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the wilderness act at

the **STORY** *so far*

a talk with doug scott, policy director of the campaign for america's wilderness

*interviewed by lucy lawliss lead, park cultural landscapes, national park service
and tim davis lead historian, park historic structures and cultural landscapes, national park service*

From the mid-1960s, Doug Scott was on the front lines of the wilderness movement, first in the national parks as a seasonal ranger, then lobbying for the cause with the Wilderness Society. Focused on getting areas designated as wilderness, he worked closely with the National Park Service and other agencies, encouraging Congress to act on their proposals and, when local citizen groups developed better alternatives, expand the wilderness boundaries. From 1973 to 1990, he worked for the Sierra Club; today he is the policy director of the Campaign for America's Wilderness. Here he reflects on the past, present, and future of the wilderness movement.



*Left: In search of solitude
before the Valley of the
Yosemite, 1872.*

EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE

Q: As we look back on this 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, could you talk about what the framers were thinking in 1964?

A: I would take the story farther back. The wilderness bill was introduced in Congress in 1956. It took eight years to pass. But it was conceived at a meeting near what is now Voyageurs National Park in the summer of 1947.

Q: Why Voyageurs?

A: Once a year, the leaders of the Wilderness Society met someplace around a campfire to talk deep philosophy. That year it was Voyageurs.

And if you could ask Howard Zahniser, the society's director, what was the motive for the bill, he would say to protect the wilderness in the parks. People think it was mostly about our national forests, but it was broader than that.

The leaders came to the conclusion that relying on administrative promises and regulations to protect wilderness—which even in parks could be changed with the stroke of a pen—wasn't working.

For its entire history, the Park Service—despite being asked again and again by people inside and outside the agency—refused to draw boundaries saying, this is wilderness. We promise not to develop it, ever. We promise that the next time we do a park master plan we won't dream up a new road or extend a campground into the wild area. And so all through the '30s, the '40s, and the '50s, the movement was fighting the concessioners, the dam builders, and sometimes the

“Last year, President Bush signed a little known bill to correct a 31-acre boundary error in a Utah wilderness area. An act of Congress signed by the President. That's the power of the Wilderness Act.”

An evolving relationship with nature: Climbing Mount Rainier National Park's Paradise Glacier at the turn of the century (right) and exploring Mammoth Cave (below).



Park Service itself over plans to develop some new thing.

If you were Zahniser in those days, your morning mail, likely as not, would have a letter from a grassroots person who cared about someplace saying, have you heard? Somebody wants to develop X. So the leaders said hey, wait a minute. We shouldn't always be on the defensive. Isn't there a way to dust our hands and say done? Not to have to re-fight the same battle two years from now. These guys were committed to the idea of not just preserving wilderness until the next planning cycle. They were about preserving it forever. So they asked Congress to draw a line saying this is wilderness. You may not contemplate developing things in it. Or, if you want to contemplate it, bear in mind you'll need an act of Congress.

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Q: Did the Mission 66 program, the announcement in the 1950s that all of a sudden the Park Service was going to spend a billion dollars on the parks, scare wilderness advocates?

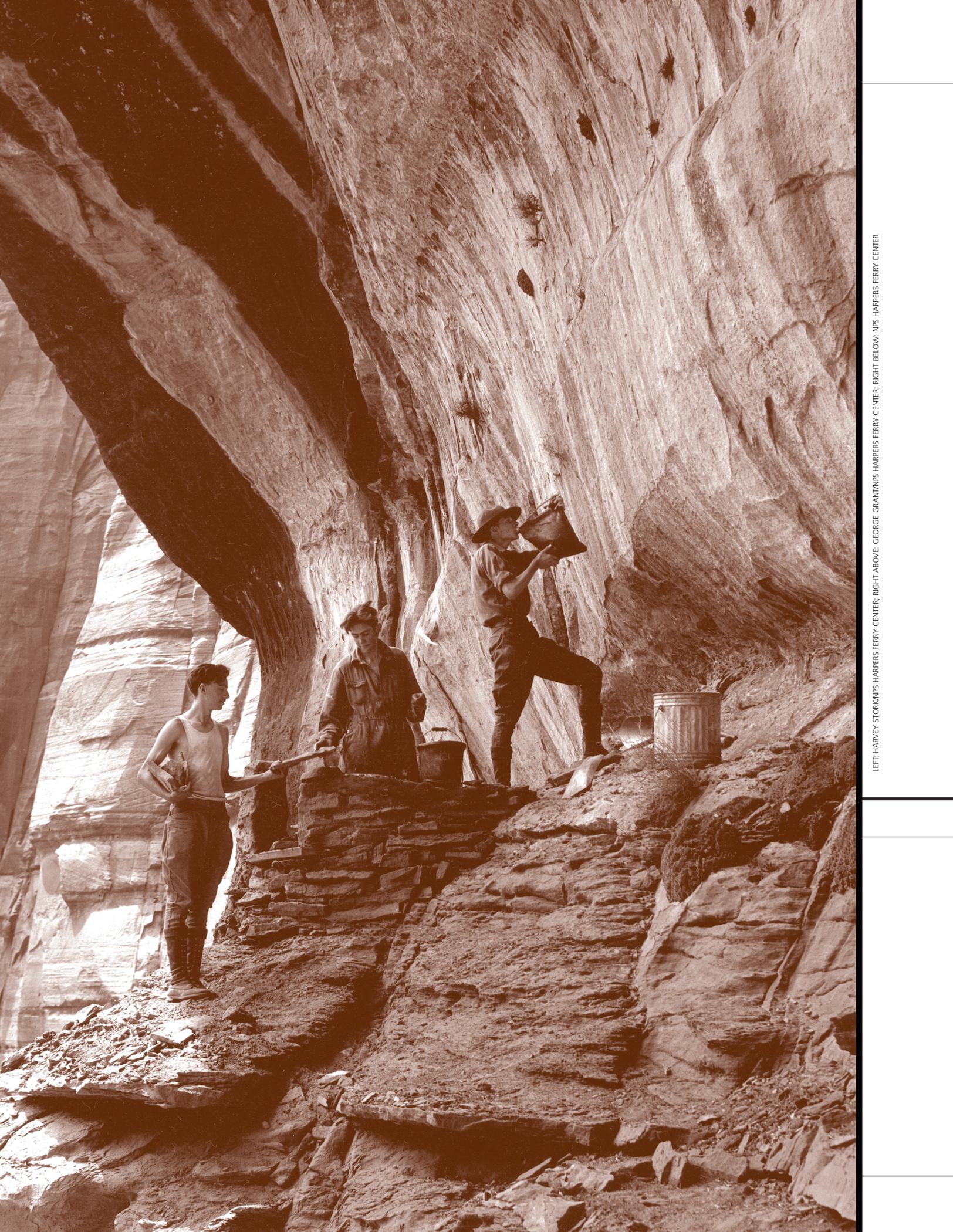
A: The sales point for Mission 66 was that in the post-war boom people were starting to travel en masse to the national parks and forests. There was a huge need to catch up with recreational facilities, and conservation groups agreed. But there was also a huge increase in roads and development generally, and the groups objected to some of that.

