

Camas

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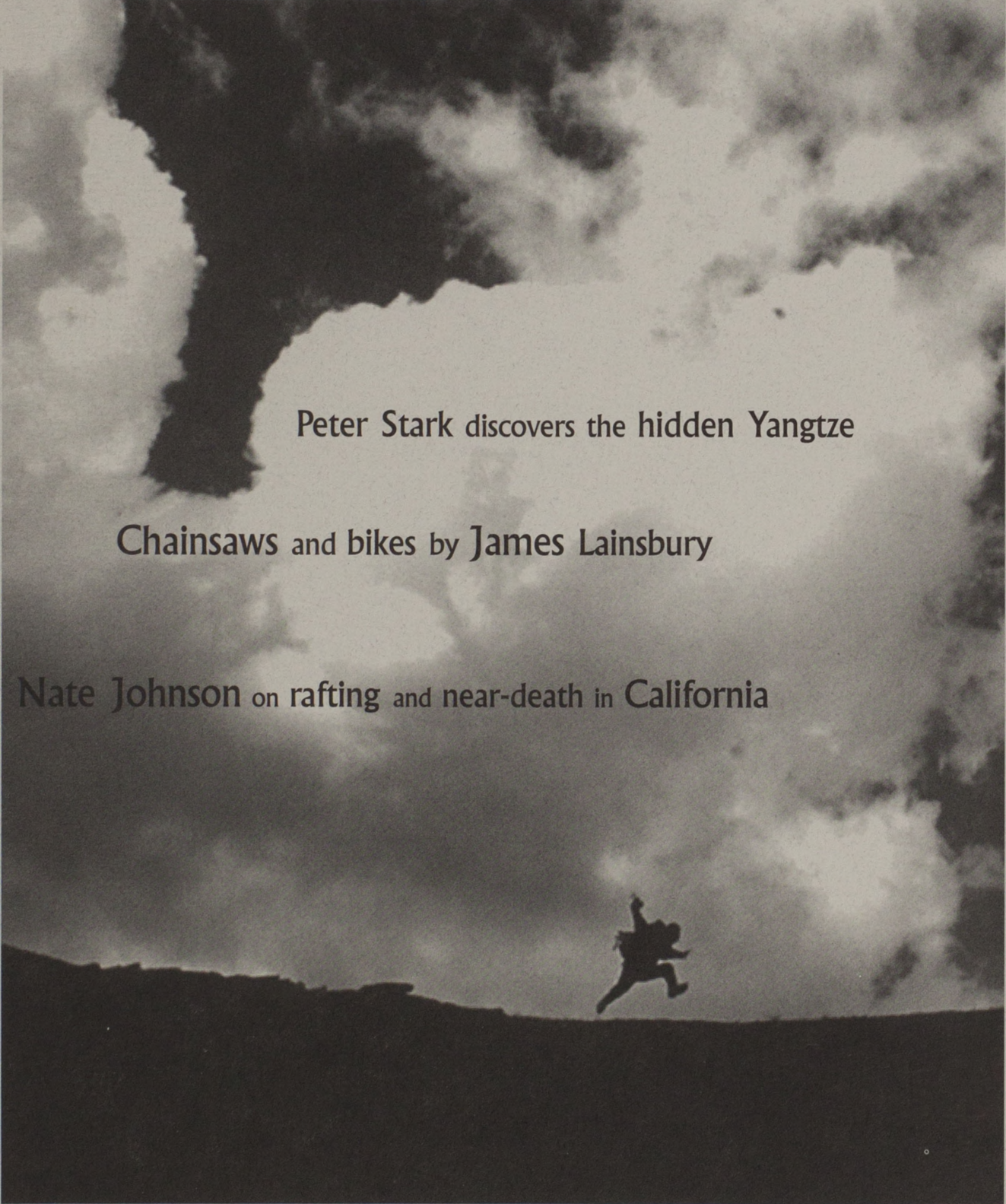
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Camas

Winter/Spring 2001

Volume 4 Number 3

Three dollars



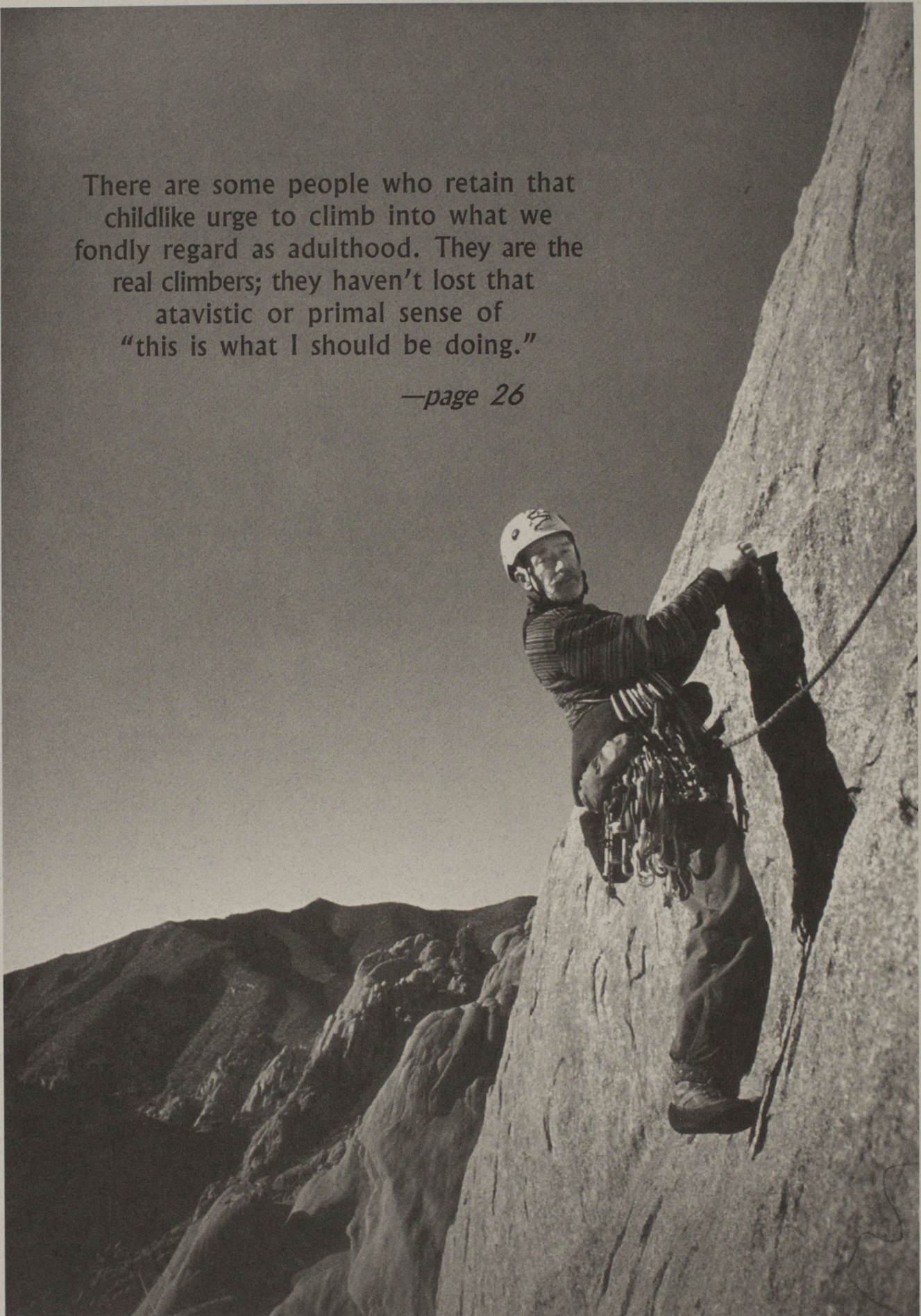
Peter Stark discovers the hidden Yangtze

Chainsaws and bikes by James Lainsbury

Nate Johnson on rafting and near-death in California

There are some people who retain that
childlike urge to climb into what we
fondly regard as adulthood. They are the
real climbers; they haven't lost that
atavistic or primal sense of
"this is what I should be doing."

—page 26





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page 30

cover photo:
Glacier National Park
Chad Harder

Inside cover photo
Graham Thompson
courtesy of Graham Thompson

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The Recreation Issue

Winter/Spring 2001

Volume 4 Number 3

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Peter Stark discovers a hidden monastery while trekking in the mountains of Tibet. page 22

Mogasm

Ari LeVaux takes us on a wild ride from one chakra to another while bumping and grinding at Snowbowl. page 30

A Little about My Chainsaw, a Horse Named Pride, and Three Hundred Miles on a Bike

James Lainsbury's story of horse logging and biking in Maine shows us all that even with the best intentions, obsession brings us nothing but the death shimmies. page 38

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We're two turns above Oxbow Bend, wading up to our belly buttons under the radiant glow of snow-covered Mount Moran. Above us, a triad of gulls spirals up and down over the water. They're fishing, too. Seth spotted a small mayfly hatch, and he's casting dry flies in hopes of luring a fish to the surface. But I'd rather fish below. For me, *not* seeing the fish that I'm chasing adds to the mystery of the creature. It remains wilder set in a dark world. When fish come up to lap bugs off their boundary, they poke a nose into our world; I'm here to visit theirs, not catch them in mine. Plus, most of what a fish eats lives between the bottom of a river and the top. I'm sticking with weighted nymphs.



Jay Ericson

My nymphs, a red San Juan worm and an olive pheasant tail, soar above me before they hit the water with the poise of a landing pelican. I watch them sink and run with the current until they disappear. But I know where they are. Drifting. Drifting. Wham! A fish takes my tomfoolery offering. I lift my rod and pull in the line. The fish sinks deep and swims against me, dragging my line downstream.

I played that fish for a few minutes before I lost him. He must have recognized that I was not, in fact, offering food, but instead a selfish request, and he spit out my fly like I might a rotten grape. I figured he swam off with the other fish in that hole to find safer water. I don't know how badly, if at all, I hurt him, although I expect that I did. And I don't know if the other fish in that spot experienced any other trauma by my presence. I'm sure that my fishery biologist friends could tell me the extent of what happened to my fish if I thought that really mattered. But what I realized I wanted to know, what really mattered to me, besides whether it was a trout or a whitefish, is: How do I *feel* about what I've done to that fish? For me, this is fishing boiled down to its moral essence.

Every outdoor sport has some basic essence. In sports like skiing or kayaking, that essence is technique and strength. For hiking, it is stamina. Fishing is primarily a mental sport, although the essence of fly casting is grace, and river crossings are a physical challenge. When you factor culture and society, friends and beer, learning curves, athletic prowess, aesthetic arrest, environmental philosophy, and free market forces back into the essences, outdoor recreation becomes a dynamic and textured topic for writing. As well as the theme for this issue of *Camas*.

To refresh our vocabularies, recreation is something stimulating that we do to rejuvenate or restore our minds and bodies. So we aren't really recreating if we've done nothing to *need* it. By this definition, retirees who play golf every day aren't recreating. Neither are professional, sponsored mountain bikers. They might fish, though, which would be a form of recreation. And I imagine that rolling burritos in the local Mexican joint could be seen as recreation for ski bums, too.

But recreation is more than just rejuvenating and relaxing our minds and bodies after

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Camas, a quarterly journal, provides a forum for discussion of environmental issues and is a place for creative writing dedicated to the nature of the West.

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We invite submissions of article ideas, prose and artwork. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission. Thanks.

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work. In our increasingly sedentary culture, for lots of us, getting outside for sport is the best way to get in and stay in shape. And with many of these outdoor sports, we learn to move and manipulate our bodies in ways that connect our mental focus with our physical movements in a natural environment—rowing a boat, skiing a ridge, climbing a peak hidden in clouds. We can exercise and, at the same time, travel across diverse terrain to access many of the wilder regions left on our planet and in our hearts. Some of these places, believe it or not, aren't even that far away.

And while we're in these wilder places, or getting there, we have unavoidable epiphanies, like I did about that fish: I am humbled by its particular and fragile existence. These moments of insight will happen to just about anyone who floats the Green River, or skis the Wyoming backcountry, or climbs Long's Peak. The trick, for our intents and purposes, is to translate those epiphanies-during-recreation into creative and meaningful writing without being trite or too fatuous.

Outdoor recreation writing is not new. For years, hunting and fishing held the spotlight. They had the magazines and the literati (Hemingway and Haig-Brown), and they bridged that narrow but deep gap between sport and spirit.

But times have changed, dude, and other sports have gained popularity and a stronger presence in our culture; something needs to be said about them, too. Market forces have infected the art of outdoor recreation writing, though, and pushed out influences like environmental philosophy and the pleasure in learning a new sport or about a new place. Now, too much of it focuses on how to be a weekend warrior; or gives play-by-play accounts of overguided, overpriced commercial expeditions; or posits what new gear YOU MUST HAVE! That's not recreation writing; it's perverted market reporting for what Ed Abbey called "industrial tourism." To be worthwhile, our discussion needs more new voices and a new spin.

When I set out to put together this issue of *Camas*, I wanted to reincarnate the written discussion of outdoor recreation, especially as it applies to culturally and ecologically minded folks like us. In this issue of *Camas*, we do that. Becca Lawrence writes about restoration work that she's done to mitigate vegetation damage on her favorite ski area. Meagan Boltwood reevaluates her role as an outdoor educator. James Lainsbury bikes to unpack obsession. Ari LeVaux skis as kundalini meditation, and Nate Johnson tries to understand the power of a river, only to yield to its intensity. The pieces in this issue challenge us to consider and reflect on our motivations and actions in our pursuit of fun and re-creation, like the genre used to. And they do that set in *our* world, the world I never pulled that trout into—I'm sure it was a trout.

—Dan Berger

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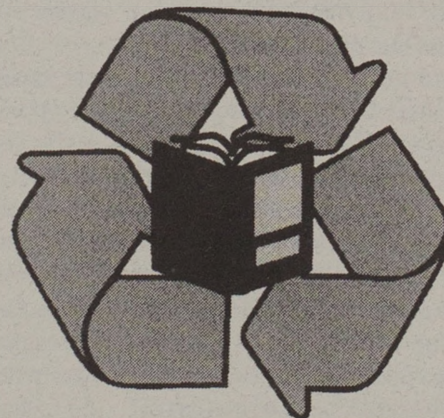
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Correspondence

Dear Camas,

I was trying to remember your email address and this is what I came up with. I wanted to congratulate you and Mac on your wedding. My mom told me that you have set your date, which she read in the newspaper. I hope everything is going well.

Sincerely,
April

Dear Ms. L—, Just so you don't hold your breath waiting for your friend "Camas" to write back, please let us clear things up: the "Camas" you have written to is not, in fact, a person. This "Camas" is actually *Camas*, a literary environmental journal produced at the University of Montana. We are a loose-knit group of artsy tree-lovers, not a young lady about to be wed. I hope "Camas" (your friend) gets back to you and that you enjoy her wedding to "Mac." If you wish to submit some writing, please don't hesitate to contact us again, and we will gladly send you our writer's guidelines.

Sincerely, The staff at *Camas*

Trickle-down Environmentalism

It's not that these guys don't want you to know about them, it's just that they've been too busy or otherwise haven't bothered to say hello. But that will change for the **Outdoor Industry Conservation Alliance** (OICA) when their forthcoming book, *Making a Difference*, written by Amy Irvine, hits bookstores and outdoor retail shops this spring. The OICA brings over 70 outdoor retailers and manufacturers together with the grassrootsiest of environmental groups to fund local environmental projects. Member companies like Patagonia, REI, Kelty, and The North Face donate \$1,000 out of every \$1 million they make each year—capped off at \$10 grand—to the OICA, which in turn, awards that money as grants of up to \$35,000 to regional environmental groups like the Predator

Project, the Utah Rivers Council, and the Wildlands Project.

The reason you may not know about OICA is because they have no marketing budget. "One hundred percent of the membership money goes to grants," says John Sterling, spokesman for the OICA and Director of Environmental Programs for Patagonia, Inc. No one gets paid, they send out no brochures, and they spend no money on soy ink or corporate eco-retreats.

Last year, the OICA awarded 10 grants, including two to Canadian groups: the Rain-coast Conservation Foundation and BC Spaces for Nature. The Raincoast Conservation Foundation used their grant to protect the mainland coast of British Columbia, known as the Great Bear Rainforest.

This forest holds the largest known continuous network of intact, ancient, temperate rain forests on the planet.

Making a Difference chronicles the success of 12 of the association's 101 grants that have been awarded since 1989. The first grant went to the Friends of the Payette to protect the North Fork of the Payette River in Idaho. Since then, the group has donated to groups and projects in Alaska, Oregon, Texas, New York, Maine, Yellowstone, and Alberton Gorge on the Clark Fork River, just outside of Missoula, Montana.

For more information on OICA, its upcoming book, or how to apply for grants, visit www.conservationalliance.com.

Buffalo Field Campaign Update

Abandoning its policy of natural population regulation, the National Park Service joined Montana in a new agreement that calls the future of Yellowstone National Park's wild buffalo into ques-

tion. The plan, signed by the state and federal governments, relies on capturing and slaughtering bison to enforce an arbitrary population cap of 3,000 animals. Additional measures include confining bison in quarantine for up to four years and fitting bison cows with radio collars and vaginal telemetry devices.

Buffalo Field Campaign (BFC)

volunteers have been running daily patrols along the park's western boundary near West Yellowstone since early November of last year. In addition to monitoring buffalo that migrate outside the park, the activists employ tactics ranging from direct action to lawsuits to stop the **Montana Department of Livestock (DOL)** from hazing, capturing, and slaughtering buffalo.

The DOL uses horses, helicopters, ATVs, snowmobiles, and shotguns to herd buffalo.

With the new plan in place, a new bison capture facility constructed at Horse Butte just outside the park, and bison migrating across the park border, this winter has been challenging.

In January the DOL violated the Endangered Species Act by constructing the bison trap without first conducting the requisite two weeks of bald eagle monitoring. An Incidental Take Permit allowing the DOL to construct and operate the capture facility inside a known bald eagle nesting and foraging area states that "pre-monitoring of the Horse Butte bald eagle nesting territory will occur two weeks before installation of the capture facility." BFC, along with **Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers** and the **Ecology Center**, filed a 60-day notice of intent to sue on January 5, 2001.

During the BFC's **Week of Action**, held March 19-25, the BFC



Jay Ericson

constructed a tripod on the only road into Horse Butte. A BFC volunteer hung in a harness from the apex of the tripod forcing the DOL to bring in a cherry picker. Law enforcement spent several hours in the cherry picker removing the activist.

BFC's intent was to delay DOL officials from hazing the buffalo that had migrated to Horse Butte while other volunteers herded the animals safely back into the park. The tactic worked, but the volunteer who hung from the tripod was arrested.

Three other volunteers were arrested and seven buffalo were captured in other areas around West Yellowstone that week. All of the volunteers were later released, but three of the buffalo were sent to slaughter.

If you would like to stay informed, sign up for BFC's weekly email updates by sending a message to the email address below. If you want to get involved, the campaign can always use volunteers and donations. All volunteers are provided with room and board, and all donations are tax-deductible. Buffalo Field Campaign, PO Box 957, West Yellowstone, MT 59758; (406) 646-0070; buffalo@wildrockies.org; www.wildrockies.org/buffalo.

—Dan Brister contributed to this report. He wrote about his experiences with BFC in the Winter 2000 issue of Camas.

Hello Out There...

