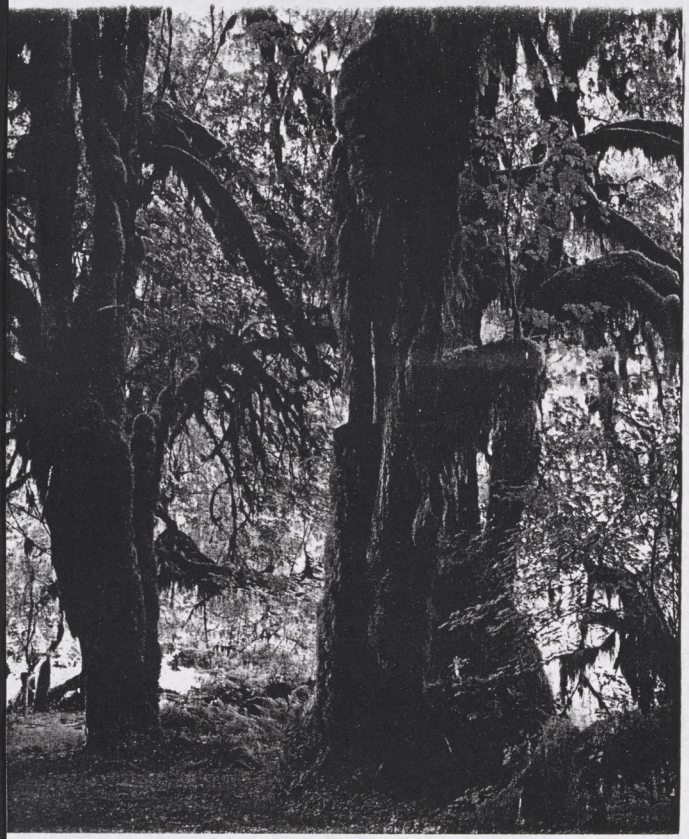


. . . and the silence of growth.

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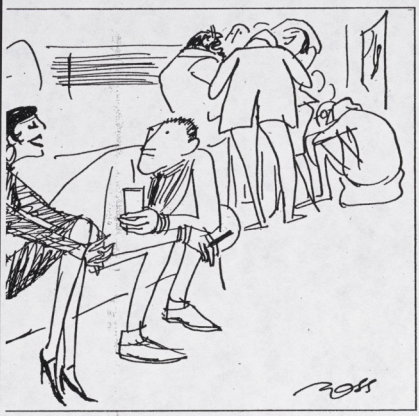
WILDERNESS

America's Living Heritage

Edited by DAVID BROWER

SIERRA CLUB • SAN FRANCISCO

The New York Times Book Review
February 4, 1962



decide whether to have another baby or another book."

EAKING OF BOOKS

By J. DONALD ADAMS

interest, including the recent "This Is the American Earth," with photographs by Ansel Adams and text by Nancy Newhall.

Certain convictions are held in common by the contributors to the present volume. They believe that man today, and in this country especially, with its enormous emphasis on technological achievement and material conveniences, is increasingly divorced from nature. He is so swollen with approbation of his technical accomplishments that he is forgetting his identity as an animal species, dependent, like all others, on his environment. He tends to think of himself, not as a part of nature, but as something above it, and indulges himself in talk of its "conquest." He forgets the interrelation of all living things.

WHAT is he doing to that environment? Consider the facts cited by Justice Douglas. Even in some of the areas set aside for protection we undermine our purpose in doing so. "Come," said Justice Douglas, "to the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in the State of Washington and I will show you uplands turning to sand as a result of overgrazing. Come to the Snoqualmie National Forest and you will see how the woodland buffers that protect the alpine meadows have been cut so thin that jeeps now can get almost anywhere. Wilderness areas are shrinking every year with the cutting of virgin forests and the building of roads. Thousands of acres of our uplands are being sprayed by the Federal Government to kill the sagebrush. Along with the sage goes the willow. And when the willow disappears the beaver do also. And when the beaver are gone, the wonderful ponds that nourish brook trout dry up."

The pollution of our streams goes on, he observed, so that many of them have become open sewers. "The historic Potomac has sewage sludge that is at points ten feet deep. One has to travel twenty miles from Cleveland to find water of Lake Erie clean enough for swimming."

Clearly, the atomic bomb is not the only threat to man's future. Because it is the most dramatic, it receives a disproportionate share of our attention; but there are slower and more certain ways of joining the dinosaur, and we must give heed to them.

Another conviction shared by the contributors to "Wilderness" is the restorative quality to be found by contact with the unspoiled places of the earth. "It seems to me significant," wrote Wallace Stegner, "that the distinct downturn in our literature from hope to bitterness took place almost at the precise time when the frontier officially came to an end, in 1890, and when the American way of life had begun to turn strongly urban and industrial. The more urban it has become, and the more frantic with technological change, the sicker and more embittered our literature, and I believe our people, have become."

This people was nourished and strengthened by the wilderness it had to face. Out of that contact came the strongest qualities of the American character. If we are to remain strong, it is a contact we must renew, and the places where that can be done must be kept inviolate. We need refuges from noise, hurry and interruption.

Several years ago, shortly before dusk on a calm and lovely evening, I stood on the porch of a small lodge on Two Medicine Lake in Glacier Park. A man came up to me, looked about, and said, "What a dump!" I asked him, "How far did you drive today?" "Better than 500 miles," he said. He could enjoy nothing, and drove on, God knows where, early the next morning.

Treasure Chest

The Wilderness Idea

SOMETHING will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed; if we permit the vast virgin forests to be turned into comic books and plastic cigarette cases; if we drive the few remaining members of the wild species into zoos or to extinction; if we pollute the last clear air and dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads through the last of the silence, so that never again will Americans be free in their own country from the noise, the exhausts, the stinks of human and automotive waste. And so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it. Without any remaining wilderness we are committed to a headlong drive into our technological termitelife, the Brave New World of a completely man-controlled environment. We need wilderness preserved—as much of it as is still left, and as many kinds—because it was the challenge against which our character as a people was formed. The reminder and the reassurance that it is still there is good for our spiritual health even if we never once in ten years set foot in it. It is good for us when we are young, because of the incomparable sanity it can bring briefly, as vacation and rest, into our insane lives. It is important to us when we are old simply because it is there—important, that is, simply as idea.

WALLACE STEGNER.

Our Virgin Areas

OUR virgin areas are almost gone. The areas that are "locked up" are insufficient to accommodate the spiritual needs of the vast population which we will have by the end of this century. Even the High Sierra that John Muir was anxious for people to see is in danger of being stomped to dust because of the heavy traffic. Roads penetrate deeper every year.

We stand on the new frontier where science and its machines threaten man. Our industrial plants and our modern conveniences have ruined many of our rivers and lakes. The roar of motors penetrates deeper and deeper into the remaining wilderness areas. Man has a constantly diminishing chance to find any retreat. Yet with the expanding population we need expanding wilderness areas where youngsters and old folks alike can escape the dreariness of life for an hour, a day, or a month and once more become in tune with the universe.

WILLIAM O. DOUGLAS.

Both above quotations from "Wilderness: America's Living Heritage," edited by David Brower (Sierra Club).