In 1951, at a Sierra Club wilderness conference, Zahniser said in a speech, “Let's try to be done with a sequence of overlapping emergencies, threats, and defense campaigns. Let's establish an enduring system of areas where we can be at peace and not forever feel that wilderness is a battleground.” He outlined what today reads like the table of contents of the act.

He already had the bill in his mind, but didn't put it to paper because he didn't want a debate over words until there was wider agreement. He wanted a consensus including the leaders of the Park Service and the other federal agencies.



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CURTIS-MILLER



LEFT: HARVEY STORK/NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER; RIGHT ABOVE: GEORGE GRANT/NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER; RIGHT BELOW: NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER

Experiencing the wild. Left: Researchers examine the remains of a prehistoric Native American granary in Zion National Park, Utah. Right Top: Young women camping at Glacier National Park, Montana, during the Depression. Right Bottom: Hiking in Mount Rainier National Park, Washington.

Well, about that time the Bureau of Reclamation proposed building a dam at Dinosaur National Monument. The Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, and others mobilized to fight it. Zahniser saw that saving the monument would create the momentum to launch the wilderness bill campaign. That this threat to one park was a threat to the integrity of the whole system.

So he set the bill idea aside for four or five years while they fought that battle. Which they won. But all along Zahniser was laying the groundwork. So it's no surprise that immediately afterwards, in early 1956, he sat down with his son Ed's primary school pencil tablet and handwrote the first draft of the act.

Q: What was Zahniser's take on the relationship between wilderness and American culture?

A: Well, to him and the other leaders, that was perhaps its most important value.

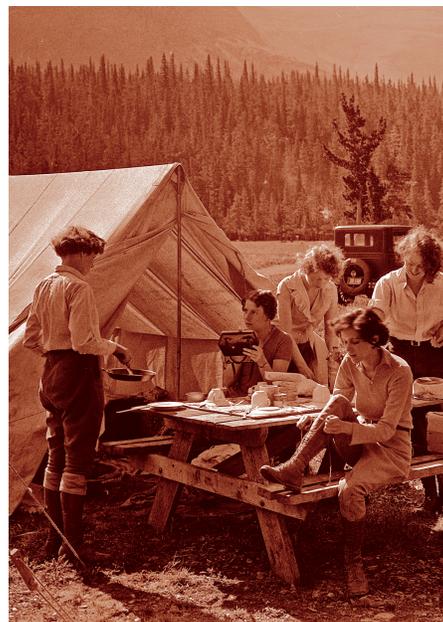
Q: Could you elaborate a bit?

A: Like Aldo Leopold, another leader, Zahniser and his colleagues were deeply infused with the notion that wilderness was not simply a recreation area. It had recreational values, obviously, but it had many others too. And it's interesting how those values found their way into the act.

When they came to Washington, where Zahniser worked, the leaders hung out at a place called the Cosmos Club. And you can just see a little room with seven or eight of them talking deep philosophy. So when the bill went to Congress, there was this theme that Americans had tamed the wild continent, but in the process the wilderness had wilded us too. Frederick Jackson Turner said our democracy didn't come over on the *Mayflower*. It came out of our encounter with the wild places.

In wilderness you become Daniel Boone. You become Kit Carson. You become LaSalle when you put a paddle in the water. You relive history. Leopold said if the day comes when we have no wilderness, then Davy Crockett and Jim Bridger will just be names in a history book and "rendezvous" will just be a word in French.

Go look at the great paintings of Frederick Church and the Hudson River School. What they were celebrating was uniquely American—our wild landscape. Keep in mind that our early culture had an inferiority complex. Europe had castles and cathedrals and great works in the Vatican. And here we were, rude bumpkins in coonskin caps on the edge of the wilderness