Skiers, an otherwise passionate, informed, and large niche in the outdoor world, have been slow to respond to the ecological damage caused by developed ski areas. Many resorts cut large tracts of trees, build in critical animal habitat, and degrade waterways with their pernicious snowmaking, yet no alliance of users has called them on it. For the most part, non-profits such as the **Conservation Law Foundation, Colorado Wild, and The Greater Yellowstone Coalition** have been working to mitigate the problems. A few years ago, it took the fire-bombing of a building at Vail in Colorado by a loosely-banded eco-terrorist group to attract mainstream attention to these issues.

Fly fishers have Trout Unlimited,

hunters have the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and boaters have American Whitewater; these and other groups are comprised of sportsmen and women who work to protect the integrity of the habitat in which their users recreate. But do skiers have such a group?

Ski Area Citizens (SAC), a coalition of environmental organizations, has come forth to inform skiers about the environmental practices and management of individual ski areas. Its most successful project thus far is the **Ski Area Scorecard**.

To grade the resorts, the SAC gathers Environmental Impact Statements, Forest Service documents, Fish and Game reports, and other public records. The same criteria, methods, and information from these documents are used to power spreadsheets and databases that eventually spit out a grade. Ski areas were given a chance to participate in last year's evaluation process, although only about 15 of over 130 areas that were evaluated took advantage of the opportunity.

SAC's website includes pages of scores, documents, comments, and links informing readers of how each resort failed and/or excelled. Although many members of the coalition are skiers, the effort was coordinated by environmentalists.

The **National Ski Areas Association (NSAA)**, a group of ski resorts, has its own environmental agenda. Last summer, the NSAA released a 24-page environmental charter it calls **Sustainable Slopes** that outlines management and development strategies to "ensure that ski areas have a well-rounded environmental program," said Geraldine Hughes, NSAA Director of Public Policy. For ski areas to associate themselves with the charter, they must appoint an overseeing charter contact person, implement charter principles, and agree to submit yearly data on their progress.

NSAA took a year to develop the

charter and, in the process, invited several environmental groups to join the discussion. According to Hughes, groups like Colorado Wild and **Save Our Wild Canyons** participated, and their input was included in the charter.

But after the charter was released,

these and other non-profits denounced the charter because "implementation was voluntary and because the charter ignores the most significant environmental impacts: expansion into wild areas and off-site real estate

development," said Jeffrey Berman, executive director of Colorado Wild and president of the SAC.

Berman argues that the charter doesn't push the industry to make changes that will significantly improve habitat or that will curtail its destruction.

Hughes counters that the diversity of ski areas and the regions in which they operate make sweeping charter principles impossible. She also noted that the voluntary nature of the charter encourages resorts to go beyond what is required by law to ensure efficient use of water and energy and that it shouldn't be viewed as a failure on the part of the NSAA. (Among the groups that endorsed Sustainable Slopes are **US Department of Energy, USDA Forest Service, Leave No Trace, Inc., and the National Environmental Trust**.)

The industry, in turn, will probably do the least that is required of it, with a few notable exceptions (see the SCA website), but will add eco-labels whenever it can. And skiers, who will continue to enjoy high-speed lifts and space-age snow, may never know the difference.

More information can be found at www.skiareacitizens.com and www.nsaa.org. Also see Becca Lawrence's piece on ski area restoration, *Turning on Fragile Ground*, on page 34.

—compiled by Daniel Berger



David Morris

Surfing

by Clara Sophia Weygant

I grew up in a town where seeing a car with a couple of surfboards on top was normal. Walking through my neighborhood I'd see wetsuits draped over deck railings and fences. There was a board shop on the corner by my grade school, and in the afternoon, sometimes I would smell the pungent chemical reek of fiberglass. This is not just a town with surfers, but a town with a world class break and a place where the ocean shapes the culture just as surely as it continues to shape the cliffs along the western shore.

I'd say that in Santa Cruz, at least 40 percent of the population surfs, or has children that surf, is married to or going out with a surfer, works with a surfer, or is mistaken for a surfer. If there's a big swell, the coffeehouses and surf shops are empty, there are more absences at the university and high schools, people call in sick to their jobs. There's a quiet everywhere but along the water, where it's packed: surfers standing on the cliffs watching the swell, scrambling into their wetsuits beside their cars, grabbing their boards off the car rack, waxing them, and then practically sprinting to get into the water.

There are stairs you can take down the cliff to this world-class break. But the real way to get into the break—to save your energy for riding the waves, rather than paddling—is to run lightly out towards the point, hurdle smoothly over the waist-high fence with your board under one arm, pick your way over the slick sandstone wet with spray, and stand at the edge of the cliff awaiting a lull in the waves. Then, carefully, timing it with the waves, descend the rock that is worn into rough steps, until you are about eight feet above the water. Bring your board in front of your body and jump out, drop into the water and as soon as you hit, paddle away from the crushing waves and into the break. I've never done that. I'm pretty sure I could negotiate the slick rock, even the steps carrying a board, and I think I'd rather enjoy the jump off the cliff into the water. But once there, I'd be doomed. You have to be good to surf the Lane. Every time I've watched a surfer jump off the point, there is an eagerness of movement and an easy assurance that totally belies just how hard this sport is.

"Did you ever surf?" an old friend recently asked me. "Well, I've slept with a surfer...." He did try to teach me. Despite our incompatibility, I learned how to read the water, the breaks, and equally important, the hierarchy of the other surfers in the break, collectively known as the pack.

I'd tried to learn before, of course. Once when I was 14, I paddled out, didn't catch a wave, and got caught in the shore break. I found out that waves suck. Literally. Going over the falls you are sucked up the face of the wave and then dropped however many feet to the bowl in the bottom of the wave, and then, all the weight and noise and water in the wave comes down on top of you. At some point in this process you lose track of your board, which hopefully has a leash, so you don't lose it completely; but in the dark wet maelstrom in which you are engulfed, a big 18-pound THING is churning around—a hard thing—with all the force of the wave behind it. When this happens in the shore break, you don't fall down into a bowl of water, you fall into a bowl of sand covered with a little water, so it's sort of like getting slapped to the ground by a huge hand and then vigorously agitated in a gritty washing machine. And don't forget about the board. When this happens out in deep water, it's actually safer; there's much less chance of breaking your neck, an all too common injury for body surfers. But the fact that you are "safer" is relative. Here, the wave drops you, falls on you, roils you, and holds you under. This absolutely terrifies me. It feels like forever. I've heard it's helpful to count when this happens, that the time you are under is only two or three seconds, but that's too long for me. I am, quite frankly, afraid of waves, and I'm a terrible wuss in the water.

recreation illustrations by Jan Scher

Even though they scare me, to the surf community in general, waves, and good waves especially, are a combination of the Holy Grail and a RareOneTimeOnlyEventThatMayNeverHappenAgain! (Or at least not for a while). If you're up early, you'll see cars with boards on top heading north out of town to check the surf, or cruising Westcliff, Eastcliff, all the way down to Moss Landing, looking for waves. Good waves are a combination of weather, sometimes hundreds of miles off-shore, and tides. Every surfer has a tidetable in the glove compartment of his or her car. Then it depends on which way the swells are running. The coast continues out beyond the cliffs into reefs; it has its own topography under water, which is what forms a break. There are a few places that only break when a big swell comes from the south, something that can be as infrequent as once every two years. At the Lane, when a big northwest swell is coming, you can watch a wave come in. As it hits the edge

of the outermost reef, the change in depth from deep to shallow, jacks it up, and it gets higher and higher, and you keep thinking it will break, it will break, but it doesn't until it hits the edge of the inner reef; and then the crest spills down the huge wall of gray blue water—sometimes in the winter it's almost black—curls, drops, falls over onto itself in a froth of creamy white. Sometimes there's an off-shore breeze that holds the water up and keeps the wave from breaking for a few more seconds—the crest forms, but hesitates, and the wind blows the spray over the back of the wave: a phenomenon that happens often enough to give the proper name to this world-class break: Steamers Lane.

Every time you paddle out into a break to surf, it's called a session. If you were hanging around with surfers you might hear something like: "Dude, I had such the great session at

But surfers know it, and, if you aren't local (i.e. live within half a mile) AND well connected and try and paddle out, you'll get beaten black and blue.

Before you get to the politics of the pack, you have to learn to catch a damn wave. Eighty percent of surfing is paddling. Most of the good breaks are off a point, or anywhere from 100 yards to a quarter-mile off shore. And when there's a swell, you have to paddle out against that force and dodge the breaking waves. You get good at timing, trying to pick a lull between sets. Waves roll in groups, called "sets." There can be anywhere from four to 15 waves in a set. Sometimes the interval between them is long, and sometimes, it's barely anything; and you battle your way out and then find a spot in the water a little away from the break and rest.

It's a physiological fact that when you are immersed in

cold water, it stimulates your kidneys. Even if you didn't have to before you paddle out, inevitably at some point in your session, you are going to have to go. One of the secret delights of wearing a wetsuit in cold water, aside from the fact that it keeps you warm and adds to your buoyancy, is that you get to pee in it.

I swam in the ocean with one of my friends just after she bought a wetsuit. We were almost to the buoy when



Ching Brodsky

Indicators, head high, throwing a little as they hit the reef, it was sweet." Surfers talk about waves endlessly.

When there is a swell, the waves are only there for a short time each day, usually around low tide. Too much water, and the swell is just that: a swell, no waves, no faces to carve, no lips to turn off of. So, when it's up, it's up. And you better get in the water. You and 50 other people at the more popular places. Just don't take someone's wave, and stay out of people's way. There are some breaks where the take-off point, the place where you actually have to be to catch the wave, is incredibly small. There's a break north of my house, where the take-off point is about as big as a bathtub. A rather theoretical bathtub — it's just a spot in the water, after all.

she stopped and started treading water. "Clara," she said urgently, "I have to pee!"

"So?"

"So what do I do? I'm in a wetsuit!" She was concerned.

"You pee in the suit." I said. "It's standard. Don't you just pee when you're swimming out here in your bathing suit?"

"Well, yes, but, this has legs, and..."

"Trust me," I reassured her, "it's really nice."

She gave me a doubtful look and then stared reflectively out towards the horizon. I treaded water and watched her face. After a moment she looked amazed, turned to me, and smiled.

"It is nice, it warms your legs." She thought a moment. "In fact, it's really nice!"

I don't know how critical that small amount of warmth is. But I can attest that after being out in cold water for a couple of hours, having your legs warmed, even for a minute or so, gets to be an increasingly pleasurable experience.

So, you paddle out, stop, rest, and pee in your suit. While you're doing that, you can scope the break from up close. Often, if it's a place you surf frequently, you'll get to know the regulars. If you are being cool—not taking off in front of anyone, not jumping on the really choice waves, staying out of the way of the alpha surfers—and if it's a beginner's break, for the most part people are friendly. You can also watch the waves, see the timing of the sets, and pick the place where the waves consistently break, which is the best place to sit and wait for your ride. There are, like skis, more than one kind of board, and what kind you have determines where you sit in the lineup. If you have a nice, nine-foot

rides they've gotten, they drive for miles up and down the coast looking for waves, they become obsessed, drugged: the ocean, the ride, the surf, become everything.

I am not obsessed. I can barely catch a wave, much less snap to my feet and ride one. This is what happens. The wave comes, I'm in position, I turn my board around, I lie on it and start paddling as hard as I can, glancing over my shoulder to keep track of that advancing rush of blue-green water. It comes, lifts me up, I paddle, paddle, feel myself lifted, paddle, and suddenly I am looking at the soft curving back of the wave, like the back of a whale, all momentum gone, and I am bobbing in the water. I've mis-timed it, or didn't paddle hard enough, or something. Each time I paddled out, I learned something new, but each time, my knowledge was infinitesimal, tiny, almost nothing compared to what I didn't know. The few times I did catch a wave, it was after all that slow paddling and fighting against the water and working and working; it was like the jump to light speed in Star Wars when all the stars blur into a wall of white. Suddenly you have the FORCE behind you, pushing you across the top of the wave faster than you could imagine, and the feel of that force is like a storm, like rockfall, like a strong wind or an earthquake. It is exhilarating. Joyous. Scary. Almost enough to fall in love. Almost. But I'm not a water person. There are water

people. They are the ones at home there, they are easy in that liquid world, they can swim and dive, and they adore being wet. Me, I'm always uneasy. I feel like an impostor; I am always acutely aware that I cannot breathe in that medium, that I cannot move swiftly, that I am unsure.

It was my own awkwardness that finally made me give

it up. I tried for a year. I'd get up early and do dawn patrol, paddling out just as dawn turned the water into a delirious reflection of itself. I tried going out every single day for a month, working and working at catching a wave.

Despite my frustration and lack of ability, I still liked being in the water. I liked the smell, and the feel, and watching the waves, reading the liquid landscape. Sometimes the sky would be overcast, the water slate gray, the waves rising up with a silvery, glassy sheen. Other times a pod of dolphins would come by, or an otter, or a seal. That's what I liked best. The quiet waiting between sets. Seeing things I didn't ordinarily see. The waves are an excuse to be out on the water, riding the border between land and sea. An excuse to be calm, to sit in a break at sunset and watch the bay turn wine dark and the color drain from the sky, to see the white foam of the waves swirling like lace around my feet as I stepped from the ocean, dripping, tired, cold, and vibrant with the world of water.

Clara Sophia is an environmental studies graduate student at the University of Montana. In addition to surfing the internet, she has recently taken up sky diving.

Suddenly you have the FORCE behind you, pushing you across the top of the wave faster than you could imagine, and the feel of that force is like a storm, like rockfall, like a strong wind or an earthquake. It is exhilarating. Joyous. Scary. Almost enough to fall in love. Almost.

long board, all solid and stable, you stay further out, because the length of the board enables you to catch the wave before it starts to break. If you have a short board, you gain considerable maneuverability on the wave, but you pay for it with having to sit further in, closer to shore, almost right on top of where the waves actually break. No matter what kind of board you are on, you need to be moving nearly the same speed as the wave in order to catch it. Those who can, make it look easy, fluid, like all it takes is a few powerful deep strokes with your arms. And as you feel the wave take you, you snap to your feet and drop, weightless, floating, speeding along the moving face of the wave, riding the edge of the physics of water, of loft, of floatation, of gravity all at once, everything simultaneously slowing down and speeding up, your body beyond thought—one, for a few precious seconds, with the force of the sea. Every surfer I know who really surfs is in love with the ocean. When there are no waves, they gather on the cliffs and look at it anyway. They tell each other about great

Fly Fishing

A dirt road dips to the Blackfoot—old ponderosa
scowl, night hawks swirl in a dusky ballet—
our footpath sinks through wheat grass,
yampa, pink pyrola, lupine, huckleberry
to the river's edge. You wade into the current
—rod, line, flies—work the water,
seek your rhythm far from yesterday.

Wader-deep, your back a shadow in the sinking
sun, you cast memories like a puzzled traveler
at the end of the day stretching his tired neck.
You bend to the current with a tight arm, whipping
the line to surface a nymph on the dark pool
sharp and light as the night hawk. If I hike
to the highway—follow the road—
will you understand?

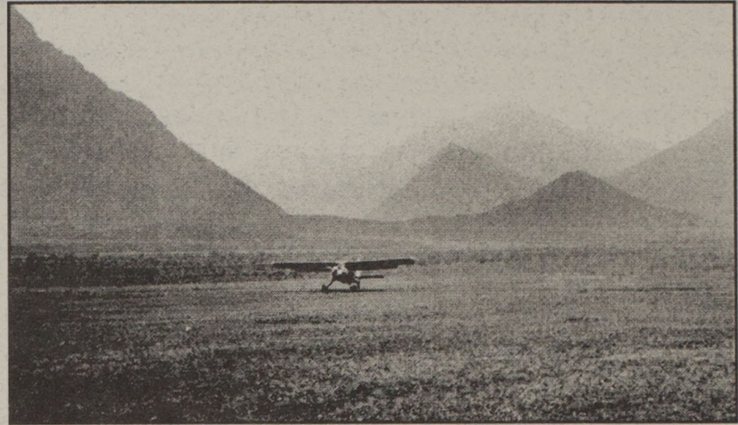
Sue Samson



pen and ink by Claire Emery

bifurcations

great and wild and free



The final of the three Cessnas that flew our group of ten from Fairbanks deposited its cargo onto the soft carpet of tundra. With a quick salute and a “see ya at the river” the pilot hopped into the four-seater and took off. The plane faded into the arctic skyline as the intensity of our surroundings set in. We stood in a great amphitheater of a valley in the dried riverbed of the Chandalar’s east fork. The great peaks of the Brooks Range rose gently around us, considerable against the smooth, glacial-carved valleys, but reaching heights of no more than 5,000 feet. At first look, the colors of the valley were all shades of green, gray, and brown. But as my eyes adjusted to the 10 p.m. sun, I began to notice

**story and photos by
elizabeth white**



Mardy Murie in Moose, Wyoming

the fiercely-colored plants coating the valley floor—lichens, mosses, sedges, and tiny alpine flowers flickered with yellows, reds, and lime greens, blending into the tundra beside the braided, cobbled channels of the riverbed.

We all stood there, silent and still, as if to give the mountains a moment to ponder our arrival, just as we considered the feeling of our new place. We were speedy travelers in a land where summers are short and time is precious. All forms of life rush to get in their fleeting dance upon the Arctic’s vast stage before the snow falls again. But great rewards are granted to those who slow down to feel the land’s rhythm. Only then can they become a part of the place as the place becomes a part of them. Those silent moments would grow to be the most memorable of my five weeks among the arctic folds of river and mountain.

I journeyed to Alaska with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) to participate in the thirty-five day “Brooks Range Backpacking and River” course in Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. For the first two weeks we traveled east from the Chandalar on our feet, hands, and knees, scrambling over scree-covered passes, carrying nearly half

our body weight, laughing, cursing, grinning, and crying, sometimes all at once. We then headed south, back to the river where our boats and rations arrived again by plane. In the following three weeks—the “mellow” section of the course—we traveled by canoe and kayak (still often on our feet, hands, and knees) on the Sheenjek River for nearly 300 miles, camping on gravel bars, scrambling up ridges through alder and aspen to view the river’s great meanders, often paddling in the early morning or late Alaskan twilight.

The Sheenjek flows from deep within the Brooks Range through the wildlife refuge. On the topo maps we carried, the river mimics a bundle of loosely woven vines laid out across the flat riverbed and surrounded by tight circles of contour lines, indicating the rising slope of the peaks on all sides. Its twisted channels cross in and out for over 500 miles before spilling into two larger rivers, the Porcupine and then the Yukon, on the flats near the town of Fort Yukon.

The landscape’s features carry descriptive names such as “Double Mountain” or “Nine-mile Slough,” names bestowed upon them by travelers who fell in love with the remote land years before. Traveling in the arctic is a commitment. The Sheenjek’s only access is by bush plane or dog sled, for no roads reach this part of the North Country.

The majority of NOLS’ courses focus on teaching outdoor leadership skills and competence in the wilderness while providing participants with solid information about their natural environment. In our outdoor classroom, we studied arctic adaptations of flora such as the white, fluffy heads of mountain avens and the compact cushions of moss campion, boasting brilliant purple flowers in July and August. We saw an arctic tern ride currents overhead, and we learned that its migration route takes it from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back within one year. We watched a least sandpiper scuttle after insects on a gravel bar, pondering why it bobs its body up and down in such a coy little dance. We studied the natural history of the Brooks Range, spending hours examining fossilized corals and brachiopods among the river cobbles. Smooth sections of sedimentary rock testified to the fact that the Brooks once lay beneath an ocean, one hundred and fifty million years ago.

