

Pastoral Visions, Wilderness Dreams
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Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you tonight. As an educator and chemist, my talks are usually on topics like chiral NMR shift reagents, aspects of undergraduate research, and the use of project- and problem-based learning in chemistry. So I am feeling a bit out of my league giving a talk titled "Pastoral Visions, Wilderness Dreams", and it is with some degree of trepidation that I address you tonight. But I do have a passion for protecting the environment, and more recently about preserving wilderness lands, and so at the same time I look forward to the opportunity you have afforded me this evening.

In addition to my standard chemistry offerings, I occasionally teach a course through the Environmental Studies program at Bates called "Using the Land." In this course we read several classic American works, including selections by Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Aldo Leopold, and Roderick Nash, that focus broadly on aspects of the human relationship to land. My talk this evening is based on reflections of ideas presented in those readings as well as my own personal experiences and beliefs.

There are four events in my life that were especially influential in developing and expanding my interest in the topics I will discuss. The first occurred during college when two friends of mine and I went in together to buy a car, tent, camp stove and other gear and headed out for a six-week cross-country trip. None of us had ever camped a day in our life. The trip was in the summer of 1973 which, depending on your age and memory, you might realize was the summer of the Arab oil embargo, an event responsible for frequent shortages of gasoline. The adults in our lives, who generally behaved responsibly, urged us in the strongest terms not to go lest we get stranded somewhere without gas. As college students prone to behaving irresponsibly, we went anyway. Besides, we had a few weeks of slack built in before heading back to school and we could always wait and camp somewhere until more gas arrived. It turns out that there was only one time in the entire six weeks that we had to try a few gas stations before being able to fill up. Otherwise it was clear sailing.

What we didn't fully realize was that most Americans that summer decided to behave responsibly. As a result, we experienced something that is probably unique in American tourism. We drove into places like Yellowstone Park, Yosemite Valley, and the South Rim of the Grand Canyon late in the afternoon, inquiring about the availability of campgrounds, and learned that every campground in the park

had openings and we could take our pick. We got to see national parks and monuments essentially unencumbered by other people. It really was a unique view of the vastness of the United States and the diversity of geology, flora, and fauna of the country. As someone who grew up in the manicured suburbs of New York City, it was my first real encounter with a wild environment and the first realization that there was a vast land worthy of protection.

I contrast that experience with another of a few years ago when, wanting my children to see some of the west, we embarked from Denver on a similar three-week excursion. In this trip, we crept along on park roads with long lines of cars, RVs, and trailers. Camping in the parks was out of the question without reservations made long in advance. Parking areas at scenic vistas were mobbed so that sometimes we had to wait for a space, and then jostle with people to get pictures of the view. It seemed like everyone was on a mad dash down the same roads after the same pictures, waiting in the same long lines.

However, there was one interesting observation that occurred over and over again. If instead of just snapping pictures of the view, you walked in on one of the trails that left from the vista, within about 100 yards of the road you found yourself alone and in silence. Even at Mount Rushmore, which in all honesty has a parking lot that easily rivals those at the largest professional football stadiums and was literally teeming with thousands of people, a short distance onto a nature trail that was advertised as providing interesting views of the memorial resulted in solitude and silence. The only two exceptions were the trail to Delicate Arch in Arches National Park and the trails into Bryce Canyon. If you have not been to either of these places, I do urge you to jostle with the crowd and go.

As Edward Abbey writes of Delicate Arch,

"It is a weird, lovely, fantastic object out of nature that has the curious ability to remind us - like rock and sunlight and wind and wilderness that out there is a different world, older and greater and deeper by far than ours."

Delicate Arch is an awe inspiring creation.

And Bryce Canyon, with its thousands of columns that look like enormous drippings of wet sand, beckons you down into it with an urge that most people find irresistible.

When I think back on these two trips, though, I realize that I was mostly what Aldo Leopold refers to as a Trophy Hunter. Leopold speaks about the motorized ant who swarms the continent in search of the view, picture, or object before

learning to see his own back yard. According to Leopold, the Trophy Hunter consumes but never creates outdoor satisfactions.

