

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Sierra Club History Series

Wallace Stegner

THE ARTIST AS ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATE

With an Introduction by
Ansel Adams

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
1982

Underwritten by
The National Endowment for the Humanities
and the Sierra Club

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APRIL 15, 1993

Wallace Stegner — Acclaimed Writer Of American West

By Carl Nolte
Chronicle Staff Writer

Wallace Stegner, the quintessential Western writer and teacher, died late Tuesday in Santa Fe from injuries he suffered in a car accident two weeks ago. Mr. Stegner, who lived in a ridgetop home in Los Altos Hills on the San Francisco Peninsula, was 84.

Mr. Stegner wrote for more than 50 years and taught writing for more than 30 years. He wrote 28 books and won a Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Club Award, three O. Henry short story awards and the praise of his contemporaries.

"He was the single most distinguished man of letters to base himself in California in the history of the state," said historian Kevin Starr.

Mr. Stegner's first book, in 1937, won \$2,500 in a literary contest. "A lot of money in 1937," he said. His most recent work, "Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West," was published last year and was nominated for this year's National Book Critics Circle award.

He refused his last literary award: the National Medal for the Arts. He wrote that he was "troubled by the political controls" placed on the National Endowment for the Arts by right-wing groups. President Bush was to have given him the award last July.

In between the awards he won and the one he refused, his work made him the dean of Western writers, "a writer with splendid integrity," in the words of his long-time editor and friend, Sam Vaughan. Mr. Stegner, he said, had "a feeling for human character in all its complexities and vagaries, and always with a finely developed sense of place."

STEGNER'S WORKS

Some books by Wallace Stegner:

- "Remembering Laughter," 1937
- "Mormon Country," 1942
- "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," 1943
- "One Nation," 1945
- "The Women on the Wall," 1950
- "The Preacher and the Slave," 1950 (reissued as "Joe Hill: A Biographical Novel")
- "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," 1954
- "Wolf Willow," 1962
- "Angle of Repose," 1971
- "The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard DeVoto," 1974
- "The Spectator Bird," 1976
- "Crossing to Safety," 1987
- "The American West as Living Space," 1987
- "Collected Stories," 1990
- "Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West," 1992

Writer and Fighter

Mr. Stegner not only wrote about the West but was a fighter for the land as well. On his death, the Sierra Club issued a statement comparing him to John Muir.

"Stegner joins John Muir, John Wesley Powell, Bernard DeVoto, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Edward Abbey in the pantheon of friends of the West," said Sierra Club executive director Carl Pope. "He was the last of the giants."

"Wally was not only an author of great power but a great teacher and mentor for other writers and an activist author whose writings and testimony to the importance of intelligent conservatism were passionate and effective," said Harold Evans, publisher of Random House.

He taught at the University of Utah, the University of Wisconsin and Harvard and came to Stanford University in 1945 as director of its creative writing program.

At Stanford, he taught — and had a major influence on — such writers as Larry McMurtry, Ken Kesey, Ernest Gaines, Edward Abbey, Eugene Burdick, Herbert Blau, Judith Rascoe, Tillie Olson, Scott Momaday, Wendell Berry and Scott Turow.

He claimed to have learned something from each of them, but Mr. Stegner himself was a formidable presence. "A good writer," he said, "is not really a mirror, he is a lens."

"You take something that is important to you, something you have brooded about. You try to see it as clearly as you can, and to fix in it a transferable equivalent," he wrote. "All you want in the finished print is a clean statement of the lens, which is yourself, on the subject which is absorbing your attention."

"Sure, it's autobiography. Sure it's fiction. Either way, if you have done it right, it's true."

Man of the West

Mr. Stegner, who above all was a man of the West, was born in Lake Mills, Iowa, — "back East," as he later wrote. His parents were George and Hilda Stegner, Scandinavian immigrants.

George Stegner was a man born in the wrong time, born too late for the Old West, too soon for the new. "My father was a boomer, a gambler, a rainbow chaser, as footloose as a tumbleweed in a windstorm. My mother was always hopefully, hopelessly trying to nest. Like many western Americans, especially the poorer kids, I



was born on wheels."

The Stegners moved to North Dakota, Washington, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Saskatchewan and finally settled in Salt Lake City. "Between my 12th and 25th years," he wrote, "we must have lived in 20 different houses."

He graduated from the University of Utah in 1930 and began to teach and write. He married Mary Page, a graduate student at the University of Iowa, and the marriage lasted a lifetime.

He submitted a group of short stories as his master's thesis at Iowa. He used an old family story of his wife's for his first book, a novel called "Remembering Laughter."

He wrote about what he knew; he used his father's life as the basis for his first big book, "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" (1943).

Different Perspective

He saw scenery differently from people from other parts of the country. He saw the West.

"You have to get over the color green," he wrote. "You have to quit associating beauty with gardens and lawns; you have to get used to an inhuman scale; you have to understand geological time."

He also wrote about people: In "One Nation" (1945) he wrote about prejudice against Asians, blacks, Catholics and Jews. It won an award for the year's best book on race relations.

His most famous work, "Angle of Repose," a complex look back into life in the West of the past century, was described in Atlantic magazine as having "an amplitude of scale . . . altogether uncommon in contemporary fiction." It won him the Pulitzer.

"The Spectator Bird," in 1977, won the National Book Award and showed that time had in no way diminished his powers.

It was Mr. Stegner's sweep and range that caused Starr to place him in the highest levels of California letters. "If he were only a historian, or only a biographer, or only an essayist or only a novelist, he would rank at the top," Starr said, "But he was all of these. I think he was the most distinguished writer and man of letters in the state's history."

Mr. Stegner continued to write and lecture until this spring. He had gone to Santa Fe in March to give a talk on his latest book, "Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs," and was driving back to Santa Fe when his car was hit by another vehicle.

The accident was apparently Mr. Stegner's fault; he was cited by the police for violating the right of way. He was taken to a hospital, and listed in serious condition. He seemed to rally, but late last week had a relapse. He went into a coma and died Tuesday.

He is survived by his wife, of 59 years, Mary Page Stegner; his son, Page Stegner, a professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz; and three grandchildren.

Funeral services are pending.



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PREFACE

The Oral History Program of the Sierra Club

In fall 1969 and spring 1970 a self-appointed committee of Sierra Clubbers met several times to consider two vexing and related problems. The rapid membership growth of the club and its involvement in environmental issues on a national scale left neither time nor resources to document the club's internal and external history. Club records were stored in a number of locations and were inaccessible for research. Further, we were failing to take advantage of the relatively new technique of oral history by which the reminiscences of club leaders and members of long standing could be preserved.

The ad hoc committee's recommendation that a standing History Committee be established was approved by the Sierra Club Board of Directors in May 1970. That September the board designated The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley as the official depository of the club's archives. The large collection of records, photographs and other memorabilia known as the "Sierra Club Papers" is thus permanently protected, and the Bancroft is preparing a catalog of these holdings which will be invaluable to students of the conservation movement.

The History Committee then focused its energies on how to develop a significant oral history program. A six page questionnaire was mailed to members who had joined the club prior to 1931. More than half responded, enabling the committee to identify numerous older members as likely prospects for oral interviews. (Some had hiked with John Muir!) Other interviewees were selected from the ranks of club leadership over the past six decades.

Those committee members who volunteered as interviewers were trained in this discipline by Willa Baum, head of the Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office and a nationally recognized authority in this field. Further interviews have been completed in cooperation with university oral history classes at California State University, Fullerton; Columbia University, New York; and the University of California, Berkeley. Extensive interviews with major club leaders are most often conducted on a professional basis through the Regional Oral History Office.

Copies of the Sierra Club oral interviews are placed at The Bancroft Library, at UCLA, and at the club's Colby Library, and may be purchased for the actual cost of photocopying, binding, and shipping by club regional offices, chapters, and groups, as well as by other libraries and institutions.

Our heartfelt gratitude for their help in making the Sierra Club Oral History Project a success goes to each interviewee and interviewer; to everyone who has written an introduction to an oral history; to the Sierra Club Board of Directors for its recognition of the long-term importance of this effort; to the Trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation for generously providing

the necessary funding; to club and foundation staff, especially Michael McCloskey, Denny Wilcher, Colburn Wilbur, and Nicholas Clinch; to Willa Baum and Susan Schrepfer of the Regional Oral History Office; and last but far from least, to the members of the History Committee, and particularly to Ann Lage, who has coordinated the oral history effort since September 1974.

You are cordially invited to read and enjoy any or all of the oral histories in the Sierra Club series. By so doing you will learn much of the club's history which is available nowhere else, and of the fascinating careers and accomplishments of many outstanding club leaders and members.

Marshall H. Kuhn
Chairman, History Committee
1970 - 1978

San Francisco
May 1, 1977
(revised May 1979, A.L.)

PREFACE--1980s

Inspired by the vision of its founder and first chairman, Marshall Kuhn, the Sierra Club History Committee continued to expand its oral history program following his death in 1978. With the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, awarded in July 1980, the Sierra Club has contracted with the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library to conduct twelve to sixteen major interviews of Sierra Club activists and other environmental leaders of the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the volunteer interview program has been assisted with funds for training interviewers and transcribing and editing volunteer-conducted interviews, also focusing on the past two decades.

With these efforts, the committee intends to document the programs, strategies, and ideals of the national Sierra Club, as well as the club grassroots, in all its variety--from education to litigation to legislative lobbying, from energy policy to urban issues to wilderness preservation, from California to the Carolinas to New York.

Together with the written archives in The Bancroft Library, the oral history program of the 1980s will provide a valuable record of the Sierra Club during a period of vastly broadening environmental goals, radically changing strategies of environmental action, and major growth in size and influence on American politics and society.

Special thanks for the project's later phase are due to Susan Schrepfer, co-director of the Sierra Club Documentation Project; Ray Lage, cochair of the History Committee; the Sierra Club Board and staff; members of the project advisory board and the History Committee; and most importantly, the interviewees and interviewers for their unflinching cooperation.

Ann Lage
Cochair, History Committee
Codirector, Sierra Club Documentation
Project

Oakland, California
April, 1981

SIERRA CLUB ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
April 1983

Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library

David R. Brower, Environmental Activist, Publicist, and Prophet, 1980

Richard M. Leonard, Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist, 1976

Norman B. Livermore, Jr., Man in the Middle: High Sierra Packer, Timberman, Conservationist, California Resources Secretary, 1983

William E. Siri, Reflections on The Sierra Club, the Environment, and Mountaineering, 1950s-1970s, 1979

SIERRA CLUB LEADERS, 1950s-1970s:

Alexander Hildebrand, Sierra Club Leader and Critic: Perspective on Club Growth, Scope, and Tactics, 1950s-1970s, 1982

Martin Litton, Sierra Club Director and Uncompromising Preservationist, 1950s-1970s, 1982

Raymond J. Sherwin, Conservationist, Judge, and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s, 1982

Theodore A. Snyder, Jr., Southeast Conservation Leader and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s, 1982

Wallace Stegner, The Artist as Environmental Advocate, 1983

In Process: Ansel Adams, Phillip S. Berry, Claire Dedrick, Brock Evans, J. Michael McCloskey, Stewart Udall, Edgar Wayburn

Sierra Club History Committee

Elizabeth Marston Bade, Recollections of William F. Bade and the Early Sierra Club, 1976

Philip S. Bernays, Founding the Southern California Chapter, 1975

Harold C. Bradley, Furthering the Sierra Club Tradition, 1975

Cicely M. Christy, Contributions to the Sierra Club and the San Francisco Bay Chapter, 1938-1970s, 1982

Nathan C. Clark, Sierra Club Leader, Outdoorsman, and Engineer, 1977

Harold E. Crowe, Sierra Club Physician, Baron, and President, 1975

Glen Dawson, Pioneer Rock Climber and Ski Mountaineer, 1975

Nora Evans, Sixty Years with the Sierra Club, 1976

Francis Farquhar, Sierra Club Mountaineer and Editor, 1974

Marjory Bridge Farquhar, Pioneer Woman Rock Climber and Sierra Club Director, 1977

Alfred Forsyth, The Sierra Club in New York and New Mexico, 1965-1978, 1981

Wanda B. Goody, A Hiker's View of the Early Sierra Club, 1982

C. Nelson Hackett, Lasting Impressions of the Early Sierra Club, 1975

Joel Hildebrand, Sierra Club Leader and Ski Mountaineer, 1974

Ethel Rose Taylor Horsfall, On the Trail with the Sierra Club, 1920s-1960s, 1982

Helen LeConte, Reminiscences of LeConte Family Outings, the Sierra Club, and Ansel Adams, 1977