Our instructors also taught cultural and conservation

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the high roller

story and photos by meagan boltwood

James, the lead instructor, looked out the window and said, "We can't. It's a policy. We can't stop to help anyone."

I climbed down the stairs and held the bus' dashboard railing as we passed the accident. We swerved around a desperate man waving his arms into an X above his bloody face. His tongue curled into an "L" that I assumed belonged to the world *help*, but we couldn't hear his cries. To the right of the road, a woman lay on the grass in front of a car lodged into a tree. The bus engine roared up the hill.

A handful of kids had migrated to the front. Jeff, a fifteen-year-old whiz kid, pushed his way forward and asked, "Why aren't we stopping?" James explained to Jeff that camp policy forbade us to stop, that the rule was created for their safety. Jeff shook his head in confusion and merged back into the darkness.

I desperately searched for a cell phone signal, chanting "Mile 168, blue Bonneville, Alaska plates" over and over again so that I would remember the details. But no signal came. We were out of range.

I looked at Melissa, the instructor driving the bus. "We have to turn around," I whispered. Just over a mile from the scene, she stopped the bus.

"This is ridiculous!" Melissa fumed at James. "It's 4:30 in the damn morning, and we're between nowhere and nowhere. We've got to go back."

"No. Keep driving." In the previous four weeks, we had become well aware of James's adherence to institutional rules. One was that no kid was allowed to buy anything at the gas stations. The instructors could, of course. We would slouch in our seats, hoarding our contraband Dr. Peppers and Cherry Cokes.

The accident occurred somewhere between Talkeetna and Denali National Park, on a stretch of highway that smirks at the word "remote." The Alaska Highway needs an adjective that combines bigness with fear, multiplied by unmarked obstacles and switchback turns. The sun had just ducked into the two-hour span of daylight that constitutes an Alaskan summer evening.

Minutes before, four instructors and 20 teenagers had been sprawled across a bus that once drove Midwestern gamblers to the Vegas strip. Its screaming pink and orange seats dotted with dice and poker chips were both our transportation and our home for the next ten weeks of kayaking, rafting, backpacking, and mountain biking. In Michigan, where we boarded the bus to drive to Alaska, I took one look at the

Viva Las Vegas interior and christened our ship "The High Roller." It held our gear, food, books, and maps. In Winnipeg we stopped at a K-mart to buy bus supplies. We hung fuzzy dice from the rear view mirror and covered the aisle in Astro Turf.

Everyone had two seats, their domain, which the students personalized with pictures and knickknacks. The girls spent hours braiding each other's hair while the boys complained about not having Discmen. These and Walkmen and Gameboys were prohibited. We called them A.S.D.s: Anti-Social Devices. Each of us instructors had a Discman tucked into the deepest corner of our backpacks. We listened late at night. Watches were banned, too, because the camp wanted the kids to lose track of time and idle through a "schedule-less" summer. When we desperately checked the digital clocks hidden in our pockets, the kids watched us watch our watches.



The bus lurched forward. After four weeks of lecturing about our duties as human beings—to each other and to the earth—The High Roller had cruised by a serious accident. As instructors, we spent hours designing and implementing environmental education activities. We taught the essentials of minimum impact backpacking and how to identify Alaskan wildflowers. We taught them how to put the group's need before their own and focus on something besides their hair and electronic gadgets. But we didn't teach them how to help someone they didn't know.

Four instructors—two of whom were in their second year of medical school—chose to obey the rule and failed the ultimate test. The rule had no doubt been written by a

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history of the Wildlife Refuge, describing the precariousness of its protected status and the oil and gas companies that hover around each piece of legislation pertaining to the refuge, coveting the riches of its coastal plain.

I felt immersed in knowledge of my surroundings through my own heightened senses and with the information provided by my instructors. But throughout my time in Alaska, I never learned about the work of Mardy and Olaus Murie.

It has been said that no other woman has done as much for Alaska as Mardy Murie. Born in Washington, Mardy lived as a young girl in Fairbanks and was the first woman to graduate from the University of Alaska. Her husband, Olaus Murie, was a pioneering arctic biologist and talented naturalist and artist. On their honeymoon, Olaus and Mardy traveled on a 550-mile dog sled trip through Alaska to research caribou along the Koyukuk River.

Mardy—with their young children in tow—always traveled alongside Olaus on his research trips, as his partner, advisor, and companion. On one such trip, a two-month expedition to the Sheenjek, they camped at Double Mountain and gave name to Lost Lake, which was also one of our camps. This expedition, funded by the Conservation Foundation and the New York Zoological Society, would later be monumental in the designation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Olaus and Mardy Murie devoted their lives to fighting and working to protect the wild places they loved so deeply. Olaus, along with other conservationists such as Sigurd Olson, Howard Zahniser, and Aldo Leopold continually pushed for wilderness legislation. They fought for the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act; created the Wilderness Society, for which Olaus later served as Co-Director and President; and envisioned the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Olaus died in 1963, a year before the signing of the Wilderness Act. After his death, Mardy passionately carried on their work, witnessing President Johnson's signing of the Wilderness Bill at the White House and seeing the Wildlife Refuge through to completion.

In Mardy's book *Two in the Far North*, she describes the endless days of living with the land—discovering willow ptarmigan nests; scouting the horizon for the unmistakable curves of caribou antlers; and becoming a part of the rhythm, a part of the place that became a part of the Muries. Mardy once described Alaska as “gray, quiet, self-sufficient, and aloof.” The humility and harmony with which the Muries approached their work and their presence in this place complemented these qualities. I believe those qualities and the

challenges and adventures they brought forth also inspired her seventy year campaign, which included three trips to the White House for awards such as the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to protect the austere beauty of the land she and Olaus loved.

Last summer, I spent several afternoons with Mardy, as she rocked slowly in a chair on her front porch peacefully looking out at the Tetons and stroking Pooto, her cat. I was working at the Murie Center in Moose, Wyoming, which is an organization committed to carrying on the legacy of the Murie family and their love for the wild. Over the summer I immersed myself in the rich history of this family. Even now, Mardy's passion for wild places is unmistakable, and she speaks of Alaska with deep serenity. At 98, Mardy still refers to the Sheenjek as her “place of enchantment.”



One morning on the Sheenjek we awoke to the splatter of cold rain on our tents. We had thirty miles to paddle that day. We donned rain gear and broke camp, cold and in a hurry.

I have never wanted to be still more than on that morning. Not only for the cold and the wet, but also

to watch the river rise, to see the birds chatter among the drops, and to feel and smell the changes of our place with the rainfall. These are the moments when spending time matters. Only with time do you know a place.

Mardy once said of the Sheenjek, “The whole area has a steady serene beauty that sings, that will stay forever, that soaks into one's being.” The Sheenjek soaked into my being in the short time I spent there. I drank from it, traveled by it, bathed in it, and slept to the soft music of its current. But I only had a taste of what it was to know that river, to know the mountains that contain it, and to know the life that flows within them all. Knowing the Muries has brought Alaska's Arctic deeper into my own spirit. Throughout our trip, we moved every day. To know a place like the Muries knew Alaska meant to be still, to listen to the rhythm of the land, to see its changes and its movement and feel a part of it all. At the time I felt I was a part of the place, but now I realize that I only scratched the surface. I suppose that is why I have wanted to return since the moment I left, and I can only tell myself I will. In the spirit of the Muries I hope that Alaska will remain “great and wild and free.”

Elizabeth White studies Latin American conservation at the University of Montana and will spend next fall living and writing in Golfito, Costa Rica. She is also an avid kayaker and has two Spanish-speaking dogs, Owen and Kooter, who, unfortunately, will not be joining her down south.

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Detroiters who feared the consequences of staged car trouble. In the city, it's a common occurrence for a psychopath to fake an accident and then do who-knows-what to your philanthropic soul. But this was *Alaska*. The Last Frontier adhered to different rules.

The sun was rising when an operator's voice came through the cell phone. I looked at my watch. One hour had passed. "Mile 168, blue Bonneville, Alaska plates," I recited. With that simple concoction of words, the incident went from reality to memory.

That group of self-conscious, burgeoning adults admired us. They looked to us for guidance. We could talk the talk; but when the moment of truth finally came, we cowered and left the scene.

And all at once I realized how much we had at stake. The seconds we spent driving by the accident held centuries of human error. I compromised ethics to adhere to an abstract policy. I didn't personally make the decision; I just offered weak resistance, a crime so hideous it makes me cringe with horror. I said nothing. On a bus filled with suburbanites from metro-Detroit, I felt years of averted glances and denial amidst political adherences.

That night wasn't about the dangers of staged car wrecks. We had a responsibility that went beyond a distant set of policies. That group of self-conscious, burgeoning adults admired us. They looked to us for guidance. We could talk the talk; but when the moment of truth finally came, we cowered and left the scene. Our roles as outdoor educators include more than teaching the skills of adventure travel. We are responsible for teaching kids how to exist in an imperfect world that threatens to undo all good intentions.

I don't know how long that couple had spent waiting for a vehicle to drive by. Seven hours? Thirteen? Did that woman survive? Did the helicopter save her life?

I wonder if anyone else on that trip is plagued by these

unknowns. How many of those kids will grow into adults who drive by accidents without stopping to help? I wonder who taught me to suppress my ethics in the face of determined opposition. On some level, we have all been taught to subconsciously obey the rules. Most of us can't figure out exactly when that happened: complicity just eases into our being.

We could have really taught those kids something that night. We could have taught them the importance of thinking outside boundaries to make the best decisions. We could have taught them how to morally react to the unexpected. I could

have taught them how to face unjust opposition with courage and persistence.

In the following six weeks, nobody ever mentioned the accident. It was an embarrassing reminder of failure for Melissa and me. As for the other instructors, I got the impression that they believed they had dealt with the scene to the best of our liability-free abilities.

It doesn't help to recreate that night. All of the "would've" and "should've" will never mask the fact that I screwed up. It's not the fault of James or the camp's stupid rules. We can't fall back on anyone else's ideas about how to take kids into the furthest edges of our frontiers. Despite all of the institutional guidelines and rules, outdoor educators are the ones out in the field, dealing with situations that few

people know exist. We have to live up to the challenge and recognize the fact that once the dice are rolled, it's all up to us, and everything is at stake.

Meagan Boltwood will be returning to Alaska this summer to begin work on her thesis project and to offer roadside assistance to all those in need.



Wintertime with *Hawks and*

by Rick Stern

Winter is the best time of them all," declares Neil Young in the last line of *Little Wing*, the first song from 1980's *Hawks and Doves*. When I slapped that album on my turntable this afternoon and sat down at my computer, I thought my motive was strictly to cover the inane commentary accompanying the Super Bowl. Until I heard that line.

The Super Bowl kicked off as four friends and I skied back to our cars at Lolo Pass cross-country ski area, just over the Idaho border. What started as another socked-in day in the Missoula Valley yielded, within the space of an hour, a nearly cloud-free afternoon up at the pass, cold enough not to melt the snow, yet warm enough to ski without a hat. Most of the day, I skied by myself, separated from my friends to be alone with my thoughts, the snow, my sweat, the occasional glimpse of a sliver of waxing late-January moon, and my kick and glide.

Meanwhile, 88 men—most of them massive—prepared to pummel each other on a football field in Tampa, in front of 90-thousand people and a worldwide television audience.

It's just a game, this Super Bowl, this American version of football. But it hardly seems so as you watch all its twisted glory. There's the New York Giants' Ron Dixon on a bench on the sidelines, his teammates nervously avoiding him. A tube enters his arm as doctors administer fluids intravenously. The announcers (before I turn down the sound to put on Neil Young) suggest that he's worn out. My friend Chris laughs and speculates that they're pumping Dixon full of steroids, or pain killers, or who-knows-what. Sugar water is my guess.

Later, the announcers marvel at the Baltimore Ravens' Michael McCrary, forcing a fumble with a right hand that is padded and bandaged to protect the fracture he sustained just minutes before. And who could forget Baltimore's Tony Siragusa, all 340-plus pounds of pudge and grit, and a veritable quote machine to boot.

This is not a game that kids play in the schoolyard.

Right after securing their victory in Super Bowl XXXV, most of the Ravens didn't even seem happy.

Before I turned off the television, I saw no dogpiles, none of your standard "I'm going to Disneyland" jubilation, nor any champagne-soaked locker room scenes. Like a great deal of our popular culture—as evidenced in the ridiculously expensive and utterly absurd commercials that have become a significant part of the spectacle—professional football has turned sour and mechanical. The Ravens have won football's highest prize with the most dominant defensive machine in the history of the National Football League—but with little grace or playfulness. These men, who risk injury if not paralysis every time they step on the field, do not play this game for fun or to improve their physical condition, unless you consider building a prolific financial portfolio to be one of these. As such, football at this level is anything but recreation.

Nowadays, the fun seems purely in the eyes of us spectators. People enjoy the spectacle so much that they fork over gobs of cash to watch overgrown men body-slam each other in stadiums named after corporations. And so many more folks watch games from the comfort of their living rooms that companies pay millions of dollars to advertise during the Super Bowl. This infusion of capital has squeezed much of the life out of the game. For some reason, though, that hasn't stopped me from watching every now and then. I may be repulsed, but believe me, I'm also quite entertained.

The first time I cross-country skied was during my first winter in Missoula seven years ago. A group of us rented skis and headed up to Lolo Pass. The snow conditions were horrible: As we *walked* forward, mounds of snow congealed on the bottom of our skis. Every few steps we'd stop and scrape the snow from our skis before continuing. Being a California transplant who had never experienced winter, I concluded that skiing sucked, and I didn't strap another pair of boards on my feet for two years.

That first winter, had I popped on *Hawks and Doves*, I wouldn't have had a clue what Neil Young meant by winter being the best time of them all. Winter seemed cold, slushy, and dreary, and I spent my free time reading, watching sports, and drinking too much strong coffee.

Doves and Ravens

That was the last year that I watched cable TV, and I took advantage of it. (I actually have cable in my house now, but I don't pay for it. Go ahead, rat me out if you feel compelled to keep your karma squeaky-clean.)

In the intervening years, I've taken to watching sports less and getting outside more. Although I'm not the skier that many folks around these parts are, I've become quite a fan of cross-country skiing and the opportunity it provides for enjoying the great outdoors during the winter. At its

best, when you haven't scraped a lick of snow from your skis all day, it's a graceful and grace-filled activity—just you and the trail, warm sun bathing your cheek, and gray jays begging for some of your trail mix. Breathing deeply and rhythmically but not laboriously, laying tracks through wooded areas and meadows, you can bet you've got a smile on your face. If not, you might as well go home and flip on the tube. Maybe the Lakers are on.

Watching sports, chilling out at the house, and having a few laughs is relaxing. On the right day, it can be good medicine. One could argue that watching sports is a form of recreation, although I'd characterize it more as a distraction.

Cross-country skiing, on the other hand, occupies a wholly different dimension. You're soaking in the seasons and the scenery and pushing the physical abilities of your body. This is recreation. Re-creation. Maybe there is no other time when we focus more on renewing and transforming ourselves as we do when we're recreating. Sure, work profoundly shapes us, but not in the same way as the activities we choose when we're not at least partially motivated by the almighty paycheck, or, in Dixon's case, a strong portfolio.

My friend Chris disagreed with Neil Young's assessment, ultimately opting for summer and its long hours of light and warmth. Summer somehow seems the easiest time of year (unless the activity called "working" dominates your agenda). The vibrancy of the sun shimmering throughout your cells nudges one towards giddiness, if not beyond.

On the other hand, winter is a time of hibernation, of bare trees, of gray skies yielding to darkness, and of reflection.

Try taking stock in the middle of the neighborhood block party or while drinking overpriced corporate beer out of plastic cups at a minor-league baseball game with a thousand other people.

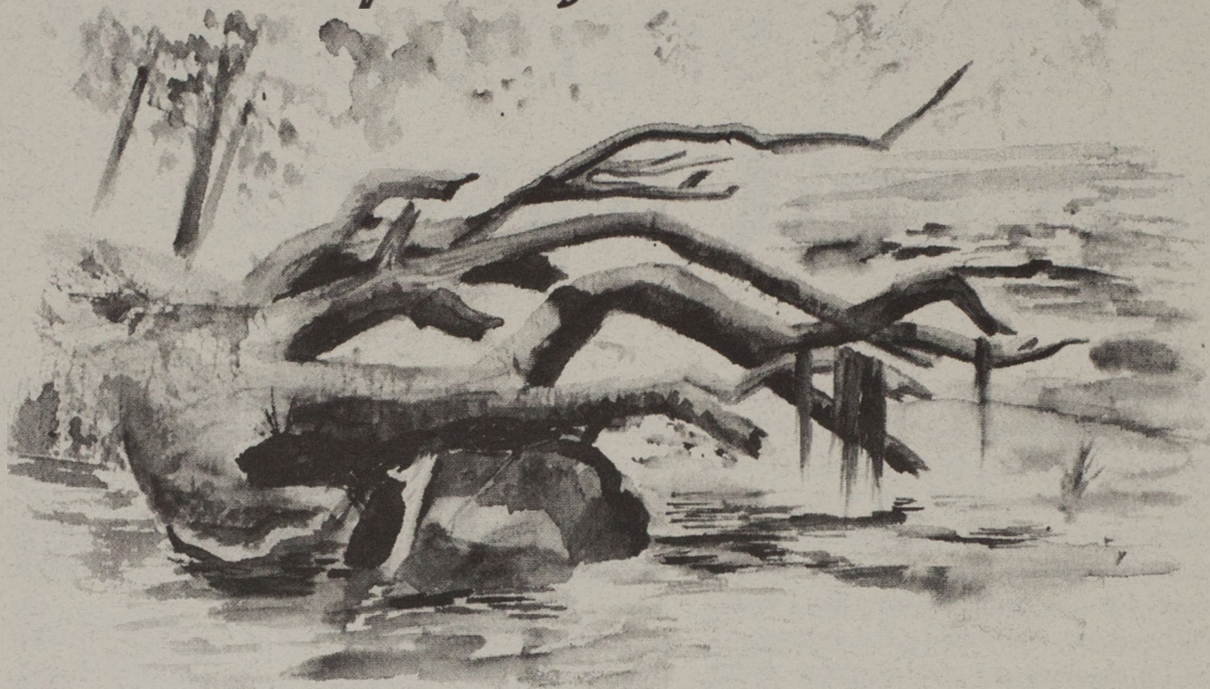
Winter is the best time, Neil Young might be saying, because it's closer to our origin. Our bodies slow down, demand more sleep and more time alone. Winter is a time for introspection and for charting our future. It's a time to imagine who we might become when the world warms and we emerge, fully alive, into the active, giddy spring and summer months.

During this time, it's appropriate that our exercise be infused with a sense of contemplation. Watching football doesn't quite do the trick. Gliding through the world on skis, though, is the best activity of them all.

Rick Stern is a former EVST student and current director of the Montana office of Rock Creek Alliance. He also throws a mean football.

Winter is a time to imagine
who we might become
when the world warms and
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and summer months.

Paying the Dues



by Nate Johnson

On the river, any claim of control is pretense. Whitewater boating is a dance: you can learn the steps, but no matter how skillful you become you must always follow, never attempt to lead. There is nothing quite like watching a kayaker move through the chaos of spray and whirlpools with perfect grace. This composure only comes to the expert paddler who has accepted the fact that the river is in command and could crush him completely at any given moment if it chooses to do so. If the river suspects that a boatman lacks the proper respect, its retaliation will be swift and vicious.