Similarly, Abbey speaks of the American tourists as "being sealed in their metallic shells like mollusks on wheels, and wonders how he can pry the people free? The auto as tin can, the park ranger as opener. Like ions shot from the sun, the weekenders radiate from every town, generating heat and fraction as they go - *Rattus urbanus*." Or when describing the mess left around Rainbow Bridge, Abbey identifies another species - *Slobivius americanus*.

The second event important to this evening's talk occurred a couple of years after my cross country trip when one of my companions from the trip and I decided to hike a substantial portion of the Appalachian Trail in New Hampshire. Never having backpacked before in our life, we went to Eastern Mountain Sports in Boston and outfitted ourselves with backpacks, boots, stove, and the other essentials for such a trip. After hitchhiking up to New Hampshire, and a few miles into our hike, on the trail up to the summit of South Kinsman, I realized that hiking through the mountains with a full backpack was the most strenuous physical activity that I had ever done in my life. As a lazy college student, I was not at all prepared for the physical demands of this adventure. But I was also determined not to give up on it.

What I discovered was that the close inspection of flora, fauna, and geologic formations, coupled with the intense exhilaration and sense of accomplishment that accompanied something like a hike across Franconia Ridge, gave me an appreciation for the natural world that I had never experienced before from the inside of a car, view from a scenic vista, or short stroll along a nature trail. My love of hiking is something that has never diminished, and it has led to me to a heightened sense of the urgency of preserving large uninhabited tracts of land.

The third event occurred about ten years ago when I served as the co-chair of the committee that wrote the current comprehensive plan for the city of Auburn. I was elected a co-chair after repeatedly speaking out at our first meeting. When will I learn? After spending the better part of a year on sections of the plan on economic development, recreation, transportation, etc., we finally got to the last major category - land use - and ended up spending as much time on this topic as all the other areas combined. It turned out that people really cared about land use. Everyone wanted land available for industrial and retail development, because of the taxes and jobs such uses generate, but of course nobody wanted these types of development in their neighborhood.

But most relevant to my topic tonight was a subtler message. Auburn has a lot of undeveloped land because about 40 years ago the city created something called the Agricultural Zone to protect farmer's properties from the higher taxes of adjacent residential, retail, and industrial land. With farming almost gone from the community today, these parcels remain undeveloped. However, the city faces increasing pressure from current land owners (over 80% of whom bought the land fully aware of the zoning restrictions) to ease the zoning to allow development. As our group debated the status of land parcels in the Ag Zone, what caught my attention was that even those who wanted to retain the land as is always put their argument in the context of saving the land as a resource for future human needs. Everyone considered the land a commodity that ultimately belonged to humans and ultimately would be used to our ends. As Leopold states, there is a universal assumption that an unused hinterland renders no service to society. The few who argued for permanent preservation of parcels still did so under the justification of human recreation. For example, we needed to preserve land for the deer so we could then hunt or view the deer. Everything tied back to human uses. I found myself alone in arguing that perhaps we ought to preserve some of this land just for the sake of preservation - for species other than humans - just so they had a place to survive.

My involvement in these discussions got me thinking a lot about wilderness. It's important to recognize that wilderness is a concept. There is no exact meaning of wilderness. Wilderness is a quality, it is not concrete. Interestingly enough, Native Americans, including those in Alaska, have no word for wilderness in their language, and no concept for it in their cultures. These people lived in concert with the land, so never really thought of it as wild. Wilderness is personal and symbolic. We might regard wilderness as land that is uncultivated, undeveloped, and characterized by the absence of humans. According to Leopold, "wilderness is an area devoid of roads, artificial trails, cottages, and other works of man that is big enough to absorb a two-week pack trip." According to the federal government, wilderness areas are defined as "a minimum of not less than 5,000 contiguous acres of roadless area."

Were my backpacking trips into the White Mountains forays into the wilderness? Well I followed maintained trails with designated camp sites and encountered other people every day I hiked. I realized that I had never really experienced something that I could consider a true wilderness. I may be wrong, and I probably don't want to do this experiment, but I do believe that you could drop me anywhere in Maine with a few days of food, water, gear, and appropriate clothing and I would be able to find my way to safety. Hardly a real wilderness.