- Grant McConnell, Conservation and Politics in the North Cascades, 1983
 John and Ruth Mendenhall, Forty Years of Sierra Club Mountaineering Leadership, 1938-1978, 1979
 Stewart M. Ogilvy, Sierra Club Expansion and Evolution: The Atlantic Chapter, 1957-1969, 1982
 Harriet T. Parsons, A Half-Century of Sierra Club Involvement, 1981
 Ruth E. Prager, Remembering the High Trips, 1976
 Bestor Robinson, Thoughts on Conservation and the Sierra Club, 1974
 Gordon Robinson, Forestry Consultant to the Sierra Club, 1979
 James E. Rother, The Sierra Club in the Early 1900s, 1974
 Tom Turner, A Perspective on David Brower and the Sierra Club, 1968-1969, 1982
 Anne Van Tyne, Sierra Club Stalwart: Conservationist, Hiker, Chapter and Council Leader, 1981

In Process: George Alderson, Ruth Bradley, Robert Braun, Estelle Brown, Lewis Clark, Frank Duveneck, Jules Eichorn, Fred Eissler, Joseph Fontaine, Kathleen Jones, Stewart Kimball, Keith Lummis, George Marshall, Susan Miller, Sigurd Olson

California State University, Fullerton--Southern Sierrans Project

- Thomas Amneus, New Directions for the Angeles Chapter, 1977
 Robert Bear, Desert Conservation and Exploration with the Sierra Club, 1946-1978, 1980
 Irene Charnock, Portrait of a Sierra Club Volunteer, 1977
 J. Gordon Chelew, Reflections of an Angeles Chapter Member, 1921-1975, 1976
 Arthur B. Johnson, Climbing and Conservation in the Sierra Club's Southern California Chapter, 1930-1960s, 1980
 Olivia R. Johnson, High Trip Reminiscences, 1904-1945, 1977
 E. Stanley Jones, Sierra Club Officer and Angeles Chapter Leader, 1931-1975, 1976
 Marion Jones, Reminiscences of the Southern California Sierra Club, 1927-1975, 1976
 Robert R. Marshall, Angeles Chapter Leader and Wilderness Spokesman, 1960s, 1977
 Dorothy Leavitt Pepper, High Trip High Jinks, 1976
 Roscoe and Wilma Poland, Desert Conservation: Voices from the Sierra Club's San Diego Chapter, 1980
 Richard Searle, Grassroots Sierra Club Leader, 1976

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SAN FRANCISCO BAY CHAPTER INNER CITY OUTINGS:

- Patrick Colgan, "Just One of the Kids Myself," 1980
Jordan Hall, Trial and Error: the Early Years, 1980
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Marlene Sarnat, Laying the Foundations for ICO, 1980
George Zuni, From the Inner City Out, 1980

SIERRA CLUB OUTREACH TO WOMEN:

- Helen Burke, Women's Issues in the Environmental Movement, 1980

LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, 1960s-1970s:

- David Jenkins, Environmental Controversies and the Labor Movement in the Bay Area, 1981
Amy Meyer, Preserving Bay Area Parklands, 1981
Anthony L. Ramos, A Labor Leader Concerned with the Environment, 1981
Dwight C. Steele, Environmentalism and Labor Ally, 1981



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WALLACE STEGNER

Introduction for the Bancroft Oral History Project

By Ansel Adams

I do not recall when I first met Wallace Stegner, but I do know that our introduction began a life-long friendship of great consequence for me.

There is no need here to repeat the accolades that have come upon him during his long career of writing, teaching and battling for the security of the earth and (hopefully) the many generations to come. His vast erudition and sympathies, his intelligence and spirit will stand forever as a demonstration of what one human being can express and accomplish in the domains of fine literature and resolute awareness of the world about him. He is fearless in the presence of the enemy: the exploiters and ravagers of our essential resources of material and spirit.

Stegner sees the tremendous power and pervasive technology of the present age as capable of advancing civilization to undreamed of achievements. But he also sees that the evils of unrestrained growth and greed can turn this power towards desecration of the biosphere and the nonrenewable bounty of our Earth. Our technology, applied without wisdom in military science, can destroy civilization and indeed all life on Earth.

Devoting much of my time and effort to the cause of environmental protection, I gratefully acknowledge that Stegner has always conveyed assurances by word and example that gave me the essential confidences in waging the battles that have been won and to reconsider the reasons why some were lost. Stegner represents our first line of defense in the name of sanity and resolute protective action. His support has not been in terms of a particular dogma but of a continuing sustenance of conviction.

We are fortunate that Wallace Stegner lives among us in this desperate age, contributing both reason and excellence of imagination in interpreting and confronting the tremendous problems that face the world in our time and in the time to come.



Ansel Adams

Carmel, California

April, 1983

INTERVIEW HISTORY -- Wallace Stegner

The idea for including an interview with Wallace Stegner in the Sierra Club Oral History series developed at the Sierra Club Annual Dinner in May, 1982. On that occasion Stegner received the John Muir Award, the club's highest honor, in recognition of his contribution to the conservation cause as an author, a participant in local, regional, and national campaigns, and a director of the Sierra Club in the 1960s. In accepting the award, Mr. Stegner modestly depreciated his contributions to conservation, implying that his commitment to his literary career kept him busy in his study rather than actively defending the environment. Listening to these protestations, members of the club's History Committee conceived the idea of an oral history interview with Mr. Stegner, which might explore the relationship between his work as an artist and as an environmental advocate.

Knowing that his literary career and the life experiences which contributed to his deep feeling for the land were well documented, the Stegner interview focused on environmental matters: the influences on his development as an environmentalist; his service as Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall's special assistant, and as member of the National Parks Advisory Board in the 1960s; and his reflections on the art/advocacy dilemma. Of particular interest here are the portraits drawn and assessments made of two giants of the twentieth century environmental movement--David Brower and Stewart Udall; his reflections on wilderness and elitism; and his view of the separateness of his literary career and his work as an advocate for the environment.

Cordial, and still modest about his many contributions, Mr. Stegner was interviewed for two hours on November 12, 1982, in the study of his home in Los Altos Hills, California. He later edited the interview minimally, resisting the temptation to apply his literary craft to the transcript of an oral interview. He answered a few additional questions in writing, and these are incorporated in the transcript. As an appendix, his 1960 Wilderness Letter is reproduced--a statement in defense of wilderness as an idea, which remains as influential and deeply moving today as it did twenty-three years ago.

Ann Lage
Interviewer-Editor

4 April 1983
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

I TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY: INFLUENCE OF POWELL, DEVOTO,
AND CALIFORNIA'S DEVELOPMENT

[Interview 1: November 12, 1982]##

Editing This Is Dinosaur, 1955

Lage: We're concerned basically with your development as a conservationist. I think so many of your writings document your life experiences that gave you a feeling for the land, but we want to know how you became an advocate for the environmental movement. What point of time would you choose that this may have begun?

Stegner: Time may correct this and second thoughts may correct it, but I think it began with Bernard DeVoto, who was a good friend of mine and was on the National Parks Advisory Board, and during the late forties and fifties was fighting a kind of single-handed rearguard action against a whole bunch of landgrabbers--sagebrush rebels, in effect, a little before their time. He got me interested in doing something on the land, particularly the public land, and it seems to me that the first piece that I ever did in that way was a piece called "Public Lands and Itching Fingers: One-Fourth of the Nation," which I think was in the Reporter in 1953 sometime. I can check that.

It was that piece, I believe, which Dave Brower had seen. A little later, when the war about the Dinosaur National Monument dams came up, Dave came down to see me and asked me if I would write for and edit a book on the whole Dinosaur area, because he knew I knew it, having come from Utah, and he thought at that time that I could be won to do some propagandizing for conservation.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 41.

Stegner: And he was right on both instances, I think. [laughs] So I did edit This Is Dinosaur, which was published not by the Sierra Club but by Alfred Knopf, who also contributed a chapter to it.* Many people contributed chapters, and I wrote an introduction and one chapter and edited the book.

Lage: Did you draw together the contributors, or had that been done?

Stegner: That was something that Dave had pretty well in mind. I guess I drew some of them together, and I certainly got their contributions and edited them. I had the pleasant, sort of fiendishly pleasant, job of editing Alfred Knopf's prose. [laughter] Which Alfred didn't like very much.

Lage: That must have been a ticklish job.

Stegner: We remained friends. He's a wonderful man, but he was used to being on the other end. I thought it was fun to reverse the procedures. That book was published you just told me in 1955. Up to that point I think I hadn't published more than one or two articles of a really partisan propagandist proconservationist sort. I had published a good many travel articles, which might have been indirectly in that direction. But nothing overt. After that I think there were quite a few.

John Wesley Powell: Beginnings of a Conservation Consciousness

Lage: How about your consciousness of the environmental problems up to that time?

Stegner: My consciousness of the environmental problems began certainly--oh, it's a very gradual process, but they began to be acutely changed when I began to study John Wesley Powell, who taught me a great deal about what was possible in the West, where I had grown up and where I knew something, but in the way that one knows one's own country without having read anything about it or without having any kind of scientific education in it. Powell taught me a lot, and while I was working on Powell I was associated with Benny DeVoto in

*This is Dinosaur: Echo Park Country and Its Magic Rivers (New York: Knopf, 1955).

Stegner: Cambridge. He was writing a lot of things like this for the Easy Chair in Harper's and for other places, so that I think probably you could date my conservation consciousness from the beginning of my real study of Powell.

That, God help me, goes back a long way, because I had a little itch to do a biography of Powell way back while I was still teaching at the University of Utah, about 1936 or so; and about 1942 I got a little grant from the so-called Milton Fund of Harvard College, so that I could take a semester off from Harvard and go up to Vermont and work on the book. Actually what I did was finish the Big Rock Candy Mountain mainly, but I did work some on Powell, too.

Lage: Somewhere I read that DeVoto had sort of put you in that direction.

Stegner: On Powell?

Lage: On Powell.

Stegner: No. I told Benny about Powell.

Lage: I see; you put him onto it.

Stegner: Yes. He was looking when he was writing a contentious little book of lectures (The Literary Talker) which he gave at the University of Indiana. He wanted an example of somebody nonliterary who had really affected his times and future times. He thought the literati took too much on themselves; he didn't think they were that important. So he had two examples. One was a doctor friend of his in Boston who had discovered a new treatment for burns. The other was Powell, who, as he said, had affected more American lives than most presidents, which is probably true.

Lage: How had you become interested in Powell?

Stegner: I became interested in Powell partly because when I was a sophomore in college I was headed for a geology exam, and I accidentally smashed my thumb in the door of a car and had to go to the hospital instead and get patched up. So I missed the exam, and instead of writing a makeup exam, I was told to go and read Clarence Dutton's Tertiary History of the Grand Canyon and The High Plateaus of Utah, which I did, and was immediately fascinated, because we had a cottage on Fishlake Plateau in southern Utah and went down there in the summers. And I thought Dutton was great.

Lage: This was your own territory.

Stegner: Yes. Dutton was great--he simply opened my eyes in all kinds of ways--and Powell was Dutton's boss, so that it led naturally from one thing to another. As a matter of fact, I finally did my Ph.D. dissertation on Dutton, which is a strange English department dissertation. And that I finished about 1935, I guess, '34 or '35. So I had a little toehold in it, and I did know the country, most of the country, that Powell had worked in, what he called the Plateau Province, all the way from about Green River, Wyoming, down through that old Eocene lake bed.

Lage: And this was also the country of the Dinosaur National Monument, wasn't it?

Stegner: It was, yes. As a matter of fact, there's another little story there which might come into it. In Salt Lake, while I was teaching at the University of Utah, from 1934 to '37, sometime during those years, I think about 1935, I met Mrs. Earl Douglass, the widow of Earl Douglass, who had come out from the Carnegie Institute to dig the dinosaur quarry in the first place. Douglass had provided dinosaur skeletons of a most complete and splendid kind for half the museums of the world. There's one up here in the California Academy of Sciences.

Lage: That came from the Dinosaur area?

Stegner: That came from Jensen, Utah, I think, from the dinosaur quarry. And he got a kind of bad deal. Things wore out for him with the Carnegie Institute. He was a good field man, but a little dreamy and impractical, and he hoped for a job after he got through there at the University of Utah, where many of his best specimens had gone. He thought he might be hired to go there and mount them and put them together and be essentially their museum curator, and somehow he got x-ed out of that by local professional jealousies of one kind or another.