I had to learn this. Although the guides had warned me about paying respect, although I thought I understood, it was not until I actually learned the lesson for myself that I began to carry the knowledge of my powerlessness along with me, next to my heart. The lesson took place within the span of a few frozen seconds, a moment that left such an indelible mark on my memory that the feeling is always present, just beneath the surface. Think of it, and I'm there: in that black room, underwater, with the sudden, unbearable weight of responsibility.

I came back from college to an almost completely new staff. Nearly all the old guides, my mentors and friends, decided that they had had enough of old man Buckley. He was the sort of guy who would break his own arm to prove a point. He had no compunction about breaking his guides.

He had usually bought his first six-pack by seven a.m. and had finished it by ten. A pioneer in the sport, he knew more about rafting than anyone else I'd met. Still, in his alcoholism and domineering stubbornness, he managed to spoil nearly every undertaking that he joined and drive away the people closest to him. As he was short-handed, Buckley sent me out the morning after I showed up.

"Think you can handle a Lower South Fork?" he asked, one hand pushing back wisps of white hair from his smooth pate. He wore a dirty white tee shirt with the words, *No Damn Dam! Save The American!* written in slanting script that stretched over his paunch.

I shrugged. Technically, I'm supposed take a training trip down each section of river at the beginning of every season before I ran it commercially, but I knew every rock on that stretch. I'd spent so many dog days in past seasons floating customers down "The Gorge" on the South Fork American River that I could probably steer a paddle raft down while my crew slept in the bottom of the boat. Why spend an unpaid day on The Gorge "training" if I didn't have to? "Sure," I agreed.

The next morning I was standing shirtless in the cool air, breathing in the smell of the river: light dusty willow scent, dank mud, and algae and the industrial smell of PVC off the raft tubes. I was already sweating from the exertion of inflating boats. Raft pumps are like oversized bicycle pumps made of white plastic pipe. Working the plunger up and down requires a lot of movement: a knee bending, stomach crunching, hair flopping, full body work out.

Joe Myers was holding the nozzle to the valve as I pumped. A big bear of a man with blond hair and the rough red face that usually develops in fair complected outdoorsmen, Joe was an old friend. He had bright clear-blue eyes that were continually squeezed into points by a squint: a pushing up of his lower eyelids' cheek bones. With his large jaw and bright, invariably squinting eyes, Joe always looked like he was just about ready to kill. I had learned that if you could endure the glare of those eyes long enough to crack a joke the wrinkles around them would turn upwards, transforming his face. The customers didn't know that, and I think Joe liked it that way. He wasn't the type to put himself out trying to please a cranky guest. His job was to get the people safely down the river.

The other guide that day, Jay Cunningham, was talking to the customers. Jay was a forty-something junior-high science teacher. This was his first commercial trip. He was tall and lean with high cheekbones, slightly bulging blue eyes and clean-shaven good looks. There were three different guys working at Trib that

summer that shared the name Jay. Later I would learn that this was "Gay Jay." He came to occupy a peculiar place in our little community. He was accepted, taken seriously for his hard work, but never really respected. Jay was not respected because guides tend to be

hyper masculine and homophobic and also because he never developed good whitewater skills. He was always falling out of the boat, breaching on rocks, and losing his paddle. But I didn't know any of this that particular morning.

When we finished topping off the last air chamber, Joe walked off to introduce himself to the customers, and Jay came over to where I was sitting on the big purple raft, straddling the tube.

"We kind of have a problem," he said.

"Yeah?"

"There are four separate groups today, six, six, seven and three."

"Okay, well, we have the two little rafts that can take six each and then this big fifteen footer," I thumped the Barney-colored boat on which I sat, "and we can squeeze ten in here if we have to."

"Do you want to take a ten load down in this thing?" asked Jay, raising an eyebrow.

"Sure."

"Good, because I don't."

We planned to split the groups, giving a few strong paddlers to each boat, but one of the customers, a Chinese-American man in his fifties named Jeffery Ho, stopped me.

"The children must go with their parents," he insisted.

"My son, Simon, is autistic, you see, and my niece," he pointed at a thin little girl, "Sarah, is, um, epileptic. I want to keep the family together." Jeffrey's other two children, Li and Jen, seemed like typical teens: young but enthusiastic. This, then, would have to be my group of seven. Three un-athletic middle-aged adults, two kids in their early teens, an autistic boy and an epileptic girl. I couldn't hand them off to Jay or Joe because that crew alone couldn't power the boat.

The group of three, a woman in her thirties, her boyfriend, and a tiny slip of a girl, didn't want to be split up either. The woman, Susan, had been giving me a hard time from the beginning, asking the same questions over and over again: "How cold is the water? Should I really wear a wetsuit? Do people really fall out? How many people have died on this river? How cold is the water?"

I told her that I myself was not going to wear a wetsuit, I didn't know the exact temperature of the water, but she was welcome to dip her feet in, and if she was unsure she should put on the wetsuit because it is easy to cool off in the river

but much harder to regain heat. Yes, people really do fall out and some have died, but very few of those deaths are associated with commercial rafting companies. She would ask me the same questions again, and I would give her the same answers. Perhaps she thought that

The river ran brown and wide, up among the tree trunks on both sides. If people fell out with the water that high, they would be carried far downstream before they could swim to shore.

I was hiding something and if she pestered me long enough she would get the response she wanted. Finally she relented, tested the water, and put on the wet suit.

"By the way," she told me, "maybe you should know, my daughter has some emotional problems. Her father was very abusive."

I groaned inwardly. My one consolation was that her boyfriend, Don, looked like a bantam-weight body builder. If it came down to it, I figured he and I could power the boat by ourselves. But once I handed out the paddles and pulled the raft away from the shore, my hopes for Don vanished. There are only two parts to a good paddle stroke: lean forward, lean back. But Don, like so many muscle bound men, would only use his arms.

"Lean forward as far as you can," I would tell my customers, "and set your paddle squarely perpendicular to the surface of the water. Now you are coiled. Just lock your arms and lean back—and when I say lean back I really mean it. Don't just sit up straight; you should be back in your neighbor's lap."

When a practiced team paddles forward hard, it is a beautiful thing: six bodies moving in unison like a set of pistons.

As I watched Don and the rest of my crew, it was quite

clear that this particular set of pistons needed a tune-up. I sat in back, steering with my paddle blade and looking over a dismal scene: paddles were placed tentatively in the water and drawn lightly along the surface only to clash and entangle.

"All right stop. Everyone together. Watch the person in front of you. Ready? Forward."

A little better this time.

"You guys have to sit far enough out on the tube so that you can get your paddle all the way in the river. That's better. Stay together. Lean back. Don't think of it as drawing the paddle through the water; you are pulling the boat past the paddle."

For a moment it clicked. They were paddling together, and I felt the raft accelerate. Then it disintegrated. Someone paddled out of stroke, the adults got tired and stopped using their bodies, Susan missed the water so that her paddle swung back wildly, and Simon, the autistic boy sitting in the center of the boat, started screaming uncontrollably. I caught Joe's eye as his raft glided past. The wrinkles were slanted upwards.

"Okay, that's good, stop," I said as Jeffery quieted Simon. I'll just have to move this boat by myself, I thought. I was beginning to wish that I was rowing this group down the river rather than relying on them to paddle. If a crew can't paddle well in flat water they are bound to fall apart completely in the rough stuff. I felt confident though: at one time or another I'd done almost every rapid on the river without my customers paddling. I'd just have to set my angles early and make the river's current work for me. The only thing that really worried me was the possibility of Simon falling out or Sarah, the girl with epilepsy, having a seizure.

"You ready?" Joe called.

I nodded.

"All right, I'm running sweep; I think we'll put Jay in the middle, so that makes you lead boat."

I nodded again, grimly. It all made sense: Joe had the first aid kit and rescue supplies, so he had to go last. It was Jay's first trip, so he should have someone in front of him to pick up swimmers and someone behind in case he got stuck. That left me as lead boat. Ideally, another raft should be in front of me to protect the weak crew, but there was nothing we could do about that. I just couldn't make any mistakes. I did not know that I had already made several.

The first half of the day passed without incident. As I had expected, my crew fell apart at the first riffles: some thrashed wildly at the water while Susan and her daughter shrank back from the waves, lifting their paddles into the air. The slow summer flow that I remembered had been replaced by spring runoff: fast and cold. The river ran brown and

wide, up among the tree trunks on both sides. If people fell out with the water that high they would be carried far downstream before they could swim to shore. On the other hand, many of the rocks that had been exposed during the summer were now under water. The big fifteen-footer, loaded down with so many people, performed like a wheelbarrow full of cement. I would set a rudder to move the boat across the current then start my turn about fifteen feet early. Inertia would carry the boat the rest of the way as it slowly turned. After the first few rapids I adjusted to the pace of the river.

Still, I knew that there were harder rapids to come. The section of the South Fork American from Camp Lotus to Lake Folsom has earned the honorific name "The Gorge" for the way the lower half constricts into a smaller channel bound by rock walls. To those who have seen the true granite gorges of the Sierra or the canyons of the Southwest "The Gorge"

on the South Fork American would be disappointing, hardly worthy of the title. But the river does change: squeezed in between steeper banks, it picks up some speed and attitude. The Gorge presents a harder set of Class II-III rapids, but nothing that I considered difficult.

"The rapid that marks the beginning of the Gorge is called Fowler's

Rock," I told my crew. "It's a simple move. The current sweeps to the left, around a house-sized rock and then flows right into a smooth, potato-shaped boulder: that's Fowler's Rock. All we have to do is to cut to the right behind the house rock, before the current pushes us into Fowler's. We'll make the cross-river move on a back paddle."

"What happens if we hit Fowler's Rock?" asked Jeffery.

"Then we have to high side. The downstream side of the boat will ride up onto the rock and the upstream tube will dip into the water until the boat flips or wraps. If we get everyone on the high side we can counteract that—but I'd prefer not to hit the rock. I never have before—it's pretty easy; I just need you guys to work together and give me a good strong back paddle. Okay?"

Nods all around.

"Forward."

I waved to Jay behind me, and we slid into the current. His jaw was clenched tight. I smiled. It wouldn't be long before he learned that this river was nothing to worry about.

"Stop," I called. We were in position now and moving slowly. That was fine with me: the last thing I wanted was forward momentum. As we sailed alongside the house rock I saw that my crew was still out of position. Susan's daughter had insisted on sitting near the front and Don was behind her. The left side of the boat was stronger than the right. I had planned to rearrange people before entering The Gorge but had forgotten. I kicked myself at the oversight. We would

**I plunged into darkness.
My body instinctively went
limp, but my mind was
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single thought: I've just
killed someone.**

just have to make the best of it. I reached out with my paddle and drew the back of the boat to the right.

"All right! Ready? Backerup!"

The crew dutifully splashed at the water but nothing happened. We accelerated toward the rock. My heart lurched.

"C'mon, dig!" I shouted through my teeth.

I stretched my body as far as I could, reaching back. I sunk my paddle in and contracted like an inchworm. The boat only slowed infinitesimally. I stretched out and pulled again. I was no match for this sluggish raft held by swift water. We were being pulled inexorably to the rock. I moved on to plan B.

"Stop!" I shouted, "Right turn, Forward! Dig it in!"

This crew could not fight the current, but maybe we could outrun it.

Paddle blades clashed in the confusion of commands. The raft slowly pivoted and began to inch right. We weren't going to make it. Plan C? We took two more strokes.

"Stop," I called out. "Left turn."

I hoped that the momentum carrying the boat to the right would take the nose past the rock just as the left turn pulled the back out of danger. No dice, I thought. The surging water carried us on. I was absolutely certain now that we were going to hit the rock.

"Forward!" I called in plan D, a desperate attempt to ram the rock and bounce off. If you are going to hit Fowler's Rock you might as well do it with style.

The raft slammed into the rock. We jolted, thrown headlong.

"Highside!" I barked. The boat stalled and slipped sideways.

Then, as if God had just punched a button on the cosmic remote, things began to move slowly. The left side of the raft was riding up the rock. People were falling into the river. I flung myself to the downstream tube, felt it slowly rise up from under me and shrug me off.

I plunged into darkness. My body instinctively went limp, but my mind was rigid, frozen around a single thought: I've just killed someone. Thick snakes of water sucked at my arms and legs, twisted and buffeted my body. Simon was somewhere down here with me, I thought, screaming in fear and confusion, the black water flooding his lungs. Was that a rock that brushed pat my knee? Or was it Sarah's head? Where were Jen and Li? Don, Jeffery, Susan, and the rest? There was no going back. No room for the luxury of regret. From here on out I would have to do everything right.

I felt myself rising back to the world. My head was above water, look right, left, and there, a purple blur: the boat. Two strokes and I was sliding in headfirst. The raft hadn't flipped, thank God. I still had my paddle in my hand, and I dropped it in the bottom of the boat as I stood up. A head popped out of the water beside me. I bent, took hold of the lifejacket by the shoulder straps, and he was in. Li, the teenage boy. That was one.

"Get up!" I bellowed. "Pull them in!"

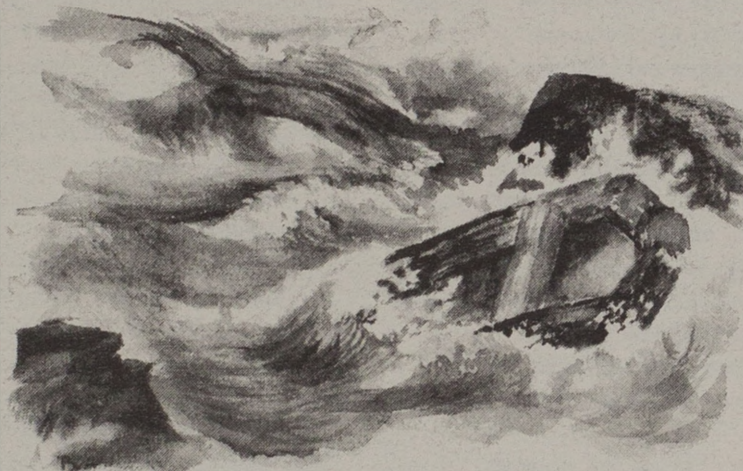
Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jay's raft swing around the house rock. I waved wildly, yelled something in no particular language, then bent and plucked two paddles from the water. We'd need them.

Li shouted, pointing at the nose of the raft. I lunged across the boat and extended the T-grip of the paddle just as his sister came up. She grabbed the handle like it was a chunk of gold (good girl) and she was in. Two.

The boat bucked and swiveled over a drop. Ahead, on the left bank, one of the women clung screaming to the trailing branches of a submerged willow by the shore.

"Let go! Swim to us!" I yelled.

The willow branch broke away in her hand and she lurched back, only to grip at the branches more desperately. The raft sailed past her. "Get her, Jay," I silently urged. I couldn't stop now, not with more



watercolor by Beth Peluso

people ahead of us floating downstream.

"Grab a paddle! Up in front, both of you."

The two kids scrambled to the bow.

"Forward."

The raft, significantly lighter and propelled by adrenaline, sprang forward. Twenty feet ahead I saw Don surface momentarily and farther down two more heads. "C'mon you guys, let's catch 'em." Don, finding himself close to the shore, pulled himself up on the rocks.

"Don!" I snarled. He turned. "Jump!"

He hesitated, then leapt into the water. I extended the paddle again and pulled him in. Three. "That," he said, between hoarse coughs, "is as close as I ever want to get to drowning."

I loosed the spare paddle from the thwart and shoved it toward Don. "Let's get the rest."

There were three people, not two as I had originally thought, still ahead of us. Three heads clustered together, specks on the big brown river, disappearing under the wave crests and reemerging in the troughs. We paddled hard toward them; it was Sarah and her parents, one on each side,

holding on to her. Even when we were beside them they would not let go. Only after I explained that I could not lift them all out of the water at once would they let me pull Sarah into the raft. She was shivering violently and as soon as she was in the bottom of the boat with her parents beside her she began to cry plaintively. Six.

The water slowed into a broad pool, and I pulled into an eddy. I didn't have long to wait; Joe was right behind me.

"I've got two," he said, "how many were in your boat?"

And suddenly, I couldn't remember. Two and six that's eight. I thought there were more than that. Li, Don, Simon, Sarah, Susan . . . I tried to remember names and faces, idiotically counting on my fingers. Who was the one in the willow? Where was she?

"How many did you have?" he repeated.

For the life of me I could not remember. I had been moving without thinking, making snap decisions without deliberation, and now numbers simply did not make any sense to me.

"What's your head count, man!" There was an edge in Joe's voice. "You tell me right now, or I'm going down into Satan's!"

No, I thought, there was no way that someone would float all the way across this pool and into the next rapid, Satan's Cesspool. Unless . . . unless they were too weak to swim, or unconscious. Images flashed before my eyes: a body wedged under a log, a helicopter touching down too late. Then Jay's raft came around the corner.

"How many do you have, Jay?" I asked.

"I picked up two," he called back.

Ten.

"Yes," I called to Joe. "We've got everyone." I sat down heavily in the back of the boat.

"The river goddess is a woman," Joe loudly proclaimed to the customers, "and sometimes she's a bitch."

The rest of the trip was miserable. The sky had grown gray. Sarah was mildly hypothermic, her teeth chattering between sobs. She lay on the bottom of the boat and squeezed her eyes shut when we went through rapids. We had split up the groups to give my boat a few strong paddlers, and though there were still two Class III rapids to go, there were no more cross-river moves to make. Besides a few terse commands I didn't say anything. I had no desire to talk my way out of the situation. I wanted to take my penance. I felt I had been issued an unduly merciful sentence: after all, everyone was okay.

"What did we do wrong?" Jeffery asked. We floated in the still brown water where Folsom reservoir backed up into The Gorge.

"We didn't make the move," I replied. Fence posts, driftwood, and plastic jugs floated alongside us.

"How often does something like that happen?"

"Well, it's never happened to me before." I put my weight into a J-stroke, pulling the boat forward.

"Never?"

"Yeah, that was my first commercial dump." And it was a full dump, at high water, with disabled passengers. I wondered what they thought of me. What was Sarah's father thinking as he held his terrified, shivering daughter? Maybe he was thinking about what an incompetent asshole I was. Maybe he was beating himself up, just as I was doing, for putting his daughter in danger, treating the river like a ride at Disneyland, not giving it the respect it deserved.

As for me, no matter what my customers thought, I knew I was wholly responsible. It was my job to teach my crew to have deference for the river, to make them into good paddlers, to get them safely back to their cars. I shook my head. What the hell had I been thinking? I should have started the move earlier. I should have forced them to learn to paddle or told them to get back in their cars and go home. I should have insisted that we split the groups up. A real river guide did not depend on luck. If I had been a real guide I would have never gotten into this situation. I had made a choice to risk my customers' lives to feed my ego, to demonstrate my complete mastery of the river, and the river, as it always does, had lashed back.

We pulled out below Salmon Falls road and drove back to the put in. I sat in the back. I didn't get tipped.

On the road to the warehouse I confessed my sins. I told Joe and Jay how I had screwed up. I told them exactly what I thought of myself.

"But you jumped right back in the boat and pulled everyone in," said Jay. "That was incredible."

I shook my head. I didn't want to be consoled. I just wanted to let my fellow guides to know that I had no illusions of innocence.

"You should have gone left at Fowler's. The water is high enough to do that," said Joe. "Yeah, you could have maybe moved some people around in your boat and maybe done a training trip, but you had a weak crew, and this shit just happens sometimes."

Back at the warehouse, when we had finished unloading the trip, Buckley walked up from behind me and put an arm around my shoulders. "So you had a rough day, huh?"

