



# The Wilderness Within

Reflections on Leisure and Life

5th Edition

Daniel L. Dustin, PhD

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# Critical Acclaim for Previous Editions

“In Polanyi’s Society of Explorers, people are ‘in thought.’ Dustin is clearly a candidate for Polanyi’s Society of Explorers in that he is creative and free of the notion of absolute self-determination. In *The Wilderness Within*, he offers readers opportunities for unlimited expeditions into their own universes through personal stories of being, time, and substance. His inquiries are ‘revealing for the problems of our day.’ There is an honesty here that elicits readers to dare to capture their thoughts in writing and then confront themselves ... These thought processes run the full gamut from inner being to global awe. It is the running back and forth, calibrating the self in relation to the other, that imbues the entire collection of essays. Dustin’s heroes, historical and contemporary, famous and obscure, inspire his observance of himself ... These to-and-fro, inside-outside, upside-down images integrate separate elements into a coherent whole. Thus metaphors are born: the semantic mechanism of integrating incompatibilities. These metaphors are the basis for making sense of the incongruities of our lives.”

–**JERRY DICKASON**

Department of Physical Education, Recreation and Leisure Studies  
Montclair State College (*Leisure Sciences*, 1993)

“According to R. D. Laing, as quoted by Ross Tocher and Dan’s acknowledged mentor, Bev Driver, ‘We see other people’s behavior, but not their experience ... Experience is man’s invisibility to man ...’ Dustin’s goal is to render some of his experiences less invisible. In sharing his own groping process of intellectual and spiritual growth, much of which is played out against a background of wilderness, he hopes to help others move toward greater self-understanding as well ... The writing style is clear and direct, the sentences short and punchy. And throughout, one of the most striking features is his sense of humor. If life is a struggle, and hard-won experience is the best kind, Dan Dustin is a good companion ... His writing is fresh and creative, the intellectual connections unusual, the insights trenchant ... This is a good book, a rare contribution to the field.”

–**J. DOUGLAS WELLMAN**

College of Forest Resources  
North Carolina State University (*Journal of Leisure Research*, 1993)



“With the same humor, humility, and holistic approach offered in the first edition, the second edition provides the reader with enlightened interpretations of Dustin’s experiences and possibilities for reflection on theirs ... Dustin’s publishing career is flush with eloquent essays, edited works, and commentaries on leisure and recreation management. In addition to his publishing, Dustin is infamous for his unique and inspirational speeches in various forums ... One of the essays in the book, in fact, was originally presented quite literally as a “running talk” during the 1988 research symposium to the shock of some and delight of others (“The Wilderness Within: Reflections on a 100-Mile Run”). Dustin’s second offering will delight the majority and shock only those unnerved by the author’s unabashed introspection and honesty ... If there is anything Dustin is not, it is typical.”

**–INGRID SCHNEIDER**

Department of Recreation Management and Tourism  
Arizona State University (*Leisure Sciences*, 1999)

“In the third edition of *The Wilderness Within*, Dustin’s continual self-reflection gently prods us to review our own near-misses ... to reconnect with our sacred places, and to reconsider the value of leisure. The cynic may scoff at Dustin’s optimism, whose hopes for environmental change rest on a belief in the unique quality of humans to reflect, to be aware, and to act in a conscious and responsible manner ... The evolution in the author’s discourse turns out to be part of the great pleasure of reading *The Wilderness Within*. As we read from one essay to the next, Dustin moves from the individual ‘I’ to the collective ‘We,’ and finally to the more personal ‘You.’ ... Students and educators in outdoor recreation and leisure education will enjoy this book, as will most wilderness enthusiasts.”

**–ANTHONY BERKERS**

Department of Physical Education  
John Abbott College, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (*Journal of Experiential Education*, 2007)

“There are no singular lessons that the reader will take away from this book. I would say the author pays the reader a grand compliment in a sort of ‘go find your own answers ... these are mine ...’ way. At the same time, the author really never finds any definitive answers. Just more questions. And, of course, that is the stereotypical life of true academics. Knowledge is just a placeholder until something better comes along to replace it ... How one responds to the essays will depend partially on the reader’s own life experiences ... The question remains of who should buy this book? Any academic in outdoor recreation should have this book ... Anyone who wants examples of reflective writing ... here you are!”

**–EDWARD UDD**

Recreation, Parks, and Tourism  
Radford University, Radford, Virginia (*Leisure/Loisir*, 2013)

*for Carol, Chad, Brock,  
Carla, Andy, Adam, and Kathleen*



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The longer I live, the more people I have to thank for making my life's journey so interesting. Many individuals have influenced my thinking about wilderness, recreation, and leisure over the years. Among them are people I know only through the literature: Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, John Muir, Robert Service, Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Sigurd Olson, John McPhee, Wallace Stegner, Wendell Berry, Bill McKibben, and Garrett Hardin. Others I have had the pleasure to meet: Willi Unsoeld, Rick Ridgeway, Edward Abbey, David Brower, Roderick Nash, Lee Stetson, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Joseph Sax, Barry Lopez, Doug Peacock, and Conrad Anker. Still others I count as my mentors, colleagues, and friends: Bev and Susan Driver, Ross and Dee Tocher, Stephen and Rachel Kaplan, John and Kelly Schultz, Leo and Kate McAvoy, Larry Merriam, Tim Knopp, Richard and Janet Knopf, Rich Schreyer, Tom and Muriel More, Doug and Janet Wellman, Dan Williams, Janna Rankin, Arthur Frakt, Gene Lamke, Larry Beck, Andrea Philips, Don and Cindy Peterson, Dana Sacks, Eric Blehm, Tom and Sunny Goodale, Jack Harper, Geof Godbey, Barbara Metzner, Emilyn Sheffield, Ingrid Schneider, Bob and Linda Wolff, Alexis McKenney, Kelly and Nate Bricker, John Cederquist, Nate Furman, Scott Schumann, Kirk Nichols, Joe Arave, Deb Bialeschki, Karla Henderson, Jim and Roxanne-Howe Murphy, Cary McDonald, Brett Wright, Larry Allen, Matt Brownlee, my sons, Andy and Adam, and my wife, Kathleen. I would like to think there is a little bit of all these people in what follows.

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I reserve the last and most important acknowledgment for the memory of my parents, Lucille and Derby, for whatever they did in my upbringing that allows me to look critically at myself without falling apart. Perhaps it was their modeling that we are never finished products, that there is always room for improvement, and that we can and should strive to become more than we presently are. Perhaps it was also their modeling to forgive and forget.

# Preface

In his wonderful little book, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, E. F. Schumacher organizes the ways we come to know the world around us into Four Fields of Knowledge. The First Field consists of our own feelings, feelings that cannot be experienced directly by anyone but us. The Second Field consists of the feelings of others, feelings that we cannot experience directly. The Third Field consists of our own appearance, an appearance visible to everyone but ourselves. Finally, the Fourth Field consists of the appearances of others, appearances visible to all but those who display them.

While wisdom about the world is derived from learning in all Four Fields of Knowledge, Schumacher reasons that knowledge about the First Field, or self-knowledge, is a precondition to everything else. How can we empathize with the feelings of others (Field Two) if we have not examined our own feelings? How can we interpret how others see us (Field Three) if we have no sense of ourselves? And how can we begin to understand the larger exterior world (Field Four) until we come to grips with our own interior one?

