Our Family visit to Grand Canyon (as it will have been)
Future Perfect: 1. a tense indicating an action or state as completed in relation to a specified time in the future. 2. in grammar, indicating time to come.

Our family vacation to Grand Canyon started long before we arrived at the park. In fact, it was nearly six months earlier in the midst of another cold, snowy Vermont winter. The January issue of Traveler Magazine had arrived in the mail that day, and I was sitting in front of the wood stove leafing through it. One of the feature articles was on the new public transit system at Grand Canyon National Park. At the same time, Martha, my wife, remarked about the cover of the U.S. Automobile Association Bulletin which showed a striking picture of the Grand Canyon. I admired it and mentioned the article I had just noticed. And then it hit us both — why not a family vacation to Grand Canyon this summer!

We each read our magazine articles. Both were helpful and seemed authoritative since the authors had visited Grand Canyon on a travel writers' familiarization trip last summer. The articles described many of the visitor opportunities at the park (and surrounding area), but cautioned that reservations for lodging, campsites, and some other facilities and services must be made several months in advance. A toll-free trip-planning number for the National Park Service was listed at the end of each article.

I called first thing the next day and was pleased to talk with an older gentleman who was very knowledgeable and helpful. He reaffirmed that summer was a very busy time at Grand Canyon. And he suggested we also consider visiting some other areas in the region that are not quite so popular, including Sunset Crater, Wupatki and Walnut Canyon National Monuments (all within 80 miles of Grand Canyon), the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests (which surround Grand Canyon), and the nearby Navajo and Hopi Indian Reservations. He made arrangements to send me a trip-planning kit in the mail.

Sure enough, three days later my package arrived. We looked through all the brochures which described the array of things to do at Grand Canyon, including hiking, camping, mule and raft trips, and general sightseeing. All accommodation options, including campgrounds, were briefly described along with prices. A central reservation telephone number and mailing address were given for activities and all accommodations. Brochures on surrounding areas also were included. The whole family poured over this material at dinner for the next several days and we laid out our plans. We would spend four days and three nights at Grand Canyon. The remaining five days
of our vacation would be spent at several of the surrounding areas.

A short catalog of publications from the Grand Canyon Natural History Association also was included in the package of materials we received. I ordered a copy of the natural history guide to the park and surrounding lands which we all studied over the coming months.

After much anticipation, our July vacation date finally arrived. In the meantime, as a result of placing our reservations, we had received more information in the mail. This material, prepared jointly by the National Park Service and the park concessioner, the private company that operates the lodges and other commercial facilities in the park, included a map of the park and the surrounding area, directions for driving to the park, and a schedule of interpretive programs and other activities.

We flew to Phoenix, Arizona, and rented a car for the five hour drive to Grand Canyon. Three hours later, we reached Flagstaff, the point at which most Grand Canyon visitors leave the interstate highway system for the 80-mile drive to the park. We all needed a "rest" at that point and stopped at the regional tourist information center. This was obviously a popular spot as the parking lot was nearly full and the building was bustling. There were lots of displays on regional parks and other attractions, and the center was staffed with local Chamber of Commerce representatives and personnel from the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service.

As we were leaving Flagstaff on the main road to the park, we passed a pull-off with an electronic information board displaying the status of all accommodations at Grand Canyon. Since there are virtually no accommodations between Flagstaff and Grand Canyon, this information board very likely saved many visitors much grief.

The drive from Flagstaff to Grand Canyon was beautiful, although traffic was heavy, with lots of cars, campers, and buses. We were amused when we passed a large tour bus and all the passengers were intently watching a video of Grand Canyon. We learned later, however, that this video was one of a series that had been jointly produced by the National Park Service and the National Tour Foundation to orient and educate tour bus passengers to the national parks.

About 15 miles from the park, we began to encounter information signs. One illustrated that there would be different lanes at the entrance station for day visitors, overnight visitors, and tour buses. Another showed the entrance fees that would be charged. A third suggested we tune our car radio to the park's low-frequency radio station. We did that and heard an explanation of how the entrance station procedure routing and entrance fee system would work. The entrance fees first sounded very high, at least compared to the nominal fees we had paid years ago. However, they included full use of the park's new transit system and the expanded interpretive program.

We arrived at the park entrance with a sense of both relief and excitement. We got into the left-hand lane for overnight visitors as the signs indicated and found ourselves in a line of cars waiting to pay our entrance fee. Several uniformed employees were circulating among the waiting cars. One approached us almost immediately and asked us where we were staying. She also gave us a map directing us to a special parking area for campers. Since everyone knew how much the entrance fee was and had already had an opportunity to ask questions, the line at the entrance station moved briskly.

Excellent Orientation

The entrance complex consisted of the entrance station where fees were paid, a large parking area which was divided into several lots, and an Orientation Center/Transit Hub. We found the parking area designated for campers and were guided to a parking space by a uniformed attendant. Along the way, we had passed other parking lots for day visitors, tour buses, disabled visitors, and lodge patrons. The parking attendant told us that a special tram to the campground ran every 15 minutes and showed us where it stopped at the edge of the parking lot.
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We learned that there are four major interpretive themes that have been developed for park visitors. Nearby, To ensure safety, the parking lot was patrolled by a uniformed employee. By the time we unloaded and toted our gear, the tram had arrived, which delivered us right to our site.