I looked at my sandals. "Yeah."

"Probably would have helped if you had seen the river first."

I nodded.

"You know, at this level you can go left of Fowler's."

"Joe told me on the way back. I'm so used to doing that river the same way, I just didn't see it."

"Learn something today?"

"Yes."

"Okay." He patted my back then walked away.

And I knew it was okay, because Buckley never pulled punches.

Nate Johnson is a student at Pomona College and a river guide in southern California. He grew up and learned to paddle on the Kerns River and has worked all over the West.

Sikh Farm Worker

First Work

Morning and the smell of sun
on skin, healthy, young
I am on coarse
concrete pocked with granite
before the door to the barn.

The ducks
I rose each
morning to feed
are squawking in
the wire cage
I hold shut

Most days the scarred stump
sat, with its two crooked nails,
against the brick wall.
Sometimes, chicken feather sticky.

That day the rusty Y of nails
cradled their soft brown necks.
As I opened the cage
he'd grab, pin them on the stump.

Usually in one stroke, short
voiceless dance in blood.
I'd open the cage for him
to grab another,
the look on Dad's face
so simple,
my eyes on
his tan forearm.

—Nathan McKeen

Skin dark as dense shade
beneath mature walnut trees,
the Sikh emerged
from tractor-cut square checks,
irrigation ditches,
and perfectly formed
low levees holding cool
water to quench trees.
He walked onto my
summer horizon mirage,
where a girl on a wood-slat
farm swing could imagine things
coming in the radiant waves of heat.
His dirt-crusting knuckles
on nut-colored hands
steadied the irrigation shovel
over his shoulders like a yoke.
He was the hired man.
He understood a child's curiosity,
smiled at me, showing teeth
whiter than a fresh-washed
turban. We never spoke.
My heart beat harder
in its green husk, ripening.

—Muriel Zeller

Tongtian He

By Peter Stark

editor's note: In 1987 Peter Stark and his wife Amy Ragsdale followed the course of the Yangtze River for five months from its headwaters on the Tibetan Plateau to its mouth at Shanghai. This essay, from a trilogy of travel memoirs Peter Stark wrote about three different journeys he took during the '70s, '80s, and '90s, has had various working titles. Tongtian He—in English, The River that Runs through the Sky—is the Chinese name for the Upper Yangtze.

I was now wild with frustration. I felt stymied at every turn, by Mr. Nian, by Little Cheng, by Ron Jia, by the suspicions of the people themselves. All this way, and all this money, and all these hopes and I'd get *nothing*, not the slightest bit of hard information.

As we walked across the wet meadow toward our tents, Mr. Nian was waiting for us. I didn't want to look at him. If I did, I knew I would explode. I needed *something*, *anything*.

Looking around desperately, my eye happened to land on the strange, boxy building high up the mountainside. I paused. Here was hope.

I nudged Amy and gestured with my head. "Let's go up there."

She looked up at it. "Sure," she said, "let's go."

I knew that neither Mr. Nian or Little Cheng would want to make the trek. It was raining, and nightfall wasn't far off, and it was a long way up the mountainside. So, tearing a page from Mr. Nian's strategy book of oblique winning plays, instead of asking for permission—in which case I knew he'd try to stop us—I asked if he wanted to accompany us up the mountain.

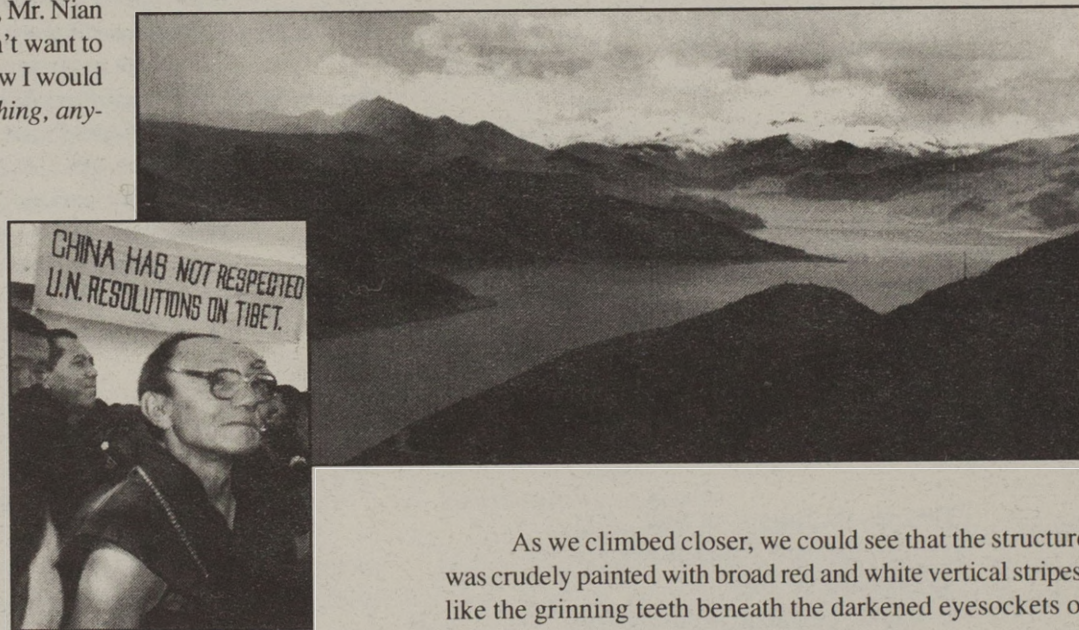
It worked. He definitely did not want to climb in the cold rain. He waved us off. "Mr. Nian say he will stay here," replied Little Cheng. "He say you should come back before dark."

Pleased with my little ploy, I walked side by side with Amy across the plain to the mountain's foot, and we started up the grassy lower slopes. The blank windows looked down on us from high above, and dark shards of cloud cartwheeled off the fissured peaks. In order to keep off the rain, I was wearing

my broad-brimmed Tibetan felt hat that I'd purchased at the general store back in the *gongshe*.

"You look like a Canadian Mountie," Amy laughed. "Or someone from 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.'"

I felt light-hearted. We'd escaped Mr. Nian and Little Cheng. I didn't know how much more of this volatile expedition I could handle, however. Since leaving Bagan, Tibet, a week ago—only a week!—I felt I'd been whipsawed back and forth through a spectrum of frustration, anger, joy, exhaustion, affection, hatred, shame, ecstasy, and confusion—especially confusion.



photos by Katherine Romano

As we climbed closer, we could see that the structure was crudely painted with broad red and white vertical stripes, like the grinning teeth beneath the darkened eyesockets of a skull.

"Do you think it's a prison?" Amy said.

"Why would they put a prison way up here?"

We dipped through a gully and clambered up the far side and had our first close view of the building. Two tall poles stood in front, each upholstered with hundreds of squares of faded orange cloth with writing on them; they looked like a rooster's shaggy legs. A golden sun topped one pole, a crescent moon and star the other.

Now we understood. *A monastery!*

We climbed a final slope to the flat ledge that held the monastery. No face appeared in the blank eyesocket windows that looked down on us. The rain splattered in the mud.

"Should we knock?" asked Amy.

"Let's wait a minute and see what happens."

us, like the view from an airplane window the moment before you climb into a cloudbank. The old monk gestured to a low doorway on the corridor's mountain side. Amy and I poked our heads into a tiny room with mud walls molded in the shape of a beehive, quiet and serene and unfurnished but for a candle stuck into a mud niche in the wall. Here, in all its hushed peacefulness, was a meditation cell.

Dozens more meditation cells lined the corridor on the mountain side; sleeping rooms sat on the opposite side overlooking the Yangtze. The old monk showed us one of the bedrooms, furnished with a simple bed and an old wooden writing table and with a big window giving a spectacular, just-below-the-clouds, eagle's view over this wild section of the green earth and mountain peaks—a bedroom nestled as close to eternity as you'd ever find.

The old monk gestured for us to sit in the kitchen room on the floor. A cook appeared and fired up the stove to prepare tea. The old monk made sleeping gestures, inviting us to spend the night at the monastery. I wished we could, but I knew the alarm it would cause down in our camp. *Goddamn that Mr. Nian!*

"I'm sorry," I said in Chinese as Amy and I stood up. "We must go. The darkness comes."

The old monk beckoned us to follow him farther through the monastery.

"We must go," I repeated.

He beckoned insistently, and we followed him along the corridor. I noticed a wide gap in the wall where the mud had collapsed. Nearby was a pile of fresh mud and a shovel, for repairs. It wasn't until that moment that it occurred to me: this monastery that looked a thousand years old actually might have been newly built. Or newly rebuilt. Through the gap, I now noticed the broken walls of what looked like the ruins of an earlier building. Large crater-like holes showed where the floors should have been, as if the place had been bombed.

Was *this* why there were no middle-aged monks here? Only the old bald monk and his pack of tittering adolescents? Had an entire generation of monks been wiped out when the Chinese took Tibet? It was only in the last few years that Deng Xiaoping had begun to allow Tibetan monasteries to reopen. Is that why none of these monks looked older than fifteen?

We followed the old monk down the darkened stairway and out the passage. He was hurrying now, dragging his leg behind him. Clearly he wanted to show us something. We followed him to the lower structure with the red and white stripes. He ducked into the doorway from which he'd first emerged, pulling his leg after. Within was a beautiful court-

yard surrounded by an ornate veranda whose roof rested on carved wooden pillars painted in luscious swirls of red and gold and blue. Dragging his bad leg, he hurried across the courtyard toward a large door in the far wall. Is *that* how he received the bad leg? I wondered.

I couldn't talk to him, but I already knew something of what happened to lamas like him. During my 1974 trip to the Himalayas, a truck driver who was a Tibetan refugee had told me—tears welling up as he wrestled the wheel through the mountain curves of Kashmir—how the Chinese had seized the lama from the monastery in his Tibetan village and locked him in an empty meditation cell. There they'd kept him day after day, without giving him food or water.

"If you want food or water," the Chinese told him, until he finally broke, "ask your god for it. We will see who is more powerful. Your god, or us."

This was only one of the many stories I would eventually hear from Tibetan refugees about Tibetan lamas and monks and other members of the upper and "enemy" classes submitted to *thamzing*—struggle—sessions by the Chinese. "Who fed you?" was the first question. "The people, whom I exploited," was the correct answer.

If the answer wasn't forthcoming, the subject's

arms were bound in front of him with ropes, then pulled back over his head, twisting them in their sockets to prompt a proper response, which included denouncing the Dalai Lama as a thief, a murderer, and having a taste for fornication with his sister.

The old monk hurried across the courtyard ahead of us, and Amy and I followed. Since the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping had permitted some limited religious practice in Tibet, and some of the monasteries had been rebuilt and reopened. The Chinese government made much of this new "liberalized" policy and officially admitted that "mistakes" had been made in Tibet. Still, that was a long way from religious freedom.

Was the old monk the only survivor from this monastery? I wondered. There was the fused knee, dragging along behind him. I could imagine the *thamzing* session. He is bound to a chair surrounded by silent men with red stars on their shoulders. *Thwack!* an iron bar slams into cartilage and kneecap. The command, "*Denounce the murderer who you call the Dalai Lama.*" No response, only those brown, unblinking eyes. Again the iron bar. *Thwack!*

Now the old monk pushed through the big wooden door in the far wall of the courtyard. Amy and I followed him through it, and after us came the pack of young monks. Inside was a smaller, inner courtyard paved with flagstones and surrounded by high, thick walls like an inner sanctum. At its center stood the temple itself. *So this is what he wanted to show us.*

It wasn't until that moment that it occurred to me: this monastery that looked a thousand years old actually might have been newly built. Or newly rebuilt.

He gestured for us to wait and then called out something to the young monks. One ran off. The rain splashed down on the flagstones. The temple looked like an Egyptian tomb, thick and vault-like, as if hiding secrets within. Mud and stone walls sloped upward to a high, flat roof. The entrance doors, tall and red, were framed by a portico and pillars beautifully painted with spiraling red and gold designs. Soon, a monk somewhat older than the tittering pack arrived, pulling a huge iron key from beneath his robe. He knelt before the temple's stone steps, inserting the key in a slot hidden there.

I then realized that we were going to be invited into the temple. I suddenly felt self-conscious, as if not worthy of the honor. I was probably the first Westerner ever to enter this remote temple on the remote mountainside in this remote corner of Tibet. I subtly shuffled the waffle bottoms of my hiking boots back and forth over the flagstones of the courtyard in an effort to scrape off the clots of mud wedged there. It wouldn't do to be given this honor and then track mud all over the temple floors.

The lock clicked. The monk with the key shoved the double doors open. The old monk turned to me, held his arms slightly wide, as the Tibetans always seemed to do to imitate my walk, and croaked out an *Om mani padme huummm*, imitating my Midwestern version of the mantra. Then he laughed and warmly gestured Amy and me into the temple.

As I stepped over the tall sill of the threshold, my first impression was of space, of whispering heights infused with a hush that muted the splatter of the rain outside. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I made out banners of fabric draped from the wooden beams of the high ceiling nearly to the floor like the long tails of a hundred kites—blue, gold, green, red, yellow. They moved as we slowly started up the center aisle, swaying as gently and quietly as the snow falling inside a glass paperweight. It was as if the old monk had unlocked a secret treasure box for us.

I tried to record in mind's eye all the details as we moved towards the front. Low wooden platforms flanked each side of the aisle, smooth and polished from generations of monks sitting cross-legged in rough, yak-wool robes. Along one wall stood a rack containing narrow books bound in wooden covers. Near the front, a high, carved seat rose over the benches—the lama's perch. Below it, on a wooden platform, lay an array of chimes and bells and cymbals. Amy and I paused to admire them. The monk who'd brought the key held up a tiny bell.

He shook it gently. *Clingg.*

Amy and I made appreciative clucking sounds.

He picked up a triangle. *Tingg.*

We clucked appreciatively again.

He picked up an enormous set of cymbals, three feet across. I covered my ears, pretending to be frightened of the sound, but he touched them ever so softly together, with a delicate *ringg* that floated like a crystalline sphere toward the ceiling.

Bleecchh! Just then a loud organic sound ripped from the pack of young monks at the back of the temple—a burp or a fart. In this particular monastery, the sacred happily mixed with the profane.

The young monks laughed appreciatively amongst themselves at the offender's fine sense of timing. Amy and I walked toward the altar. Several old wooden tables held hundreds of yak-butter candles in brass cups. Only one of them burned, its guttering flame throwing an ochre light on the mud wall in front. A simple board shelf fixed to the wall supported a collection of brass Buddha figurines. A tapestry hung above the shelf, at the spot where the whole temple seemed to focus. It wasn't



Katherine Romano

large, measuring only about four feet by five. As we drew close I could see that it was torn. Its edges were singed. It was almost black with what looked like smoke. Scraps were missing from its center.

It looked as if someone had ripped it to pieces in anger and scorn and then thrown it into a fire. He'd left it there, smoldering, and walked away. Someone else had hidden himself in the heaps of rubble and broken walls that had once been the monastery. He waited until the other one had marched on. He crept out, dragging one leg stiffly behind him, and plucked scraps of smoldering embroidery from the flames. For fifteen years he'd hidden them away, buried in the earth. When the danger was past and the authorities in Beijing said that a few of the temples could be rebuilt, he brought them out, meticulously pieced them together, and hung it here, in the rebuilt temple. It was the Buddha, sitting in the lotus position. It had survived.

Peter Stark, a long-time contributor to Outside and Smithsonian, wrote Driving to Greenland (Burford Books, 1998) and Winter Adventure: A Complete Guide (Norton, W. W. & Company, Incorporated, 1995) and edited the anthology Ring of Ice: Adventure, Exploration, and Life in the Arctic (Lyons Press, 2000). His new book, Last Breath: Death at the Extremes of Human Endurance, is due out soon.

Rock of Ages

an interview with Graham Thompson

by Kyle McClure

In the 35 years Gray Thompson has been climbing, he has pioneered first ascents in the Himalayas, the Canadian Rockies, and the Sierra. Thompson also teaches geology at the University of Montana, Missoula, with an emphasis on the interactions between clay diagenesis (the recombination of a mineral resulting in a new mineral) and petroleum generation. Thompson is the co-author of numerous books, including *Earth Science and the Environment* (1992), *Essentials of Modern Geology* (1994), and *Environmental Geoscience* (1995).

While Thompson continues to climb, in recent years his focus has shifted toward “safer” climbs (which still means “impossible” and “terrifying” to people like me) in places where the sun shines and with limited danger of avalanche or rock fall. Thompson has not, however, completely eliminated what he calls “objective dangers” from his life. Several days after this interview, Thompson, who is an experienced and careful backcountry skier, was skiing Wisherd Ridge, 15 miles northeast of Missoula, when a small avalanche buried him up to his waist. He came back to Missoula and spread the word: be careful on that hill. What he does not say, though, is stay off of it.

K: Many people seem to be compelled to climb to the tops of hills. And we admire climbers; they're celebrities. What's up there?

G: You know the old question: Why do you climb? Mallory, one of the famous old British climbers, answered “because it's there.” And he had no idea that was such a tongue-in-cheek answer. Not everyone does it. Lots of people have no urge to climb. It's sort of like gambling. I



can stand around a casino for hours and be entertained, but I have no interest in gambling. And I think that climbing is similar in the respect that some people are attracted to it and other people are not. One thing that is interesting and I think makes a relevant observation: Most kids are good climbers. You watch little kids who come in for birthday parties at the climbing gym at the Missoula Athletic Club, and many of these skinny little girls are just *really* good at climbing. They climb trees. They climb on jungle gyms. In one sense I think it's sort of an atavistic urge to climb up things. And I think a lot of kids lose it as they get older. But certain people who become long-term climbers just keep on climbing. Like Alex Lowe. He just died a year ago in the Himalayas, and he was one of the world's best. Alex was one these people who climbed because he really liked it. On the other hand, you see a lot of climbers, some of whom are famous, who climb for the reputation. They discover they can make some money, which is much truer in Europe than in the United States.

In North America, even the really famous ones just make enough money to get their next expedition paid for so they can keep climbing. But for a lot of them, the reinforcement that they get is the reinforcement that comes with publicity and with reputation and with whatever income they

earn. They usually last for five or ten years, and then they drop out of the climbing scene. But then there are the ones like Fred Beckey, Jim McArthy, Tom Frost, the late Chuck Pratt, Jack Tackle, and Alex Lowe who climb into their 50s and 60s, and in Fred's case, into his 70s. And for those people, the answer to "why climb?" is "because I am a climber." There are some people who just retain that urge that most children have into what we fondly regard as adulthood. They are the people who are the real climbers. They haven't lost that atavistic or primal sense of "this is what I should be doing." There are the others, the financial climbers, the reputation climbers, and so on, but they disappear.

K: Do you remember the very first thing that you ever went up?

G: Sure. Like most kids, it was a tree. There weren't any jungle gyms or exercise parks where I grew up. But there were lots of trees. My brother and sister and I used to scramble up and down trees.

K: Can you summarize your climbing career? When did you get serious about it?

G: Well, I never got "serious" about it. I don't take things that are important seriously. I grew up in a very small town in Connecticut and went to college at Bates College in Maine, which had a good outing club but no climbing. In fact, when I was in college I didn't even know about technical climbing with ropes and protection and gear like that. When I finished my undergraduate degree at Bates, I went to Dartmouth for a master's degree in geology. At that time, which was in the early 60s, there were very few climbers in North America, and they were centered in a few places: in California around Yosemite, and around Southern California where Royal Robbins and Yvon Chouinard lived. Tom Frost and Chuck Pratt were centered around Boulder, Colorado with Layton Kor and his contemporaries. And then climbers were centered at the Ivy League schools, particularly Dartmouth and Harvard.

