

Victory at Red River

The decision of the Nixon Administration against building a dam in the Red River Gorge of eastern Kentucky is a notable triumph for citizen conservationists. A beautiful and scientifically interesting wilderness valley has been saved from drowning, and an important principle established.

It is rare, if not unprecedented, for the Army Corps of Engineers to drop a project once it has received Congressional authorization and appropriations. But a new breed of conservationists has appeared in Kentucky as elsewhere on the American scene and has proved that even the most impenetrable bureaucracy can be made to yield. Outsiders like Justice William O. Douglas who led a protest hike along the Gorge two years ago provided the local people with valuable help. Much credit also goes to Senator John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, an original sponsor of the dam, who had the intellectual courage to re-examine the issue and fight for a better solution.

Another, less ecologically expensive site can be found for a flood-control dam. What is needed first is a comprehensive plan for the entire Red River Basin which would relate flood control to scenic, scientific and recreational considerations. Most of the Gorge, for example, probably should be part of the state or national park system. A natural resource as complex and valuable as the Red River ought not to be frittered away by one-dimensional *ad hoc* decisions. That is the larger meaning of the hard-won battle of the Gorge.