



Shot Porter

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH, INC. 529 COMMERCIAL SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94111

September 10, 1975

Mr. William Hogan
World of Books
The Chronicle
San Francisco, California

Dear Bill:

Your column on Sierra Club books was great. No one could read it without sensing what publishing means to conservation, nor I without remembering what your support meant to the club's publishing program throughout all the years I worked with it. It is good to see John Beckmann, its present chief, and Fred Hill getting the same kind of support. The club's new Thoreau book is an extraordinary feat in many ways. All hands deserve congratulations.

Your allusion to the Exhibit Format Series sent me back into pleasant memories.

The format was worked out initially with Ansel Adams and the late Nancy Newhall to serve one purpose--to put back into book illustration the dynamic of size. The usefulness of size was once taken for granted, even in early government reports--John Wesley Powell's, for example. This erstwhile noble function of books was sunk without appreciable trace in the pricecutting sea.

But Nancy Newhall, from much exhibit hanging, knew the value of having some photographs medium in size, some jewel-like in smallness, and some exploding on you, forcing your eyes really to travel around in its dimensions, taking your spirit along on the trip. We could have used a photomural-size book, I suppose, but reigned ourselves in, settled for something liftable, and I dubbed it "Exhibit Format."

This Is the American Earth, first in that format, worked beautifully--and still does, fifteen years later.

We tried to get several commercial publishers to finance and distribute the book but failed. "Beautiful, but too expensive to produce." "You'd have to charge \$15 for it and no one would pay that much." And so on. So we looked for angels, found one (a nice grant, an interest-free loan), did ten thousand copies in the best gravure we could find, varnished it in a way that amazed Alfred Knopf, charged what it cost to publish it, and had to order a second printing before the year was out.

Eliot Porter's great Thoreau book, "In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World," repeated the story, in color. Joseph Wood Krutch called Porter's the best anthology of Thoreau there was. Porter had spent a good twenty years making it right--and trying to interest commercial publishers in it. Nancy Newhall told him to send it to the Sierra Club. I decided we'd have to publish it, even if it required my taking up a life of crime. But first, look for angels again. Hold your breath, wear a bold look, and ask for \$25, because we need that to buy the finest color printing you could find anywhere in the world, the best paper, and a special varnishing technique for essential brilliance.

It worked, too. A second printing was required in the fall of publication. Poor students were discovered cutting back on their beer money to afford something that beautiful. It is still being reprinted.

Then Ian Ballantine came along, with his small-format paperbacks for those who didn't have beer money. "In Wildness" and American Earth, then our best, were the first two contracted for. They're still tops. The Exhibit Format Series was off on a course that would win it the Carey-Thomas Award for the outstanding achievement in creative publishing in the United States.

Something extremely important, economically, about the format was that it looked impressive enough to warrant a bold price. You don't save all that much, in producing a book with a great deal of excellent color in it, by reducing the trim size a couple of inches each way. But you do severely reduce what people will willingly pay. And it was those who were willing to pay the \$25 (about \$10 less than a commercial publisher would need for similar color, content, and quality) who made the rest of the program possible for the club.

Twenty in exhibit format were published by the club while I was there, and three since then. At Friends of the Earth, we've done eight. The last is due late this month from the printer, Mondadori (where many gentlemen from Verona produce remarkably beautiful work for us). It is Micronesia: Island Wilderness. The text is by Kenneth Brower and the photographs by Robert Wenkam. Through no fault of our own it appears just as the United States Congress needs to know more about what is at stake in Micronesia. Legislation now pending that would make part of Micronesia (the Marianas) a U.S. Commonwealth, in violation, we think, of the U.S. obligation, under U.N. mandate, to prepare Micronesians for independence.

Perhaps, in an age that knows it's high time to reduce car size, book size must come down too. I would hope not. Big cars are hard on the environment and make heavy demands on open space. They depend upon irreplaceable resources, and the more air that goes to cars, the less there is to breathe--something a species that has to breathe every five seconds should remember.

Books can be a bother, too. They take trees. But trees will regrow (we are careful not to allow redwood pulp in our books; redwoods do not regrow to size in less than a millenium), and a book once bought isn't burned, as oil is. We would like people to spend a lot of their gasoline money on books, especially ours.

Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth books explain and portray ways of making the environment last longer, of enjoying it more. They also accomplish something else. By rough calculation, I figure that since 1960, 20 million people have spent some \$35 million to buy, use, and enjoy those books' message (big and little, and in derived reminders that the earth is worth staying in love with). Reviews, editorials, articles and TV specials based on these books, and enemy apoplexy from the same source, have extended their impact nicely. Of all the reviews, yours have been the most consistently supportive. We'd like to think the earth is in better health for all this.

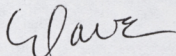
Oh, other formats are useful, too. Smaller and larger. There are our Celebrating the Earth books, for example, and--only a quarter of the Exhibit Format size--mass-market paperbacks that have a huge effect on the mundi populi. Who could not be affected--even Charles McCabe--by Paul Ehrlich's The Population Bomb, a book that is bringing realization, just in time, of what the earth needs besides twice as many people?

I may as well confess that we have a still larger format on deck, to appear early next year. It is Richard Kauffman's remarkable, unprecedented Headlands, a limited edition for which he has taken and developed the photographs, made the separations and the color plates, and has hired and is directing the printer--himself. He is lithographing the book at home, one double spread at a time, one color at a time, one month at a time, month after month--in addition to such other duties as completing the photography for an only ordinarily beautiful book on Italy's hill towns and serving as chairman of the board at H.S. Crocker.

In Headlands, lines from Robinson Jeffers are paired with Richard Kauffman's color photographs, the combination matching the splendor of the coast that moved them both. Mr. Kauffman added the duties of getting me to write a foreword and inventing the new format. Headlands will be first in what we are calling, in part because of its 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 17-inch dimensions, the Gallery Format Series.

But don't worry. Until the end, we'll resist Billboard Format!
Our warm thanks for all your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. Brower", written in a cursive style.

David R. Brower
President

World of Books



Sierra Club Books

William Hogan

INCREDIBLY sharp photographs made between 1899 and 1920 are reproduced in black and gray. They retain the meticulous detail of the original glass plates — "Ice-coated Grass, Shrubby and Trees at Lincoln, Mass." to "Mill Pond, Chatham, Cape Cod."

Thoreau country is every American's country ("In the long run men only hit what they aim at," H. D. Thoreau wrote in "Walden," "Therefore . . . they had better aim at something high"). And the book "Thoreau Country," text selections from the works of Thoreau, photographs by Herbert W. Gleason, edited by Mark Silbur with an introduction by Paul Brooks, could be one of the big gift attractions of the autumn.

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SIERRA CLUB BOOKS are alive and well. The other day Frederick E. Hill, a veteran of the Eastern publishing scene who now heads up the club's publishing program, offered us an advance look at his fall list. My eyes became riveted on the Gleason pictures.

A one-time New England cleric, Gleason became attracted to Thoreau the man and writer and devoted 21 years to retracing Thoreau's footsteps, photographing exactly what the writer had recorded in his journals and books (the country then was about the same as Thoreau had known it in the mid-18th Century). A dedicated conservationist, Gleason made several

photographic forays into the West and, among other works, illustrated John Muir's "Travels in Alaska" (1915).

In 1970, Barre Publishers, a small Massachusetts firm, issued two collections of Gleason's photographs; later Princeton issued "The Illustrated Walden" and "Maine Woods" with Gleason prints. But Thoreau country in its entirety remained to be done. The Sierra Club took it on and, in a modified version of its once overly-elaborate Exhibit Format Series, is both a jewel of a book and, in the softbound edition, a bargain (\$9.95; cloth \$32.50).

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"A CLOSER LOOK," by Michael A. Godfrey, who has written widely for nature publications, is another prominent entry on the Sierra Club's fall list (November). Godfrey feels the average backyard or vacant lot can be a mini-wilderness area, if one looks closely.

This is "doorstep ecology," caterpillars, winter birds, a mosquito, a branch, a leaf, through which we may see sustaining life systems and the biologic process at work. The color and black-and-white photographs are vivid and informative, and Godfrey's peek at the "ecosystems of a house" (the creatures that live within the house, why they are there, how they subsist) is fascinating (\$14.95 cloth). These two alone would make the Sierra Club season a success.