned with an inner life than with outward appearances. Her influence was profound, and the child who lived in the shadow of wealth grew up with an empathy for people who struggle just to survive.

Seiberling was active in Democratic politics in Akron, but he didn't run for national office until 1970, when he was fifty-two years old. As a congressman, he thought he could help force an end to the war in Vietnam and insure the preservation of the Cuyahoga Valley. The way he saw it, the two issues were somewhat related. While the war weighed most heavily on the poor, taking their sons disproportionately, creating a national park in Ohio's most industrialized region would benefit the very people who are most often left out. He saw the park as a way of evening the score between the haves and the have-nots.

At the time, there were no national parks in urban areas, and there was an elitist slant to the Park Service's insistence that America's national parks must be limited to those areas with natural wonders to protect—a policy that effectively put the parks in the Far West, out of the reach of most Americans. Seiberling thought Ohioans—whose taxes support the great western parks that most of them would never see—ought to realize some return on their investment.

He introduced the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area Act in 1971 and got himself named to the House committees whose support he'd need. Devising a strategy, he studied at the feet of the master, California Congressman Phil Burton, who would later make a name for himself as author of the famous "Park-Barrel" bill, the largest piece of parks legislation ever drafted—a $1.2 billion something-for-everybody package that created eighteen new parks, expanded twenty-nine others, added eight rivers to the wild and scenic rivers system and tripled the number of national trails—a bill that passed easily since it contained provisions benefiting forty-four states.

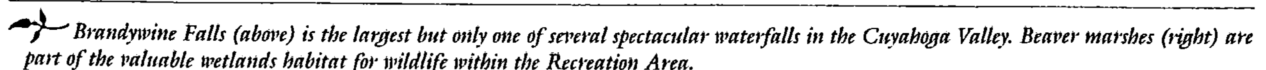
For Seiberling's more modest proposal, Burton explained that it was merely necessary to show that Ohio *deserved* a national park, and to do it in such a way that no politician would dare oppose it. Seiberling's bill took three years to work its way through the House, gathering steam (and influential backers), then sailed past the lame-duck Senate in just three days in the waning hours of the 93rd Congress, emerging in time to spoil the president's Christmas vacation.

President Ford desperately wanted to veto it—he thought it was too much money for substandard parkland. His secretary of the interior, Rogers Morton, was dead set against it, and the Park Services didn't want it; they were afraid if Seiberling got his way, every congressman would demand a national park in his district.

Morton hand-carried a draft of the veto to President Ford, who was vacationing in the Rockies. Ford listened while the secretary denounced the park, then he looked at the list of supporters. It read like a Who's Who of the GOP—Robert Taft, James Rhodes, Ray Bliss, former chairman of the Republican National Committee. Every potent civic group endorsed this park, from the League of Women's Voters to the Garden Clubs of America, and every major corporation in northeast Ohio.

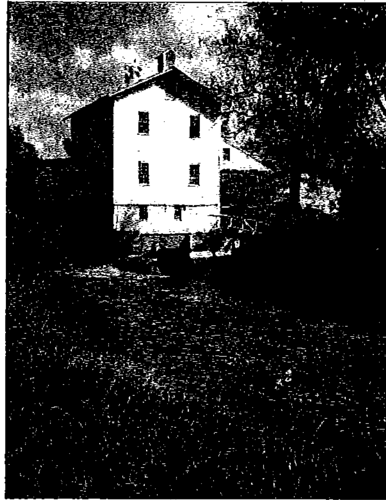
Seiberling the Democrat had created a package that Ford the Republican could not possibly veto—if he wanted to hang onto the presidency. So, with his back to the wall and his eye on the voters, Gerald Ford did what he had to do. As it happened, Ford lost in 1976, but the political decision could not be undone. Ohio had gotten its national park.

At the time, there were about 600 houses within the park boundaries, but most people didn't feel threatened. They'd been assured that only thirty houses would be taken. They thought this was a park they could live with—and in.



Brandywine Falls (above) is the largest but only one of several spectacular waterfalls in the Cuyahoga Valley. Beaver marshes (right) are part of the valuable wetlands habitat for wildlife within the Recreation Area.