The fourth event occurred a few years ago when I had the occasion to travel to Alaska. My response to Alaska is probably best summarized in some comments in an essay by Henry Gannett in 1901 in *National Geographic Magazine*. In it, he says:

"If you are old, go by all means, but if you are young, stay away until you grow older. The scenery of Alaska is so much grander than anything else of the kind in the world that, once beheld, all other scenery becomes flat and insipid. It is not well to dull one's capacity for such enjoyment by seeing the finest first."

Alaska was a land so vast, remote, uninhabited, and devoid of almost any human development, that I finally gained an appreciation for wilderness. I realized that, if you dropped me almost anywhere in Alaska with a few days of food, water, appropriate clothing, and gear, I would almost certainly die. I finally understood the plight of the first settlers to the new world. The original settlers were frightened by wilderness, and set out on a quest for survival that for them involved efforts to conquer and defeat the wilderness.

Europe at the time of the discovery of the new world was already highly developed. Forests existed in isolated pockets rather than vast expanses. Even so, forests at those times were regarded as places of demons and spirits, ogres and werewolves. A wilderness forest was evil, supernatural, and monstrous - the antithesis of paradise - the antithesis of the Garden of Eden. Wilderness was unknown, disordered, and uncontrolled. The vast forests of the eastern coasts of America were of a size and scope not known in Europe. William Bradford of the Mayflower spoke of the hideous and desolate wilderness that was a threat to their survival.

The European settlers set out to convert the new world into a pastoral landscape, which was regarded as something akin to paradise. The goal was to make the land rural and useful. To see the wilderness blossom like a rose. Cows and sheep on the hills of cleared pastureland, fields, orchards, and gardens were all desirable attributes of the pastoral landscape. The pastoral landscape was one of order and serenity. In essence, a work of art. A garden-like earth, shaped and controlled by man. An orderly arrangement of farmlands, pastures, wooded areas, and gardens.

I recently drove from Minneapolis, Minnesota to La Crosse, Wisconsin along the valley of the Mississippi River. This is about a 150 mile trip through a rural area. The northern part of the trip is mostly farmland. I have to admit that the isolated farmhouse clustered with a barn and silos, the

dairy cows out in the fields, the rows of crops that were erupting forth from the ground, and the quaint rural villages provided a serene, peaceful, and beautiful landscape. The place had an easy, relaxing feel to it. I really did not want to see the landscape change as I drove toward La Crosse.

However, Thoreau points out the irony of the farmer who toils day after day usually, at best, to eke out a tenuous living off the land, creating a pastoral landscape for the rest of us to enjoy but perhaps never himself stopping to enjoy that beauty. Think of the times you have stopped to take in the beauty of a pastoral landscape, and think of Thoreau's words: "I am the monarch of all I survey, my right there is none to dispute." Many of you work to maintain this garden so I and others get to enjoy its pastoral beauty without having to do any of the work. For that we ought to be most grateful.

But the conquering of the wilderness took on a much greater significance for our country. It was important to the inhabitants of the new world to craft an identity that distinguished them from Europe, especially after the revolutionary war. It was obvious that Europe was more refined and developed than the United States. It was also obvious that Europe had many outstanding natural wonders. What Europe didn't have though was wilderness.

As the artist Thomas Cole wrote in 1836:
"Though American scenery is destitute of many of these circumstances that give value to the European, still it has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe ... the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness."

You had to be brave and strong to conquer and carve a life out of the wilderness. No ordinary person was able to do this. It took someone of special skills and character. Taming the wilderness gave meaning and purpose to the American life. Our new country identified itself with a sense of pioneer pride. We were tough. We were strong. We were brave. I think if you listen to the way we often talk, it is apparent that a sense of pioneer pride still infuses many aspects of our national identity.

However, by the mid to late 1800s, there really wasn't much wilderness left to conquer, and the wilderness that was left (for example, expanses of the desert Southwest) was not really worth conquering because it was so inhospitable. What began to happen then was a change in the view that people held toward wilderness. With wilderness now scarce, some people began to advocate that the few remnants that did remain ought to be protected. Interestingly enough, the

drive to protect the few remaining wilderness areas began in the cities. As Leopold notes:

"Wild things had little human value until mechanization assured us of a good breakfast."

Wilderness began to be promoted as something that was sublime, that brought a sense of adventure, and that held the glorious works of the creator. Wilderness was now valued by some because of its aesthetic qualities. For example, I suspect that many of you were familiar with swamps when you were a child. Today, of course, we know these areas as wetlands, which has a very different connotation from swamps.