The essays in this book are explorations in the First Field of Knowledge. They are about me from my perspective. Most of them are about journeys I have taken to places “out there,” to the exterior world of mountains, forests, deserts, and tundra. But in a more important sense they are about journeys I have taken “in here,” in my interior world, a world invisible to you. Indeed, the fact that you cannot see what is going on inside my head is what compels me to write in the first place. I want to share with you what it is like to be me. But I also write from the conviction that in coming to know me better you will come to know yourself better as well.

I have added 22 new essays to this fifth edition: five were written during my California years (“Recreational Usufruct Rights,” “Recreational Ethics in a World of Limits,” “To Feed or Not Feed the Bears: The Moral Choices We Make,” “Looking Inward to Save the Outdoors,” and “Peace, Leisure, and Recreation”); five were written during my Florida years (“Buffalo Tiger’s Dilemma,” “Land as Legacy,” “Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument: The Politics of Environmental Preservation,” “A Leopoldian Success Story: Mojave National Preserve,” and “Wilderness and Everyday Life”); six have been written during my Utah years (“Writing People Back Into Wilderness,” “Lunch with Hayduke,” “Sky Pilot,” “Fishing Off the Dock of the Bay,” “Friendship,” and “Antidote to Despair”); four have been added to the Postscript (“In Defense of Not Knowing,” “Mark Twain on Darkness and Lightness in Social Science,” “On Penmanship,” and “Writing My Own Ending”); and two have been added to the Synthesis (“The Power of Possibility,” and “Democracy Is a Verb”). They are a mixture of outdoor recreation adventures and observations flowing out of everyday life. The essays reflect what I have been thinking and learning as I have ventured even farther down my life’s path. Additionally, the eight essays in the Postscript are ruminations on a life spent in higher education, and the four essays in the Synthesis summarize my feelings about humankind’s place in, and obligations toward, the larger living world.

*I should not talk so much about myself  
if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.  
Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme  
by the narrowness of my experience.*

—Thoreau

# Prologue

## *Angel Fire, New Mexico*

On a hillside overlooking Angel Fire, New Mexico, is a small white chapel. Erected in 1968 by Dr. Victor Westphall to commemorate the life of his son, David, who was killed in Vietnam, the chapel has been likened to “the arms of the earth,” welcoming home the men and women who served in Vietnam, cradling those who did not return, and embracing the families who loved them all.

I stumbled onto the chapel January 17, 1993, while driving along a mountainous road between Taos and Cimarron. The chapel just appeared—ghostlike—before me. Freshly fallen snow blanketed the landscape, and there was a hush in the air that invited contemplation. I had the chapel to myself. It was, after all, Super Bowl Sunday, and America was otherwise occupied.

Once inside, I was drawn to the window and a view of a sweeping, glorious valley. The panorama lent itself to prayer and thanksgiving. Then, as I was about to leave, I noticed a row of photographs across the back wall honoring soldiers killed and missing in action. On this particular day they were men from Missouri, and the names read left to right: Robert Anspach (missing in action), Henry Casebolt, Gary Grissom, Jeffrey Hicks, Carl Houser, Robert Hubbard, Galen Humphrey, Harold Hunter, Randolph Spiers, Henry Tejada, Rafael Tenorio, and Sam Tenorio.

My heart stopped. You see, one of the names belonged to someone I had known, and for 25 years I had lived my life oblivious to the fact that he lost his soon after I left Basic Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

In that instant, I understood that we never accomplish anything in life by ourselves. We are standing—all of us—on the shoulders of countless unnamed others who have given of themselves, who have sacrificed themselves, so the rest of us might remain free to build a more enduring and civilized society.

Living in the United States of America amounts to much more than an opportunity. We are obliged to live our lives in a manner that honors all who have surrendered theirs to safeguard the ideals underpinning our nation. Opportunity and obligation. Together they constitute our freedom. History will judge each of us by the use we make of that freedom.







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part one

# The California Years



## chapter one

# In Search of Rescue

I have a close friend, a researcher with the United States Forest Service, who wondered out loud to me recently if we had not been condemned by our education to a life of unhappiness. I too wonder about that. We are both graduates of the University of Michigan, a campus that was a center of political protest during the 1960s in the name of peace, civil rights, and other social causes. Psychologically, we came of age at a time when it appeared as though the world's problems could be resolved by a global coming together and a reaffirmation of that which makes us human beings. Our slogans reflected our idealism: "We shall overcome" and "Give peace a chance." It was as though we were intoxicated with the prospects for humanity if only we could persuade those less enlightened than we were to join in the march.

The years since Ann Arbor have had a sobering effect on both of us. Our continuing education has taught us that things are much more complicated than we ever imagined and that they are likely to become even more so. Those lofty prospects for humanity that we sang and chanted about so fervently back in the 1960s have given way to a new realism. Our attention now has turned to the management of complexity and coping, both at home and abroad, with irreconcilable differences.

For both of us, then, it is as if our education has played a cruel trick on us. Psychologically we have been nurtured to hope for, perhaps even to expect, social unity, a consensus of some sort about what it means to live a good life. But our intellects have taken us down a different path. The resulting divergence between what we long for and what our ongoing education tells us is possible has precipitated this malaise, or what my friend has termed this inevitable unhappiness.

I begin with this personal reflection not because I think our situation is unique, but because I think it typifies the mind-set of many Americans. For lack of a better term, and with an apology to Henry Winkler and company, I call it the *Happy Days* syndrome. We long for a future just like the past, but present realities make that impossible. We strive for clarity of purpose, commonly held values, and security for our children. But we must deal with contradictory purposes, conflicting values, and an age of immense insecurity when the fate of our children rests in the perspiring hands of nervous world leaders, all of whom have access to their own “buttons.” Indeed, it is comforting to drift back to those images of malt shops, Fats Domino, and slow dancing.

Sooner or later, however, unless we want to live a life of perpetual escapism, we must come back to the present world, the world unfolding before us at this very moment, the world of contradictions, conflicts, and insecurity. This is the world in which we must ultimately make our way. And it is in this world that we must somehow make our happy days, if indeed we are to have them.

Perhaps the best way to prepare ourselves for these uncertain times is by considering the possibility that it has never been otherwise. Is it not a fact that all we really have, and have ever had for that matter, is the precarious present moment, the moment that comes and goes even as I write about it? Is it not also a fact that what we call “memories” are really present recollections of past events and that what we call “anticipation” is really a present imaging of what we expect a future event will be? Does it not then follow that despite our language, which suggests a past and a future, there is really nothing but the present unfolding of experience, and everything else is an illusion?

Is it not also reasonable, therefore, to suggest that living by its very nature is impermanent, unstable, and insecure? Attempts to make life more permanent, more stable, and more secure are thus not only futile, they work against the human condition itself. Yet we try. It is as though we want to hold onto something that cannot be held. Just as running water when cupped in the hands stops running, so life when held in check loses its essence. To be alive is to be in motion, to be on the go, to be vulnerable. The wonder is not that this is so; the wonder is that, knowing this, we fight so hard against it. We try our hardest to insulate ourselves against life’s insecurities. We take out insurance. We hedge our bets. We file lawsuits. Many of us even go so far as to not get involved, to sit on the sidelines, because the prospect of being hurt or failing is more terrifying than the prospect of not playing the game at all.

Why we choose to be this way I do not know. Perhaps it has something to do with our unspoken anxiety about death. In the absence of a deep and abiding faith that promises life everlasting, it is not surprising that so many of us do everything in our power to forestall that final breath. If we cannot be saved by divine intervention, then we will give most anything else a try; from vitamin supplements to artificial hearts. Some of us even give up smoking.