Early one morning in 1975, a valley homeowner heard a noise in his garage, and when he went out to investigate he found a stranger in a park ranger's uniform taking measurements. The man introduced himself as Bill Birdsell, the park superintendent. "We're going to need your house," Birdsell explained.



Washington hadn't wanted this land, but Bill Birdsell did. It was his first major superintendency—the most coveted job in the National Park Service—and he saw it as a rare opportunity and the grand finale to a long career. He would take command of this hard-used valley and by sheer will—and government millions—turn it into a wilderness. To eliminate the structures that offended him, he embarked on a house-buying spree unprecedented in national park history. He seemed determined to wipe out all signs of human habitation.

The Park Service's intent was never clear; no detailed land-acquisition plan was submitted, although Congress had mandated one. The original proposal, which called for purchase of 26 to 30 homes, seemed forgotten as Birdsell bought 378. He referred to houses as "visual pollution."

By law, residents couldn't be forced to move; Seiberling had written the legislation in a way that protected his valley neighbors from eviction. They had to be offered the option of staying, for periods from one year to life, as tenants of the government. But some, apparently, were not informed of their rights. They said they felt threatened by agents of government knocking on their doors telling them they'd have to leave. There was also considerable panic selling; people phoned Birdsell at home begging him to buy their houses so they wouldn't have to face a volatile open market.

People who'd lived in the valley all their lives no longer felt welcome. They disliked the park rangers in their soldier suits—some carried guns—and they regarded the Park Service as an army of occupation that had slipped into their country when no one was looking.

Some rangers seemed to throw their weight around; they laid down the law, *daring* residents to pick flowers where they'd always picked before, or to hunt where they'd always hunted. Rangers slapped Clara Schmidt with a $15 fine, for destruction of government property, when her dog killed a woodchuck on federal land. If this was war, Mrs. Schmidt was their Barbara Fritchie, and the tale of her persecution was constantly invoked as a symbol of government insensitivity.

The National Park Service had never run a park like the Cuyahoga Valley, where there were so many people to contend with, and they seemed to regard the people as an annoyance to be rid of as quickly as possible. In the little village of Everett, they bought the houses and urged the people to leave. They intended to make the town into an artists' colony, renting the houses to painters and sculptors. But no artists seemed eager to move to Everett, and the empty houses began falling apart behind their boarded-up windows.

Superintendent Birdsell took the heat for everything that went wrong. Some saw him as a laughable figure, puffed up with government power. A very tall, heavyset man, he always wore the Park Service colors, the khaki uniform with the big ranger hat, the short pants in summer. That he was a fifty-year-old bachelor who lived with his mother fueled their jokes and fanned their sarcasm. "Boy Scout," they hissed. They accused him of preferring bunnies and trees to *people*.

They resented his total control of "their" valley, this outsider, elected by no one, who had come unbidden and unwanted. They tried to stop him with a class-action lawsuit (eventually thrown out of federal court), and one night somebody tossed thirty-five road-killed woodchucks onto his front porch. When things turned ugly, the National Park Service brass pulled the rug out from under their man in the Cuyahoga Valley. They told Birdsell to pack up his things and report to Washington for a desk job.

Birdsell had been sick for some time. He was increasingly irritable, chain-smoking nervously, against his doctor's orders. On the day he was cleaning out his desk, he suffered a fatal heart attack. Bill Birdsell is buried at the pioneer cemetery at the foot of Ira Road hill, where he rests in the company of the Connecticut Yankees who came to this wild land so long ago. Those first white settlers cursed the wilderness that impeded their progress and made the valley such a cruel and dangerous place. Birdsell, attempting to recreate a portion of that wilderness, also found the valley inhospitable.

Continued on page 80

Wilson's Mill (above) was built as Alexander's Mill in 1853; it was the last operating mill on the Ohio and Erie Canal.