I ended up at Dartmouth, not because of climbing, but because of geology... pursuing a graduate degree in geology. The president of the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club, Denny Elbert, was also a geology graduate student, and as soon as we got together we became partners immediately. He basically taught me everything he knew about climbing in ten minutes. There wasn't much to know back then. There was very little in the way of technique or equipment. But he was a really good athlete. And I still climb with him.

K: What types of climbs did you do then?

G: Back then, whenever any big trip was organized it would typically involve people from Dartmouth and/or Harvard. Shortly after I started to partner up with Denny, one of our friends from the Harvard Mountaineering Club,

Boyd Everett, who was very good at organization, had this long-term plan to organize some big Himalayan expeditions. In preparation for that he organized a trip to do a new route on Mt. Logan in the Yukon, which is the second highest peak in North America. I went as sort of a yeoman climber. We climbed a good new route on Mt. Logan. The next summer Boyd put together another trip to Mt. McKinley, or Denali, and for this one he tried to organize a more complicated expedition. He got about a dozen people to simultaneously do three different routes. One was the South Buttress, which was a route that had been done. Another was the Cassin Ridge, which is a route that had been done by Ricardo Cassin and the Italians and which had subsequently been done once by a Japanese party. The other route was the direct South Face, which is a very big, steep technical face that had not been climbed. Four of us, Denny and I and Dave Sideman, who was also a Dartmouth climber, and Roman Laba, who was from New York City, were going to do the direct South Face while two other parties simultaneously did the South Buttress and the Cassin Ridge.

Denali was very remote at the time. I mean, it wasn't like Denali is today; when we were on Denali we didn't know anybody else was also there. Turned out there was another party at the time, the Wilcox party, of which seven members died while on the mountain. They were on the West Buttress, which is now the standard route, and we didn't even know they were there until we got back out to Talketna. All three parties in our group were successful. We had made the first ascent of the Direct South Face, which is an 11,000-foot face—probably the biggest and certainly the most dangerous and maybe the most difficult route on Denali, at least of the routes that go right to the summit. That trip in 1967 got me involved in this larger expedition scene.

The plan for the next year was to go to Dhauligiri in the Himalayas. And Boyd again got the whole thing organized. We were going to go to K2, but we had to put off permission for K2 for a year. In the meantime, we got this permit to go do Dhauligiri, and Boyd sent us photos of the route. Denny and I were in graduate school at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, which is where we both got our Ph.D.s. We got our photos, and looking at them, looking at the route that Boyd had picked, we decided not to go because it looked like a very big and perfect avalanche slope. Instead, Denny and I decided we'd go to Europe and climb in the Alps that summer. We told Boyd we still wanted to go to K2 but we didn't like the looks of this route. Well, while we were in Europe, all those guys got killed in an avalanche on that face on Dhauligiri. In the meantime, Denny and I had made the first American ascent of the North Face of the Matterhorn, which is one of the big north walls in Europe.

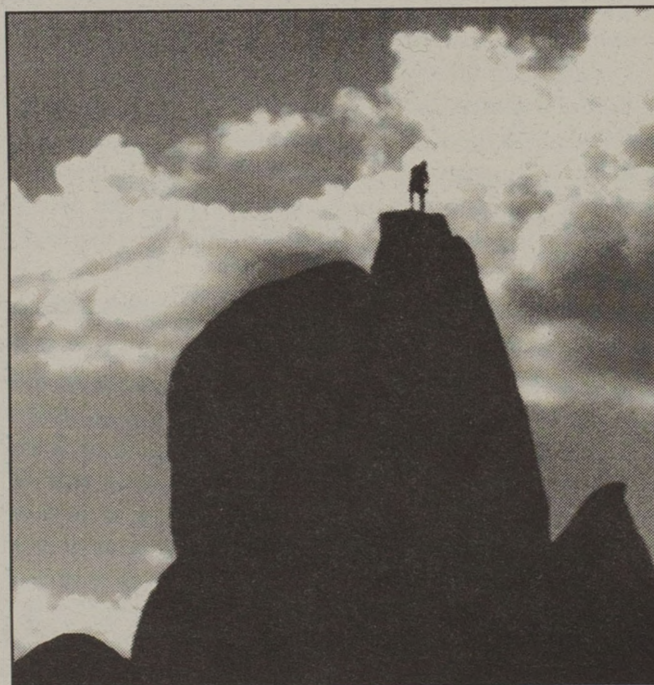
Those were big climbs in each of those years, and they were featured at the annual meeting of the American Alpine Club. We began to get this reputation reinforcement that I was talking about earlier that drives people, and we

responded to that. For ten years we got into doing more and more of the Canadian north faces, most of which had not been climbed previously. One of the games of climbing is to do first ascents. We were just picking out the big north faces in Canada and some other big faces, and every season we'd do that.

Eventually I got into playing the game of doing the research for picking out what lines, what faces and ridges were really aesthetic and really good but hadn't been climbed yet. I pursued that first ascent game up until just a few years ago. Then I started climbing in the Sierra where virtually all of the good lines and all of the big lines have been done. I discovered that I could do really exciting, high-quality climbing in the sunshine where it is warm. And I also started sport climbing.

K: How is sport climbing different than traditional climbing?

G: Sport climbing came in to North America fifteen years ago. Sport climbers fire bolts into the rock instead of using natural protection and cracks. You put in natural protection, and then you take it back out again. Sport routes are typically bolted, and the bolts are permanent installations into the rock. This has taken over climbing in North



Jay Erison

America. It's a lot safer because bolts shouldn't pull out, although occasionally they do. And since you're not worried about falling—you fall frequently in sport climbs—you learn to climb harder and harder, and you get better because you're not climbing a couple of grades below your limit to keep from falling and getting hurt. You just climb at your limit and fall freely.

K: You didn't have a hard time getting used to falling?

G: Oh sure, yeah. Falling without fear... you can't do it the first hundred times. You're afraid of falling, but then eventually you learn that the bolts do hold and the ropes are good and the harness is comfortable and there are just lots of climbs that you can fly on. When you are about to fall, the fear factor still comes in. And it commonly helps to keep you on the rock. But sport climbing to me is a completely new dimension and one I have enjoyed as much as I enjoy any other kind of climbing.

K: The two great environmentalists, John Muir and David Brower, who are products of the Sierra, were both view climbers. In his writings, after reaching the top of a mountain, Muir would spend pages describing what he saw. And Brower often spoke of hiking and climbing as an effort to compose the perfect view. Are you a view climber?

G: I think all climbers are. I took ten rolls of film on my last month-long trip, and I was just looking at them last night. The aesthetics of your environment, the visual aspects, the olfactory elements, and the sounds are all important parts of climbing for, I'm sure, every climber. You get such wonderful views. But it's not just the view; it's the whole environment. It's everything.

K: When I am physically exerting myself I find that things blur and I miss out on details. Do you experience a heightening of the senses when you climb?

G: Climbing is an act of complete concentration. It is not that you can't or shouldn't stop concentrating; it's that what you are doing induces total concentration. Every now and then you hear about athletes who fail at something because they lost their concentration. And I'm sure in sport climbing, particularly where there is not a severe penalty for falling, people lose their concentration in the way an athlete might when he misses a football. But it's not that you stopped concentrating, because just the act of climbing requires concentration. It's that you might not have been concentrating in exactly the way you should. You might not have seen the next sequence of moves you have to make, or you weren't concentrating with the full spectrum. Climbing itself is just a concentration event.

K: What about falling? Or giving up? Do you feel as if you have failed when you fall or back off?

G: No. For me, it's more confined to the climb itself. There are lots of climbs you just back off. This happened to me on one pitch, actually a fairly easy pitch when we were down in Cochise's stronghold in Arizona this winter. There was this chimney, and I said, "I'll lead that." And it wasn't even very hard, but you had to do it with your knees on one wall and your back against the other, and it really hurt my knees. I got up about 50 feet. But I decided I didn't want to do this pitch. And so I backed down out of the chimney. One of the other fellows who was climbing with

me just floated up the thing, although he trashed his knees pretty seriously, as it turned out. I felt a bit badly about backing out of the chimney, but after he got up, I came up an alternative first pitch. It wasn't a fear of falling; I just didn't want the pain. I don't feel like I failed when I back out of something like that. In fact, sometimes I end up patting myself on the back for not having continued to hurt myself. But at the same time you certainly have to realize that you failed on that pitch. And I feel a little bit grumpy about that sometimes. But it doesn't last.

K: How big a part does fear play in climbing? I am sure that you have found yourself in situations where you were scared and you had to make a choice to continue or not. Is this type of decision a part of every climb for you?

G: No, not every climb. Although if you are climbing at your limit on a sport climb or a traditional climb, even with good protection, and if you reach your limit or exceed it and fall off, there is usually this little tinge of fear as you lose contact with the rock. But it's not an overwhelming sense of fear. On some climbs, like on the South Face of Denali, there was real fear because these were bad places.

On the South Face of Denali we got six or eight pitches up the face. It's 11,000 vertical feet and it's just a helluva snow catchment. We set up a camp, and that night a bad storm rolled in. Turned out that storm lasted for two solid weeks. We put our tent, for avalanche protection, under a rock that was maybe fifteen feet high and that hung out just enough so that the avalanches, as they came over, would do a ski jump, barely missing our tent. Because there was a 10,000-foot face above us, there was a huge funnel of snow right down to where we were. We sometimes had these major avalanches coming over us every thirty seconds. That was terrifying. We had this tiny Alp-sport tent, a two-man for Denny and me. The very first avalanche that came over ripped the fly off our tent. Just disappeared. We never saw it again. This is how close we were, how marginal the ski jump effect was. We banged pitons into both ends and ran the rope in one door and out the other, and we both stayed tied into the rope in case the tent got blown away. That went on for two weeks. At first it was terrifying. But these big avalanches would go by so often that after a while we wouldn't even wake up. That was pretty scary.

K: Is there a payoff? Do you climb despite the danger? Or do you climb because of the danger? How does danger factor into the climber's experience?

G: Climbers have two different categories for danger. There is objective danger, which is avalanche, rock fall, the sorts of danger over which you have no control. They are typically things that hit you from above. Then

there is the other category, which I suppose one could call subjective, which is when you find yourself asking, "Am I going to fall?" With equipment and the increasing skill that you get the more you climb, you can deal with the subjective dangers and pretty much eliminate them. You can't eliminate the possibility of falling, but you can use your protection devices, your rope and your nuts, pitons, ice screws so that if you do fall you don't hit the ground. Developing the skills to offset subjective dangers and using those skills is part of the game of climbing.

In order to do certain types of climbs, you have to tolerate a certain level of objective danger. If you want to do the South Face of Denali, you have huge avalanche potential. It is so huge that I don't think anybody should do that route. If you want to do these big north face routes, you have to tolerate a certain level of rock fall potential or cornice collapse or something like that. I used to, obviously, get myself into those situations. Now I try to avoid climbs that have a substantial objective danger.

K: In the more hard-core climbs especially, your ability to come down off the mountain determines whether or not you will survive the climb. In one sense, coming down *is* the climb.

G: In mountaineering, particularly, there is a big discussion about that. The essence of the discussion is: Have you had a successful climb if you die on the descent? There are some real examples of that. Many people thought that Mallory and Irvine made the first ascent of Everest but died on the descent. Clearly, on big climbs, the descent can be technically really difficult and arduous. I did a grade VI with Jack Tackle and Galen Rowell and Rob Millan in the Karakorum over by Trango Towers and K2, and we rapelled for two days getting down off the thing. It was just such a high peak, and the descent had to be rigged technically to get down. Getting down can involve as least as much skill as getting up a climb. That descent was as trying as the climbing was.

The very first avalanche that came over ripped the fly off our tent. Just disappeared. We never saw it again. This is how close we were.

Photos courtesy of Graham Thompson

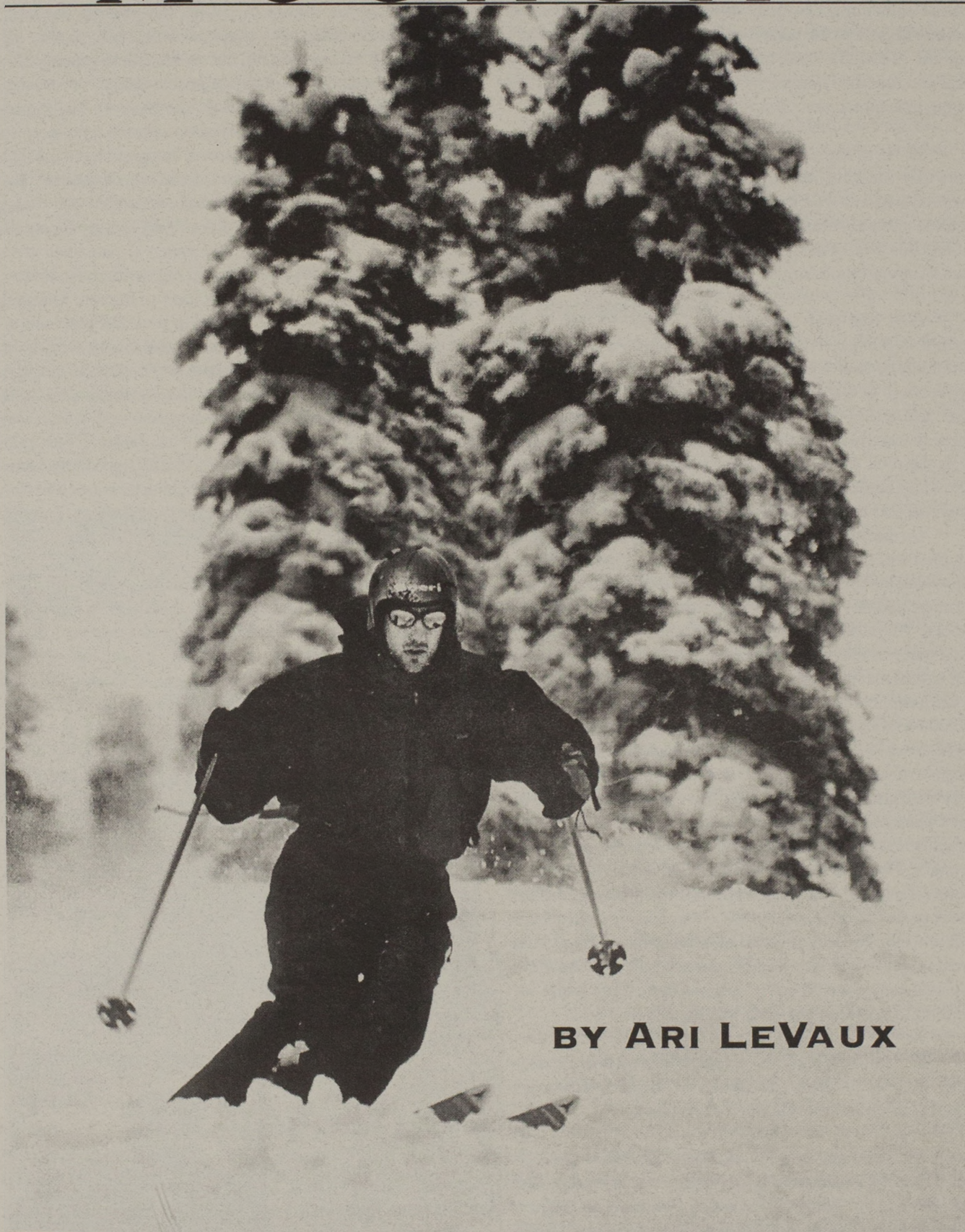
inside front cover - Days of Future Past, Cochise's Stronghold, 5.9, 2001.

page 26 - Second Ascent of the north face of Edith Cavell, Canadian Rockies, 1966.

page 29 - North face of Mt. Merriam, 5.10, 2000.



M O G A S M



BY ARI LEVAUX

Chad Harder

Move like a beam of light:
fly like lightning,
strike like thunder,
whirl in circles around a stable center.

—Mrihei Ueshiba
Art of Peace

Don't cross your skis, kid.

—My Mama

(Pause to wipe drool off of keyboard.) Creamy vision... Snowbowl. Wanna ski those slopes. So steep, so much vertical drop, and your chair—she carries me all of the way to the top of the mountain. And your moguls...don't get me started. Wasn't always this way, though.

My parents met at a ski area in French Canada. Soon after, I was a runt with no poles, terrorizing the ski hill. From an altitude of two feet above snow-level, face plants didn't hurt, unless somebody was watching. My body was supple and resilient, and so I learned about *yayas* pretty cheaply.

Then came the increased flow of testosterone, the excitement of turning into a superhero. And skiing with the possibility of babes watching. Every aspect of skiing: skill, strength, momentum, drive...they all turned up a notch or two as my cultivated taste for *yayas* evolved into a hunger. But all of a sudden the *yayas* lurked in harder to reach places—places I couldn't find on the Ski Area Map. Moguls were what kept me going. And my friend Pete, with his indestructible body, with twice my testosterone flow—Pete and his stack of Warren Miller Ski videos.

I've seen "Blizzard of Ahhhhhhs" more times than "Star Wars." I can still close my eyes and see Glen Plake and Scott Schmidt sailing off of cliffs, triggering avalanches with their smear-turn landings, shooting gaps between rocks and crevasses. Pete and I would go to the mountains and conduct research to prove that it wasn't trick photography.

No details in case my parents are reading, but there were several times in my late teens that gave the Little Voice ample justification to whisper, "This is *not* reasonable. Life's a marathon, not a smear-turn." After I skied the smoldering crater of Mt. Hood, the Little Voice screamed at me at volume eleven, and I can't repeat what it said.

I retired my Green Sleds.

The air was cleaner backcountry, the rates were

cheaper, and I didn't have to hit such extreme *gnar-gnar* to get my *yayas*. With climbing skins on my skis, I learned that *yayas* of highest magnitude could be found backcountry at a fraction of the G-force. At a climbing pace, your eyes can focus on the subtle flavors of outdoor experience, the neon-yellow wolf lichen hanging from the trees. On runs down, I sharpened my telemark turn, working my way up a learning curve whose hump lay years in the distance. Photographers no longer tried to tempt me with offers like "If you drop that cornice, I'll shoot it." Having survived my youth, I was happy to be a grasshopper once more, not ready to leave the monastery. For seven years I recreated in the backcountry.

But when I moved to Missoula, I began to hear intriguing reports about highest-magnitude *yayas* here in town, at a place called Snowbowl. Long before the first snowflakes fell, I had my Weekday Pass. It was December of Y2K, the month I fell in love.

Dusting off the Green Sleds brought back skills and feelings that I thought I had left behind forever. Combine this gear-awakened body memory with issues related to my impending thirtieth birthday, and I was a mid-life Pac-man after eating the big dot, gobbling everything in my path with manic impunity.

But my bones are no longer supple. And I've got that pain in my lower back. And the voice was whispering, "Marathon, please. *Re*-creation, not *Wreck*-reation." This was not the time to push the envelope of *gnar-gnar*. After a few quick stunts that I survived more by habit than merit, I resolved that staying out of danger was a restriction I would have to work within if I was to continue with the Green Sleds.

The other restriction I had to work within was that it is not possible to ski slowly. First comes terminal velocity, then you start skiing. But when you ski fast, especially in deep snow, it is a matter of *when* and not *if* you bite it. I had to eliminate from my diet the vegetable and mineral topographies that did not mix with high-speed wipeouts. Confine my *gnar-gnar* to the open slope, away from trees and rocks, and ski the Bowl without problems.