While I gather a certain amount of anxiety about death is healthy for the soul, it is the extremes to which people go to avoid that which is ultimately unavoidable that concern me. I am concerned because a preoccupation with the future and what might happen and what might go wrong gets in the way of being open to the present moment. It precludes living in the here and now. And that, if my earlier argument holds any water, means not really living at all.

There is, I believe, a lesson in this for us. It has been stated best by Alan Watts as the “Backwards Law”<sup>1</sup> or the law of reversed effort. Put simply, to live life fully is to let go of life completely. The Backwards Law reminds us that to cling to life in an effort to preserve it is to snuff it out. Hold your breath and you lose it. Take the risk out of life and you take the life out of life.

This lesson, although clear, is incredibly hard to benefit from. Its message runs counter to almost all of our accepted strategies for living. We have been brought up to believe that we should hold on tightly to those things we cherish most. This results in a possessive quality that permeates not only our attitudes toward our own lives but also our attitudes toward relationships with other people. A popular bumper sticker says it best: “If you love something, let it go. If it doesn’t come back, hunt it down and kill it.”

If we are to have any chance at happiness in this uncertain world, we must learn to embrace its insecurities, give in to change, and celebrate the present moment. To do otherwise is to do battle with ourselves. We are as a wave moving forward to a distant shore. No matter how turbulent the sea, no matter how strong the urge to return to port, there is no turning back. Our happiness rests in our recognition of this fact of life and in our subsequent determination to enjoy the ride.

The notion, then, that we human beings have a “right to risk” is misleading. We have no choice in the matter. There is nothing but risk. What we do have a choice about is the way we deal with life’s risks. We can delude ourselves, hide behind our fears, and pretend it is not so. Or we can confront the risks, announce our fears, and give it a go.

I prefer the latter choice. Moreover, I prefer to exercise it most in wilderness. To me, wilderness is the logical place, the ideal place, to marvel at life’s unfolding, to live at life’s edge. It is in wilderness that we can best discard the protective armor that shields us from life itself. It is in wilderness that we can best get down to earth, that we can best open up and receive the world around us. It is in wilderness that we can best rejoice in the here and now.

But the way wilderness is managed these days tends to undermine this opportunity. Wilderness is subdivided into zones, and wilderness recreationists are required to file backcountry trip itineraries indicating where they will be on any given day. Then, should something go wrong, they are searched for and, on occasion, rescued. These measures are taken in part to protect wilderness itself. But they are taken to protect wilderness recreationists as well. Wilderness managers too have been brought up to believe that we should hold on tightly to those things we cherish most. And wilderness recreationists are the beneficiaries of that upbringing. Or are they?

Remember the Backwards Law. To live life fully is to let go of life completely. Attempts to make wilderness less wild, to protect wilderness recreationists from the consequences of their mistakes or the quirks of nature, however humanitarian on the surface, work against living life fully. What remains is essentially illusory. Left unchecked, this kind of wilderness promises to end up strikingly similar to that portrayed by William Leitch in *Backpacking in 2078*;<sup>2</sup> electronic devices implanted in wild animals for shocking purposes should they impose a threat to people and tracking devices attached to people for rescue purposes should they pose a threat to themselves. It will be wilderness where recreationists will likely be turned every which way but loose.



I ask you to consider a clear alternative to Leitch's future scenario, a scenario where all illusions would be stripped away to leave nothing save the individual and the present moment. We will call it with horrifying clarity "no-rescue" wilderness,<sup>3</sup> and we will place it far away in Alaska. Then we will insist that people who choose to go there must assume all the risks, indeed embrace all the risks, and insist further that a government that would shelter them from themselves would be barred from doing so.

No-rescue wilderness would not be for everyone. It would not be for those who are busily trying to insulate themselves against life's bad bounces. Nor would it be for those who are reluctant to get involved in the game while the outcome is still in doubt. No, it would be for a different sort. No-rescue wilderness would be for people who want to breathe deeply of the precarious, precious present, for those who want to dance on the edge of life. It would be for strong people who recognize their weaknesses and weak people who recognize their strengths. It would be a place to savor the tenuous, fragile, temporary, changing, and fluid nature of life itself, a place to square off with reality.

Wilderness managers, while sympathetic to the spirit of this idea, have pointed out myriad problems that make it unworkable. Chief among them is the fact that most people would not want it that way. They would welcome a little help from a friend. Moreover, there are all those other issues—legal liability, ethical considerations, and the potential litter at the base of the cliff. Wilderness managers are concerned about what might happen, about what might go wrong in the future. And so it goes.

To say this no-rescue wilderness proposal has not been well received would be an understatement. Some say it is ahead of its time. Others say it is behind its time. Of course, you and I know better, since there is no time other than the present. It is now or never, and it will always be that way. Such is the nature of our journey.

I do not know what else to say to convince you of my sincerity or my seriousness in this matter, so I will leave you with George Gray's epitaph from Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. May it not at the end of your life befit you as well:

## George Gray

I have studied many times  
The marble which was chiseled for me —  
A boat with a furled sail at rest in a harbor.  
In truth it pictures not my destination  
But my life.  
For love was offered me and I shrank  
from its disillusionment.  
Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid;  
Ambition called to me; but I dreaded the chances.  
Yet all the while I hungered for  
meaning in my life.  
And now I know that we must lift the sail  
And catch the winds of destiny  
Wherever they drive the boat.  
To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,  
But life without meaning is the torture  
Of restlessness and vague desire —  
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.<sup>4</sup>



## chapter two

# The World According to Gorp

**H**enry David Thoreau said, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”<sup>1</sup> It is amazing. He did not even know me. Recently, I was promoted into an office without windows. Can you imagine that? I teach about the outdoors. I write about the outdoors. I love the outdoors. But in my day-to-day existence I have only an Ansel Adams print, a Sierra Club calendar, and my sister’s artwork on barrel stays to remind me of who I am and what I care about.

So I find it necessary from time to time to make a pilgrimage, to go back to the source of my concern and caring. This time it is California’s John Muir Trail, a 210-mile thread along the backbone of the High Sierra connecting the summit of Mt. Whitney in the south with Yosemite Valley in the north. Of course, since I only decided to take this journey at the last minute, I am told I must start 30 miles south of Mt. Whitney. “It is the busy season,” the permit ranger says matter-of-factly. “Space in the wilderness is hard to come by.”

I take a fishing pole, a pipe, two hardcover books, a notebook, a small tent, and food for 18 days. I soon realize it is too much for my Camp Trails pack. Something has got to go. I take out several meals. Then I’m off.

I am taking this walk alone. There is no one to catch up to or slow down for. I also have no one to share this with or to praise or blame for the way I feel. I have to be responsible for myself. This could be revealing.

At first, it is hard to concentrate on anything other than the weight of my pack. The first several miles are uncomfortable. My heart is pounding. I experience shortness of breath. There is no turning back, though; I am on a mission.

I stop for the day in midafternoon and stretch out on my sleeping bag. The next thing I know, it is three hours later. Apparently, I am exhausted after six or seven miles on the trail. I consider the possibility that I've bitten off more than I can chew. "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" I fall asleep trying to remember who said that.

Things start to fall into place the second day. I feel strong most of the walk, although my feet begin to throb as the day wears on. I still don't cover much ground. At the rate I'm going, it should take about 40 days to complete the trip.