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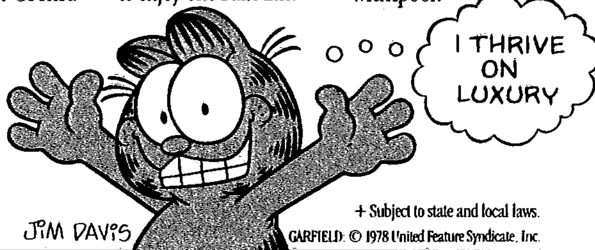

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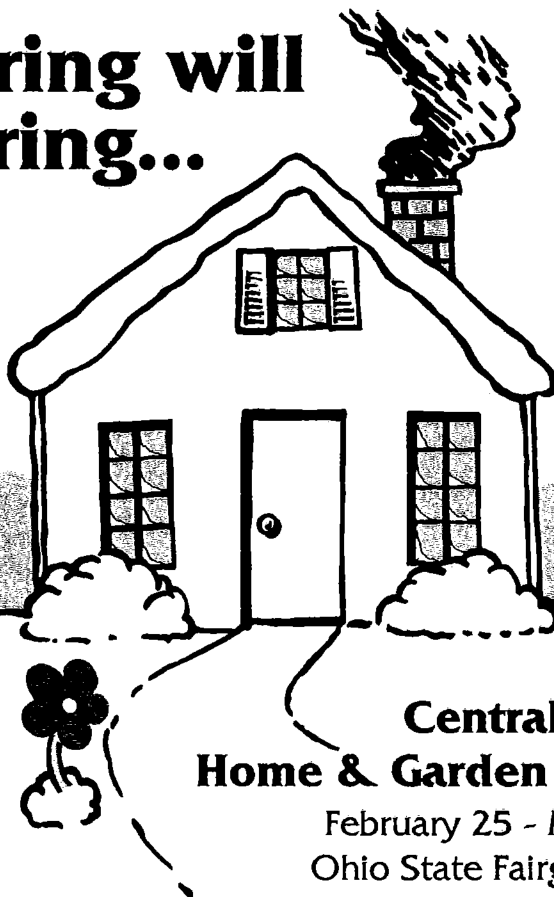

at the
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The Secret Valley
Continued from page 43

During Birdsell's five-year tenure most of the government money (about $50 million at that point) and nearly all of its energy, were spent on land acquisition to halt the spread of commercial development and to eliminate the houses that spoiled the views. Consequently, there was little left over for site development and park promotion. The park suffered its infancy in anonymity. There were no signs to betray its presence in the valley, and there were no maps, except the ones that Sohio printed free of charge. But the maps bore little resemblance to reality, so a visitor looking for the canal locktender's house would find only a weed-choked path leading to an abandoned boarded-up shell with signs that said: *U.S. Property. Keep Out.*

Eventually, the Park Service opened two Visitors' Centers, one near Peninsula, the other on Canal Road just south of Cleveland, where rangers use a table-top replica to demonstrate the workings of a real canal lock. There are some modest exhibits portraying the Indians' presence and the pioneer settlements, and a visitor can now find up-to-date maps showing the new trails and fishing ponds and a few modest picnic spots. The rangers put on history, nature and recreation programs that are fairly well attended. Primarily, though, this is a park that people drive through, admiring the scenery.

From the high ground on Hines Hill Road, just inside the park's eastern boundary, it is possible to see across the entire broad valley, a succession of wooded hillsides and deep-cut gorges, a surprising vista in predominantly flat northeast Ohio. The land appears quite wild, although it is an effect only recently achieved, and the unnatural lines of yews and blue spruce trees betray the places where houses stood.

Most of the homes are gone now, but some evidence is not so easily erased. The lovely ridge of Hines Hill Road is marred by a chain-link and barbed-wire fence that secures 5,000 barrels of hazardous wastes, smashed cars, abandoned appliances, broken concrete and ancient metal drums rusted through to a filigree—whatever liquids they contained long since leaked into the soil. "Area Closed to Visitors," a sign advises.

The National Park Service had not known what a mess it was getting when it purchased John Krejci's old dump site. Beyond the obvious problem of the junk cars and household rubbish, they discovered hidden lagoons of industrial wastes, herbicides, insecticides, heavy metals and soils contaminated with PCBs, the result of forty years of industrial dumping that the owner claimed he hadn't known about.