Olympic Wilderness The Quileute and Olympic National Park

QUILEUTE MEMBER CHRIS MORGANROTH III recently spoke with Jacilee Wray, NPS North Coast and Cascades Network Anthropologist, about his tribe's relationship to the mountainous landscape, long a source of sustenance. "Traveling overland was nothing to people, they were hardy people," he says. "My grandmother never even wore shoes. Even in the snow. And I would go along too as far as I could and my sisters went along. It was a lot of fun just going up there when I was a wee little kid. And everybody would fish and watch the elk and have a good time." **Q: HOW WERE THE MOUNTAINS FORMED?** **A:** The mountains were formed, as my grandmother would say, "Táḷa'ykila," meaning a long time ago. But it was before the beginnings of time, so to speak, when the mountain range was not a mountain range. It was a beautiful huge valley where people went. And they would set down their implements of war at the outskirts because they couldn't bring them into

the valley. When they went inside they had foottraces and feats of strength just like they do in the Olympics. **THERE WAS THIS ONE BEING** called "Tatá·k'ay'al," which means the big one or the giant one. Tatá·k'ay'al didn't care for human beings because of what they did many, many years before. He would stomp on the people and try to subdue the people as best he could to get rid of them. But he couldn't catch up to them, so he swept great big mounds of land with his arms and his feet . . . This was how the mountains were created, from pushing the land together. **THE PEOPLE KNEW** that Great Spirits lived in the mountains, such as the Thunderbird, which lived under Blue Glacier. He brought them food during the great freeze of 11,000 to 12,000 years ago. According to legend, the people heard Thunderbird flying over and they feared for their lives in this time when ice was up over their houses and over their heads. They watched the Thunderbird hover

over their village and then went over the ocean and picked up a whale and came back and put the whale at the feet of the people. **ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING STORIES** is about when everybody was having arguments and Quati said if you're going to fight then I'm going to cause a flood and do you in. And people built canoes and floated aimlessly and they found a mountain peak and there were already animals up there taking refuge. And that was Mt. Olympus. And several tribes landed to wait for the flood to recede. But when they tethered their canoes it began to get turbulent again. And some broke loose and people got back in as quickly as they could and all went different directions. **Q: I'VE HEARD THAT SOMETIMES YOU CAN STILL SEE THE TETHER ON THE MOUNTAIN WHEN THE SNOW MELTS BACK.** **A:** It could be a myth, it could be a story, and it could be true, we don't know. Because a great flood did happen we think about 6,000 years ago.



ABOVE: GEORGE GRANT/NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER; RIGHT: HENRY G. PEABODY/NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER

with the bears and the Indians. But that image evolved into a sort of patriotism.

The leaders talked about it incessantly. They said we have a deep moral responsibility to preserve wilderness so future generations are not robbed of the opportunity to know what shaped our culture. So even if you think you're just backpacking with your Boy Scout troop, you're connecting with something fundamental about our country. Leopold said that if there's a distinct American culture, it came out of the experience of the frontiers-

man—the hearty independence, the self-reliance. Senator Hubert Humphrey, the original sponsor of the act, talked about wilderness in the same way.

Q: Do you think the idea of wilderness is being usurped by scientists and environmentalists now?

A: Well, spell that out.

Q: There's a sense in much of the dialogue since the '60s that wilderness is a place without humans, without history. That the absence of people is a



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Above: “Primitive”
transport—horse and
rider, Olympic Peninsula,
Washington, 1934. Right:
“Mechanization” in the
parks—passing through
one of Yosemite’s giant
redwoods.



good thing, ecologically and spiritually. That human trespass degrades wilderness.

A: I could not disagree more. To the early leadership, the essential quality was the exclusion of machinery. If there were virgin areas that could be saved, great. But they didn’t want to be limited to that because of their broader concerns.

Virtually all of Shenandoah National Park had been settled and farmed and logged, so there were fading scars of past inhabitants. For the purposes of the act, that wasn’t the most important thing. It was a place without mechanization. A place where the primitive forms of travel could still be practiced. That’s what the leaders focused on—the absence of “mechanization.” And that’s the word the act uses. It was machinery they wanted to get away from, the accoutrements of modern civilization.

The first sentence in section 2(c) of the act describes the ideal: areas where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man. Zahniser went to enormous trouble to pick the word “untrammelled.” He got criticized and stuck by his guns. He said untrammelled doesn’t mean untrampled. It means unfettered, unrestrained. It means the earth and its community of life shall unfold in its own way. If the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has been unfolding in its own way for eons, great. If Shenandoah National Park has been unfolding in its own way, that’s great too, even as it recovers from the past human impact. It can only get better and wilder. Our job now is to stand at the boundary and keep the forces of nature from being constrained by human activity.

As a leader in the wilderness movement, I don’t hear much that no one should be allowed in these areas. Just the opposite. They should be enjoyed by people. Because wilderness has so much to offer to the individual and society.

Some academics criticize the human-centered focus of wilderness discussions. Most of that is idle theorizing. It’s all very nice. It just doesn’t have anything to do with the world I live in. The world I live in is about helping people around the country protect the treasured wild places on our federal lands, using a practical law written by practical people who understood what they were doing. Who cared passionately about the national parks and forests and the grander mission of conservation.

People love wilderness. They flock to it. A few years ago I was driving in Yellowstone and there was an RV in one of the gravel pullouts. It had an awning with an older couple in lawn chairs gazing out at the wild valley. They were *using* the wilderness. When we get the wilderness formerly designated in Yellowstone, I sure hope Congress puts the boundary right at the edge of that pullout, right at the edge of the roads.

Senator Frank Church, the floor manager for the Wilderness Act, called it the critical edge. The largest use—and I mean *real use*—is by people who never set foot in the wilderness. They are feasting on it with their eyes and ears. That couple probably would have said, “Oh, my God, there are wolves and bears just over there.” They wouldn’t step into it. But they didn’t come to enjoy the turnout. They came to enjoy the wildness of that view.



LEFT: MATT N. DODGE/NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER; RIGHT ABOVE: GEORGE GRANT/NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER; RIGHT BELOW: NPS HARPERS FERRY CENTER

We work to save these places, with all the strength of the Wilderness Act, *for them*. Sorry. I got on my favorite hobbyhorse.

Q: Do you think the act has achieved its goals?

A: It's still in the process. If Zahniser returned from the dead and we said, remember your wilderness law? It now protects 4.7 percent of all the land in the United States. Your original 9 million acres has grown to 106 million, thanks to over 115 individual pieces of legislation Congress has passed in these four decades. He'd be happy. But there's more to do.

Q: Has the law succeeded in ways you didn't expect?