So I went up to the Dinosaur Monument and looked around, more or less at Mrs. Douglass's instigation. She had shown me a lot of his papers and pictures and all the memorabilia of their years there. They had lived for years out on that bald flat on the banks of the Green. And I wrote a piece which was published about 1936 or '37 in the Southwest Review, I think. It was later included in Mormon Country, wasn't it? It's called "Notes on a Life Spent Pecking at a Sandstone Cliff."* That again reinforced my interest in the country and in the people who had opened it or discovered it.

*Mormon Country (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942).

Bernard DeVoto: Push toward a Partisan Role

Stegner: None of that, of course, made a partisan of me. I had come here to Stanford from Harvard in 1945 after having been on leave during about a year and a half of the war to do a wartime-patriotism book called One Nation on racial and religious minorities and how they were faring in World War II America. I came directly to Stanford from that without going back to Harvard. When I got here I ran into the GI Bill students who were just pouring out of the navy and army and air force, who were so exciting as students that I found myself establishing the writing program at Stanford. And so for a good many years I was very literary indeed and involved with teaching clear to my neck.

Lage: This was in the forties?

Stegner: I came in '45, and as you see I didn't really begin to write articles like this until '53. I'm not quite sure when Benny DeVoto came out here to lecture, but I got him out to lecture to the writing students at some point. He died in '55, so it had to be somewhere around '53-'54. He was bending my arm all the time to get me to write, because he himself was a great partisan, and he wanted all the voices he could get.

Lage: He wanted you to step out as an advocate?

Stegner: Yes, he did.

Lage: Did he specifically mention Dinosaur? He wrote on Dinosaur also, didn't he?

Stegner: He did. He was involved in the early stages of it. I think he was dead before--he definitely was dead before This Is Dinosaur was published, and he probably was dead before it was begun. We did it pretty fast. He died in November, 1955, as I remember, so that this was probably all produced--Alfred Knopf produced the book within a couple of months at a fantastic speed because of the need of getting something out, and the Sierra Club distributed it to all the members of Congress. And I think it was quite effective actually. I don't remember working with Benny on Dinosaur at all, but I remember--since I wrote his biography--that he was working on it earlier, particularly when it came up before the National Parks Advisory Board.

Lage: In the early fifties even?

Stegner: Yes, '52, '53. It came up before the National Parks Advisory Board because of the threat to a national park area, the threat that was posed by these power plant reservations that remained. They were legal reservations, all right, but they shouldn't have been there. And he worked on the advisory board and wrote at least one article on that subject, so that I had that to draw from, but I never did talk to him about Dinosaur that I recall.

Lage: You mention in your book on him that you had a lot of similarities based on your background, so this may be a case of similar interests rather than direct influence.

Stegner: Yes. As it turned out, I actually knew Utah a whole lot better than Benny did, because he grew up without an automobile, and I grew up with one, and that makes a great difference, you know. He hardly ever got out of Ogden, but I was all over the state in one way or another, and I did know it physically pretty well by the time I was twenty-one, and I've known it a lot better since. He never, so far as I know, had been to Dinosaur, though he wrote about it. I know Alfred Knopf had been. He went down, I think, through Split Mountain Canyon and some of the lower canyons in a boat with the advisory board.

And I'm not quite sure who did--to go back to your original question--who did assemble the people for This Is Dinosaur. There were some--Bradley's boatmen; there was Alfred Knopf; there was Martin Litton, who was then the travel editor at Sunset. There was [Otis] Dock Marston, who was a Colorado River boatman and took expeditions down. Maybe eight or ten people who contributed to that book in one way or another. On geology, rivers, Indians, archeology, so on.

Threats to the Green Foothills of the San Francisco Peninsula

Lage: You mentioned your move out here to Los Altos and Stanford. Did you settle right here in Los Altos Hills?

Stegner: No, we lived in the girls'--what do they call it? A kind of pest-house. [laughter] Where they put girls with minor ailments, colds and sniffles and ear infections and things like that. On Salvatiera Street. We lived there the first summer. Then we moved down onto Waverley Street in Palo Alto for a year, and then up onto the campus for two years, and then we began building this house in 1948 and moved in in the beginning of '49. So we've been here thirty-three years [in Los Altos Hills].

Lage: I wondered if your observations of changes here had had some effect on your consciousness?

Stegner: Well, the observation of changes here are acute. [laughs] Yes, yes, indeed, because you could watch--well, you see, we were here all during the time when the Santa Clara Valley was simply overrun and became Silicon Valley, and that was sort of demoralizing to see. When we came that was all a sea of blossoms in the spring. It was all orchards. It may be just as useful now, but it's very different.

And up here--we live, as you may have found out, on a kind of backward road. There were various eyesores and so on on the road that we applauded and wanted to stay, pig farms and things like that.

Lage: They're certainly not here now.

Stegner: They're not here now. And when they went, and when water came into the hills, the whole place just exploded, and it came belatedly here at a time when real estate values were already heavily inflated, so that lots were expensive by the time the developers got hold of them, which meant that the bank wouldn't lend on a cheap house for an expensive lot, so that the houses got bigger and more ornate and more vulgar, and so we're just full of these bloody seven hundred thousand dollar castles, with all these four-car garages. That's just too bad. It's just a kind of accident of history. This steepest and prettiest part of Los Altos Hills, right around through here, has been developed in a way that would make a cannibal cry, I think.

Lage: Destructive to the hillside?

Stegner: Destructive to the hillside, destructive to the watershed, destructive to the visual amenity, destructive in many ways.

Lage: Are you close to Hidden Villa?

Stegner: Well, we're over the hill. It's probably three or four miles, if you go up over Page Mill Road, over Altamont and then down the other side of Moody Road. Now that's been held, of course, relatively stable because of the Duvenecks.

Lage: Were you involved in any of the local groups that grew up around here, like Committee for Green Foothills?

Stegner: Yes, I was one of the founders of the Committee for Green Foothills. There were about twelve or fifteen of us, I guess, who got organized, partly because of things that seemed to be happening in the hills that we didn't like to see happen, and also out of fear of what

Stegner: Stanford might do in the hills, since Stanford owned a lot of them. And we didn't know whether Stanford had the wit to foresee the future as well as we thought we could. [laughter] We were a little arrogant about that.

Lage: Did you have an official role in Green Foothills?

Stegner: I've been honorary president practically from the beginning.

Lage: When was the group organized?

Stegner: We had our twentieth anniversary the end of last June--just about a year ago, so I suppose it was organized about 1961 or '62. Among the founding group of The Committee for Green Foothills were Lois Hogle, Ruth Spangenberg, Morgan and Katy Stedman--all good citizens, good conservationists, good stewards. Gary Girard--a tight group, many of whom later became town officials in Palo Alto and Portola Valley.

Lage: Has it been an effective group? Does it have a particular style--?

Stegner: I think it has been an effective group. It's very neighborhoody, except that it does, you know, extend its vision now and again clear down to the bay and up to the skyline. But the people who have made it run, many of them women and all of them volunteers, have been very dedicated people. And pretty stiff and tenacious, too. So that we were involved in a good many sort of regional wars. One against PG&E and the Atomic Energy Commission, which was funding S.L.A.C., the Stanford Linear Accelerator. There was the whole question of how power was to be brought to that. There were several proposals. One to bring an enormous big high tension line across the bay; the principal one to bring it down the skyline on towers two hundred and fifty feet high or so--I've forgotten the exact height, but big enough to be very, very visible. So we protested that, and the town of Woodside, Green Foothills and the Sierra Club were the three principals in that squabble and dispute. We hired Pete McCloskey as our lawyer, which was the beginning of Pete's political career.

Lage: That's interesting. I didn't realize that. How did Stanford respond to these issues? I assume they would have had a role in that kind of decision.

Stegner: Actually, I have to say good things for Stanford. They have a responsibility. They're the biggest landholder on the Peninsula, so they have an enormous effect, but they're also much more responsible than ordinary profit-minded developers would be. Nevertheless, there are some things I think they should have perhaps pushed a little harder than they did. I think, for instance, they

Stegner: should have built some housing into the whole industrial tract, so that everybody didn't have to go to Mountain View and then just make enormous traffic patterns back and forth, or over to Alviso or somewhere to find a reasonable house to live in. But that's all hindsight.

Stanford responded to the Green Foothills when we didn't want them to come up Page Mill Road--I don't know whether you know Old Page Mill, which is blocked off now, one way. They were going to put a road up Old Page Mill, canalize the creek, cement the creek, and so on up past the Frenchman's tower. We talked to them and said we thought that was a terrible idea, that it would be better, though we weren't particularly enthusiastic about that either, to come over the hill. When you come up Page Mill Road now from Foothill to meet 280, you come over the hill. That was something that we just talked the planning department of Stanford into doing, and then they talked the county into it, and that meant that little intimate canyon and the old Frenchman's tower were like dead-ends--it's just kind of a lagoon of nontraffic. A few things like that.

But there were other squabbles. You win some and lose some, and you win far fewer than you lose. There was a man named Luckman who had been hired by the city of Palo Alto to do a plan for the foothill lands of Palo Alto clear to the skyline, and he was a real madman. He had a proposal to put highrises up on the skyline and a population of seventy thousand people in the skyline foothills. A lot of people were against that plan. We were profoundly against it, and it finally got completely turned around, because the Livingston-Blaney Report that followed it persuaded the town of Palo Alto that it was cheaper for the town to buy that land and hold it as open space than to develop it, that it would cost the citizens in the town far less as open space held than as developed housing land. And I think that's perfectly true. That's been true in lots of different places where the effect of growth is to increase taxes and costs for everybody who lives anywhere within reach of it. So now of course Palo Alto has all these foothill lands, and they're holding them effectively as a landbank. Thank God.

Lage: Yes, you're lucky. There could be a lot more development than you see here.

Stegner: Oh yes. The town of Los Altos Hills, on the other hand, is quite another dish, so that this side of Page Mill Road is bad; the other side is still good.

Lage: Los Altos Hills has had more development?

Stegner: Los Altos Hills has been the developer's paradise for the last fifteen years.

Lage: One of your council people or former mayor, Lucille Hillstad, hit the big time recently.*

Stegner: Yes, yes, couldn't happen to a nicer person. [laughter] No, I think she had it coming. I think she was bucking for it. And I think the whole tone and tenor of that town council for a period of at least ten years and maybe longer has been going further and further in that direction. There have been good people on the council. I don't mean to say that they're all that way, and I don't say that any besides her are probably guilty of that sort of thing, but they have been dominated by developers, and the town staff has been, I think, in the developers' pockets. Maybe their hands had been in the developers' pockets, too.

Lage: How do you account for that when it's right adjacent to Palo Alto, and you'd assume the same type of individual would be living there?

Stegner: Well, you see, this town was undeveloped. It was limited by its charter to one-acre lots, and it was going to be a country town, remain country--we formed the city in order to remain country. And as a sixth class city, we had certain privileges and rights, and we tried to hold those, and in the beginning it was a high-minded town. It got taken over as the Peninsula filled in; newcomers came in who hadn't any particular feel for the country, and a lot of those newcomers turned out to be development-minded, with their eye on a profit, getting some cheap land and splitting it up later. So that all of the course of the town has been directed by the idea of profit.

I can think of at least three former town managers who left the town managership in order to become developers. It was a nice, cozy, sweetheart arrangement. It's natural in one way, psychologically natural. The staff works with developers all the time when lots are being developed and houses are being built. So they know them better than they know the citizenry. But this got to the point where the citizenry were just sort of derided and disregarded, treated with disdain, and nobody treated them with more disdain than Mrs. Hillstad. [laughter]

She has been begged to resign and won't. So she's going to tough it out. If she's convicted she's automatically out, but if she isn't, she may be there a long time. [They have not yet been brought to trial, and Mrs. Hillstad continues to sit on the town council, --WS, 3/83.]

*Lucille Hillstad and her husband were charged with accepting bribes from developers.

Lage: Then you'll see if the people turn her out.

Stegner: Yes. Well, I don't think there's much doubt of that. But, you know, it takes another election. I don't think she's up for another two years.

II ADVISOR TO INTERIOR; INVOLVEMENT IN THE SIERRA CLUB

Special Assistant to Secretary Udall, 1961

Lage: Do you think that this involvement in the local scene sort of fueled your desire to get out and man the barricades, or was there a connection?