Krejci's dump was declared a Superfund site, a first for a national park, with the cost of cleanup estimated at $10.5 million.

The Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area is also a management nightmare, with the most complicated array of public/private ownership of any site in the national parks system. For this is a park made up of twenty-one disparate parcels of state, city and private greenspace whose operators must be accommodated, including Hale Farm and Village, a living history museum owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society; Blossom Music Center, the summer home of the Cleveland Orchestra; two privately owned ski resorts; four golf courses; two scout camps; a private school; and the Cuyahoga Valley Line, a privately owned steam train that runs on National Park Service owned tracks.

Thus, the National Park Service, for all its power, must walk a narrow line between competing interests of institutions that have been in the valley for years—long before Washington decided to take it on, and take it over.

The pretty village of Peninsula (pop. 604) is the hole in the doughnut of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, a town that is surrounded by parkland, but is not a part of the park—although the Park Service keeps nibbling away at the outskirts, buying land, burning and bulldozing houses, leaving little Peninsula an island of discontent.

If there were a Geiger counter capable of measuring ill will, it would crackle ominously in Peninsula. While the save-the-valley movement began here in the Sixties, many of those early activists have grown to detest the park. As Lily Fleder puts it, "We did such a great job preserving the valley, *those* people came in and said, 'This is lovely, we'll take it.' " In her view, the price of preservation was far too high, for in saving the valley, they lost it. The Park Service runs things now.

People in Peninsula had thought the government would protect them by freezing time, stopping development at precisely the point they preferred to stop it: That is, after they'd gotten in, but before anyone else could do so. But the Park Service chose not to *stop* time but to turn it back.

So the machinery of government, once set in motion, moves inexorably, advancing on Peninsula. Eventually the federal government will own 65 percent of the land area of the village and 85 percent of the land area of the township. Already one of the township elementary schools has been converted into a middle school because of a drop in elementary-aged children, and the little league teams have disbanded for lack of players. Township population has declined from 2,196 to 2,000.

In a file cabinet at the Peninsula Library there are dozens of folders with information pertaining to the creation of the national park. Lily Fleder insists that pro-park people have removed some documents in order to destroy evidence of anti-park sentiment. So now the files are kept locked, and no one is permitted access without checking first at the desk.

On the fourth Thursday of every month the dissident homeowners meet at the library, although their numbers are greatly diminished now. "People who've settled with the government don't care anymore," says Marilyn Griffith, a resident who still cares very much. "I *despise* the park," she says hotly. "I hate the rangers with their guns and badges. They destroyed our community." A couple years ago, when she was driving down Oak Hill Road, Mrs. Griffith stopped her car at the foot of the Ira Road hill, walked over to the pioneer cemetery, approached Bill Birdsell's grave and kicked the headstone with all her might. "It felt very good," she said later.

"If there were a Geiger counter capable of measuring ill will, it would crackle ominously in Peninsula."

On a recent sunny Sunday afternoon another pilgrim stood at Bill Birdsell's grave. He took a few photographs of the headstone. "Bill gave his life for this park," the man said. "They should have given him a bigger stone."

Joe Jesensky has been walking this valley since the 1920s when he was an art student in Cleveland and would come out on weekends with his sketchpads and pencils to draw the old barns and the canal locks, the wooded ravines and the broad bottomland meadows. On his walks he found himself more fascinated with history than art, as he befriended valley people who told him stories and showed him half-forgotten trails where Indians once walked. He tramped the fields after spring plowing, looking for arrowheads, and poked about the hillsides, looking for the caves where canal-era bandits hid their loot. He followed the colorful career of the counterfeiter of Boston Mills, who was also the town justice of the peace.

He met Dillow Robinson, the last of the canalers, who described his life on the boats. He studied the diaries and maps of the Moravian missionaries who'd passed this way ten years before the first white surveyors.

In sixty years of overland hiking, he filled hundreds of sketchbooks with drawings and field notes, a modern-day scout exploring *history*. He still walks the valley, at age eighty-three, leaning more heavily on his walking stick now, and he often stops at the pioneer cemetery to pay his respects to Bill Birdsell. He considers him a hero and a martyr in the service of history, a man who did what he felt he had to do.