In the evening I puff on my pipe. I am trying to be a mountain man. The only problem is that the pipe goes out every 30 seconds. At this rate, I will be out of matches in a week. Mountain men's pipes should not go out on them.

My first dilemma concerns water. If you believe all the literature the rangers give you, *giardia* is on the rampage. "Boil your water for at least five minutes," they say. At that rate, I would be out of fuel in a week, too. No matches, no fuel. Touché. Finally, I decide if you cannot drink this water, you might as well pack it in. Nuclear threat indeed! What kind of future do we have if we can't drink the water?

This country is absolutely beautiful. I would like to bring everybody I know out here. It sure has an effect on me. But, of course, if everybody took me up on my offer, it would not be the same. And I know this is not everyone's idea of a good time. Then again, "good time" seems to trivialize what I'm having. It is more than that. Most of the time I am huffing and puffing. It has the flavor of a struggle more than a "good time." It is work.

Ah, but the hurting feels so good! I think this all must have something to do with the difference between comfort and pleasure. I live a comfortable existence. But it is hardly pleasurable. It is the change of pace, the novelty of all this that makes it so pleasurable. Even as I walk it is hard work. But when I stop to rest or drink or munch on gorp, I undergo a transformation. I am able to look around and absorb the beauty. Amidst the struggle of the hike there are time-outs when I am especially aware of the trees, the flowers, the streams, the sky, and the wildlife. But it is only when I pause in the walk that I seem to be really sensitive to these things.

The wilderness is my well of souls. I am stripped down to the weight on my back. There is nothing much left but me and my wits. Everything is laid open for me and the wilderness to see. I am not cushioned by the civilized world. There is no one to make excuses for me. There is no system to blame things on. My assets stand out. My liabilities announce themselves. Strengths I was unaware of surface at opportune times. Weaknesses have their moments, too. But there is no denying them or hiding from them or running away from them. I am stuck with myself.

I like going up better than coming down, especially the passes. Their negotiation demands honest work. If you stick to it, if you persevere, you make it eventually. There are no tricks or gimmicks. It is just one step after another. Coming down is a different story. Gravity teases you. If you are not careful, you begin to think you can fly down. But then the rocks trip you, or you twist an ankle or stub a toe. I think going up is for those who like the struggle. Coming down is for those who are looking for the easy way out.

It is 5:30 in the morning. I am awakened by the sound of a bear rummaging through my backpack, which is leaning against the base of a nearby tree. I fumble for my glasses

and zip open the tent fly in time to see a large black bear shinnying up the trunk toward the limb where my food supply is counterbalanced in two stuff sacks. “Show some compassion!” I shout. “I’m going all the way to Yosemite!” Unmoved, the bear goes about its business. “You’re just like all the others!” I chortle. “You don’t care about me as a person! You only care about what you can get from me!” Empty-pawed, the bear drops down to the ground and lopes away to find better pickings. After five days in the wilderness, I am having a one-sided conversation with an animal. Clearly, I am beginning to feel at home.

As I start up the trail, I hear a helicopter overhead. Thinking that perhaps the president is in need of a new National Park Service Director, I decide to stick around and see if it is coming for me. The helicopter is set down about 100 yards from where I camped, and a crewman runs across the meadow to another tent. Always concerned about my fellow backpackers, and wary of the possibility of a high-tech heist, I take off my pack and go to investigate. In a few minutes, I find myself at the foot of a stretcher assisting in the evacuation of a woman who is having a gall bladder attack. I cannot believe it—Dan Dustin, a chief proponent of no-rescue wilderness, aiding and abetting a search and rescue operation. No photographs, please. I consider dropping my end of the stretcher once or twice as a sign of protest.

There are lots of people on the trail today. If I were Edward Abbey, I would call this the “John Muir Freeway.” But I do not resent the others being here. They have certainly earned their way into this wilderness. More power to them. Who said “the woods are overrun and sons-a-bitches like me are half the problem”?

I am paying attention to things here that I never pay attention to at home. My life has been reduced to decisions about making sure I have enough water to drink, figuring out how far I want to walk each day, deciding where I want to camp, choosing what I want to eat, and rationing matches for my pipe. Everything is very basic and routine. Things I pay attention to at home are not important here—the mortgage, the mail, the Middle East. Again, it seems to be the contrast, the change of pace that makes it all so engaging.

I thought for a while this morning that my body was going to give out on me, to go on strike. It turned out to be a work slowdown. I think the problem is the freeze-dried food. It is getting to me. Thoughts of fresh fruit and vegetables are working their way into my head—sweet corn (it is August for God’s sake) and tomatoes and melons. I had better stop. I will be suicidal. I have to go at least another week before I can entertain these thoughts.

I want to bring my sons, Andy and Adam, here someday, if I can just tear them away from video games. I don’t know how to generate a love for the outdoors in them. I do not want to push them. Perhaps I will do what my dad did. He taught me to fish early in life, and then he took me to the edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana and turned me loose. The rest, as they say, is history.

I am camping tonight in Evolution Basin. I am looking up at Mt. Darwin, Mt. Huxley, and several other peaks named after prominent evolutionary thinkers. How strange. I am not a particularly religious person, but I find it hard to believe that all this beauty, all this perfection is the result of some cosmic quirk, some earthly indigestion that fractured the strata to create the Sierra Nevada. I find it hard to believe that this



was not premeditated by a Great Premediator, whoever she, he, or it might be. To think otherwise is to acknowledge that great beauty can be created as easily by Bill Russell bouncing basketballs dipped in paint on a canvas as by a da Vinci agonizing over a Mona Lisa. Evolution perhaps, but I cannot help but continue to wonder whose idea that was.

I went almost 20 miles today. My head felt good, my back felt good, my legs felt good, and my feet felt good. I was moving. At about the nine-mile mark, I saw a blur of fur. It could have been a deer or a bear or a chipmunk. I don't know. I was in overdrive. I am just thankful the good Lord gave me the strength and the ability and that I was able to put it all together out there today. I am not taking anything away from the wilderness. It put up one heck of a scrap. It was just my day. One more thing: "Hi, Mom!"

Why am I doing this? Why does anyone get out of bed in the morning? To go to work to earn money to survive. But do I have to do this to survive? Well, certainly not in any physical sense. The value of this, it seems to me, must be in my mind. This experience enhances my quality of life by giving me a different perspective from which to ponder the same questions I ponder in my everyday life. Who am I? What am I doing here? How do I fit in? What should I be doing with my life? But why is wilderness so special for this kind of reflection? Why not a park bench? Why not a slot machine stool in Las Vegas? I do not have an answer.

Is wilderness friendly, hostile, or indifferent? I think it must be indifferent. Other than the bears and fat marmots who want my food, I do not think the wilderness gives one damn about what happens to me. But why, if that is the case, should I care so much about it? Oh, the pain of unrequited love!

I am beginning to think this is all symbolic. I am beginning to think wilderness is a metaphor. We make of it, like everything else in life, what we will. For some, wilderness is a place to search for good wood, for others, good fishing. For me, wilderness is a place to search for answers that elude me in the rest of my life.

There is a sense of immortality here. I think the rivers will flow forever. I think the trees will grow forever. I think the mountain passes will have their ups and downs forever. There are never-ending patterns here. There are never-ending cycles. The wilderness endures. And, like everything else that has stood the test of time, it has lessons to teach. For those who take the time to watch and listen, wilderness offers wisdom.