A: The congressional push forced our movement to decentralize. When I got involved there weren't Sierra Club chapters or *ad hoc* citizen groups everywhere. If you had a hearing on wild lands in Isle Royale National Park, there wasn't a group in Michigan's upper peninsula to help you. So the movement decentralized and, boy, is it decentralized today. Instead of a relatively few national leaders, there are hundreds of leaders all over the country.

But that's the secret of the national wilderness system. In many cases, the acreage Congress ultimately chose to designate was not what the Park Service and other agencies recommended. Often it was more, much more because local citizens took their case to Congress.

Look at Idaho's Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, one of the first parks with designated wilderness. The 1966 master plan reflected Park Service Director George Hartzog's infatuation with motor-nature trails through wild lands. And the Park Service planners said, oh, the boss wants the motor-nature trails, so they planned them everywhere. At Craters, they tried to take this decrepit old rutted trail around a butte and turn it into one. We at the Wilderness Society—backing a proposal by local citizens—kept it from happening. We persuaded Congress to put that area inside the wilderness boundary. That set a pattern.

Congress had become a court of appeals, where citizen groups could offer their own counter-proposals. Senator Church took the Park Service to task for leaving wild parts out of their wilderness recommendations. He championed the idea of bringing the boundary right down to the edge of current development. Unless the Park Service had a sensible reason not to.

In Frank's mind, you don't leave it out because you want the option to build someday. Congress will change the boundary if the case is persuasive. But the presumption had shifted.

And then the Forest Service announced blithely one day in 1971 that no federal lands in the eastern half of the United States qualified under the Wilderness Act. That was news to Congress, amongst others. We thought it was a little odd since, back when they could designate their wild areas administratively, the agency established three of them there. Well, we now have lots of congressionally protected areas in the East.

Did the Wilderness Act draw lines that would stick? Yes. Is the act being applied in lots of places? Yes. Is the work done yet? No. Look at the iconic parks along the center of the continent—from Glacier to Big Bend—virtually every one with outstanding wilderness yet to be designated by Congress, despite Presidential recommendations.

Seeking the scenic. Left: Guided tour of Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah, 1940. Below: Looking down a canyon at Zion National Park, Utah, 1929. Bottom: Early trailer camping at Yosemite.



A Wilderness for All Wild Places and Cultural Diversity

IS WILDERNESS a lockup for spoiled, upper middle class, Daniel Boone wannabes? Vast tracts for the well-heeled few to experience frontiersman fantasies? That's one question posed by an upcoming video from the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. *American Values: American Wilderness* explores the importance of wilderness to all Americans, emphasizing its often intangible appeal. ONE OF THOSE INTERVIEWED IN THE FILM, Cheryl Armstrong, is executive director of the Beckwourth Mountain Club, which offers wilderness experiences to culturally diverse groups. When she brings urban Denver youth

into the wilderness, she describes their reaction as "an awakening." Others in the film also evoke the transcendent qualities of wild places. Wilderness is a "wellspring of spiritual nourishment," says one. "The environmental regulatory functions of wilderness are important," he says. "All you have to do is look at the brown cloud over Denver to realize that." THE FILMMAKERS INTEND TO PRODUCE a Spanish language version too, not just a translation but a separate video that speaks to the role of wilderness in Hispanic culture. NARRATED BY CHRISTOPHER REEVE, the film is one of a series of events planned to coincide with the 40th

anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The Carhart Center, established to train federal land managers responsible for wilderness areas, is aiming for wide distribution of the one-hour film on public television. REI, Inc., which sells outdoor gear, donated \$50,000 toward producing *American Values: American Wilderness*, matched by the National Forest Foundation, a nonprofit partner. FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Chris Barns, Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, James E. Todd Building, 32 Campus Drive, Missoula, MT 59812-3168, (406) 243-4682, carhart.wilderness.net/index.cfm.

Q: Let's talk a bit about preserving cultural artifacts in the wilderness.

A: I'm all for preserving the old things you trip over in Shenandoah and other parks. The act enumerates a whole list of purposes; the words historical and educational are both on it. I'd love to see a lot more of interpreting the wilderness and its human history. It's part of the story—our encounter with this once all-wild continent. The act is not about rolling up the trails and keeping people out.

Q: Some people believe that wilderness should be cherished as a prehuman, above-human ecological sanctuary. You suggest that the original meaning has been lost, that the shapers had more of a cultural view.

A: I wouldn't set it up as a dichotomy. But you're right. It's been lost by way too many people. There's no reason why you can't do both. Take the controversy at Bandelier National Monument.

Because of fire control measures, junipers have invaded up on the plateaus, shading out the native grasses. So when the heavy rains come, the soil runs off. Well, the Park Service did this fabu-

“Guardians not gardeners,” Zahniser said. He was reacting to a report about how the national parks should be managed ecologically, to hold them as a vignette of primitive America defined as when the first white person saw it.

Q: Well, doesn't that interpretation beg the question whether they understood the degree to which Native Americans were manipulating the landscape?

A: Certainly right. Name the acre even before global warming that hasn't been impacted by humanity. You only have to look at Alaska to say that the Native American qualities are part of the story of this land. What we're trying to keep out are the Wal-Marts and the go-carts and the dirt bikes and the seemingly endless proliferation of roads.

Q: What are the primary challenges today?

A: There's unfinished business in the parks, and I use the “low-ercase w” for wilderness to mean the area outside the boundaries. You know, the average person doesn't give a hoot whether it has a capital “W” and has yet been designated by Congress. They're out to enjoy some wild place and have a wonderful time.

There are certainly enormous challenges for those who administer our wild park lands. I try to avoid the phrase “wilderness management.” I prefer “wilderness stewardship.” Challenges in how to look after wilderness once it's designated. How to cope with the fact that in some places it's being loved to death.