Stegner: Well, I was in it in all kinds of ways. In 1961 Stewart Udall sort of flagged me down. I was doing a Phi Beta Kappa lecture tour, and I had sent him a copy of Beyond the Hundredth Meridian, the biography of Powell, because I thought there might be something in it that he could make use of. I knew he came from Arizona, and it was in the same general area. And I was vastly enthusiastic when he was made secretary of Interior.

Lage: But you didn't know him before that?

Stegner: I didn't know him, no. And then he said, "If you ever come through Washington, come in and see me." So we did go through Washington on this Phi Beta Kappa tour--I guess I was on my way down to talk at Sweet Briar or somewhere in Virginia. We stopped in the office and talked to him during the afternoon, and we liked each other on sight.

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Then we were down in Williamsburg, being tourists, and got a call from Stewart saying, "How'd you like to come to Washington and work with us while we work out a program of conservation, parks, acquisition, and so on for eight years of Kennedy administration?" I said, "No, I can't do that. I'm teaching at Stanford." He pursued me around the country and finally caught me in Pullman, Washington, on another leg of that Phi Beta Kappa tour and persuaded me that I should come. So in 1961, in September, I guess, I went up to Washington to the Olympic Peninsula to a meeting of the National

Stegner: Parks Advisory Board, representing the secretary, just to get acquainted with people, and then immediately after that went to Washington and worked through the rest of the year.

Lage: You were there from September to December, 1961?

Stegner: Just a few months, and then quite a lot of consultative business after that.

Lage: What was your title?

Stegner: My title was special assistant to the secretary.

Lage: I suspect his interest in you was partly because of your wilderness letter; it must have really affected him.

Stegner: He used that wilderness letter, and I can't tell you the date of that [December 1960]. I had written that to Dave Pesonen, again at Dave Brower's urging. Dave Brower comes into this very strongly.

Lage: I want to go back and discuss that more thoroughly.

Stegner: I wrote the letter to express the notion that there were spiritual values to wilderness which had nothing to do with what kind of price you peg, you put on them. And Stewart came upon that I don't quite know how. Maybe Dave Brower gave it to him, I don't know. But he used it as a basis for a speech that he made either to the Sierra Club or to one of their wilderness conferences I think, in San Francisco. Later he himself arranged for it to be published in the Washington Post. He liked that letter, yes, I think that's true.

Lage: And then you also had a meeting of the minds when you met personally..

Stegner: Yes, I'm very fond of him, and I think he likes me. We sort of think alike, and we come out of the same kind of background. Also, he had, of course, on his mind that he wanted to write a book on what he called the quietcrisis, which is a good name for it. He thought it was a crisis, and he thought it ought to be given a kind of historical perspective. He had a helper, somebody who was willing to help him with that book, a fellow whom he had hired off Sports Illustrated or somewhere. And this fellow just sort of fled the coop, just vanished. Nobody knew where he was. We hunted around and made telephone calls, and would get replies which we knew were his voice, and "No, he isn't here," he would say. He fled Washington for some reason which I never did understand.

So that the helper that Stewart had counted on to do the research and run errands and do the legwork on the book wasn't there, and in the end Stewart and I sat down quite a lot, several times, and worked out an outline for the book. I did a little research in the Library of

Stegner: Congress for him, and we tried it out on a panel of people, including Ted Sorenson and some others, to see if they thought that was the way it should go, and everybody seemed to approve of that. And then I left, so that the book later was worked on pretty much according to the outline that we had established, first by Don Moser, who is now the editor of the Smithsonian Magazine, who had been a student of mine here at Stanford, and later by Hal Gilliam, who had likewise been a student of mine at Stanford.

And it was a good book, I think.* It had some impact. A lot of people accused me of writing it, which was not true at all. I helped make the outline. That's as far as I went.

Lage: The style doesn't appear to have your stamp on it.

Stegner: No, Stewart wanted it to be his own style. Even when he would get a draft chapter from some helper, he tore it all apart and made it over again in his own way, so it's his book, I think. That was 1961, the last few months of 1961.

Lage: It's also mentioned that you helped draft a national parks bill during that time.

Stegner: National parks bill--I don't know whose--

Lage: I couldn't find reference to that except in that Robinson book [F.G. Robinson, Wallace Stegner (Twayne, 1977)].

Stegner: Oh, that's an error. We were working on the wilderness bill to some extent, and that's probably what they mean, but I didn't help draft it, either. Bills are drafted by lawyers. But we talked about it a lot.

Lage: So the wilderness bill was one of the things discussed?

Stegner: Yes. We were working toward that, and also on the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Those were the big bills that were up in that period, both of them very important bills. But I had nothing to do with drafting them.

Lage: Okay. Did you have any input to Udall's thinking on the wilderness bill, do you think?

*Udall, Stewart, The Quiet Crisis (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963).

Stegner: Oh, I think so, yes. We talked a lot, and we were very good friends. And with in and out, free access to the office, I was often present while things went on, if I chose to be or if I wasn't doing something else.

Proposing an Alternative to Grand Canyon Dams

Stegner: One of the things that most bothers me about that whole time is of course the problem that arose on the Grand Canyon. We were resisting the two Grand Canyon dams, one in the lower Grand Canyon and one in Marble Canyon, and it was pretty hard to resist, because Stewart was from Arizona, and his brother was a congressman from Arizona, and no Arizona congressman can be against dams or even presume to--

Lage: Was he even against them in his private conversations?

Stegner: Oh, I don't know Mo Udall. I never talked to him at that time, but I think Mo was for the dams, because as a congressman he felt it was political suicide not to be for them. Stewart was against them and wanted to find some way, but he didn't think he could just nix them out. In fact, he couldn't as secretary. This was a congressional matter, but he had to exert his influence as he could. Eventually we all agreed that an alternative which had been proposed by a consortium of power companies in southern California and the Southwest--that these power dams be supplanted by coal-fired plants--was a better solution. It would keep dams out of the Grand--so now we've got the coal plant at Four Corners and in Page. Now, [laughs] this is not good.

Lage: All the alternatives turn out to be disastrous. Another alternative to that was nuclear power. I think that was Dave Brower's alternative, which he regrets.

Stegner: There was no good alternative. There's something wrong with producing massive amounts of power, particularly in a wilderness like that where it has to be transported long distances, or where it's made with coal with all kinds of particulate pollution problems, or nuclear with dangers of several kinds, or with dams in the Grand Canyon. Which do you choose? You know, you flip your coins. We all came down on the side of the coal-fired plants, and then wondered later if we'd come down on the right side. Although we did save the canyon. That at least was something.

Lage: And that's a permanent thing, so maybe the coal-fired plants can't leave as permanent a scar.

Stegner: You know, if they would put on scrubbers in those damned stacks, it would cost them a million dollars or two, but it's not impossible. So maybe there's some hope eventually of cleaning it up. They've spoiled the picture taking all through the Southwest with that blanket of smoke, and all of those national parks now are out monitoring air quality. Every day you see a ranger out there with his little scopes and vials and so on.

Udall's Admirable Acquisitions to the Park System

Lage: That's really sad. Would you have a kind of a general assessment of Udall and his vision, and if you feel he had limitations as an environmentalist--or has?

Stegner: I like him very much indeed, and I think he was an extremely effective secretary of Interior. He was strong on acquisitions for one thing, exactly the opposite of Watt now. And for twelve years or something like that before he came in, there had been no publicly promoted accessions to the national park system. The only things that had come in were St. John's Island in the Virgin Islands and I guess the Grand Teton National Monument, which later became part of the park, and both of those were gifts of the Rockefellers. Three are gifts of the Rockefellers. Acadia in Maine is another Rockefeller gift, so three of our national parks are Rockefeller-oriented. But the government had done nothing in a dozen years when the Kennedy administration came in. Stewart was intent that it should do something, and that there were all kinds of splendid areas that ought to be added, and he worked very hard to get them added, and Kennedy I think was sympathetic. One of the ways to get Kennedy sympathetic was of course to make Cape Cod a national seashore. [laughter] But still, that's all right, too. That's a legitimate national seashore. But Canyonlands [Utah] came in, you see, very soon we were working on Canyonlands. All the offices were full of Canyonlands color separations. The enlargement and enhancement of Capitol Reef [Utah]-- I went out on a special trip from Washington in October, 1961, with several other people, picked up some local superintendents, and we toured all up and down in the Capitol Reef country to see what ought to be added to upgrade that to a national park. That was another one that took some years to develop, but it eventually did develop that way. Arches [Utah] was upgraded from a monument to a park about the same time. Glacier Peak in Washington was in the works as a national park. And lots of things like Indiana Dunes and so on, which were not absolutely prime country, but which existed in relatively pure and decent states in areas of heavy population. Indiana Dunes used to be forty miles of untouched dune and lake-shore, and it was just going...

Lage: So that was sort of a new departure, too, to pick the smaller areas that are more impacted.

Stegner: Well, what Stewart's administration did was to make a series of categories of natural areas, from national recreation areas, which were essentially resorts, water-based--water skiing, motor boat places, many of them on reclamation dams--from those through national lakeshores and seashores and sometimes national historical sites, on up to national monuments and parks, which were the purest of the spectrum.

They don't like to talk that way now. You know, the gradualism of purity. Maybe because they fear that if they acknowledge that some things are less pure than others they'll all get impure, that they'll all get leveled down to the lowest. But that was the intention, to try to save all kinds of country and to make something in the Middle West and the East and the South where there weren't large areas of public domain and where the land had been pretty well used up, to put it away while it was still put awayable and still relatively pure. And a lot of that was done. If you check the acquisitions during Stewart Udall's eight years, nearly eight years, as secretary, you'll find that it's a big period.

Lage: What about the redwoods? Did you--?

Stegner: Redwoods came later. And if you want to know about the redwoods, you should ask Ed Wayburn. He's the one. [laughs]

Lage: We have, but I just wondered if you were in touch with Udall at all about it?

Stegner: Later, when I was appointed to the National Parks Advisory Board in 1962, I guess, after I had left the office, I'd go back to meet him, and the redwoods were very much in the works then. I don't remember talking with Stewart too much about that, but I know that he was profoundly in favor. I remember once when I was on the Sierra Club board, likewise in the sixties somewhere, calling him with Ed Wayburn, a kind of conference call from Los Angeles to see something about the redwoods, because Ed was the great pusher for that. I had little to do with it. I didn't know the country, and it wasn't anything that I could help with.

Lage: Do you recall any deliberations of the Advisory Board regarding the siting for a redwood national park (Redwood Creek vs. Mill Creek)?

Stegner: No. Redwood came up strongly just after I left, though it was in the works before. The board, naturally, was one hundred per cent for a redwoods park.

The National Parks Advisory Board: A Controversy Recalled

Lage: You went on the National Parks Advisory Board in 1962. Are you still on it?

Stegner: No. What happens is that you are appointed to a six-year term, and I resigned before the end of my six-year term because I was going abroad and could't make the meetings. I was going to be writing a book in Italy, and I didn't think I should stay on. So I had a short term. I was chairman when I resigned. After the six-year term you are supposed to be on a thing called the National Parks Advisory Council, but this is pretty much at the pleasure of the secretary, and the secretary makes a great difference.

The advisory board was established by Congress to advise and assist the secretary in all kinds of matters and give him some kind of citizen input, and most of the people on there were historians, architects, wildlife people, biologists, and so on. There's a lot of input that can be given, but Mr. Watt doesn't want input. And several secretaries since Stewart have been up and down on the matter of utilizing the board. It seems to me that it has nowhere near the kind of prestige and power that it used to have when Benny DeVoto and Alfred Knopf were on it, for instance, or when I was on it, or a lot of other people who were intensely interested.

Lage: So it's an advisorship to the secretary, rather than to the Park Service?

Stegner: No, it's to the secretary. As a matter of fact, we found ourselves now and again at loggerheads with the Park Service, because the Park Service had a tendency, like all bureaucracies, to set up the meetings and program us all and get us off on a meeting and have us rubber-stamp what they wanted, and then we didn't always want what they wanted. It's a good bureau, but it isn't infallible.

Lage: It's an interesting bit of American politics, really, your lay board--

Stegner: It is a lay board; it's a citizen board. And we every now and again would, not always to the happiness of the Park Service, insist on executive sessions in which there were no Park Service proctors there, to see on matters of policy how we did feel, and when there was nobody there putting the words in our mouths.

Lage: Do you remember things that came up that were particularly controversial? Does anything stick in your mind?