There is also peace and quiet. Just me and my thoughts and a little breeze to keep me company. And now the sun is going down. The sky is a brilliant combination of yellow and blue and white. Mt. Ritter and Mt. Banner dominate the horizon 30 miles to the north in the Ansel Adams wilderness. It is so beautiful I want to cry. For a few moments, everything I see is perfect. Somehow it gives me hope that there can be perfect moments in other dimensions of life as well—between people, between nations. Tonight, the wilderness is setting an example.

It is dark now. I feel isolated and alone. But soon there is a jet overhead, a moving light among the stars. It is so easy to imagine the plane is heading for San Francisco and the flight attendant is having a last call, since "We will soon be landing." Civilization is so near and yet so far.

And, oh, the mysteries overhead! Just when I think I am approaching a measure of understanding of the meaning of wilderness in my life, I look up and realize that to solve

the mystery of the wilderness would be only a beginning, a first step in making sense out of all the rest. I cannot believe how little I know.

I am about ready for this walk to end. I want to see my children. I miss them dearly. I am glad I have done this, though. I am glad I have taken the time to be on my own for a while. I am 38 years old. Bob Marshall died when he was 38. You never really know how much time you have to do the things you want to do. Like the band Chicago sang, "Does anybody really know what time it is?"

There is something special about a journey, an odyssey, a pilgrimage that challenges you and that tests your limits. And then comes the realization that you are going to make it, that even though you have bitten off more than you can chew, you are going to be able to chew it after all. It is an affirmation of your ability to break barriers, to forge ahead, and to grow. It is an affirmation of your potential as a human being.

Maybe that is what is so special about wilderness to me. It offers the kind of challenge that is increasingly rare, a paring down to the essentials, a stripping away of the civilized veneer that shields us all so that we can once again experience the basic nature of our existence. This kind of outing allows us to appreciate what we have accomplished as a species, the building of a comfortable and convenient way of life. Hopefully, wilderness will always exist as a barometer, as a gauge against which we can place these human achievements in their proper perspective.

But there is more to it than that. Though I have not yet been able to describe it or define it, or even come close to putting my finger on it, wilderness is much more than a stage for my little soliloquy. There is something else going on. There is a strong sense of affinity here. There is a strong sense of bonding. I do believe I am part of the wilderness. I do believe I belong here. But I cannot tell you why. I don't know if this feeling of kinship is rooted in my psychic history or in my imagination. But I do know I feel it.

As I begin the last day of my walk, there is a tune I cannot get out of my head. It is "Amazing Grace," and with it come visions of a movie by the same name I saw some time ago in the Lodgepole Visitor Center in Sequoia National Park. I think that tune and its associated images of giant sequoias, sparkling water, sunlight, and the High Sierra express the essence of wilderness for me. How ironic that sight and sound should be the vehicles for my understanding. I am a writer. But words fail me in this matter. Wilderness remains a mystery to my intellect, if not to my heart.

How, then, do I feel as I take the last steps of my journey? I am at once happy and sad. I am happy because I will soon be among friends again. I am, after all, gregarious, a social being. But I am also sad because I'm leaving behind another kind of friend, an environment that has served as a mirror unto myself. The Sierra Nevada is called the Range of Light. It certainly has enhanced my vision. It has forced me to take a closer look at myself. And for that I will be forever grateful.

I am also humbled by this walk. I feel as though I have been permitted to get through it all unscathed, that there has been a benevolent force at work. I cannot explain it, but I do feel it. There were so many times when I could have, when I should have taken a tumble. But I didn't. I feel as though I've been cradled. And now I feel as though I am being delivered. By whom or what, I have no idea.

Finally, I feel confident and optimistic. I am looking forward to the future. I am rejuvenated. As I charge down into Yosemite Valley, a young day hiker asks me how it is

going. After 18 days, after 10 passes, after 240 miles of ups and downs, I hear myself say, “Okay.” But that is only on the outside. On the inside, it is another story. On the inside, Mark Twain is doing all the talking for me:

Whoo-oo! I’m the old original iron-jawed, brass-mounted, copper-bellied corpse-maker from the wilds of Arkansaw! Look at me! I’m the man they call Sudden Death and General Desolation! Sired by a hurricane, dam’d by an earthquake, half-brother to the cholera, nearly related to the smallpox on the mother’s side! Look at me! I take nineteen alligators and a bar’l of whiskey for breakfast when I’m in robust health, and a bushel of rattlesnakes and a dead body when I’m ailing. I split the everlasting rocks with my glance, and I squelch the thunder when I speak! Whoo-oo! Stand back and give me room according to my strength! Blood’s my natural drink, and the wails of the dying is music to my ear. Cast your eye on me, gentlemen, and lay low and hold your breath, for I’m ’bout to turn myself loose! <sup>2</sup>

## chapter three

# The Myth of Comfort

I was recently invited to debate the idea of no-rescue wilderness with several search and rescue professionals. I shuddered. After all, until now my writing about the idea of no-rescue wilderness had been just that—writing. But now there would be people present who put their lives on the line for others. Would they find me contemptible for what I had to say? Would they want to clean my clock? I fought off the urge to take out some insurance.

Instead, I went looking for another kind of help. I traveled to New England. Maybe if I walked in the footsteps of Thoreau I would somehow sense what needed to be said. Just as the cold is transmitted through the soles of one's feet to chill the entire body, perhaps the law of conduction would channel the essence of Thoreau up from the soil to inspire my entire being. It was worth a try. Unfortunately, it did not work. The only thing to wind its way upward through the soles of my feet was the heat of an unusually warm New England day.

Disappointed in my footgear, I headed back to San Diego. On the way, however, the Boeing 767 touched down briefly in St. Louis, Missouri. It was 103 degrees outside. The steward offered his condolences to those exiting the plane, and then he turned his attention to the remaining San Diego-bound passengers nestled snugly in the air-conditioned seats. Our dinner choices would be chicken, beef, or shrimp Creole. Fancying myself a risk taker, I opted for the last one. Then, as we winged our way westward, I thought of Joseph Sax<sup>1</sup> and how just as the automobile insulates people from really experiencing the national parks so did this new jet insulate me from really

experiencing a 103-degree day in St. Louis, Missouri. I chuckled smugly to myself as I bit into the shrimp.

Yech! The rubbery excuse for seafood jolted me. Then, déjà vu—something out of the past, something I had read. What was it?

Something about a man biting into what was supposed to be a sausage only to find it filled with fish. What was it he had said of his experience? Something like “it gave me the feeling that I’d bitten into the modern world and discovered what it is really made of ... everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else.”<sup>2</sup>

And that, in turn, reminded me of a piece I had just read in *Newsweek*. By next year, “visitors to the Grand Canyon will not even need to venture into the park to ‘experience’ its splendors. At a \$5 million complex going up less than a mile from the park boundary, they can view a 30-minute film of the canyon’s four seasons in a 100-foot-high theater. Next door, 32 tourists at a time can brave a five-minute simulated raft ride through four feet of artificially swooshed waters, riding rafts just like the ones real river runners use. ‘We’ll show visitors what they can’t see by standing on the rim and looking in,’ says ... a spokesman for FORMA Properties, which is planning similar thrill centers outside Yosemite and Yellowstone.”<sup>3</sup>

What was that book, anyway? And who wrote it? Then it hit me! I remembered. The book was called *Coming Up For Air*. And the author—and, just as suddenly, I knew exactly what needed to be said.