This left me with just two forms of *gnar-gnar* with which I could procure *yayas*: los mogels and, from time to time, the **Figure 11**.

All aspects of skiing depend entirely on the "fall line," this concept that we use to understand the lay of the terrain. The fall line is the most direct route down any slope from any particular point on that slope. The fall line is the route which a ball rolls starting from where the ball is released and continuing downward. The fall line is the route that water will flow, the path of least resistance. This, at least, describes the gravitational manifestation of the fall line. For

discussion of other manifestations, see Lao-Tzu.

The skier stays constantly aware of the fall line and is constantly reassessing the position and direction of his or her center of gravity with respect to the fall line. If you are avoiding the fall line, then you are holding back, and maybe you should be skiing somewhere where the line is not so steep.

Because ski runs are as individual as snowflakes, the slope—and hence the fall line—is forever changing as you move. Surface conditions vary as well, such as snow conditions, trees, rocks, and the simultaneously unknowable values of both the position and direction of psychosnowboarders.

Q...What is the second thing you hear when you meet a snowboarder?

A..."Sorry, dude."

Try and keep your upper body in a smooth glide down the fall line, and let your skis turn back and forth across it. Together, your steady shoulders and oscillating skis trace a \$ down the fall line. As skiers follow each other down the same fall lines, their skis carve and displace snow into little piles between ruts. Your skis find their way through braided sine wave canyons between mountains of snow, and a line of moguls is born. A field of moguls looks like a chain-link fence, interlocking diamonds with the corners rounded, the wires tracing the canyons between the moguls.

To ski *los mogels* requires a controlled surrender to gravity. Or, as I prefer to call gravity, the "downward flow." You mix and serve an ever-changing brew of yield and resistance to the downward flow, maximizing *yayas* while remaining in contact with Mother Earth.

In contrast, the **Figure 11** carves two long, straight lines in the snow with no turns. It is the maximization of *yayas* through pure speed, pure yield to the downward flow, free fall. At this point, I would like to point out that I am not responsible for what happens to you when you try this. It can be dangerous. Don't hit anything, or anyone. Don't cross your skis.

Surrendering to the downward flow is a well-worn path to bliss in many outdoor circles. Some forms of outdoor recreation, such as skydiving, bungee jumping, the **Figure 11**—or driving with my mother in Boston (if you call that recreation)—involve a direct and weightless ride down the fall line. Others, such as bashing *los mogels*, resist the flow to some degree. In rock climbing, the whole point is to go against downward flow entirely, avoiding at all costs a ride down the fall line. The fly fisher's universe is driven by the downward flow of the river. The surfer is constantly falling downward and forward, like a body in orbit, driven by a wave that is driven by, among other things, gravity. The kayaker joins the flow but at the same time

doesn't fully surrender. To truly join that flow would mean to be disinterested in whether you are under a rock at the bottom of the river, floating face down on top, or trout piss. Nonetheless, the kayaker must think and behave like water to succeed.

So, too, must the bump skier, compressing and expanding like a water droplet, carving canyons between moguls. But unlike water, the mogul skier attempts to use his brain to rise above the trial and error route-finding of water. If the mogul skier was like water, then trial and error would suffice; water is disinterested in which way it goes or how long it takes to get home.

I, however, remain mired in this world of top-down cause and effect. To the mountain, please. One ride to the top, please. One active part in the cosmic dance, please.

Re-creation....Is that, like, kind of like, re-incarnation? O m m m m m .

Alas, you can't put no funk in yo trunk if that back pain has you sunk. Years of life and improper lifting technique have taken their toll on the trunk of my physical plant. I have no choice but to acknowledge the pain when I ski so it doesn't get worse. That spot, just above the base of my spine, is what I call the "upper booty," or "B-spot" for short.

When I ski the bump and grind, it is essential that the B-spot stay poised to absorb shock from any direction, so that it won't get sore. If my attention waivers during skiing, such a lapse can be as costly as during heavy lifting—*improper technique can hurt*. But if my attention lingers on the B-spot while skiing, not only do I prevent the boo-boo, but there is an unanticipated bonus as well: I ski like a rock star.

The B-spot is my center of gravity, the fulcrum between the upper body—which is held steady, shoulders square to the fall line—and the lower body, whose legs are pumping like fast-forward Oaxaccan ricochet pistons. The B-spot corrals the piston action below the belt where it belongs. Because of the strategic positioning of the B-spot, focusing my attention there opens up my skiing like a kite into the wind. After I hit terminal velocity, I still find myself with time to spare between moguls, my body already in correct position to meet what comes next, my eyes scouting three moguls ahead, my hands in front of me, one pole reaching forward, nothing to do but fall through space toward the next mogul, prepared.

KUNDALINI

"the passage through which the life force moves. It is visualized as a coiled serpent residing in the lowest chakra (or center) of the body, located at the base of the spine.

As energy awakens through meditation, the *kundalini* moves through the chakras and ultimately, when enlightenment happens, it is released through the last chakra, which is located at the top of the head, often visualized as the opening of a thousand-petaled lotus."

So says Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, describing the Kundalini, a yogi term for the B-spot. This man, possibly clad in nothing but a turban and a diaper, is describing something very similar to what happens to me when I ski moguls. The language is different (*upper-booty* Vs. *lower chakra*, *the release of kundalini energy through the upper chakra* Vs. *yayas*), yet he is describing an unavoidable element of the human condition. And when you think about it, diapers are kind of cool.

Unlocking the B-spot seems to happen in a lot of diverse cultures. The !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert in Northwest Botswana, for example, dance for hours in order to "heat up" the *n/um*—analogous to kundalini—so that the *!kia*—blissful state—can be attained. Carl Jung even speculated that the kundalini is "an autonomous process arising out of the human collective unconscious, using the individual as its vehicle."

All I know is that if me skiing moguls is Kundalini's way of manifesting itself through the human collective unconscious, then baby, you can call me Kundalini's Bitch all day long.

"Free the Booty, and the mind will follow"
—George Clinton

I'm at the top of the Lavelle Creek chair, at the top of Snowbowl, preparing for my first run of the day. I crank my boots as tight as they will go. My helmet is wired for sound with mini-headphones, samba turned up to eleven. It is near-essential that I listen to samba when skiing moguls. No wilderness experience to chase away here at Snowbowl. Just the gain of groove. I push off and ski toward the Mission Mountains.

Figure 11 down Grandstand, standing up for wind resistance when my speed creeps past controllability, jacket flapping like a skydiver's. In less than one minute I am at the base of the Lavelle chair. Body loose, adrenaline primed, heart beating, ready to make some turns.

For some reason, my next run begins in the trees, where I have to make my first turns of the day in deep powder. My skis have a mind of their own, lingering in the heavy snow, getting thrown around by the snow, not following my orders. My back is already hurting from hucking my skis around in this wet cement. I'm not even supposed to ski in the trees—my *gnar-gnar* resolution. I feel old, weak, foolish. There is, however, a way to finesse instead of power your way through the deep snow: Ski fast.

The price of skiing fast in the trees is that matter of *when* and not *if*. That's why I don't ski in the trees.

I point my skis down the fall line and start missing trees, letting my momentum do the work instead of my B-spot. My head is approaching a tree. I compute that the slow rotation of my trajectory through the air should arc me around that tree. It does, by four inches, just like I figured. I land, and then I shoot a two-foot gap between two spruces because I can. "**Hold I say hold I say hold on**" says the Little Voice. Life's a marathon. Abandon the dark wood.

Emerging from the trees, I **Figure 11** the cat track toward my favorite slope, Far East, whizzing past psycho-snowboarders, pulling all of my attention into my lower back. I am standing straight with my pelvis tipping forward, my hands in front, shoulders and elbows loose, my kundalini revving like a jet engine on a runway. "Voce e Eu, Sempre" by Jorge Aragau programmed on perpetual repeat in the discman turned up to 11.

I drop off the ridge into upper Far East. *Shewp shewp shewp shewp shewp shewp*. The moguls are coming at me in slow motion like white waves of frozen cream. Left right left right my hips dance across the fall line, while my eyes scan five moguls ahead and I plan the continuation of my line. I'm thinking I wish that cute girl at the ski shop could see me now when my skis slam crossed and the mogul hits me before I see it coming. I'm double-ejected from the Green Sleds. Hit bumps hard, moan, slide in between. Moaning. Lie there like a yard sale looking up at the sky. Everything intact, I think, I hope. Helmet paid for itself, again. Needed a rest anyway. CD didn't even skip. *Jorge*.

Back on task, left right left right, dance a little samba toward the next mogul. Using every inch of my skis, however-necessary: hit each mogul hardest with the inside edge of my downhill ski, then kicking both tails into the mogul for a little pop, pivoting on my tips—skiing on my tips—during that long weightless moment when I prepare for the next turn, my poles like two proboscises palpating the moguls around me. Enjoying *yayas* worthy of extreme skiing at a fraction of the danger, I am trying as hard as I can, harder than almost anywhere else in life. My lower back/center-of-gravity/origin-of-motion/upper-booty/B-spot/kundalini/n/um/et al is starting to tire from the heavy responsibility of holding me together through this whirlwind, but I know that I will be able to recharge on the chairlift.

I turn my kundalini up to eleven. Powder puffs flying into my face like cream pies, creaming my vision. Try to remember the mogul line ahead, keep dancing. Please, not yet ready to leave the monastery.

Ari LeVaux is working on two masters degrees, one in Literature and another in Environmental Studies. He also grows fantastic garlic in his garden.

Turning on Fragile Ground

by Becca Lawrence



I learned to ski at three and a half, not that I did much beyond holding onto my father's legs as we went down. I wore the blue snowsuit that had been passed down from my older sister. Between Papa's knees, I had the sensation of skiing on my own but with all the security of his presence. My only other memory from this trip is of the house where we were staying: it was smack on the ski slope and we could ski right out the door.

Twenty-two years later I found myself skiing out my own door to work at Alta Ski Resort in

Utah. I had the glorious job of selling lift tickets, a task that came with a season's pass, two-hour ski breaks, and too much fun. The previous summer, the ski area had hired me to catalog the wildflowers and to improve the seed mix that they used for revegetation; I stayed on through the next two winters and for the next three summers.

I first arrived at Alta in late August, long after the renowned peak of wildflowers. Nonetheless, I was impressed with the ones that were still blooming. I collected the seeds of wildflowers that grew naturally on the mountain, particularly those suited to surviving and thriving in disturbed areas. Judging from the number of seed heads and pods that I collected over the next six weeks, the peak must have been breathtaking.

Identifying plants by seed and leaf is difficult at best, especially since many of these particular species were new to me. I spent much of the first two weeks with four guidebooks in my backpack, keying out the flowers. Sometimes I lucked out and found a plant still in bloom right next to one that had already gone to seed, and I could, with utmost confidence, identify the species. My crew that first summer consisted of me, my Walkman, and eight tapes of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Over the next two summers, my job grew easier as I became more familiar with the mountain and the plants growing there. The crew expanded to include two more people, and we alternated our time between collecting and sorting and screening the dried seeds. We set up some rudimentary experiments the first summer, seed-

ing two locations with only hand-collected wildflower seeds and none of the grass-flower seed mix.

The following season, there were not many plants in either spot. The smaller section was a wash of yellow from the showy goldeneye. By the third season, sticky geraniums and penstemons had also emerged. In the fourth season, the larger plot was covered with ten different species of small plants. Some of these plants may have come from the surrounding vegetation or may have been lying dormant in the ground as part of the site's seed bank. And some came from the seeds we dispersed there. Eventually we discovered that without the competition of the grass-flower seed mix, the wildflowers flourished. On steeper slopes, however, the grasses, which grow quickly, help keep soil from eroding off the mountain.

Without the snow, Alta is a completely different place. It is much quieter, the pace of life is slower, and the mountain is visually transformed from the winter. Rocks,



flowers by Jay Ericson

trees, shrubs, and gullies that are hidden under feet of snow emerge. It's staggering to think about how much snow is needed to cover the terrain and obstacles, which are more often cliffs and flowers, not just grass. Each summer, the naked mountain reveals something new to

me, usually a flower I haven't seen before. The steershead has eluded me for four summers, but I have learned where it grows.

Prior to its reincarnation as a ski resort, Alta was a mining town. Its mining past is evident today in the piles of waste rock that freckle the mountainsides and by the swaths of second-growth forests replanted by the miners. Like mining and many other human activities, skiing is not without its deleterious impacts. In the summer I see the impressions the winter enthusiasts make on the mountain, which are often in fragile areas. The winters are harsh and long, followed by a short growing season, and precipitation is highly variable.

Throughout the winter, skiers and the snowcats that groom the slopes compact the accumulated snow, which packs down the soil and, in the spring, slows the melting of the snow-pack. Compressed soil impedes root growth,

making new plant establishment more difficult as well as hindering the continued growth of already existing vegetation. Soil nutrient and water cycling processes and soil chemistry may also be damaged by the altered soil structure. The vegetation is also affected, as branches and stems are broken and growth buds injured or cut off by skis and snow grooming machinery during early season skiing or low snow years.

Alpine ecosystem restoration is not a new concept. Many ski areas in Austria have been doing it since the late 1970s. Alta began revegetating disturbed areas in the early 1980s. In 1996, Alta changed the customized grass seed mix that it had been using to include a few species of wildflowers. The next year, my first year there, I changed the mix again to include only native flowers. The seeds of many of these species must first lie dormant in the ground, sometimes for more than a year, before germination occurs. So it takes several growing seasons for the flowers to become established and eventually bloom. These revegetation efforts are not full-scale restoration projects; their purpose is to protect the resource, not to reconstruct an ecosystem that existed prior to human disturbance and modification.

I wonder why more skiers don't work to protect the terrain that they love so much. Perhaps because many skiers simply never set eyes on the slopes once the snow has melted. Most of the employees are gone in the off-season, and not all ski areas are year-round resorts. Even at a four-season resort, a visitor may not see much of the damage. For me, revegetation and restoration are ways of letting us continue to enjoy skiing while accepting the responsibility of our use. It may not be perfect—damage is inevitable—but if we are aware that damage is occurring, then we can try to mitigate some of it.

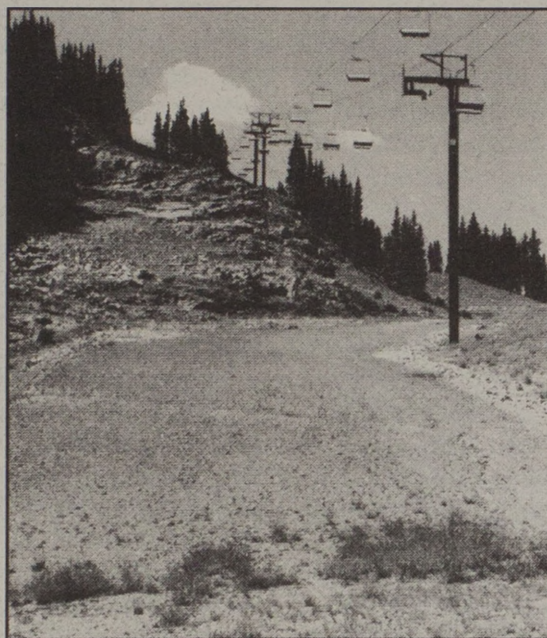
Last summer, Alta finished the construction of the Patrol Dispatch Center and the new snowmaking facility under Cecret Lake. Both sites were reseeded in the fall with the usual seed mix supplemented with four specially selected species as well as some hand-collected seeds,

and then they were covered with erosion control blankets. That season I moved away from seed collection and set up monitoring plots. I put half the plots in disturbed areas and the other half in relatively undisturbed locations. In each plot I recorded what species of shrub, grass, or wildflower was growing and what percentage of the plot was covered by each species. Ideally this information will serve as a baseline, so that in the years to come it will be possible to see the changes in survival and mortality and in species composition and dominance. The goal is to be able to figure out if our revegetation efforts are effective or not. The snow always melts, and each summer the evidence of our successes and failures becomes apparent yet again.

Skiing has always been an integral part of my life. It started with family ski vacations with cousins and grandparents and now includes trips with friends, too. Skiing is not only an exhilarating sport; I also love the time my mind has to wander while I sit on the chairlift, ski, or stand at the summit with the world laid out around me. I take a few turns for those far away, and I imagine them there with me.

As I connected my turns down East Greeley three years ago, perma-grin firmly in place, I thought

of all that I was really skiing on. This was my first foray off the groomed slopes on telemark skis. Floating for that brief moment between each turn, the powder flew up and sprinkled my face. The intense blue of the sky and warm sunshine made for a perfect day. It wasn't only the greatest snow on earth but also the kaleidoscope of columbines, larkspur, currants, shrubby potentilla, geraniums, lupine, and a plethora of rocks underneath that made the skiing so wonderful.



Becca Lawrence

I wonder why more skiers don't work to protect the terrain that they love so much. Perhaps because many skiers simply never set eyes on the slopes once the snow has melted.

Becca Lawrence grew up skiing in New England and Austria before she moved to the Rockies. She has spent four summers at Alta Ski Resort working on her EVST Masters degree project.

The Best American Science and Nature Writing

Edited by David Quammen, Houghton Mifflin, 2000

On rare occasions, very talented people do an honorable job of combing out essays worthy of inclusion in a "best of" book. If you are lucky, the editor even does an exceptional job of framing the collection with an introduction that explains not only the evolution of that general subject, but also what it's evolving into and why. And on even rarer occasions, that editor is one of the most insightful and enjoyable authors of our time.

So it is for *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*, edited by David Quammen. Quammen, author of award-winning *Song of the Dodo* and long time columnist for *Outside* magazine, is well versed in the fields of science and nature writing. He introduces the book by intertwining wit and fact to unfold the subtle distinctions between science and nature writing and the historical path of nature writing. "Science," according to Quammen, "is a subset of human culture, which is a subset of primate behavior, which is a subset of nature." At the same time, "Science is getting ever bigger and more potent, whereas nature in the narrow sense is getting smaller piece by piece, like a pizza on a platter between teenage boys."

This has led to important evolutions in science and nature writing. Historically, there have been two primary realms of nature writing: "Stay Home and Observe with a Gentle Heart" and "Go Forth and Observe with a Probing Mind." The former is best represented in Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* and the latter by Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*.

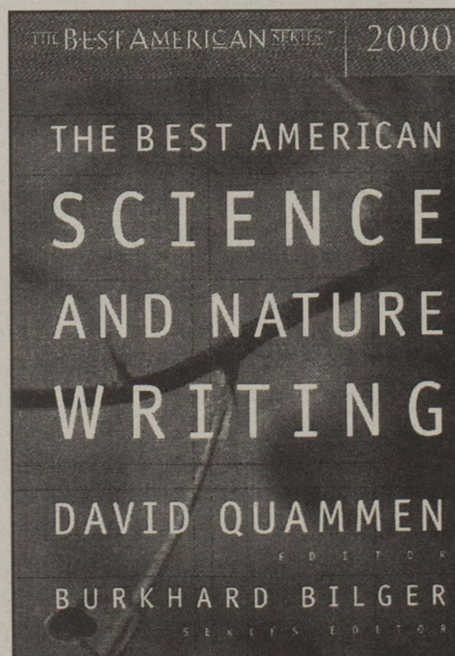
These two genres, Quammen writes, while still acting as a foundation for numerous works today, are evolving in a new direction. Nature writing is at a point where it must respond to the reality of ever decreasing biodiversity and habitat. The stakes are too high and the loss too great to not address this. Today's nature writing, which Quammen loosely labels "Landscape Non-fiction or Political Ornithology," "has had to reinvent itself with a sense of outrage, and of outreach, and of dark, desperate humor."