I will tell you this, the American people get it. They get that wilderness areas are not primarily for recreation, though that's the way most of us talk much of the time, with recreational blinders on. Oh, wilderness, that's about backpacking.

Forest Service researchers, based in Athens, Georgia, do extensive polling. They've devised a list of 13 benefits of wilderness. For each they ask respondents whether it's important, really important, not important, really not important.

The sample size is huge, the statistical reliability off the scales. The American people, as measured by the poll, say all 13 benefits are important. By a huge margin. But when you rank the benefits, the ninth thing down is recreation. The first eight don't involve putting your foot in the wilderness area.

But the value that leaps out as most important to me is our moral obligation to leave some choices to the future. And the way I put it is, you know, it's conceivable that our movement might someday persuade the Congress to designate “too much” wilderness. A hundred years from now, people can say, uh, too much wilderness here. But we'll have given them the choice.

Former Senators Dale Bumpers and Dan Evans, a Democrat and a Republican, wrote a column a while ago. They said the wilderness designation is the most lower case “d” democratic land use decision our society makes. This act is a people's law. It is people saving wilderness for people.

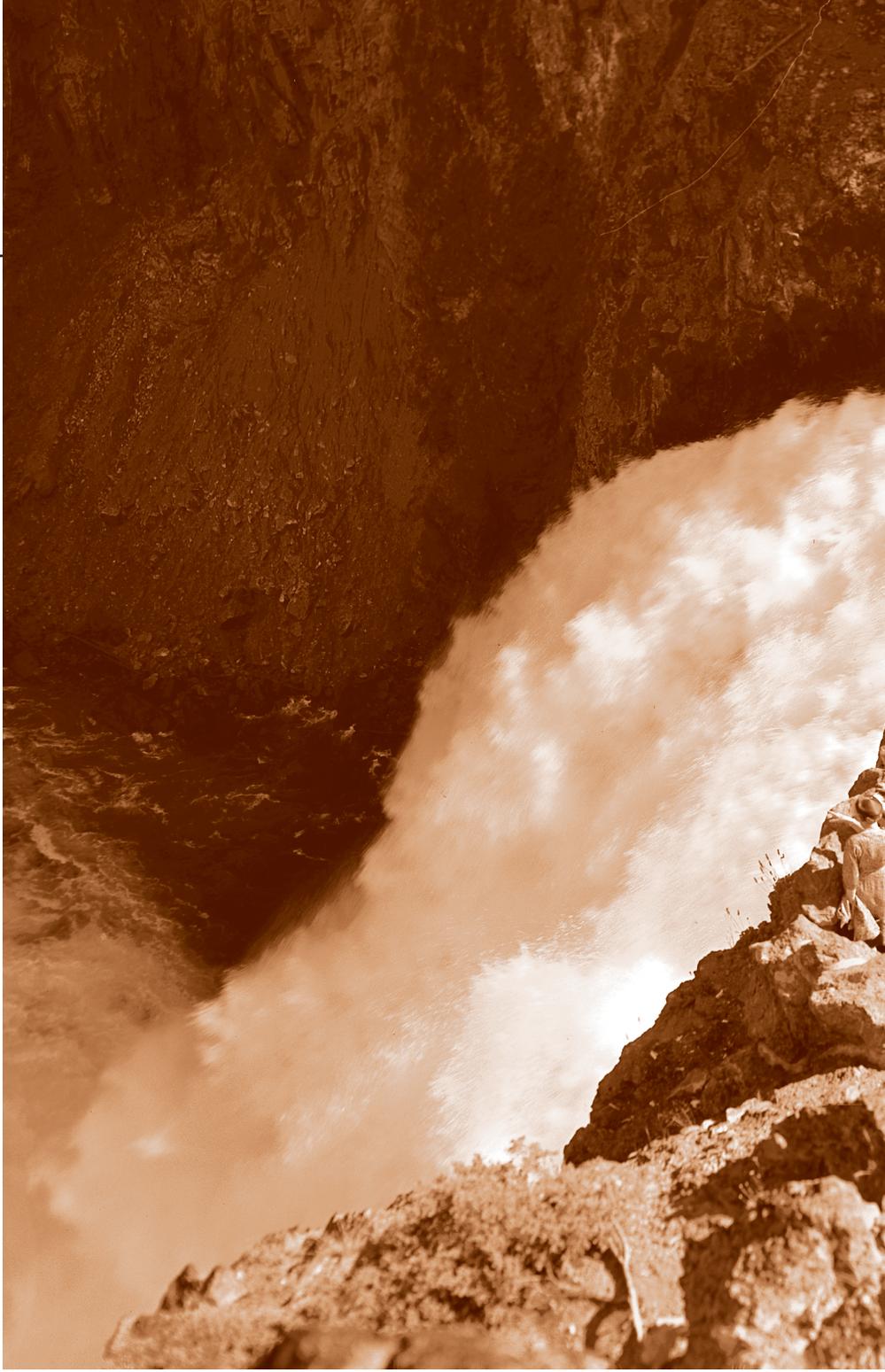


Above left: Using the wild—climbing Eagle Cliff at Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. Above right: Park overload—campers at Yellowstone. Right: Picturing nature at Utah's Bryce Canyon National Park in 1960.

lous little test plot. They chainsawed the juniper, usually a forbidden tool in a wilderness area, but permitted in this case by countervailing regulations. The grasses came back.

In another plot they did nothing. The park archeologist took me down to the catch basin below that plot, cupped his hands, and came up with Indian pot sherds from the runoff. And I said that's it. Get your chainsaws out. The Wilderness Act is not a straightjacket. The monument's purpose isn't just to have asphalt trails out to a couple of ruins. It's to leave those artifacts in place.





We live in an age of cynicism. In a thousand unspoken ways we teach our children that our politics are corrupt and everybody's on the take and they all make these awful decisions and they don't give a damn about the rest of us. I've worked with Congress for 35 years, and I know that cynicism is way off the mark.