You see, in 1949 that same British author penned another work of fiction in which he predicted the failure of a society characterized by warmth, comfort, and the absence of strain. That society failed because, however appetizing on the surface, once bitten into it was inherently distasteful to a human being. The author, of course, was George Orwell. And the book was *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.<sup>4</sup>

No, I am not suggesting that the kind of life portrayed in Orwell’s fiction mirrors the world we live in today (tempting as it is). But I do wish to direct your attention briefly to one of the principal themes of Orwell’s book—the myth of comfort.

It was Orwell’s contention that while human beings pursue comfort in the name of pleasure, having attained it for any length of time, they actually find it painful. Guy Murchie underscores this point in his book *The Seven Mysteries of Life*, when he adds

... of course there must be millions of people, particularly in Earth’s more materialistic and complacent societies, who reject the need for ... any kind of serious struggle in life. ... Many of them no doubt would love . . . conscious life to be really just a bed of roses—roses without thorns of course—and they imagine they would be happy to loll in thornless roses forever if they actually got the chance. But any sensible person could tell you that ... it is certain (assuming they possessed a streak of humanity) that the lolling would get so deadly dull within a week that they would yearn for something to break the monotony: anything, even if it hurt.<sup>5</sup>

That which makes life interesting to human beings are the contrasts, the conflicts encountered. That which makes life challenging to human beings are the problems to be solved. That which makes life enjoyable to human beings are the struggles after

all. Remove the contrasts and conflicts, remove the problems—indeed, remove the struggles—and you remove the sources of life’s interest, challenge, and joy. You find comfort turned into discomfort. You find pleasure turned into pain.

Murchie tells us that “... the human soul thrives on a challenge or a problem and, once it is stretched by struggling with any sort of adversity, it can never shrink all the way back to its original dimensions. And so it grows bigger.”<sup>6</sup> Eliminate the adversity, eliminate the risk, and while in the name of comfort you may save the body, you sacrifice the soul. George Orwell understood this. It is no accident, then, that “the worst punishment in 1984 is to be compelled to live.”<sup>7</sup>

If you are committed to comfort, if you are committed to the belief that the only good recreation is safe recreation, if you are committed to protecting recreationists from themselves, you must therefore consider the possibility that you are impeding the growth of the human spirit. You must consider the possibility that you are doing a disservice to humanity, however good your intentions.

Moreover, I urge you to reconsider what seems to be the corrupt nature of the ideal of comfort itself. Orwell has illustrated dramatically for us how uncomfortable a comfortable society can be. Life, it seems, is more characteristically governed by what Murchie calls the “polarity principle.” I know of no better expression of this principle than the thoughts of Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein on the summit of Mt. Everest. Having reached the pinnacle, having conquered the mountain,

Willi and Tom did not try to talk. They were full of understanding beyond understanding. They turned off the oxygen and stood looking down on the world. Within the beauty of the moment they felt loneliness. Within the roar of the wind they felt silence. Within the glory they felt fear, not for their lives, but for the unknowns that weighed down on them. Within the triumph, they felt disappointment that this, only this, was Everest, the summit of their dreams. They knew that there were higher summits still if they could only see them.<sup>8</sup>

Just as the answer to every question includes a new question, just as the solution to every problem includes a new problem, just as the conquest of every mountain includes a new mountain to be climbed, so must we realize that safeguarding recreationists includes new dangers, while allowing them to experience danger includes new life.

What, then, do I want? I want recreation land managing agencies to reassess their commitment to the goal of providing a system of safe recreation opportunities. I want them to work proactively to expand opportunities for choice. I want them to promote independent functioning in the citizens they serve. Finally, to that end, I want them to sanction the right to risk in wilderness in its ultimate sense. I want these things not in the name of comfort, which is a myth, but in the name of struggle, which is the stuff of life itself.

Fortunately, we do not live in an Orwellian society. On the contrary, if you put much stock in *Megatrends*, our culture is moving in the opposite direction—from institutional help to self-help, from representative democracy to participatory democracy, from either/or options to multiple options.<sup>9</sup> Are recreation land managing agencies to be dragged along reluctantly in this current of societal change? Or are they to lead the way?



If, as Naisbitt argues, Americans are beginning to disengage from their institutional dependencies and are relearning the ability to grow on their own, then I believe our government has an obligation to provide them with the room. We cannot guarantee human growth. That is a matter of individual responsibility. But we can guarantee the environment to nourish it. And if we are to extend true freedom to the citizenry, we must respect their right to succeed and fail. Such freedom is, indeed, a risky proposition. But I, for one, would not have it any other way.

## chapter four

# The Wilderness Within: Reflections on a 100-Mile Run <sup>1</sup>

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.”<sup>2</sup> All right, John Muir! Show me the way.

I cannot believe I am actually doing this. I cannot believe it is finally happening. I have invested so many hours, so many days, so many weeks, so many months into this moment. I have invested so many miles. Now I am on my way. I am running across the Sierra Nevada.

I started out at the base of Sequoia National Park’s General Sherman Tree. That was no coincidence. The General Sherman Tree is the largest living thing on Earth. Later on, when I run out of fuel, when my glycogen gauge reads “zero,” when I begin to experience the pain of burning muscle, I will draw on the strength of that colossal soulmate, and I will persevere. You have heard of carbohydrate loading. Well, I inspiration loaded.

In my fanny pack I have a polypropylene shirt, a small water bottle, a Baby Ruth candy bar, a packet of Gatorade, a flashlight, Vaseline, aspirin, and Kleenex. All the comforts of home.

I am running these first six miles on the highway through the Giant Forest. At Crescent Meadow, a place John Muir called the “gem” of the Sierra, I will pick up the High Sierra Trail and head east 71 miles to the summit of Mt. Whitney. Then I will do the last 23 miles to Lone Pine by way of Whitney Portal. If all goes according to plan, I will finish the run in 24 hours. If all doesn’t, perhaps the run will finish me.

I am here because “I [wish] to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I [can] not learn what it [has] to teach, and not, when I [come] to die, discover that I [have] not lived. ... I [want] to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that [is] not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms.”<sup>3</sup> Thank you, Henry David Thoreau.

I am running because I have to. There is so much to work through. There is so much to learn. If I were to walk, I would not be able to get where I want to go. I would come up short. But running makes it possible to get there from here. Aristotle said it best when he defined motion as “the mode in which the future belongs to the present ... the joint presence of potentiality and actuality.” By running I can get to that place I would not otherwise know. I can transcend barriers that have held me back so far. I can break new ground.

Besides, I need to practice. I am the real-world equivalent of the pilot, Orr, in the novel *Catch-22*.<sup>4</sup> Remember him? Everybody thought he was crazy for crash-landing his plane in the Mediterranean all the time—crazy, that is, until they heard he had crash-landed safely in Sweden, free at last from the madness of a world at war. Well, I am getting accustomed to running across national parks now so that when they hike those entrance fees I will still be able to get my fill.

*This land is your land, this land is my land,  
from California to the New York islands,  
from the Redwood Forests to the Gulf Stream waters,  
this land was made for [those who pay].*

I can feel the extraneous matter peeling away. Just like these exfoliated domes. As I

“settle [myself] and work and wedge [my] feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvia which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till [I] come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which [I] can call reality, and say, This is ... ”<sup>5</sup>

Kaweah Gap is 20 miles east of Crescent Meadow; it is 10,700 feet of reality, of hard bottom and rocks in place. The problem with reality, of course, is you have to deal with it (Well, at least some folks do.). But this is what I wanted, my world reduced to its simplest terms, my challenge laid out before me in the clearest language, mile after mile. Simply a test of me. A matter of looking the dragon in the eye and mustering the courage to move ahead, one foot in front of the other, a straightforward and honest task, an opportunity to be seized.