However, efforts to preserve wilderness still related to human usage. Yellowstone National Park was started as a natural museum to preserve the geysers and other thermal features and had nothing to do with wilderness preservation. The Adirondack Forest was protected because of perceived threats to the water supply of New York City. The National Forest system was established to furnish a continuous supply of timber. The Park Service, established by Congress in 1916, was directed not only to administer the parks but to:

"provide for the enjoyment of same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

The mission of the Park Service is steeped in ambiguity. By requiring that the parks provide enjoyment, developers saw a mandate to make the parks readily accessible to visitors by building roads, concession stands, and places to stay. By requiring them to remain unimpaired, preservationists saw a mandate to leave the parks as is. Suffice it to say that, in this argument, the developers almost always won out over the preservationists.

Edward Abbey's book *Desert Solitaire* is largely a rage against the practices and policies of the Park Service. Edward Abbey was a summer park ranger in Arches National Monument at a time when there were no paved roads into the area. But as Abbey soon realizes, "there is a cloud on my horizon - its name is progress." As he further states, "progress has come at last to Arches, after a million years of neglect - Industrial Tourism has arrived - Arches National Money-mint."

Abbey sees the destruction of natural areas and wilderness that occurs through development disguised as progress and accessibility and writes:

"Raze the wilderness, dam the rivers, flood the canyons, drain the swamps, log the forests, strip-mine the hills,

bulldoze the mountains, irrigate the deserts, and improve the national parks into national parking lots."

Abbey goes on to wonder:

"Why is the Park Service generally so anxious to accommodate the indolent millions born on wheels and suckled on gasoline, who expect and demand paved highways to lead them in comfort, ease and safety into every nook and corner of national parks? For the answer we must look to what I call Industrial Tourism and the quality of the mechanized tourists - the Wheelchair Explorers - who are at once the consumers, the raw material and the victims of Industrial Tourism."

As Abbey explains:

"Industrial Tourism is a big business. It means money. It includes the motel and restaurant owners, the gasoline retailers, the oil corporations, the road-building contractors, the heavy equipment manufacturers, the state and federal engineering agencies and the sovereign, all-powerful automotive industry. When a new national park, national monument, national seashore, or whatever it may be called is set up, the various forces of Industrial Tourism, on all levels, immediately expect action - meaning specifically a road-building program."

And about the Industrial Tourists, Abbey says:

"They work hard, these people. They roll up incredible mileages on their odometers, rack up state after state in two-week transcontinental motor marathons, knock off one national park after another, take millions of square yards of photographs, and endure patiently the most prolonged discomforts: the traffic jams, the awful food of park cafeterias, the nocturnal search for a place to sleep or camp, etc."

Abbey longs for national parks without automobiles, where people would walk or ride bicycles on the existing paved roads to the places they want to see. On the issue of accessibility, he says:

"What does accessibility mean? Is there any spot on earth that men have not proved accessible by the simplest means - feet, legs, and heart?"

And Abbey is brash and unsympathetic:

"What about the children? What about the aged and infirm? Frankly, we need waste little sympathy on these two pressure groups. Children too small to ride bicycles and too heavy to be borne on their parents' backs need only wait a few years. The aged merit even less sympathy: after all they had the opportunity to see the country when it was still relatively unspoiled." But in a rare moment, Abbey relents

and says "we'll stretch a point and let them (i.e., the aged and infirm) ride the shuttle buses."

Finally, Abbey suggests that were his plan for the parks adopted, that we could erect at the entrance to each park a large billboard that would read:

HOWDY FOLKS. WELCOME. THIS IS YOUR NATIONAL PARK.
ESTABLISHED FOR THE PLEASURE OF YOU AND ALL PEOPLE
EVERYWHERE. PARK YOUR CAR, JEEP, TRUCK, TANK, MOTORBIKE,
MOTORBOAT, JETBOAT, AIRBOAT, SUBMARINE, AIRPLANE, JET PLANE,
HELICOPTER, HOVERCRAFT, WINGED MOTORCYCLE, SNOWMOBILE,
ROCKETSHIP, OR ANY OTHER CONCEIVABLE TYPE OF MOTORIZED
VEHICLE IN THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PARKINGLOT BEHIND THE COMFORT
STATION IMMEDIATELY TO YOUR REAR. GET OUT OF YOUR MOTORIZED
VEHICLE, GET ON YOUR HORSE, MULE, BICYCLE OR FEET, AND COME
ON IN. ENJOY YOURSELVES. THIS HERE PARK IS FOR PEOPLE.