The work that ordinary citizens do using this act is the essence of democracy at its best. I can tell you about the pear orchardist in California or the cocktail waitress in a casino in a small town in Nevada or the hardware dealer in Montana who have gone to the halls of Congress not as silver-tongued lobbyists but as citizens urging action. That there are people like that working their hearts out for places they cherish.

Contact Doug Scott at the Campaign for America's Wilderness, 705 Second Avenue, Suite 203, Seattle, WA 98104, (206) 342-9212, cell (206) 200-0804, fax (206) 343-1526, email dscott@leaveitwild.org, www.leaveitwild.org. For information on the NPS Wilderness Program, contact Rick Potts, National Wilderness Program Manager, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240, email rick_potts@nps.gov.



Ground View A Talk with Don Neubacher, Superintendent at California's Point Reyes National Seashore

Q: In practice, do you think the Wilderness Act promoted a privileging of natural over cultural resources because people weren't conversant with the historical aspects of its mandate? **A:** Initially that was true. I would be the first to admit in the beginning there was less emphasis on saving historic features. But it's matured. And the Park Service, in general, has a greater appreciation of that than we did 40 years ago. **Q:** When do you think that appreciation came back? **A:** It was

always there. But our sophistication in working with cultural landscapes has really matured in the last 15 years. We still have a ways to go, though. **Q:** When wilderness areas were first designated, was there a program of active removal of historic remains? **A:** Yes, some removal did occur in certain areas. When our park was formed in 1962, they set up a pastoral zone and a back country zone. Then the Wilderness Act came in, and the Park Service proposed setting aside

only around 8,000 acres. The public pushed that and so did Congress to around 32,000 acres. But you have to put it in context. There was a threat to wild places back in the '60s and '70s. It was the genesis of a big movement. Our community in particular bought into it. And if you look at the wilderness hearings, the public really wanted to keep the primitive area intact. I don't think there was much mention of preserving cultural remains. **Q:** It was interesting to



“People love wilderness. They flock to it. A few years ago I was driving in Yellowstone and there was an RV in one of the gravel pullouts. It had an awning with an older couple in lawn chairs gazing out at the wild valley. They were using the wilderness.”

Far left: Touring urban wilderness at Fire Island National Seashore, New York. Left: Seeking the spectacle—peering into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Below: Alien presence? Remains of the Desert Queen Ranch at Joshua Tree National Monument, California.



hear from Doug Scott how the Wilderness Act was the first federal law to promote public participation in land decisions.

A: People were really scared of overdevelopment at Point Reyes. And they were afraid of promoting urban encroachment from San Francisco and Oakland. The Park Service was very recreation oriented; there were plans for everything from marinas to major complexes to a coastal highway. All of it was stopped with the wilderness overlay.

Q: Do you or other parks interpret the re-wilding of formerly developed lands? For example, by telling the story of how the Wilderness Act took conspicuous cultural landscapes like the old cabins at Shenandoah and perhaps some of the ranches at Point Reyes. **A:** Most of our back country was heavily wooded, marginal in terms of ranch landscape. We do a good job of telling the story of the past presence. It’s part of the experience, going to campgrounds that

are old ranch sites. And we have a big program to share information on the Native American use. But we don’t really talk about making it wilder. We try to get cultural and natural to complement each other, preserving both. And the boundary was artfully drawn to keep historic structures out of the wilderness area. For more information, contact Don Neubacher, Superintendent, Point Reyes National Seashore, Point Reyes, CA 94956, (415) 464-5100, email don_neubacher@nps.gov, www.nps.gov/pore.



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the wilderness act at

WILDERNESS

STATE OF MIND

*a talk with roderick nash
author of wilderness and the american mind*

*interviewed by lucy lawliss lead, park cultural landscapes, national park service
and tim davis lead historian, park historic structures and cultural landscapes, national park service*

Roderick Nash, professor emeritus of history and environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, published the landmark *Wilderness and the American Mind* in 1967. Now in its fourth edition, it has been praised as a book that changed our world. “Wilderness preservation is an American invention, our unique contribution to world civilization,” Nash says. “If you want to understand American history there is no escaping the need to come to terms with our wilderness past. Wilderness areas are historical documents; destroying them is comparable to tearing pages from our books and laws. We can’t teach our children about our history on freeways or in shopping malls. Take away wilderness and you diminish the opportunity to be American.”

Roderick Nash is a descendant of the Canadian river explorer Simon Roderick Fraser.

Left: Inyo Mountain Wilderness, California, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service.



LEFT: © PETER DRUSCHKE, RIGHT: CHRIS BARNES

“Wilderness is a state of mind. It doesn’t exist like a mountain or a canyon or a river; it isn’t a place, it’s a quality. And the perception of that quality will vary from individual to individual . . . It’s like happiness, also a word that ends with ‘ness.’ What makes you happy isn’t necessarily going to make me happy.”

Q: We chatted with Doug Scott about who drew the lines around wilderness, and where, why, and how they were drawn [see page 12]. But we haven’t talked much about what’s inside the lines.

A: Well, wilderness can certainly be defined as a place on a map, which the 1964 act did. You say, that’s wilderness. But where did it come from?

Wilderness is a state of mind. It doesn’t exist like a mountain or a canyon or a river. It isn’t a place, it’s a quality. And the perception of that quality will vary from individual to individual. We might all be standing in the same place and say, well, is this wilderness? Well, it is to me but it isn’t to you. It’s like happiness, also a word that ends with “ness.” What makes you happy isn’t necessarily going to make me happy.

Civilization created wilderness. About 15,000 years ago, as the hunting and gathering lifestyle gave way to settlement, we began to fancy we were different from the rest of nature, above it. We drew lines around things: fences, corrals, city walls. We

thought of as threats to the security and survival of civilized society. Wilderness was “howling”—hated by European colonists, who longed to bring order to the chaos of nature, light into darkness. In their religions God cursed wild places. Civilization was a blessing; wilderness was a devilish place.