Stegner: [laughs] Yes, I remember one that we lost, and lost because of Stewart. When I was chairman, probably in 1964, we visited Alaska and all of the potential Alaskan parks and all the active, existing Alaskan parks. And since Alaska was eighty-six per cent, or something, owned by the Department of Interior, we naturally got quite a reception. Everybody was out there with red carpets or flags or shotguns at the railroad stations as we came by. I remember we had a meeting in the train which runs from McKinley Station down to Anchorage, which was owned by the Department of Interior, too, so we had a kind of club car and held meetings, which I was chairing, all the way on down through Alaska.

One of the things that the advisory board did was pass on natural and historical sites, whether they were legitimate and worthy of being included; all of this stuff was prepared for us by the Park Service, but we had to do the deciding, and then recommend to the secretary. Practically all presidents' birthplaces, for instance, turn out to be historical sites, just because it's in the nature of things. That farm in Plymouth, Vermont, where Cal Coolidge was born is just going to be a place of pilgrimage for certain people. But it's always been assumed that you waited until presidents die before you made their birthplaces historical sites, and in this case Lyndon Johnson was still president and the proposal came through to make his birthplace a historical site. So we all voted no. [laughs]

Lage: This was up in Alaska?

Stegner: On the train. And Stewart was along. Stewart was on part of that trip. And--who was the director of the Park Service then? Not Connie Wirth.

Lage: Hartzog?

Stegner: Yes, George Hartzog. George was there. Stan Cain, who had previously been on the advisory board and was then assistant secretary for Stewart. A lot of people. And we all voted no, we shouldn't make Mr. Johnson's birthplace a national historical site, and then we got word from Stewart that we damn well had to. [laughter] So swallow and hold your nose and do it. That's the kind of thing where politics comes into even a board like that. The board itself was absolutely right, I think. The political situation was such that Stewart just couldn't go home without having that done.

Lage: Your word wasn't final on these things, or was it?

Stegner: You asked me if I remember places where it didn't work. [laughter] That's the only place I remember where our recommendation at least wasn't accepted. The recommendation doesn't have to be acted upon,

Stegner: of course. It's only an advisory board, and only the advisory board people in their present six-year term vote. The advisory council may talk and advise and so on, but they don't vote. And when you have come to some kind of decision, you put it in the form of a resolution or a memorandum to the secretary and send it on up. A memorandum is confidential, and a resolution is public. But our memorandum, or resolution, didn't stick in that case.

Lage: That's a good example.

Stegner: Yes, that embarrassed Stewart, too, but he just couldn't go home without that. After all, a vain man in the White House whose vanity would be flattered by that and whose vanity would be very much irritated by what we proposed, could just throw him out of office.

The Advisory Board in Alaska: A Mixed Reception

Lage: Do you recall what kinds of decisions were made on Alaska that trip, or was it just more of a showing--?

Stegner: One of the things we were looking at was the so-called Ramparts Dam. Do you remember that controversy?

Lage: Yes.

Stegner: We went up on the Yukon, to Fort Yukon, and talked with all the locals, none of whom wanted the Ramparts Dam. All the Indians, the few white residents, trappers and so on, they were all strongly opposed to the Ramparts Dam. You get out on those Yukon flats and envisage the great recreational area that's going to be created by the Ramparts Dam, the wind coming across it, you know, it just cuts you in two, a great place to go and sit all day in a boat and fish. [laughter] No, I think we sort of helped kill the Ramparts Dam on that trip just by looking at it. It was a big Alaskan boondoggle.

We didn't get up into the Gates of the Arctic and some of the far north business on that trip, so I didn't see any of that, which later became part of the Alaskan park system. But we went to Glacier Bay, and we were all agreed that had to be a national park. Problems of existing mining claims, of course, were still there. We wanted to get them out, but that is a long process. We went also to Brooks Camp, the Kenai Peninsula, and up in the Wood-Tikchik Lakes, toward Mt. Wrangell, Bristol Bay and Walrus Islands, argued with the Chamber of Commerce in Anchorage, which invited us to dinner in order to denounce us. [laughs]

Lage: They weren't happy with you conservationists even then?

Stegner: Oh no, Anchorage is a terribly reactionary town. Literally. What the devil was the man's name? He was the sole congressman from Alaska, who went with us along that trip, a very amiable fellow from Fairbanks, a Democrat [Ralph Rivers]. The Anchorage Chamber of Commerce was all Republican and all development-minded. They spread out a big red carpet when we came into Anchorage on the train and had us all down to dinner. No sooner had us seated there and our mouths full of food than they began to get up and harangue us and denounce us, denounce the fed influence on Alaska. It got so angry and nasty that Stan Cain as assistant secretary, who was the ranking man there at the moment, had to get up and answer them sort of, you know, as a guest. Eventually, as we left, the congressman from Fairbanks angrily picked up the check; he wouldn't even let these Chamber of Commerce people invite us to dinner. [laughs] He said he wasn't going to permit that, so he picked up the check for the whole party. Anchorage is a reactionary town, and I suspect represents the whole advancing progress front in Alaska.

Lage: That's probably the best introduction you might have had to Alaska!

Stegner: There were many, many good introductions. We had just extraordinary facilities because of Interior's involvement in Alaska, so when we wanted to go up Glacier Bay we had a Bureau of Land Management boat and a Geological Survey boat, the two of them took us on up the bay. When we wanted to go to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, some helicopters came and took us on in. If you wanted to get anywhere, they laid it on. Because the federal people, the bureaucratic people, were talking to the boss, and many of them, of course, were quite agitated to protect the federal lands against some of the kinds of pressure that were being built up in Anchorage and elsewhere. So we did have great facilities for seeing it, but it was a short trip. It was only three weeks. You can't see a place that big in three weeks.

Lage: Do any further memories of your time with Stewart Udall come to mind?

Stegner: Udall as secretary was completely on the side of the environment, a good steward. It is true he was often hampered by the power of certain bureaus, especially Reclamation, and that on occasion environmental groups sued him to enforce or ventilate an issue. But he welcomed even the intransigent environmental people because, as he said, somebody had to take that view in order to balance equally intransigent views from the exploitative side. He was also intensely interested in the literary life, and was a good friend not only to me but to Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Archie MacLeish, and other

Stegner: writers. He took Robert Frost and Bill Meredith to Russia with him, and he tried very hard to get Sandburg's North Carolina place and Frost's Vermont place (Ripton) made into national "poetic" monuments.

Note too that almost as his last act as secretary he urged Lyndon Johnson to upgrade a whole bunch of national monuments into national parks, and make other large-scale additions to the park system. As he told me, "I gave him a chance to go out in style," but he wouldn't take it. The model for all that, I suppose, was the Roosevelt-Pinchot establishment of a whole batter of national forests on the eve of the signing of the bill that would have prevented them. Johnson wasn't quite that bold, or that convinced.

Publishing the Conservation Message

Lage: Why don't we go back to the Sierra Club and your contacts with them and Dave Brower?

Stegner: My first connection with the Sierra Club was through Dave, I'm sure. I knew about it, and I may even have belonged, but I wasn't active in any sense and I hadn't gone out even on any Loma Prieta chapter hikes or anything like that. Maybe one. I guess we went down and climbed Pacheco Peak once with the crowd. But whether that was before or after I got involved in Dinosaur I'm not sure. I think before.

Lage: So Dave's approaching you--?

Stegner: Dave's approaching me got me interested in this, though I had written one or two articles before that. During the early fifties, about 1952--this would have been before the Dinosaur book--I went up to Berkeley and stayed in some hotel, Durant or something, and used Francis Farquhar's library, which is a great library on mountain climbing and mountain history, western history, exploration.

Lage: Most of it in UCLA now.

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Stegner: Francis was very kind to me, and I went over and used his library day after day for a long time. And then when the Beyond the Hundredth Meridian came out, he was enthusiastic about it and gave me a big party, and that's the first time I remember being fully aware of Dave, because Dave was getting interested in Dinosaur, and he found out that we had fooled around in the Green River when we were kids, you know, swum down the Split Mountain Canyon and so on, and he thought that was gay and dashing. [laughter] It wasn't that dashing at all.

Lage: He was probably very happy to find someone who knew that area as well as you.

Stegner: Well, yes, and he's always said that if he'd listened to me then Glen Canyon Dam might not have gone in, because I kept telling him Glen Canyon was a whole lot more worth saving than Dinosaur. But, you know, at the moment Dinosaur was threatened; Glen Canyon wasn't. So that's the way it went. But that's where I first remember being aware of Dave, when he was at that party at Francis's. That was a nice party. I enjoyed meeting all those people, and I enjoyed having my book appreciated. That was somewhat, about a year, I suppose, before the Dinosaur book came along. Because I was in Denmark from March to about September of '54, and the Powell book came out while I was in Denmark sometime.

Lage: After you met Dave, and he got you to write the Dinosaur book, do you recall another involvement after that?

Stegner: Of course, we've been talking about the involvement after 1961 with Stewart Udall. By that time I was pretty deep in it. I had published the Powell book, which was essentially a conservation book and taught me most of what I know about it.

Lage: You did an article for the Bulletin, "Roughriders versus the Bird-watchers."

Stegner: That's right.

Lage: That's '59.

Stegner: Fifty-nine. That was before the Stewart Udall episode but after the Powell. I don't know who got me to do that. I think maybe Francis Farquhar, who was--maybe he was still editing the Bulletin, maybe he wasn't.

Lage: Dave was editing it then.

Stegner: That was also a kind of continuation of the sort of approach that Benny DeVoto had been using, the abuse of the public domain by the Two-gun Desmonds. [laughs]

Lage: With a plea for the wilderness, though?

Stegner: Yes.

Lage: I talked to Dave to ask him what his recollection was of all this, and it wasn't real clear either, but he said that he remembered that you first submitted that to Harper's and they didn't accept it, and then they printed it in the Bulletin. Do you have any recollection of that?

Stegner: I don't have the slightest recollection of that. It's perfectly possible. You know, not everything you send to an editor gets--

Lage: Right. I just wondered if they were tiring of the environmental message. They're certainly opposed to it now.

Stegner: Oh, Harper's has gone kaput. But even while--this is quite incidental but symptomatic--when I was in the secretary's office in the fall of '61, I wanted to do a piece on the need for acquisitions in the park system, and I naturally thought of Harper's because Benny had been there and because I knew Jack Fischer, who was then the editor. I wrote a draft of that, as a matter of fact, not simply a proposal but a draft, and sent it to Jack Fischer. When he came down to Washington on other business, he came over to the office, and we talked about it. He didn't want it because, he said, these are the same old arguments. And I said, "You bet. You know, they never go away, but if you don't keep making the arguments, the results just go away." But he couldn't see it that way. He said it sounds just the way Benny used to sound. He apparently had got tired of Benny's rather clamorous voice in Harper's. That wasn't true of the other editors of Harper's, but apparently it was of Jack.

I don't remember submitting this Birdwatchers, but it's just possible that it may have been. What time was it?

Lage: It was '59 that it came out in the Bulletin.

Stegner: No. It couldn't have been, because I wasn't in the office until '61. I was thinking it might have been the article that I had showed to Jack Fischer when I was in the office. That was another one. That's two that Harper's rejected on me. I'll hold that against them. [laughs]

Recollections of a Stormy Sierra Club Board

Lage: Somehow you got pulled in to run for the Sierra Club board, and that was '64 to '66 you were on the board.

Stegner: That was Ansel Adams that did that to me, and that was a mistake, because I don't have the kind of life that can make meetings. I had to get out of that. Again, I think I went abroad. [laughter] So I was never an effective or a good board member. I found it interesting, but difficult. I just couldn't get loose to get to meetings. I guess I went to one in Los Angeles and two or three up here, but I missed every other meeting, and nobody should be on a board and do that.

Lage: The storm sessions were beginning at that time.

Stegner: Oh yes, the Mineral King business was beginning. The Diablo Canyon thing was beginning. Before I was on the board, I was on the book committee.

Lage: The publications committee?

Stegner: The publications committee. Along with Dave, who was really the spirit of all that. He had got the club into the business of being a publishing house, which was one of the things, of course, that made some of the trouble later. The director of the UC Berkeley Press--

Lage: August Frugé.