If Birdsell was overzealous, as some valley residents claimed, his intentions were honorable, says John Seiberling, the man who started it all in the first place. Seiberling wasn't altogether pleased with Birdsell's methods either; he thought it was a mistake to hand over the job of land acquisition to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, a group more accustomed to strong-arm evacuation methods than the gentle persuasion this mission called for; and he thought Birdsell bought more houses than he should have. (Seiberling's own house was spared, a decision that was criticized by those whose houses were taken.) But Seiberling didn't intervene directly during Birdsell's home-buying spree, and now that it's over, he's well pleased with the result. In Seiberling's view, the dislocation of a relative few was a small price to pay for the pleasure of the millions who will enjoy this park.

John Debo, the new park superintendent, seems eager to make amends for past excesses. Unlike Birdsell, he wears a business suit so that he blends in with the civilian population, which makes it easier for him to mend fences with the inholders—the 250 families still living within the park. When Marilyn Griffith phoned recently to complain that rangers had installed park signs on her property, Debo drove out immediately to have a look.

"This is wrong," he said, and the signs came down. Debo is willing to concede that mistakes were made. "Everett was a mistake," he says, admitting to extreme discomfort when he drives through the sorry ghost town with its deteriorating homes waiting for an arts colony that's still years away.

This is Debo's first superintendency, and he took the Ohio assignment sight unseen. He'd read about the valley, but he was unprepared for the enormity of it, and the wildness.

He was expecting a more urban set-

ting—the literature speaks of the Cuyahoga as a park that begins where the sidewalk ends—and he thought he'd see Cleveland's skyline to the north, and Akron's bulk pushing up from the south. But the valley isn't like that at all. The park is geographically and visually separate from the two cities; even the suburban sprawl thins away here, because good water is scarce.

In Peninsula, people's wells are failing, and many rely on trucked-in water. The former gas station owner, counting flushes, refused to let tourists use his toilet. Not that there are many tourists. The national park is within an hour's drive of 5 million people, but its attractions are not well known. Peninsula has two restaurants, two bed-and-breakfasts and not much else, although the good old buildings are intact on Main Street. Peninsula has the expectant look of a town that's waiting for something to happen.

Since the Park Service came to the valley over fourteen years ago, more than 17,000 acres of private property have passed into government hands, at a cost of around $100 million. Nearly 300 families have moved away, and people will continue to leave as their occupancy leases expire. The junkyard on Riverview Road has been cleaned up and is now a beaver marsh. The more troublesome hazardous waste dump on Hines Hill Road has at least been secured, with the final cleanup expected by 1991.

The splendid Brandywine Falls has been made accessible to the public for the first time ever—the former owner used to threaten visitors with a shotgun—and the long-neglected towpath of the Ohio and Erie Canal is being rehabilitated as a 22-mile-long bike path. The Cuyahoga River, while still too dirty for canoeing, is somewhat less smelly now, because of improvements at nearby sewage plants.

It's not too late for this valley. The thought often occurs to Debo as he drives to work. He comes into the park from the east, by way of Highland Road, where the land rises onto a long ridge. From the summit, the valley unfolds, the morning fog layering the slopes in a primeval mist. No buildings are visible, and it is possible to see the valley for what it was, and for what it will become—the largest, most cohesive piece of Midwest landscape to be preserved largely as it appeared during the development of Ohio's Western Reserve: a place that will tell the stories of Indian settlements and pioneer villages; of canal towns and railroad junctions. A long broad valley that will run from the twentieth century to the eighteenth century and back again, all in a matter of 22 miles. ❶

A Passage to China

Continued from page 72

A comparable Western show on Mediterranean art, says Dr. Thorp, would have to stretch from the Mycenaean bronze age straight through to early twentieth-century Cubism. And, even then, the analogy would be inaccurate. No Western empire, nation or dynastic succession comes close in absolute power or longevity to the institution of the Son of Heaven. The closest thing, Dr. Thorp suggests, might be the Papacy and even that has yet to span 2,132 years, assimilate three major religions and spawn the myriad artistic, political and scientific innovations that are closely associated with the imperial court of China.