The furthest thought in John Winthrop’s mind when he stepped off the boat in Massachusetts Bay in 1630 was to protect the wild country. He feared the wild country; he feared the wild people, the wild animals. He wanted a city upon a hill; the last thing he thought about was a national park or a wilderness preserve.

Driven by these biases, the pioneers eliminated a lot of the wild places, and the wild people too. But pioneering changed us as well as the land. We began to understand that the conquest of wilderness could go too far. Yet only gradually did the conquer-and-dominate mindset give way, first to appreciation and then to preservation.

Romanticism, with its delight in awesome scenery and noble savages, underlay the change, as did the concept of wilderness as the source of a distinctive American art, character, and culture. The Adirondacks and the Grand Canyon became the equivalent of the Acropolis and Buckingham Palace.



A new generation of wilderness values.

Left: Half Dome in the Yosemite Wilderness.

Above: Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness, New Mexico, Bureau of Land Management.

began to say, this is controlled, something we own, and what we didn’t control was wild.

Q: In your book you lay out the transition from wilderness as something negative to something we cherish. Could you talk about that—especially as it pertains to the beginnings of the National Park Service and later the Wilderness Act?

A: This, of course, is the big story I tried to tell in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. It’s one of the most dramatic turnabouts in the history of ideas.

Initially we feared what we did not control. Wild country, wild animals, and wild people were

By the 1850s, Henry David Thoreau could celebrate the physical and intellectual vigor of the wild as a necessary counterpoint to an effete and stale civilization. He called for people and landscapes that were “half cultivated.” He realized that saving some wilderness from development would help keep the New World new.

Q: Back then his views were not widely shared, or appreciated.

A: Granted, few people paused to read Thoreau at the height of westward expansion, but the next half century brought a sea change. The national parks—with Yellowstone in 1872 and Yosemite in 1890—began a policy of protecting public lands for their scientific, scenic, and recreational values. In 1892, John Muir organized the Sierra Club to defend the parks, rallying the nation behind the idea of wilderness as a valuable part of civilization.

With the public perception of a vanishing frontier, wilderness emerged as a novelty. You have the first glimmerings of people thinking that they did not have to fight the wild any more. They began to think, I’d like to get away from the city. I’d like to get back to nature. I’d like to read *The Call of the Wild*. I’d like to read *Tarzan*. I’d like my kid to know something about the old frontier, go camping, join the Boys Scouts. Theodore Roosevelt’s popularity was an expression of the new idea of wilderness as an asset rather than a liability. The old enemy had become an important part of American history. The park and conservation movement built on these ideas.



Q: Do you think the Wilderness Act idea could have carried the day in 1916—when the park system was established—or did it have to wait another half century? That is, considering the Wilderness Act’s more ambitious stance favoring protection over recreation.

A: The Wilderness Act was anticipated in the 1920s, when the Forest Service began to take stock of large roadless areas. At the same time, the growing science of ecology pointed to wilderness as a reservoir of natural processes. Aldo Leopold, a forest ecologist, led the way in the 1930s in defining an ethical, not merely an economic, relationship

to the land. When Bob Marshall and others founded the Wilderness Society in 1935, they understood wild country to be more than a playground.

Still, recreation, scenery, and economics were the arguments for protecting wilderness. Economics meant tourist economics, which, of course, figured back as early as the railroad interest in nature tourism at the national parks—Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Glacier. The utilitarian rationale served the cause well, but by the 1960s there were changes in the air.

Q: Now that’s interesting. Doug Scott told us the rationale was largely to preserve this very human, “small d” democratic experience. A chance to be Daniel Boone, to quote Doug. A chance to connect with these early, revered Americans. It was not a nature movement.



“With perceptions of a vanishing frontier, wilderness emerged as a novelty. You have the first glimmerings of people thinking that they did not have to fight the wild any more. They began to think, I’d like to get away from the city. I’d like to get back to nature.”

A: Doug was talking about '64?

Q: Yes. And before that, about the '20s and '30s with Leopold and later the '40s and '50s with Howard Zahniser and the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club. Doug said they wanted to preserve this experience of a lost America. Not just plants and animals and habitats. That was a post-'60s idea. The concept was to save cultural experiences from being lost in the developed areas of the parks.

A: I believe what Doug is saying applies more to the early 20th century. You had organizations like the Sons of Daniel Boone; people going out there to learn woodcraft skills and, as the phrase went, “get back to nature.” But with Rachel Carson’s work in the early 1960s and the resurgence of Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*, we see the start of a different rationale. Still recognizing the need to protect wild country for the primitive experience, as Doug put it, but now looking at wilderness as a way to protect the planet.

The act gave specific, systematic, and secure protection to the wilderness. The language itself was revolutionary; the law spoke of “an enduring resource of wilderness” for the American people. Traditionally, the term “resource” was reserved for hard-core economic stuff like lumber, oil, soil, minerals, and hydropower. In calling wilderness a “resource,” Congress—really, Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society, who wrote most of the act—enlarged the definition to include space, beauty, solitude, silence, and biodiversity. These uses became just as legitimate as the extractive industries. Zahniser, a great fan of Thoreau, certainly had a much broader vision of wilderness than simply for outdoor recreation.

Q: Do you think the anthropocentric view is more pragmatic politically, given the realities of environmental advocacy today?

A: I think that, politically, the older view will continue to be a mainstay of appropriations and justifications. But in my book, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, I examined the emergence in the 1960s of a new philosophy of environmental advocacy. This was clearly ecocentric. One sign of the times was the Endangered Species Act of 1972. The value of wilderness in this context points to a very different direction than the old recreation and economic arguments.

Q: Agreed. But you take the recreation and economics view to task.