Stegner: August Frugé, Martin Litton--I think there were five of us. I've forgotten who the other one was. I used to get up to those meetings when I could. There was always the problem that the more cautious members felt that Dave was willing to take many risks with the club's finances, and then they got uneasy about inventory. You know, what if you get a real dud, you get a warehouse full of books, and the club's entire funds are tied up in dead books. That scared them a little bit. That didn't scare Dave at all. He was absolutely unscarable, and most of his stuff paid off, because he was so energetic that if it started to look stuck he would unstick it. [laughter]

But I remember directly from those meetings going into the board meetings, and Martin was also on the board still, and I remember the sessions on Diablo Canyon and Mineral King. Mineral King I think was pretty much--the resistance to it was pretty much Martin's doing, because he knew the country better than any of us. But Dave and Martin carried the ball on the Diablo Canyon thing, which involved a switch of policy. The club had agreed to something earlier, and now felt that it had to change its position, which again bothered some of the people on the board, because they thought it waffling--you know, you made a deal, you ought to stick with the deal.

Lage: How did you feel about it, coming in more or less as an outsider?

Stegner: I didn't know how I felt about that. I generally do, I guess, agree with Chief Justice John Marshall that a deal's a deal, and if you've agreed to it once, then you shouldn't weasel on it later. But I wasn't very pleased about the Diablo Canyon plant. And all of the latter evidence is that nobody should have been pleased with it. No, I've forgotten how I did vote on that. I probably voted along with Martin and Dave, because they were the people I knew best. But

Stegner: I wasn't an authoritative vote, and I didn't know Mineral King at all. I didn't know Diablo Canyon. All I did know was that the club had in the past made a deal with PG&E, and now it was renegeing on the deal, which I thought was unfortunate. I still do. You shouldn't make deals until you're absolutely sure. But it's like the deal on Marble Canyon and the coal plants. You accept one thing, and you take another with it.

Lage: Then some say you shouldn't choose alternatives, just say no to what you don't like and don't pick the alternative for them.

Stegner: Maybe. Somebody will always offer you a worse alternative.

Dave Brower in Retrospect

Lage: Eventually you seemed to feel that Dave had gone beyond the bounds of proper action.

Stegner: I don't know. I think he probably got sucked into the spirit of the times, which was the sixties, beginning of the seventies, was it--still sixties?

Lage: Sixties, still the end of the sixties.

Stegner: And that he was taking the club on a confrontationist course which probably was not the most productive course it could take. Those were the years when you saw bumper stickers up in the Sierra, you know, "Fuck the Sierra Club," and he was making the club into something which the moment its name was mentioned would raise hackles. He was on the right side, we all agree; it was just a question of tactics. But the thing that bothered some of the people on the board--it bothered Ansel Adams exceedingly--was the risking of club funds in the publications program. Since it turned out that members of the board were legally liable in case the club failed, they were personally liable for a bankruptcy, which they could see coming, and they didn't want that. I wasn't on the board then, so that didn't affect me, but I could understand the position. And I didn't, I guess, agree with Dave on the confrontation business, because it didn't seem to me to be productive. It seemed to me to be productive of strife, but not of resolutions of any kind. The somewhat milder, not necessarily less resolute, but milder approaches might have been more effective.

Lage: So you think it was related to the overall feeling of the sixties, the campus wars and Vietnam--?

Stegner: I think there was some of that. All of us were affected in those years. You couldn't not be. And Dave was getting more and more embattled because he had to fight more and more with the board for every book he put out. He was going to do a book on the Seychelles, as you remember, and some other things, did a two-volume job on the--

Lage: The Galapagos Islands?

Stegner: Yes. And all of those strains put him into conflicts which I never fully understood with individuals on the board. Some members of the board were violently opposed to Dave and thought he was trying to be Captain Ahab, you know, and run the ship in spite of the board in despite of the board, where they felt that the board's function was to tell him what to do and his function was to do it as executive director. Those were conflicts that, as I say, I didn't fully understand, but I talked with Ansel a lot about it and with some other people. Martin was with Dave; Ansel was against him. You had to take your choice.

Lage: Some have said that that editorial you wrote in the Palo Alto Times about Brower was one of the things that really swung the election against him. I don't know if that's true. [the April 1969 elections to the Sierra Club Board of Directors. Brower and his slate failed to win election to the board. Brower consequently resigned as the club's executive director.]

Stegner: I'm afraid Dave thinks so. I was pretty upset at that time, because I did think that the more he got blocked by the board, the more intransigent he became, and that somehow he was getting almost hysterical in his will to impose his will on the board. I didn't express myself very well in that editorial, and later I regretted in many ways having written it, because I liked Dave and I like him yet. I thought he was the most effective partisan that the conservation cause ever had, and he still is.

But I do think he was probably not good for the Sierra Club. It's probably in many ways desirable that he should have left the club and had his own organization formed according to his own purposes, and raised money according to his own likes for his own purposes. I just wish he could have raised ten million more. And I belong to the Friends of the Earth. But it was a question there where it did seem that the actual existence of the Sierra Club was at hazard, and I didn't think Dave had the temperance, as it were, to back off enough to save it.

Lage: Would you have any more to say in assessment of Brower and his impact?

Stegner: He's the chief Druid. He certainly is without any question the chief Druid. And his impact hasn't lessened since he left the club. As a matter of fact, it may even have increased.

Lage: You've mentioned Martin Litton. Do you know him well? Can you comment on his style and impact?

Stegner: Martin is a tough and unswerving partisan like Dave Brower. He is sometimes abrasive and unyielding, but he is never soft, and is generally very effective. In addition, he knows the terrain of California and the West by the square inch--I don't know anyone who knows it better. When he takes a position, he takes it from knowledge. He knew, for instance, Mineral King and Diablo Canyon better than any of the rest of the Sierra Club board, and led the fights on those issues.

III THOUGHTS ON WILDERNESS, ELITISM, ADVOCACY, AND STEWARDSHIP

The Wilderness Letter, 1960: Written in an Afternoon, Known around
the World

- Lage: We've touched on the wilderness letter, which was such an impressive piece of writing I think. Is there more to tell, about what led up to that? I looked at the Living Wilderness issue in 1980, where the letter was reprinted, and you wrote a short introduction talking about it. Do you have anything further to say about what led up to that statement or how the thinking developed?
- Stegner: No. I remember some telephone calls, again, I think, from Dave, and maybe from Dave Pesonen, who was then in charge of the Wildlands Institute at Berkeley and was doing something for the ORRRC [Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission] Report, had been given a commission to produce a report on wilderness and the needs therefore and the reasons therefore, by Laurance Rockefeller. The letter I wrote in an afternoon and sent on up. It did seem that it hit some chords that people wanted struck. The fact that it gets picked up all around the world and used in bulletins and posters and so on--
- Lage: That is interesting, because it seems so much focusing on wilderness as an American--
- Stegner: Well, I've seen it in Treehouse in Kenya. And is it the Kreuger Park? No, some park group in South Africa has been distributing it for years in two or three forms as a poster. Australia's used it as a poster. Canada's used it as a poster.
- Lage: Even though you talk about wilderness as something that shaped the American character and history?
- Stegner: Yes. It doesn't seem to make much difference. If you're trying to defend wildlife and wild land, it seems to work.

Stegner: No, I don't remember much about the letter, and it didn't strike me at the time as anything terribly important, but a lot of people have picked it up since.

Lage: It really did strike a chord. It still strikes a chord when you read it. It's wonderful.

No Apologies for Elitism

Lage: How do you respond to charges that this type of outlook is basically elitist? How do you say that the quiet experience in the wilderness is superior to snowmobiling across the wilderness?

Stegner: Well, (a) it's manifestly less destructive. It leaves fewer tracks. It leaves something for somebody else. The snowmobiling is a kind of momentary destruction, but other kinds of things are more permanently destructive--off-trail bikes and things like that. That whole problem of how one adjusts one's life so as to gain maximum freedom, pleasure, independence, and the rest, for oneself and at the same time not cross anybody else's boundary lines, is involved in this kind of question.

In a way it is elitist, but God help us, the world is--if it weren't for elitists, the world would be full of barbarians, completely full of barbarians. Civilization, culture, intelligence, literature, everything worthwhile, is promoted by special people, and often against the will of lumpenproletariat or barbarians, people who simply don't see things that way, who don't see very much, as a matter of fact. And I guess I would rather be Aristotle than the spearman who killed him. [laughter] I don't think those souls are equal. They may be in the eye of God, but they're not to me.

Lage: So rather than apologize, you don't need to apologize for being elitist or try to say it's not elitist.

Stegner: I don't apologize for being elitist. God knows, my background is about as democratic and lumpenproletariat as you could get. But it does seem to me that the world progresses only through its special people, and that instead of resenting them, it's time we acknowledged them. An Ansel Adams is worth ten thousand of us. We ought to admit that. Dave Brower is worth ten thousand of us, just because he is a very special person. He's a kind of zealot. I think that may be a disadvantage in some ways, but as a partisan, and since I agree with his cause [laughs], he's a very effective partisan. If he were, let us say, a Lebanese Christian, he would be formidable, because he's got that kind of temperament. I don't know where I would be in Lebanon. [laughter]

Shaping a Wilderness Ethic

Lage: Let's not try to solve that. Have you given thought to what creates the birdwatcher instead of the roughrider? You know, you talk about wilderness and its effect on people, but there are those who don't seem to be affected.

Stegner: I think one of the things that creates the birdwatcher is some kind of surmounting of machismo. When you're young, when you're a young man particularly, or when you're a boy on the frontier, as I was, you just kill a lot of things just because you have a gun and you shoot at what moves. Women have less of that, I think, a great deal less, so by and large women are going to save us. [laughs] If we're saved. It takes a lot of men a long time to outwear that, but generally speaking, hunting, the blood sports, that kind of business, wears out in men, and I think what replaces it is some kind of wisdom and some kind of tolerance for other creatures. I know all kinds of hunters who know a lot about animals and who like animals, but who haven't got over the lust to kill them. By the time they get old they generally have. They haven't got over fishing, but they often fish with a barbless hook and return all fish to the water, which is all right. It just seems to me that we're still responding, when our blood is hot, at least, to the kinds of motivations that must have moved us when we first came down out of the trees, that we are the hunter and gatherer people, and the hunting part of it, the chase, is an automatic excitement in us. It certainly was in me when I was young. I think the last thing I shot in my entire life was a skunk that had wandered up through here, and that was twenty-five years ago, and it sickened me. I don't know why I shot the damned thing. Just because I was who I had been.

Why you get so that you want to keep some of the beauty and naturalness of the world is a hard question. Some people obviously never get to that point. Many people do when they're older. Young people have to be taught it surely, almost surely. Because left to themselves, they will chase anything that runs. It was probably better when there were a few things that chased us. It put us in our place a little more, you know, when there were a few wolves and grizzly bears around. Now a wilderness is absolutely safe for us. But not from us.

Lage: Even to helicopter rescues.

Stegner: Oh sure. The safest place in the world. No muggings--

Lage: Safe from the urban scene!

Stegner: Yes, absolutely. No traffic accidents, no muggings, no anything.

Lage: In a sense it has a different meaning now for us, for those of us who love it. It is a refuge.

Stegner: Oh sure, it's a refuge.

Lage: Rather than a place where you're testing yourself.

Stegner: It's not adventure. It is for some kinds of people. But a lot of those testing people, the people who climb Karakorum or whatever, they begin to wear out on those personal testings after a while, and they complain there's just no wilderness left. "If I can't go into space, there's nothing left for me to do." I'm not sure that that's very different from the kind of spirit that moves people on off-road bikes down in the Anza-Borrego Desert. It's fun just to get out there and tear around. It's fun to climb a mountain and prove that you can do it. That's not an argument against climbing mountains, but if that's your principal reason, just to test yourself and your own nerve and muscles and so on, it's a rudimentary and primitive motivation, I think. I think if you sit up there and ruminate, that's another matter. You've gone another step.

Lage: Do you still get out in the wilderness?

Stegner: Climb mountains? No. I'm seventy-four years old. [laughter] No, I don't. I wish I did. I was out in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada last week, though, and it was wonderful. We got there mainly by car and walked about a mile, but how marvelous it is to get out where there's absolutely no sound, just a little wind in dry grass.

Defending the Public Lands

Lage: What about in the seventies and eighties? How active have you been as an advocate in the environmental movement, and what issues have kind of struck a chord for you?