It is with these concepts in mind that Quammen, along with Burkhard Bilger, editor of *The Best American Series*, chose the 19 essays they consider the best science and nature essays published in 1999. The topics

vary widely, including an account of various theories of how AIDS began, a call for localized agriculture and logging efforts, the shortcomings of the computer revolution, and Mormon archeologists looking for clues to the history of their faith in Central America.

Perhaps the best example of this emerging "Political Ornithology" is "Gorilla Warfare," by Craig Stanford, co-director of the Jane Goodall Research Center. In this essay, Stanford forces honest evaluation of international politics and its effect on species protection, using examples from his research on gorillas. In 1999, the Interahamwe, a group of Hutu guerrillas from Rwanda, kidnapped fourteen Western tourists and murdered eight of them. He uses this example to demonstrate how protection for endangered species such as the gorilla is often dependent upon support from money raised through tourism and that tourism's survival is dependent upon political stability. He closes the essay with "Through science we may try to fix what people have botched through politics and economics. But in Africa, the divisions that matter the most are the ones between people, not between animals, and they cut deeper than any border on any map. Only by healing those rifts can we ever hope to save the mountain gorillas." Though this essay is short on the dark, desperate humor of the new nature writing genre—and appropriately so—it exemplifies the outrage and the outreach, the willingness to set environmental issues in the larger context of the political economy and to challenge the reader to reflect deeply on his/her own role in and response to such a situation.

The book is a collection of essays about survival: survival of species, of ecosystems, of healthy emotional states, of relationships between the sexes, of spiritual hope and intellectual integrity. Individually and collectively, these authors are weaving a web of our survival game plan. They write with a necessary critical intellectual edge and very, very large hearts. Each of the pieces provides hope despite the seemingly formidable challenges. Read this book for your own sake and for the sake of all of us earthly creatures. The collection exposes the necessity to grapple with both the joy and pain of our beautiful and confusing existence. That, pure and simple, is why these essays needed to be assembled and distributed to the world.



Long on Adventure:

The Best of John Long

Falcon Publishing, 2000

Take the largest globe you can find. Spin it as hard as you can without tipping it off its axis. Close your eyes and stop it with the point of your finger. No matter where it happens to land, chances are John Long has been there. Twice.

Long on Adventure: The Best of John Long is a compilation of 28 stories chronicling a lifetime of travel and adventure. Whether two-thousand feet off the deck on El Capitan in Yosemite Valley, slogging for weeks through Indonesian Borneo while it is on fire, or deep inside the mind of a rock climbing manic depressive with a death wish, Long has the ability to bring you right into the moment and kick you straight in the stomach with its harsh reality.

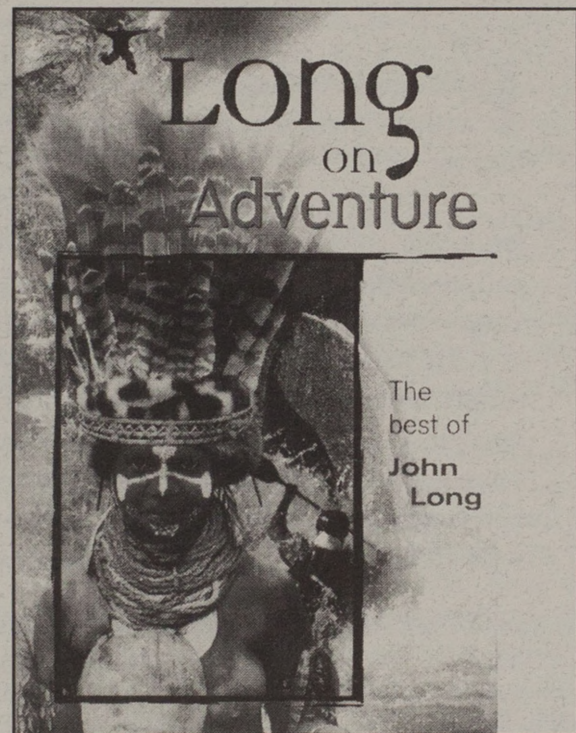
A gifted storyteller, Long succinctly paints vibrant pictures full of character and depth. The individuals he encounters and the ridiculously outrageous situations into which he puts himself jump from the page with the richness of a National Geographic photograph. We get tales of extreme kayaking, rock climbing, traveling, fighting, and exploring, to name a few.

reviewed by
**Jay
Ericson**

Long does not provide an A to Z account of each adventure. Rather, he dives directly to the heart of the action. "Improbable Marksman" begins, "We were 100 miles into the Sarawak jungle (Malaysian Borneo). It had not rained in nearly three weeks and all living things cried out for relief." In many instances, he leaves readers scratching their heads wondering just how in the world he ended up 100 miles into the Sarawak jungle in the first place. If I were to ask for anything more from this book, it would be greater insight into the motivation for and the planning of these improbable escapades. As a reader I was left with a feeling of why? and how? too often.

What I feared about this book was that it would be a self-absorbed, ego-boosting narrative about the exploits of a testosterone-filled adrenaline junky in the all too ubiquitous "I can climb higher and drink more beer than you can" motif. In fact this book is anything but that. While Long no doubt has a healthy ego and a penchant for the over-the-top, he tells his tales with humility and humanity. In "Hide the Women and Children: Yabbo's Soloing, Again," Long treats an obviously troubled individual, his former friend, climbing partner, and mythic figure John Yoblanski with respect

and admiration. He finds the greatness in Yoblanski's spirit and achievements and doesn't dwell on his demons. Long writes, "Perhaps five feet nine inches tall, lean as a skinned rabbit, Yabbo had an atomic-caliber energy that could take hold of him like a possession.... He'd go days without eating, then would suddenly wolf down 10 hamburgers and a gallon of ice cream—if you



were buying. Yabbo loved LSD and 'shrooms and flourished on adrenaline, hashish, coffee, and Camel straights. A right-brained 'feeler,' he was generous to a fault, wonderfully childlike, and so naive you'd swear he'd just stumbled from Mother Hubbard's boot. His heart was solid gold." And although John Yoblanski's life ended tragically, cut short by his own hand, Long allows his memory to endure as a "rogue prince."

Throughout his career as a writer, John Long has separated himself by taking an extremely personal approach to each of his subjects. This compilation of stories, spanning three decades, does more than entertain us with fascinating tales of high adventure in foreign lands; it takes us into the mind and spirit of the adventurer himself. With each of the stories in *Long on Adventure*, we are given a sense of who this person is and not just what he has done.

A LITTLE ABOUT MY CHAINSAW,

A HORSE NAMED PRIDE,

AND 300 MILES ON A BIKE



BY JAMES LAINSBURY

Pride didn't like dragging birch logs. He didn't like dragging maple or hophornbeam, either. The 500-pound beech logs that channeled into the dry soil of the twitch trail irritated him the most.

I'd back him up close to one of those massive logs, and he'd shift his weight from one rear leg to the other in anticipation—his own solo version of the Riverdance. Only he wasn't Irish, and no applause followed: just the pull of deadweight against his shoulders and my tiresome commands.

He hated logging and tried many things to get me to take him back to the barn. He danced on his trace chains as I connected them to the whiffle-tree and the log, forcing me to prowl beneath his hindquarters. He flexed those muscles in my face as I untangled the chains. He "jumped" loads, like a race car going from 0 to 60 in three seconds, forcing me to drop the reins and watch him careen down the trail with a bouncing log in tow. He tried to kick in my teeth. I was stubborn, and I worked him until he foamed at the harness.

I enjoyed myself in that hot summer, walking behind his clipped tail with the reins in my hands, carefully hopping over the sap-heavy logs he dragged as we traversed the bends in the twitch trail. The hills of shaggy yellow birch, sugar maple, and beech grew around me. It was a drought year, and the dust we kicked up peppered my face and smudged as I wiped the sweat with my forearm. The dryness brought out the horseflies and blood from bites ran in rivulets down Pride's rib cage. The sweet odor of oat-laden horse-shit, the hot scent of two-stroke exhaust, and the metallic tinge of blood fused into a smell that I identified with work.

I was harvesting firewood and pulp selectively, which was as low-impact as I'd ever been in the woods before. That made me proud if not a bit self-righteous. I enjoyed the pace of horse-work and the peacefulness. Pride's snorting was a nice change from the jet-plane roar of my uncle's skidder. For years I had been trying to prove something to myself with my chainsaw. I wanted to be a man, an adult. And where I come from in northern Maine—the land of potato farms and logging operations—you have few ways to prove this. Here, work defines who you are, and how hard you work is not merely a measure of character—it's all that matters. I was writing poetry in college and feared that writing was a dubious enterprise. Logging gave me concrete results: I could

look over my shoulder at the end of the day and see the work I had done.

Working with Pride balanced my pragmatism with my environmental ethic. I was logging, turning raw nature into firewood, but I was doing so gently. Pride may have weighed 2,200 pounds, but his hoof marks could not compare with the waist-deep skidder tracks I had waded through in the past. I thought I had found my calling: I was to be a horse-logger. Pride had erased all romantic notions I once held about horse-work. He had tested me and found I could not be easily felled. Horse-logging was *real work*, something beyond industrial and environmental rhetoric. Wendell Berry would be proud.

I worked seven long days a week. I never went to have beers with friends—I didn't need to.

In 1997 I had a mid-youth crisis. Instead of having an affair or buying a red convertible, I bought a mountain bike, one that rode like a Barco-lounger. I had just graduated from college, the world was supposed to be my oyster, but I felt like the guy standing on his porch, looking at the smoldering bag of shit he just stomped out. I was lost.

I fell in with a group of hard riders and beat the snot out of that bike: I crashed it; I swore at it; I vomited on it. I rode so much that I outgrew all of my 501 Levis. It didn't take me long

to turn into a gear-head. I read bike magazines, hung out at the local bike shop, and talked the lingo. My girlfriend left me. Eventually, I stopped wearing cotton and got serious; I bought a slick, yellow jersey and joined a race team.

Pride was a distant memory. Over a year had passed since I logged with him. I still had notions of becoming a horse-logger, but at the moment, intact ideals seemed impossible. I was working at a hardware store selling bags of the pesticide Sevin to illiterate fools ("Ya got that number seven stuff?"). Frustrated, I asked my boss to get rid of the pesticide aisle, but he wouldn't. I didn't know what to do, so I pedaled through the days hoping life would sort itself out.

Parks Hardware was old. The hardwood floors peaked and dropped into valleys that creaked underneath customers. The dust of 150 years lay in fine layers throughout the store; we could age pieces of hardware by the accumulated strata. The place had history and the kind of hardware I now see as relics from another time. It is an unwritten rule that customers at old-fashioned hardware stores expect to get harassed by curmudgeonly employees. It's part of the show, and it's the only reason I wasn't fired.

My attitude was not showmanship—I was simply not a happy person. I was stuck in Orono, Maine, where I had just graduated, working for seven bucks an hour. Five years of college, and I had no idea what kind of work I was supposed to do.

About the time my girlfriend left me, I started training for R.A.T.S. (Ride Across Three States). It was a grueling road-ride that my friend Jim, who owned the local bike shop, had invented. R.A.T.S. followed the windy, hilly, logtruck-choked Route 2 through Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. It was not a sponsored ride—neither Coca-Cola nor the United States Postal Service wanted anything to do with us—and there were no prizes. It was for masochistic nitwits who wanted to see if they could pedal 300 miles without vomiting too much or losing feeling permanently in their lower regions.

I signed on.

Surprisingly, there were only three of us: Tim (a race buddy), Jim, and me. We trained March through June, building strength and getting used to each other's habits in a pace line. We told jokes on those backroad rides, philosophized, and egged each other on. Most people thought we were crazy; they wouldn't have ridden their bikes two blocks for a quart of milk, let alone 300 miles. I thought I was crazy, too, but

the cadence of steady pedal-strokes filled a void. I wasn't sure I'd be strong enough to complete the ride, but I was viewing it as a vision quest: I thought the answers to my questions about life would be waiting at the finish line.

The point of recreation is renewal. Traditionally, recreation was something to do to recover from work—even God rested on the seventh day. Bicycling certainly was a diversion I needed after eight hours of sweeping floors and filling nail bins. I needed to ride with my friends. Biking was renewal for me, giving me the strength to rise each morning knowing I would have to explain the benefits of silicone caulk over latex at least a dozen times. But R.A.T.S. had elevated my desire for cycling beyond the stage of renewal into a realm of perversion: In lieu of meaningful work, I was biking. And I truly believed that R.A.T.S. was going to help me attain nirvana.

On July 14th, Tim, Jim, and I mounted our bikes and left Orono at half past midnight. We planned on finishing the ride in under twenty hours. We pedaled in the dark slowly, the tiny beams of our headlights pulling us forward. Route 2 was deserted, and the cool, damp air made it seem like we were under water. At 3 a.m. it started to rain, and it didn't stop for twelve hours.

Sixty miles into the ride we pulled over to huddle in the entryway of a McDonalds and sipped stale coffee. The sky was a gray wash through the windows, and our hopes for finishing the ride were slim. Our faces were streaked with the street-filth spun up by our wheels, and I could feel grit in my teeth. Jim was shaking uncontrollably, mildly hypothermic, and I was already saddle-sore. Tim wasn't fazed in the slightest: he happily chewed an egg McMuffin.

We commiserated and decided to head on, hoping the rain would stop. Tim finished his sandwich, and I went into the bathroom with a tube of Vaseline. I slathered it all over my thighs and nether regions praying one of those logtruck drivers that had passed us wouldn't walk in. I knew nirvana wouldn't be easy, but this seemed ridiculous.

The rain did stop in time for a seven-mile hill. At the top, the burnt mounds of the White Mountains and a long descent spread out ahead of us. The sun was shining, and I felt like a horse released from its bridle: I wanted to fly. I pedaled hard hoping to hit at least 50 mph. At 43, a strong crosswind took hold of my front wheel and shook it. My arms

IN 1997 I HAD A MID-YOUTH CRISIS.
INSTEAD OF HAVING AN AFFAIR OR
BUYING A RED CONVERTIBLE, I
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and handlebars followed suit: the Death Shimmies. I had heard tales about Death Shimmies but had never experienced them. As I was about to be flung into traffic, I slowed to a steady gallop. Flying sounded good, but we still had 150 miles to go.

We rode, popped a few Advil, and rode some more. Night came again, and the temperature dropped unseasonably low for July.

Twenty miles from the end my body went into mild shock. It refused all fluids, and I couldn't stomach fruit. I began hallucinating. The green mile-markers seemed to me the eyes of a predator slinking alongside the road, following me. Eight miles outside of Burlington, with one hill to go, we stopped alongside a guardrail. I sank to the road, unable to stand. Tim and Jim were talking next to me, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. I didn't think I was going to finish. I grabbed a handful of sand that had accumulated in a depression in the pavement and ground it in the palm of my hand. Holding it up against the moon, I released the sand. It cascaded into my lap, glittering momentarily in the moonlight. *What the hell am I doing*, I thought. *I'm working at a hardware store and riding bikes. That's it.* I grunted into a standing position, ate half a Clif Bar, and winced as I lifted

my sore leg over the bike. I threw out a telepathic hail to the Greater Spirits: *O.K. . . . the ride's almost over . . . if you got any epiphanies for me, now would be a good time.*

They never got back to me. We made it to the HoHum Inn, Jim passed out on the floor in his bike clothes, and I passed out watching the end of Saturday Night Live. No fanfare, no epiphanies. Life went on. Two days later I was once again waxing brilliantly about silicone caulk and dealing with a customer who wanted to solder her favorite grocery cart back together.

There is a fine line between fetish and perversion: It's a line between enjoying something and letting it rule your life. When does a hobby, a pastime, turn into an obsession? When does recreation cross the line into a realm that isn't about renewal? The lines between work and play are so blurry these days it's hard to tell. We have baseball players with \$10 million contracts, and we have professional snowboarders. I do know that I was looking for something from R.A.T.S. that it couldn't deliver. And the morning after that ride, the void I had been feeling for months had grown larger.

For the last five years my reminiscing about Pride has been tinged with regret. I talk about how he twitched logs and how that brought me a strange kind of joy, knowing he was working as hard as I was. I had a sense of purpose when I logged with Pride: I knew what I was. I knew that I was doing good work. I remember it being a bittersweet day when I drove away from that graying barn and into a new semester of school. I had been sad to leave Pride but also grateful to have a rest from physical labor. I also felt that it wasn't the end of my horse-logging career, but just the beginning. I have never been back. It took me five years to figure out why. Obsession.

Just as I obsessed over bikes because I didn't have a fulfilling job, I used Pride to fill a similar void. It was an easy answer to a difficult question: What is my calling?

Last summer I worked for a logger known for his low-impact techniques. He would shake his head as I exited my sleeping quarters dressed in a neon-yellow jersey and black Lycra shorts. He couldn't understand why I'd want to sub-

ject myself to thirty miles on a bike after working eight hours in the woods. I was driven by fear. I needed to turn those cranks to avoid heading down the same obsession-laden route I had been down before with Pride. I knew then that all my romantic notions about being an environmental logger

were just that—romance. I'll probably cut trees down again for work, but I know it's not my calling.

So what is my calling? I'm still trying to figure that out. Part of the process is weeding out possibilities and not becoming too attached to one lifestyle. I know that I don't want to be just a horse-logger, and I don't want my life to revolve around bicycle wheels and saddle sores. Obsession is a trait of the anal-retentive: We just won't let things go. Obsession becomes perverse when you let it become the answer to monumental questions in your life: I bike, therefore I am. These days I'm trying to avoid it at all costs.

Lately, I've been obsessing over words. I have now rewritten this essay four times. Writing is really not much different from road-biking: you sit for many hours at a stretch, and eventually your ass goes numb—but at least there aren't any Death Shimmies.

James Lainsbury is looking for someone to care for his dog Willow for the summer. He is headed to southern Idaho to lead kids on wilderness trips.

TWENTY MILES FROM THE END MY BODY
WENT INTO MILD SHOCK. IT REFUSED ALL
FLUIDS, AND I COULDN'T STOMACH FRUIT. I
BEGAN HALLUCINATING. THE GREEN MILE-
MARKERS SEEMED TO ME THE EYES OF A
PREDATOR SLINKING ALONGSIDE THE ROAD,
FOLLOWING ME.

Letter to the Main Fork of the Salmon River

It has been three days since I left your shores
Where sometimes quiet sometimes rapid water runs,
Where otters curve like thick snakes through the current.
Leaving the brown bear to storm your fisheries
With massive claw and tooth.
Leaving the wolves to pace the water's edge in peace.
Your golden eagle with spotted wing
is the only one to watch you.
Yet, I still can hear the rush of your water,
It has found a tributary in my veins.
I carry you with me always, cool water
Sloshing and splashing inside the cavity of my chest,
Like you, carrying the reflection of the moon
fragmented on your back.
From the sands I saw the Northern Lights
stretching fingers across the sky.
Blotting out the stars with shades of purple, red, and green,
A symphony of color to
Complement your trickling nighttime melody.
The spring warmed the canyon
And snowmelt ran down to meet you,
Down the lush mountainside, bursting with tender shoots
Of Glacier Lily and Balsam Root,
To join you and your whirling eddies
that curl and twist up stream
As if you did not want me to go
Down where the South Fork meets you,
Down where I met the road that took me home.

T.E. Barrett



Gary Hughes

Camas

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