A: I recognize their value politically, but I think there are higher, less selfish horizons in the pro-wilderness argument. Let me share something I sometimes slip into my lectures. I say I want to talk to the men in the audience only. Haven’t we all been asked—usually in the middle of the night by a partner—why do you love me? And I say the three answers to that question that aren’t going to work are scenery, recreation, and economics!

Our love of wilderness can be articulated on a similar less selfish plane. The starting point is thinking about its inherent value—in Thoreau’s words, as a civilization other than our own with rights and interests we should respect.

ABOVE: © PETER GOIN; RIGHT: WILDERNESS.NET

Above: The wild through the windshield—California’s Joshua Tree Wilderness, with over a half million acres. Right: Back to nature. Images from Wilderness.net, an educational initiative by the University of Montana’s Wilderness Institute, the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, and the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute. Go to www.wilderness.net.





Q: Can you talk about “big W” wilderness—places congressionally spearheaded and delineated and controlled? How do we deal with artifacts inside the boundaries? What’s their role in a place where we’re not supposed to be reminded of humans? Do we remove them?

A: I think artifacts from the native or pioneer past have a legitimate place. The National Park Service has a cultural mission as well as one involved in protecting nature. But let the cultural preservation be in the context of wilderness where people are visitors who do not remain.

Q: How does that square with the rights of nature? Is that as important as protecting wilderness for the birds and bees?

The wild from afar. Above: Montana’s Glacier National Park; President Nixon recommended setting aside almost a million acres as wilderness, managed as such while awaiting congressional action. Right: View of California’s Yosemite Wilderness, 1980.

A: The key is to keep modern development, including interpretative infrastructure, out. Let designated wilderness be a place where we relearn that we are members, and not masters, of the life community. Why not do for other species what we are trying to do for the oppressed minorities of our own?

Q: Doug Scott spoke about the idea of wilderness as a place for people to escape the machines, the frustration of urban life. Today there’s a concern about another form of technology—cell phones.

A: Sounds like a good point from Doug. Organizations like Wilderness



LEFT: MARTIN STUPICH/NPS/HAER; ABOVE: © ROGER MINICK, COURTESY JAN KESNER GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Watch support a similar logic. As for cell phones, I'm a wilderness guide in the Grand Canyon. It's hard to tell customers paying \$4,000 a trip that they can't get a stock quote or talk to their grandkids. We don't prohibit phones but we do point out they change the experience. Leaving the cell behind might be thought of as a form of restraint essential to preserving wilderness. Mountain bikes stay out; why not cell phones? Communication aids make for carelessness in wild country; they undermine the self-reliance at the heart of the experience.

Q: If you're lost, does looking at your GPS break the contract?

A: There's an argument that getting lost is a valuable experience. There's something to be said for the old-school methods

of exploration. If it's too easy we'll lose much of the value of a wilderness visit. I say gain the experience you need—perhaps by going first with others who know the way—so you don't need cell phones and GPS on your journeys.

Q: Doesn't that get back to your definition of wilderness as a place beyond control?

A: Right. Let's look at it this way: I think that stumbling across a pioneer cabin in wilderness is much less damaging than making a call on a cell phone. The latter puts you in contact with the whole enchilada of modern civilization.

Q: Unfortunately, we're not always very good at interpreting

Right: President Carter recommended setting aside 20,000 acres of Utah's Bryce Canyon National Park as wilderness. The National Park Service protects the wilderness character and values of not only its 46 officially designated areas, but also areas in an additional 31 parks either recommended by the President or studied or proposed by the agency. These places encompass 55 million acres—about 84 percent of park lands—from the Mojave to the Shenandoahs, from the Everglades to Fire Island. Below: Natural encounter? Image from the educational initiative Wilderness.net.

wilderness within the parks. How would you gauge the public perception of wilderness?

A: I agree there is much value of wilderness left unfulfilled. I tell my students to think about individual parks and wilderness areas as books, over time shelved in libraries such as the National Park System. Rangers have been librarians with primarily a protective mission. Now the challenge is to learn to read the books we've saved, to become environmentally literate. This calls for a new generation of educators; scientists, yes, but also poets, theologians, historians, and philosophers. With their help we may be able to understand wilderness as a moral resource, its preservation a gesture of planetary modesty by earth's most dangerous animal. We may be able to produce an ethic that leads the way to sustainable inhabitation of this planet. Nothing can be more important.

Q: In a culture not noted for self-restraint, don't you think it's remarkable that the Wilderness Act is still quite beloved? In 2064, what do you think our relationship with wilderness will be like?

A: It's pretty evident that the wilderness we have now is all we'll ever have.

Pressures are mounting; wilderness will become increasingly rare. The scarcity theory of value will kick in and wilderness, like diamonds, will gain value. In 2064, Americans will see that preserving the parks and the wilderness areas were among the best ideas we ever had as a civilization.

Q: We work with countries around the world where it's impossible or undesirable to remove people, yet we're one of the few nations who insist no one can live in a wilderness area. This would be ludicrous in the Brazilian jungles. Yet here we moved Native Americans out and settlers too. We said we'll maintain the artifacts of your existence, and even be proud that visitors can encounter them, but you can't live there.

Do you see a softening of our stance because of encounters with other cultures? Or do you think we'll promote our way of dealing with wilderness on an international scale?

A: If everyone who wanted to live in wilderness accepted the lifestyle of Brazilian hunters and gatherers, I would have no problem with people living there. Problem is, they want cars and computers and credit cards too. They also have trouble keeping their population in check. I take a hard line here. People who have chosen the road of technology should be visitors only—just like the act states. As a species we have made far too heavy an impact on the global environment. There is more pavement than designated wilderness in the lower 48 states. Protecting wilderness gives us a chance to level the playing field with the rest of nature.

For information on the NPS Wilderness Program, contact Rick Potts, National Wilderness Program Manager, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240, email rick_potts@nps.gov.



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