Stegner: I was more into it in the sixties when I was the president of the Committee for Green Foothills locally and on the Sierra Club board regionally and on the National Parks Advisory Board nationally. I was getting it from all sides. I haven't been active that way lately. I do still participate in the Green Foothills campaigns when I know about them. I suppose I'm constantly making public statements, shooting off my mouth, sometimes because people ask me and sometimes whether they do or not. [laughs]

I haven't been active in the national business except to write articles. I'm writing one now on the national park idea for the Living Wilderness--a topical issue that Tom Watkins is going to do

Stegner: on the whole past and future of the parks, which are in danger with Watt in there. They really are. I got something here today about the shooting of mountain lions within national parks, which Watt has approved because they take an occasional sheep or something outside the national park boundaries. If you start shooting mountain lions within the national parks, somebody's going to blow up the Interior Department building. Really. You can't go that far, I don't think.

Lage: You've written about the sagebrush rebellion.

Stegner: I wrote a double piece on the sagebrush rebellion, because the public lands I think are at even greater risk than the national parks. They're not protected by anything. They're not protected by a strong bureau. The BLM [Bureau of Land Management] never had enough money to operate and never had enough time to get itself established. And also all of those vested interests, particularly grazing interests, but also mining, that come in on the public land, put the BLM in a position where it can't enforce rules. It gets a FLPMA [Federal Land Policy and Management Act, 1976] act; it can't enforce it at all. It tries to enforce it and gets a Sagebrush Rebellion. Just [whistles] as automatic as that. I don't know how long it's going to take to cure the cowboys and the miners, who are I should say the least enlightened element in the American populace. Really. With the most arrogant leftover attitudes from the mid-nineteenth century. Just like Mr. Reagan's, actually. He thinks exactly that way. Good old American initiative. Whether it's your land or not.

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Stegner: The whole cowboy industry is a federal subsidy. They're not the independent cowpokes they pretend to be. They're subsidized dependents.

Lage: And they're the ones that talk most about individual initiative.

Stegner: Oh sure. And as Benny DeVoto points out, they assume somehow that everybody in the West also has a vested interest in that myth of independence. All of which is cockeyed. Most of the small ranchers I know are absolutely not that way. The ones who are that way are the ones who have been living on government subsidies for so long that they've come to take them for granted, and who also fly into a rage at the slightest notion that things might change. That's a big vested interest to get rid of. Even though it's not a big business. The cattle business is a bad business, but it's so attractive a living that the barons are going to stay in there as long as they can. [laughter]

The Relationship of Art and Advocacy

- Lage: One thing that's kind of intriguing to me about the breadth of your career is how you reconciled the advocacy with the artist. It seems as if it's been well reconciled.
- Stegner: I don't know. Ansel Adams and I had a public conversation at Stanford a couple of weeks ago. And I was asking him how he felt about that, because everything that Ansel does is automatically not merely a work of art but a statement of advocacy. You can't look at one of his pictures without having conservationist eloquence pour over you. And wherever I do it, I have to do it with different hands, I guess. I don't think that my fiction, or nonfiction for that matter, is very effective advocacy. Partly because I don't want it to be. I keep steering away from advocacy. I try not to make literature into propaganda. On the other hand, the propaganda business is completely necessary. Somebody has to do it, and generally I have to get sort of mad before I do, but I constantly do it. I suppose every year I must write two or three articles of one kind or another in advocacy of some conservationist platform. But I'm always conscious that I am being a journalist when I'm doing that.
- Lage: So you keep this well separated.
- Stegner: It's separated. Maybe it shouldn't be. I don't know.
- Lage: Well, you mentioned the Powell book as being one that certainly raised your consciousness.
- Stegner: There I think I'm coming a little closer to the Ansel thing, because the whole statement of Powell's life is an effective piece of propaganda even though there's no overt urgency in it, and I'm not asking anybody to join anything in it, or send a letter to his congressman.
- Lage: That's a good corollary which I hadn't thought of--Ansel Adams bringing together the artist and the advocate.
- Stegner: He just gives you the moon and Half Dome, and you have to protect it. That would be an admirable position to be in. If I were writing fiction on different themes than the ones that seem to occur to me, if I were writing a Chekhov's Cherry Orchard or something, then the mere business of the sound of chopping the cherry trees at the end of the play would be advocacy as well as art. But I don't seem to do that.
- Lage: But the themes have come in. Not as an advocate, but the environmental people, the concern with the environment in some of your characters--it's a reflection of life, I guess.

Stegner: Yes, and I suppose I indicate, I'm always tipping my hand, I can't possibly not do that. I couldn't be neutral, so that whenever I do a developer in a story he's going to be a [laughs] villain. But that's not conscious. That's--in fact, my deliberations go the other way, but I can't really live up to my deliberations.

Lage: It occurs to me that you come close to the artist-advocate role in Angle of Repose by portraying in such an emotionally complex way the exhausting drive to bring water to arid lands. Do you agree?

Stegner: I suppose there is some inadvertent advocacy in Angle of Repose.* At the very least I let in some of my own responses to unspoiled country. But it should be noted that Oliver Ward is a developer, of a kind that Ronald Reagan would applaud. His vision of a growing civilization in the Boise Valley is the sort of vision that motivated a lot of fairly piratical exploiters in the early days of the West. I treat him sympathetically in the novel because as a human being, with human problems, he enlists my sympathy. He simply wasn't able to know the consequences of some western development. But he did know the difference between a Clarence King--temptable--and a Major Powell--untemptable--and a George Hearst or Horace Tabor--contemptible. If I had been writing that novel as an environmental advocate, I would have made something of that. I made very little--mainly because in the 1870s, '80s, and '90s few people in Oliver Ward's position would have been able to foresee some of the consequences of intensive settlement in the arid West. Powell was unique.

But the book illustrates a dilemma of mine. It would be easy to let my personal convictions dominate the story. I chose not to let them, because I wanted to deal, more or less from within, with actual people and actual history. I suppose it's a case of literary honesty overcoming a perfectly legitimate intellectual and emotional commitment.

Lage: What about other authors today who express a wilderness ethic? Who would you feel are promising?

Stegner: Well, wilderness is not so common, because there aren't very many western writers, and the experience of wilderness is simply, by the nature of American geography and history, very often a western experience. Gary Snyder I think is sound on the matter of wilderness. He allies it with Zen in ways that I might not, but he understands Mr. Coyote. [chuckles] Who else?

*Angle of Repose (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971).

Lage: I'm thinking of Wendell Berry, who--

Stegner: Wendell, yes, I was just about to name Wendell. He's unique, or very close to it. He was another student of mine here, and I'm fond of him. In many ways he's the most distinguished writer who ever came out of the Stanford bunch, and the one who is closest to my own preoccupations with the land. He's of course a farmer. He's a pastoralist really rather than a wilderness advocate. He just likes to get out there with his mules or his Belgian studs or whatever and plough some ground and restore some hillsides and so on. He's off in England now, as a matter of fact, seeing how they run farms and how they've managed to keep land intact without deterioration in some parts of England for two thousand years or more. I hope he finds out.

There are a lot of people who sympathize, who are generally on the Sierra Club side. My son Page is kind of an advocate, and writes some things for the Sierra Club and elsewhere. I don't think of very many fiction writers--

Lage: What about Edward Abbey?

Stegner: Ed is not so much-- Another student of mine.

Lage: He is? You've taught the whole world!

Stegner: Yes, American literature came through that shop. [laughs] Don Moser, too, the editor of the Smithsonian, still another student. He and Abbey were in the same class. Abbey is an advocate in the Dave Brower pattern, even worse. Worse in the sense of more intransigent.

Lage: More partisan?

Stegner: Yes, he's likely to be absolutely outrageous. You can't always take him at face value. But a very lively writer, and I think a strong force. He's got a lot of readers. Has done a lot of good.

Americans and Their Land

Lage: I'm always interested--in your writings you speak of the characteristic American relationship with the earth. Could you elaborate on that?

Stegner: Where did I say that?

Lage: I found it several places.

Stegner: Characteristic? Well, I suppose I must have been thinking of the characteristic confrontation of somebody from a high energy civilization with a relatively untouched environment and with no laws binding anything, no feudalism that tells you that this land has to be protected because this is in fief from so-and-so and you have to deliver him seventy bushels of corn every year to pay off your feudal debt. We weren't bound to the earth in any feudal sense. It's very different from any part of Europe. In America free land was the condition--you couldn't hold people in slavery because they could just vanish into the wilderness, and you couldn't even hold them to a kind of feudal bondage, though many were brought here in the early days on that kind of basis. None of those systems lasted, simply because, as Jefferson said, it was a country with plenty of land and little labor. When you've got lots of land and little labor, the land will just swallow up the labor, and the labor will go free. Where you've got little land and lots of labor, then land begins to be treated in the Japanese fashion, say. It's a very different thing. And I think I must have been thinking in those terms.

The grandiose notion of opulence, of unending plenty that the whole history of the continent has engendered up to fairly recently, and which in the West is still pretty plausible because you can go out in the Black Rock Desert and look thirty miles and not see anything but empty space. All through the public lands in the West, in the arid parts of the West, that's still true, because there's nothing much that anybody can do with that arid land, and that space is preserved by its own limitations. And also by the fact that it has been federal land from the beginning. If it had been like Texas, then it would be like Texas now, all chopped up into little things and half of them abandoned, you know, but the spaciousness gone because it would be interrupted by constant little attempts at human improvement. What I'm thinking of is the notion of unlimited opportunity on vast open spaces, which produces maybe a kind of largeness of mind and may also produce real wastefulness, inability to think beyond the immediate grab.

Lage: And I think your idea of having no tradition of stewardship--

Stegner: That's forming. We've had, what, four--nearly five hundred years of it now. In 1992 it'll be five hundred years since Columbus, and in a half millenium you ought to be able to develop something. But it certainly isn't anywhere near the uniform respect for land that almost anybody from Europe or any European country I know would have.

Everybody talks--Stewart Udall used to talk at length about stewardship. Being a Mormon, he had some notion of it, because Mormons did have some notion of it. They were an agricultural

Snegner: people. They've lost some of it now, but his family in Arizona, I'm sure, had a respect for land because they had to work for it and with it in order to make it pay. A lot of his stewardship comes from the mere labor expended on it, as Wendell's does. Wendell is living on land that his grandfather farmed, and he wants to bring it back to something like--as if to do penance for his ancestors, who were slaveholders and land wasters. Wendell's going to do it with his own two hands before he's through, and have a model farm.

I think what I had in mind was the wastefulness, the largeness, the sense of unlimited possibilities for the future. One of the things that makes the sagebrush rebels most angry is the notion of limits, because those are the most unlimited people. They live out in the widest open spaces, which they don't even have to own.
[laughter]

Lage: So it's the people from the urban centers that are often coming in and putting on environmental constraints.

Stegner: Very often, and that's another cause of antagonism, of course, because it means city fellers against country fellers. It means academics and eggheads against people who quote "know the country." But those people who know the country have gone a long way toward ruining it in lots of places, too. So I don't think they know as much about it as they say they do. I would trust a BLM man, you know, who'd taken a degree in range management at Utah State, a whole lot ahead of any of those cowboys.

Environmental Groups in the Eighties

Lage: Would you have any particular assessment of the role of the conservation groups, particularly the Sierra Club, now? Are they performing the mission that they should?

Stegner: They're a little in disarray, I think, partly because the present administration is so actively hostile to environmentalists, as they call them, but to the environment, too, that the environmental groups are all swimming upstream, and finding it a little bit hard to make any headway, because it's not upon Congress that they have to work. It's generally speaking within the administrative part of the Interior Department, which can simply, like a district attorney, choose not to enforce a law. They can just disband the legal staff of the EPA, and there we go. Nobody's there to do anything about anything. If you choose not to enforce laws, and you're in a position as strong as that of the secretary of the Interior, you can do an awful lot of harm. The only thing we can do is holler

Stegner: against Watt and try to get him out. But obviously you're not going to get him out until the Reagan administration goes out, because, I think, he's doing exactly what the Reagan administration wants him to do.

Lage: In this case do you think that being a strong advocate rather than seeking a middle ground is preferable?

Stegner: I don't mean to disparage being a strong advocate. It's only tactics that I'm talking about. If you adopt tactics which make not merely your opponents but large elements in the population shrink back and say, "Oh well, just another Sierra Clubber," then I think you're doing your cause harm, because the manifest purpose of groups like that has to be public education. You don't do it without the votes. You can do quite a lot by lobbying congressmen, particularly if you're a group of three hundred thousand strong, as the Sierra Club is, but that isn't going to get you all the way. You have to have an awful lot of support from people who are not members of the Sierra Club in and out of Congress. You have to have it. And there may be reactions if you challenge people too bluntly, particularly where you may yourself be a little offbase, you may be going a little too far, you may be considering too little the point of view of workmen, let us say, blacks, whoever else, who think of environmentalists as elitists. I think there is a little bit of that stigma attached when we go too far.