As you can tell, I love Edward Abbey!

A consistent theme throughout the works of Abbey, Leopold, and Thoreau is the opportunity to experience more through close observation in one's own backyard than we will ever see by rushing around on some trophy hunting expedition.

For Aldo Leopold, this ultimately leads to his idea of a land ethic. Leopold laments that the land-relation is strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations, because he recognizes that many members of the land community have no economic value. Aldo Leopold is often credited as the father of wildlife conservation in America. He was one of the first to realize the interconnectedness of species and the extent to which living species represent an interwoven community. But he also worried about teaching the 'real botany', because then we would realize the extent of the destruction we had already done to the flora of the earth. He points out that no matter how intently someone studied the hundred little dramas of the woods and meadows, that person could still never learn all the salient facts about any one of them. He felt that only when people appreciated the interconnectedness of the natural world, could they then think of preserving land for land's sake rather than for human's sake. He wished that we would go from a conqueror of the land to a plain member and citizen of the land community. With Leopold's land ethic, it is possible to be a defender of the wilderness without ever having to set foot in it.

We have preserved some remnants of wilderness today and some of the national parks have begun to restrict automobiles from certain parts of the parks. At the same time, though, the revolution in equipment, information, and tourist services has resulted in a situation whereby wilderness areas are now being loved to death. As Leopold laments:

"all conservation of wildness is self-defeating for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish. The wilderness that he cannot personally see has no value to him."

Leopold, even though he spent a lot of his life in the business of land management, worries about these conservation efforts. He notes that there used to be grizzlies on every mountain but no conservation officers, and now there are conservation officers on every mountain but no grizzlies.

And so we have a final dilemma. To maintain wilderness, it seems that it must be managed. But can a land that is managed appropriately be called or thought of as wilderness?

I have never set foot in wilderness, hence I only have wilderness dreams. But I am comfortable with the idea of wilderness for wilderness' sake. I'm alright with the idea that other species should have a place to live on their own, free from the hand of humans.

Finally, tonight I will close with some thoughts from Thoreau. My students usually don't seem to like *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* all that much. They tend to see Thoreau as a fraud because he visits the nearby village and takes advantage of certain of the amenities offered by society. I find myself having to point out to the students that his work is not subtitled *Life in the Wilderness*. Thoreau was one of the first to provide reasons for wilderness preservation and to change people's views about the human relationship to the land, but his primary message in *Walden* is a different one. Instead of having to do with wilderness, his message is that we should simplify our lives. As Thoreau sees it, we live our lives in a rush to accumulate things. When we finally get something we desire, we often soon realize that this object doesn't bring complete satisfaction so that we then want more. In so doing, Thoreau believes that we miss the finer fruits of life. He argues that we need to value beauty over commerce, and realize that beauty from the natural world is usually right in front of us, in our own backyard, so long as we open our eyes to it.

This garden is a form of beauty and art. I doubt that this garden is a source of commerce. I believe that the act of tending one's flower garden is an exercise in simplifying one's life. Gardening is inherently a deliberate and relaxing activity. I don't know that there is such a thing as speed gardening. I don't suspect that there is such a thing as speed weeding. Time spent in the garden is time spent in contemplation, participating in a measured activity

apart from the hustle and bustle that often characterizes other parts of our lives. I can well imagine why Bernard McLaughlin so loved his garden. He could probably have written a book titled: *South Paris: or, Life in the Garden*, that would have contained messages every bit as pertinent and persuasive as those of Thoreau's. That people have risen to the cause to preserve such a labor of love is commendable. Those of you who work the soil can enjoy the simple activity of doing so, and people like me can enjoy the fruits of your labor in the quiet contemplation that always seems to occur with the viewing of a garden. Thank you for making such a special contribution to our community, and thank you for allowing me to speak to you this evening.