I take water whenever I find it. It is my lifeblood. I can feel its regenerative power as it flows through my body. Like a wilted flower, I perk up when I splash myself, when I water myself. There is no more beautiful sound when you're thirsty than that of an unexpected stream up ahead. There is no more beautiful sight than that of cascading

water high above the trail coming down to greet you. Nature's drinking fountains. A run like this, at the minimum, is an important reminder of water's primacy in the order of things.

See these? The Australian Olympic coach, Percy Cerutti, calls them "forelegs." When things are clicking, when all four limbs are in synch, we revert back to an earlier time.

Running well, we affirm our kinship with other mammals. Our senses become sharper, our motives purer. Gray areas disappear. Life rushes out to meet us in bright primary colors. We run for our lives. If only we could remember: the terror of flight, the triumph of pursuit, the ache of distance, the fulfillment of approach.<sup>6</sup>

When I started this run, I felt kinship with the deer. I pranced the first several miles. At Bearpaw Meadow, I romped through a gauntlet of wet ferns, each of them slapping me gently on the behind, each of them urging me on. Going up Kaweah Gap brought out the badger in me, the hardheaded tenacious side. Now, working my way up to the Chagoopa Plateau, it is other critters. Most recently the fool's hen.

Any time you're in something for the long haul, there are moments when your vision fails you, when you forget what it is that attracted you to the challenge in the first place. Whether it is a job, a relationship, or a long-distance run, these are the dangerous moments. If you do not regain your perspective, if you do not come back to your senses, you risk cashing it all in for some short-term relief. Then you regret it:

When you're lost in the wild, and you're scared as a child,  
And Death looks you bang in the eye,  
And you're sore as a boil, it's according to Hoyle  
To cock your revolver and ... die.  
But the Code of a Man says: "Fight all you can,"  
And self-dissolution is barred.  
In hunger and woe, oh, it's easy to blow ...  
It's the hell-served-for-breakfast that's hard.

"You're sick of the game!" Well, now, that's a shame.  
You're young and you're brave and you're bright.  
"You've had a raw deal!" I know—but don't squeal,  
Buck up, do your damndest, and fight.  
It's the plugging away that will win you the day,  
So don't be a piker old pard!  
Just draw on your grit; it's so easy to quit:  
It's the keeping-your-chin-up that's hard.

It's easy to cry that you're beaten—and die;  
It's easy to crawfish and crawl;  
But to fight and to fight when hope's out of sight—  
Why, that's the best game of them all!

And though you come out of each grueling bout,  
All broken and beaten and scarred,  
Just have one more try—it's dead easy to die,  
It's the keeping-on-living that's hard.<sup>7</sup>

Ah, Robert Service. You would not think I would be inspired by his poetry. He was not like John Muir or Bob Marshall or other wilderness visionaries. Service was cut from a different cloth. He was a bank teller who dreamed of doing larger-than-life kinds of things, too. But he fell short. He once tried to hike from New York City to New Orleans, but he cashed it all in for a train ticket. Disappointed in himself, Service headed for the Yukon and a fresh start. Once there, he settled for writing about characters who were larger than life. But he, himself, was limited.

I am beginning to realize I am more of the ilk of Robert Service than that of either John Muir or Bob Marshall. Maybe that is why I like his poetry. At least he could laugh at himself. As the miles wear on, my limitations are becoming more and more evident, too. I think I knew that would be the case before I started. I think that's why I chose a route without a train station.

The midway point in the run does not bring the uplift in spirit I anticipated. Instead of feeling good about the fact that the majority of the miles are now behind me, I am depressed by the fact that I have a similar amount yet to go. Instead of feeling good about the fact that the next 10 miles are on a relatively flat stretch along the Kern River, I am depressed by the fact that I must resist the temptation of the Kern River Hot Springs if I am to go on. Instead of rejoicing in the fact that I am well on my way to reaching the goal I set for myself, I am mad at myself for having set such a ridiculous goal in the first place. Clearly, I have an attitude problem.

This journey is not exactly unfolding the way I thought it would. I expected it to be a celebration, a dance with the wilderness. But it is beginning to take an ominous turn. Instead of probing outward for connectedness, my psyche is focused inward. It is time for self-scrutiny, for self-doubt. Nightfall doesn't help matters.

What is going on here? Is this a midlife crisis? Fighting your newly sensed mortality? Trying to trim the waistline? Rewinding the old ticker? Impressing the ladies? Bought any Grecian Formula 16 lately? Just who are you kidding, anyway? It is after midnight, for God's sake! You ought to be home in San Diego in bed, falling asleep to *The Tonight Show*. You ought to be acting your age.

Whether you make it or not, the fact of the matter is running 100 miles across a mountain range does not prove a thing. If you succeed, it is only because your fear of failure overpowered your good sense to treat your body with respect. Finishing the run would be nothing more than Tarzan beating his chest. Big deal. It is macho. It is hollow. It is hype.

You are a "nature faker," Dustin. Wilderness is not meant to be run through. You do not run through museums, do you? You are a defiler of wilderness. You are committing sacrilege for the sake of self-aggrandizement. Stop it now. If not for yourself, then for Sigurd Olson and Aldo Leopold and all those others who actually care about wilderness.

Just what are you trying to prove, anyway? Do you honestly think that by pulling this off you can purge all the mistakes you have made in your life? That's it, isn't it? This is an

act of exorcism. You think that this accomplishment will wipe the slate clean, that you will be remembered for this one feat, that everyone will forget all the other blunders. You are divorced, Dustin. You have hurt people. You are flawed. Learn to live with it.

The real long-distance runners are all around you. They are your parents, who have persevered through 50 years of ups and downs to sustain their marriage. They are your neighbors, who show their children unconditional love. They are your own sons, who think the world of you despite your selfishness. They are the ones who understand the meaning of endurance. They are the ones you could stand to learn from.

You are so shallow. You see this run as some sort of cleansing, as an act of purification, as a way of expunging your accumulated shame. Do you really think you can sweat away all the wrongdoing, that you can huff and puff away the unwanted past? Do you really think that at the end of all this you will be redeemed, that you will walk more upright, that you will be a better person?

Come on. Nothing will change. Nothing. You will come out of this the same stumbler, the same bumbler you were to begin with. You will be exhausted, sore, and hungry. But a warm bath, some food in your stomach, and a good night's sleep will bring you back to normal. You will be your old inadequate self again. You will need to prove yourself once more. You will be back to square one. Ah, the circle of life. You will have run 100 miles for nothing.

Why not put an end to this silliness and invest your energy in something useful? Be a Big Brother. Volunteer in a soup kitchen. Anything but this pitiful self-flagellation. This is not worth the price of admission, let alone a Golden Eagle Passport. How many people would be foolish enough to pay \$5 to run across the Sierra Nevada, anyway?

I am being too hard on myself. I have to lighten up, regain my perspective, and gather my wits about me. I have to remember why I wanted to do this in the first place. There must have been a good reason. Think, Dan.