The idea for "Son of Heaven" was to group the objects so they could speak for themselves. They are organized around the five spheres of the emperor's world—the Altar, the Outer Court, the Temple, the Inner Court and the Tomb. Chronology is secondary to theme. Those who want to place all 225 objects into the full sweep of China's history can study Dr. Thorp's exhibition catalog plus the 35 recommended works he lists under "Suggested Reading." That or go to China. Meantime, they should stand aside and let the masses loose on "Son of Heaven."

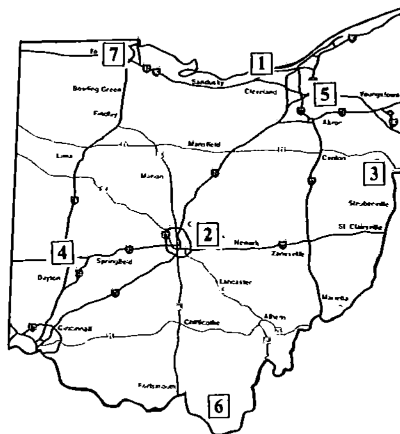
They have a lot to see. Even purely as exercise for the eyeballs, "Son of Heaven" improves the harder you look. Take the jade belt (you wish), fourteen figured plaques of milk-white jade mounted on gold plates, that was excavated from the tomb of a Ming dynasty aristocrat in eastern Jiangsu province in 1970. Jade has fascinated the Chinese from neolithic times. (For a glimpse of the religious significance of jade, study the second century B.C. ceremonial *bi* jade disks or the eye-popping jade burial suit displayed elsewhere in "Son of Heaven.") By the Ming dynasty in the fourteenth century A.D., jade belts were official symbols of rank with the number of plaques and their accouterments precisely regulated by imperial decree. The level of craftsmanship and the lavish materials in the Ming jade belt shown in "Son of Heaven" could have come only from the imperial workshops, says Thorp, marking it as a gift from the divine emperor to an important vassal. But look closer.

"It is a luscious object, an amazing thing with all that carved jade mounted on gold plates," says Thorp. "But when you get your nose up to it and think about the ostentation it represents to create such a useless thing, it is mind boggling."

The surface is drilled and cut into a light scrim of clouds, and each of the four main 3″×3½″ plaques is surmounted by a twisting sky dragon. Nowhere on this supremely flashy belt is any sign of the maker's identity. It was made not to reflect the skill of the artist but the power of the man who ordered it made, the Son of Heaven, the ruler of the Middle Kingdom, the utterly serene sovereign of the civilized heart of the world. The Ming jade belt was an assertion of national pride, culture and feudal loyalties.

This is also the soundest explanation of what the "Son of Heaven" exhibition is doing in Columbus, Ohio. State, city and business leaders thought a big international art show was what Ohio and Columbus needed to assert its pride, culture and tourist loyalties. International art shows are the modern equivalent of Ming jade belts—for Ohio, a Rust-Belt state groping for a high-tech future, it is a chance to tout new international economic connections; for Columbus, a mushrooming university and state government metropolis trying to shake its cowtown image, it is the opportunity to sport a new urban sophistication. When the original Seattle organizers began casting around for a second American city for "Son of Heaven," Columbus was at the front of the crowd of bidders, offering a remodeled Central High School for a gallery plus the government and business communities as boosters.

The exhibit is in America to begin with because it offered the Chinese People's Republic the chance to show off both its ancient heritage and its current political forwardness. Imperial art is, after all, a daring theme for an exhibit from Communist China. Twenty years ago when Mao's Cultural Revolution was in full swing, imperial history was an official non-subject, a shameful and politically incorrect chapter in China's past. The rampaging Red Guards destroyed much of what re-



Editorial Key to February Stories

[1] pg. 9, Cleveland [2] pg. 12, 70, Columbus [3] pg. 18, Toot's Corners [4] pg. 24, Phoneton [5] pg. 32, Cuyahoga Valley [6] pg. 85, Lawrence County [7] pg. 96, Toledo.