The campground was located just a quarter mile south of the rim and a quarter mile east of Grand Canyon Village, where most of the other visitor facilities were located. A five-minute walk along the trail through the pinyon-juniper forest and, suddenly, there it was—The Grand Canyon! We then walked west along the rim trail for half a mile, enjoying each new vista. But it was getting late, and we were tired and hungry from our long day of travel. We walked back to our campsite, cooked a simple dinner, talked about our plans for the next day, and went to sleep under the stars.

The next morning we decided to take the campground tram back to the park entrance complex and visit the Orientation Center. It was a very large building, but somehow it blended in quite well with the landscape. Most of the building was faced with Coconino sandstone, the same material as the exposed rocks and ledges in the area. The roof and wooden structural members were stained a burnt umber which matched the surrounding ponderosa pines.

The inside of the building seemed larger than the outside. The dominant feature was a very large scale model of the Grand Canyon with trails, tram routes, and other visitor facilities and services marked on it.

Scattered around the building were several information stations staffed with both National Park Service and concession personnel. There were also several banks of telephones and several racks of brochures and other publications. Two publications in particular seemed quite popular. One described several suggested itineraries, depending on how much time visitors had at the park. The other

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Several activities proved to be favorites for the whole family. We especially enjoyed the Native American interpretive center, staffed by members of several lo-
cal tribes. (We later learned the center had been jointly planned and designed by the National Park Service and a council of representatives from the local tribes.) We learned about the spiritual meaning of the Canyon in Native American life and watched weaving and pottery demonstrations. Like the other interpretive centers, this one had a specialized gift shop.

Martha liked the walking tour of the historic buildings in the Village, many of which are included on the National Register of Historic Places. They have all been restored, though many are now used for other than their original purpose.

The kids liked the star walk interpretive program we signed up for. The night sky is remarkable and our guide pointed out many of the major constellations; we saw several shooting stars. The new lighting system in the park made it easy for us to participate in this program. The main trail connecting the campground, the Village, and the canyon rim has solar powered lighting. However, all the lighting, including that in the Village, has been installed at low level so it has minimal effect on the brilliance of the night sky.

I liked the voice-pack tour we took along the west rim walk. We rented tape players in the Village and the tapes were keyed to markers along the trail. The tape explained the natural history of the landscape and some of the human history as well.

We were all impressed with the interpretation and information program in the park. There were several staffed information kiosks scattered throughout the Village. Moreover, roving interpreters moved through the Village and along major trails answering questions and conducting short impromptu programs when appropriate. We even saw an interpreter conducting an informal program for visitors as they waited in line for dinner. Interpreters always finished these programs by inviting visitors to scheduled programs later in the day or the next day. As a consequence, we were never at a loss for information about the park and felt we really understood what we were seeing and experiencing. Even concession employees, such as wait staff and housekeepers, were able to answer most questions.

In fact, all of the visitor facilities and services worked well. The transit system and hiking and biking paths made it efficient and enjoyable to move around the park. Restrooms were readily available in the Village, and vault toilets were strategically located elsewhere. Even food service was a pleasure and included options that ranged from vending machines to fine dining in the El Tovar.

We stopped one afternoon to look at one of the lodges for future reference. It was modest, but basically attractive and comfortable. Each lodge had a "theme" and was decorated and furnished accordingly. Themes included Native Ameri-
Visitor facilities and services are provided for both protection of park resources and enjoyment by visitors.

ican, Mexican, turn of the century, and river running. There were no telephones or televisions in rooms, but each lodge had a "family room" with games, books, and a nature movie each night. Other accommodation options included the elegant (and expensive) El Tovar, the only lodge left on the rim, a youth hostel, and, of course, the campground.

We were very favorably impressed with how the park was planned and managed. Visitor facilities and services provided for both protection of park resources and enjoyment by visitors. Although there were many more people in the park than when Martha and I had visited 15 years ago, it somehow seemed less crowded. We were not distracted by congested roads and parking lots. And the park was so quiet we could hear the wind blow through the Canyon and the ravens call. We felt like we really understood what we saw and had enough information to make informed choices about how we spent our limited time in the park. In other words, we really appreciated the park. We also appreciated the service mentality of both the National Park Service and the concessionaires, who seemed really to care about the park and its visitors.

Our four days at Grand Canyon flew by. We all agreed that it had been a perfect visit — future perfect.

The preceding scenario was developed from an unusual workshop held recently at Grand Canyon. The purpose of the workshop was to lay a creative foundation for development of a new management plan for the South Rim area of the park. This new management plan is being designed to deal with the extreme problems now facing the park and its visitors. The scenario just described was based on major workshop recommendations. A longer version of this article is available from the author.