It was to have been an exercise in self-discipline, a year of sacrifice, of 30-, 40-, 50-, 60-, and 70-mile weeks. It was to have been an exercise in delayed gratification. Pay now, play later. Put the body through what it could but would not choose to do of its own accord. It was to have been a test of the wisdom in "The Tortoise and the Hare," an exercise in economy, pace, and self-control. It was to have been a personal validation of the adage "a journey of 1,000 miles. . . ." It was to have been a lesson that would benefit me throughout my life.

But it was not meant to be an act of machismo. Far from it. The whole point of this, the beauty of it, was that if I could do it, anyone could. It would prove that even Robert Service types could call on other qualities—dedication, commitment, stick-to-itiveness—to overcome their limitations. It would prove that within each of us is the capacity to accomplish more than we thought humanly possible, if only we'd try.

It was not meant to be done at the expense of wilderness. On the contrary, it was meant to be done in the company of wilderness. It was meant to be done among friends. What better place? What better acquaintances to share in the quest than those who can relate: the deer to the running, the marmots to scrambling over the rocks, the eagles to the hard-earned views. It was to have been an expression of unity, of oneness with all things.

When running, I become part of all that I run through. I die unto myself:

The mountain, I become part of it . . .  
The herbs, the fir tree,  
I become part of it,  
The morning mists,  
The clouds, the gathering waters,  
I become part of it.  
The sun that sweeps across the earth,  
I become part of it.  
The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen . . .  
I become part of it. <sup>8</sup>

We forget the Earth runs, too—continuously from west to east, just like me. The wilderness runs with it. I am in harmony with nature, not in opposition to it. I am going with the flow. I am giving in to it. This run, when all is said and done, is an act of surrender.

What was it Scott Momaday said? “He was alone and running on. All of his being was concentrated in the sheer motion of running on, and he was past caring about the pain. Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think.”<sup>9</sup> By giving in, the pain has lost its sting. What I started out fighting, I now embrace. I no longer feel the knife-like stabs in my legs. I am now one big ache, soon to become numb. As morning comes, I could care less. After 22 hours on the trail, I still must ascend Mt. Whitney.

What was it about that General Sherman Tree? I feel as though I have nothing left. How to say it politely? I am spent. I move on because I do not know what else to do. A creature of habit. I must endure for the sake of the Free World, for America. Anything to force myself to keep moving. Anything to divert attention away from my quadriceps.

I am now kin to the possum belly-up at the side of the road. “Why did the chicken cross the street?” my 8-year-old gleefully asks. “To show the possum it could be done.” Where does he get his sense of humor? If something happened to me on this run, he would turn it into a joke within a week. He did it after the space shuttle Challenger accident. He would do it after mine. It would be all over the playgrounds of Northmont Elementary. “Why did the chicken cross the Sierra Nevada?” Adam Dustin. Wise beyond his years. He knows the show must go on. But I will not be fodder for his comedy act. I will show the little bugger.

Storm clouds overhead. Magnificent and terrifying. Magnificent because of their swiftness, their energy, their electricity. Terrifying because I am exposed. They are waiting for the right instant to unload and to remind all below of the power above. At first, I welcome the drops, a refreshing shower on the switchbacks. But the rain soon turns to hail, and like my relatives, the rodents, I look for the nearest rock to crawl under. There, in the company of a furry little pika, I burrow in. I wait and watch nature’s fireworks: thunder and lightning.

After 15 or 20 minutes, I peek out to see white fluffy clouds mixed with blue sky. High above me at Trail Crest, I can see snow. Fearing hypothermia, I push on.



Here and now, Dan. Put everything else out of your mind. One step at a time. Do not look up. Do not look down. Concentrate on the next foot placement. Do not even think about how far you have to go. Chip away. Immerse yourself. Savor each moment. Lose yourself in it. Forget who you are. Forget where you are. Find the rhythm. Find the pattern. Your breathing. Your heartbeat. Make a chant out of it. A mantra. There is no beginning. There is no end. There is only now. You are motion. Pure and simple. The embodiment of potentiality and actuality. The future is present. Like a butterfly, you are floating effortlessly and gracefully upward. Believe it. It is true. You are there: 14,594 feet above sea level, atop Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous 48 states. Go ahead and say it. You have earned the right. "It's all downhill from here."

This was supposed to have been a euphoric moment, a peak experience, and the apex of the run. But such is not the case. I consider jumping for its dramatic effect. "He probably thought he could fly," they would say. "He probably thought he was taking a shortcut to Lone Pine." For all the significance of this event, it leaves something to be desired. It is a bittersweet moment and almost anticlimactic. Or am I just too tired to care?

The problem with a challenge of this magnitude is that it requires so much attention, so much concentration, so much dedication to succeed that so much else is missed along the way. Anytime you strive to do the extraordinary, you block out other things that also give meaning, purpose, and joy to life. In my case, I have missed much of the beauty of the High Sierra because I have been preoccupied with my next step. Now, as I begin to weigh the costs and benefits of my striving, I am haunted by the question, "Was it worth it?"

They say we should do things in moderation, and that we should seek out some sort of balance in life. But if we all adhered to that proposition, who would tackle the really difficult tasks? Who would challenge the outer limits and the frontiers of human accomplishment? If the cause is worthy, we must have people who are willing to extend themselves for the good of the order. We must have people who are willing to live their lives out of balance. We must have people who are willing to say, "It was worth it."

As I start the descent to Whitney Portal, I pass from Sequoia National Park into the John Muir Wilderness, from National Park Service land to Forest Service land, and from one land managing agency and philosophy to another. In my present state, however, such distinctions are irrelevant. I do not have a wilderness permit. I do not have anyone's permission. I am alone. I am John Colter running barefoot through six miles of prickly pear to escape the Blackfeet. I am Lewis and Clark running from a grizzly bear. I resurrect the frontier with every stride I take.<sup>10</sup>

I am a dreamer. But don't you see? "All of us are dreamers. Dreams are what started everything. Dreams are the most realistic way of looking at life. Dreamers are not shadowy, ephemeral-thinking people. The dreamers are the realists ..."<sup>11</sup>

Don't you see? "All America lies at the end of the wilderness road, and our past is not a dead past but still lives in us. ... Our forebears had civilization inside themselves, the wild outside. We live in the civilization they created, but within us the wilderness lingers. What they dreamed, we live; and what they lived, we dream."<sup>12</sup>

Don't you see? The most significant thing about the American wilderness is that it is free. It is that place where we escape the bonds of social convention. It is that place



where, unshackled, we recast ourselves each in our own fashion. It is that place where we build anew. The wilderness nurtures character and confidence. It is that place that “provides the ultimate delight because it combines the thrills of jeopardy and beauty. It is the last stand for that glorious adventure into the physically unknown. ...”<sup>13</sup> The wilderness is all that we have left to discover about ourselves. Don’t you see?

They say laughing and crying are similar emotions. I hope so, because I hurt so much that I cry with happiness in this, the last mile. I am, at the same time, so proud of my body for having done what I asked of it and so upset with my mind for having asked it, that I laugh and cry simultaneously. After 28 hours and 45 minutes, I am chock-full of ambivalence, shedding tears of joy and sadness, of relief and remorse, as I finish what I started out to do.

Someday, when I am old and wise, I will look back on this day and smile. I will, no doubt, be in a rocking chair, and I will have that faraway look in my eyes. Perhaps my sons will have told their sons and daughters about grandpa’s big run. Perhaps, just perhaps, my grandchildren will want to know more. I do not know what I will say to them, but I have a hunch I will begin the story once again with the words of John Muir. “I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”<sup>14</sup>