I talked with the head of the AFL-CIO in Montana a couple of years ago, three years ago or so. A rather strange fellow, born in Butte, you know, a real toughy from the mines, but a very philosophical man, and he said, "We've got to get together. Labor and the environmentalists can't afford to be the way they too often are. I recognize," he said, "that the environment matters a hell of a lot to me, because ultimately the future is built into or comes out of it, but I don't find many situations where the environmental groups deliberately come to labor asking labor's help in a cause." He said, "They would get it more often than they think they would. They wouldn't always get it, but they would sometimes."

And that's probably true likewise with minority groups and others who, being on the very bottom of the ladder, often have the shortest view. They have to, because you know, survival is what they're looking at. They're not looking at the best view; they're looking at survival. I think probably any environmental group ought to recognize that and ought to accommodate itself in some way to the absolute needs of that absolute floor population.

Lage: So that would mean a broad agenda for an environmental group?

Stegner: It would mean an absolutely broad agenda. It's not just aesthetics, no. The place where environmental groups get the strongest public backing now is in things like clean air, where everybody's involved and everybody understands it, because everybody knows somebody with emphysema or whatever. The response when the Clean Air Act was under attack recently was not a Sierra Club or environmental group response, but a public response. And when you get that on other issues, when you get it on park issues or public lands issues, then there's nothing even the secretary of Interior can do. But it's hard to know how to get that unity.

Lage: That's right. I think Reagan is helping bring the environmentalists into coalition with other groups.

Stegner: Yes, but the last election wasn't as good as I thought and hoped it was going to be. I really wanted it to swing around and blow back in his face.

Lage: It wasn't enough of a signal, was it?

Stegner: No, not quite.

Lage: Especially in California. Any other thoughts to add? I've run out of questions, but you might have some profound thoughts at the end here.

Stegner: No, I don't really have any profound thoughts. If I have, I've probably aired them.

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SAGA OF A LETTER

The Geography of Hope

Wallace Stegner

WHEN I WROTE my "wilderness letter" to David Pesonen 20 years ago, I had probably been prompted to do so by David Brower. He was usually the cattleprod that woke me from other preoccupations and from my workaholicism and directed my attention to something important. In this case what he woke me to was close to my heart. I had been lucky enough to grow up next to wilderness, or quasi-wilderness, of several kinds, and I was prepared to argue for the preservation of wilderness not simply as a scientific reserve, or a land-bank, or a playground, but as a spiritual resource, a leftover from our frontier origins that could reassure us of our identity as a nation and a people. The Wilderness Bill, already debated for years and the subject of hundreds of official pages, had not yet passed. The ORRRC report,* with its inventory of what remained of our outdoors and its promise of reorganization of the bureaus managing it, seemed a good place to put in a word.

By luck or accident or the mysterious focusing by which ideas whose time has come reach many minds at the same time, my letter struck a chord. Before it had time to appear in the ORRRC report, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall had picked it up and used it as the basis of a speech before a wilderness conference in San Francisco, and the Sierra Club had published it as a document of that conference. It was published in the *Washington Post* and the ORRRC report, and I included it in my collection of essays, *The Sound of Mountain Water*. Before long, some friend of mine saw it posted on the wall in a Kenya game park. From there, someone in South Africa or Rhodesia carried it home and had an artist named C. B. Cunningham surround it with drawings of African animals and birds, and turned it into a poster which the Natal Park Board, a Rhodesian kindness-to-animals organization and perhaps other groups have distributed all over south and east Africa. A quotation from it captions a Canadian poster, with a magnificent George Calef photograph of caribou crossing river ice; and I have heard of, but not seen, a similar Australian poster issued with the same intent. The Sierra Club borrowed its last four words, "the geography of hope," as the title for Eliot Porter's book of photographs of Baja California. Altogether, this letter, the labor of an afternoon, has gone

farther around the world than other writings on which I have spent years.

I take this as evidence not of special literary worth, but of an earnest, world-wide belief in the idea it expresses. There are millions of people on every continent who feel the need of what Sherwood Anderson called "a sense of bigness outside ourselves"; we all need something to take the shrillness out of us.

Returning to the letter after 20 years, I find that my opinions have not changed. They have actually been sharpened by an increased urgency. We are 20 years closer to showdown. Though the Wilderness Bill in which we all placed our hopes was passed, and though many millions of acres have been permanently protected—the magnificent Salmon River wilderness only a few weeks ago—preservation has not moved as fast as it should have, and the Forest Service, in particular, has shown by its reluctance and foot-dragging that it often puts resource use above preservation. Its proposed wilderness areas have consistently been minimal, and RARE II was a travesty.

Nevertheless, something saved. And something still to fight for.

And also, since the BLM Organic Act, another plus-minus development. It is now possible that out of the deserts and dry grasslands managed by the BLM there may be primitive areas set aside as wilderness, as I suggested in my letter to Pesonen and as some of us proposed to Secretary Udall as early as 1961. Unhappily, the Organic Act was contemporary with the energy crisis and the growing awareness that the undeveloped country in the Rocky Mountain states is one of the greatest energy mines on earth. That discovery, at a time of national anxiety about energy sources, has brought forward individuals, corporations, and conglomerates all eager to serve their country by strip mining the BLM wasteland, or drilling it for oil and gas. Economic temptation begets politicians willing to serve special economic interests, and they in turn bring on a new wave of states'-rights agitation, this time nicknamed the Sagebrush Rebellion. Its purpose, as in the 1940s when Bernard DeVoto headed the resistance to it, (it was then called Landgrab) is to force the transfer of public lands from federal control to the control of the states, which will know how to make their resources available to those who will know what to do with them. After that they can be returned to the public for expensive rehabilitation.

The Sagebrush Rebellion is the worst enemy not only

**Outdoor Recreation for America, A Report to the President and to the Congress by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission*, U.S. Government Printing Office, January, 1962.

of long-range management of the public lands, but of wilderness. If its counterpart in the 1940s had won, we would have no wilderness areas at all, and deteriorated national forests. If it wins in the 1980s we will have only such wilderness as is already formally set aside. Federal bureaus are imperfect human institutions, and have sins to answer for, and are not above being influenced by powerful interests. Nevertheless they represent the public interest, by and large, and not corporate interests anxious to exploit public resources at the public's expense.

In my letter to David Pesonen 20 years ago I spoke with some feeling about the deserts of southern Utah—Capitol Reef, the San Rafael Swell, the Escalante Desert, the Aquarius Plateau. That whole area has been under threat for nearly a decade, and though the Kaiparowits Complex was defeated and the Intermountain Power Project forced to relocate northward into the Sevier Desert near Lynndyl, the Union Pacific and 13 other companies are still pushing to mine the coal in the Kaiparowits Plateau, surrounded by national parks; and a group of utilities wants to open a big strip mine at Alton, four miles from Bryce, and a 500-megawatt power plant in Warner Valley, 17 miles from Zion, and a 2,000-megawatt plant north of Las Vegas, and two slurry pipelines to serve them. The old forest road over the Aquarius is being paved in from both ends, the equally

beautiful trail over the Hightop from Salina to Fish Lake is being widened and improved. Our numbers and our energy demands inexorably press upon this country as beautiful as any on earth, country of an Old Testament harshness and serenity.

It is in danger of being made—of helping to make itself—into a sacrifice area. Its air is already less clear, its distances less sharp. Its water table, if these mines and plants and pipelines are created, will sink out of sight, its springs will dry up, its streams will shrink and go intermittent. But there will be more blazing illumination along the Las Vegas Strip, and the little Mormon towns of Wayne and Garfield and Kane Counties will acquire some interesting modern problems.

What impresses me after 20 years is how far the spoiling of that superb country has already gone, and how few are the local supporters of the federal agencies which are the only protection against it. They would do well to consider how long the best thing in their lives has been preserved for them by federal management, and how much they will locally lose if the Sagebrush Rebellion wins. Furthermore, the land that the Sagebrush Rebellion wants transferred, the chickenhouse that it wants to put under the guard of the foxes, belongs as much to me, or to a grocer in Des Moines, or a taxi driver in Newark, as to anyone else. And I am not willing to see it wrecked just to increase corporate profits and light Las Vegas.

Wilderness Letter

Los Altos, Calif.
Dec. 3, 1960

David E. Pesonen
Wildland Research Center
Agricultural Experiment Station
243 Mulford Hall
University of California
Berkeley 4, Calif.

Dear Mr. Pesonen:

I believe that you are working on the wilderness portion of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission's report. If I may, I should like to urge some arguments for wilderness preservation that involve recreation, as it is ordinarily conceived, hardly at all. Hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain-climbing, camping, photography, and the enjoyment of natural scenery will all, surely, figure in your report. So will the wilderness as a genetic reserve, a scientific yardstick by which we may measure the world in its natural balance against the world in its man-made imbalance. What I want to speak for is not so much the wilderness uses, valuable as those are, but the wilderness *idea*, which is a resource in itself. Being an intangible and spiritual resource, it will seem mystical to the practical-minded—but then anything that cannot be moved by a bulldozer is likely to seem mystical to them.

I want to speak for the wilderness idea as something that has helped form our character and that has certainly shaped our history as a people. It has no more to do with recreation than churches have to do with recreation, or than the strenuousness and optimism and expansiveness of what historians call the "American Dream" have to do with recreation.

Wilderness Letter

Nevertheless, since it is only in this recreation survey that the values of wilderness are being compiled, I hope you will permit me to insert this idea between the leaves, as it were, of the recreation report.

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

We are a wild species, as Darwin pointed out. Nobody ever tamed or domesticated or scientifically bred us. But for at least three millennia we have been engaged in a cumulative and ambitious race to modify and gain control of our environment, and in the process we have come close to domesticating ourselves. Not many people are likely, any more, to look upon what we call "progress" as an unmixed blessing. Just as surely as it has brought us increased comfort and more material goods, it has brought us spiritual losses, and it threatens now to become the Frankenstein that will destroy us. One means of sanity is to retain a hold on the natural world, to remain, insofar as we can, good animals. Americans still have that chance, more than many peoples; for while we were demonstrating ourselves the most efficient and ruthless environment-busters in history, and slashing and burning and cutting our way through a wilderness continent, the wilderness was working on us. It remains in us as surely as Indian names remain on the land. If the abstract dream of human liberty and human dignity became, in America, something more than an abstract dream, mark it down at least partially to the fact that we were in subtle ways subdued by what we conquered.

The Connecticut Yankee, sending likely candidates from King Arthur's unjust kingdom to his Man Factory for rehabilitation, was over-optimistic, as he later admitted. These things cannot be forced, they have to grow. To make such a man, such a democrat, such a believer in human individual dignity, as Mark Twain himself, the frontier was necessary, Hannibal and the Mississippi and Virginia City, and reaching out from those the wilderness; the wilderness as opportunity and as idea, the thing that has helped to make an American different from and, until we forget it in the roar of our industrial cities, more fortunate than other men. For an American, insofar as he is new and different at all, is a civilized man who has renewed himself in the wild. The American experience has been the confrontation by old peoples and cultures of a world as new as if it had just risen from the sea. That gave us our hope and our excitement, and the hope and excitement can be passed on to newer Americans, Americans who never saw any phase of the frontier. But only so long as we keep the remainder of our wild as a reserve and a promise—a sort of wilderness bank.

As a novelist, I may perhaps be forgiven for taking literature as a reflection, indirect but profoundly true, of our national consciousness. And our literature, as perhaps you are aware, is sick, embittered, losing its mind, losing its faith. Our novelists are the declared enemies of their society. There has hardly been a serious or important novel in this century that did not repudiate in part or in whole American technological culture for its commercialism, its vulgarity, and the way in which it has dirtied a clean continent



Wallace Stegner at home.

and a clean dream. I do not expect that the preservation of our remaining wilderness is going to cure this condition. But the mere example that we can as a nation apply some other criteria than commercial and exploitative considerations would be heartening to many Americans, novelists or otherwise. We need to demonstrate our acceptance of the natural world, including ourselves; we need the spiritual refreshment that being natural can produce. And one of the best places for us to get that is in the wilderness where the fun houses, the bulldozers, and the pavements of our civilization are shut out.

Sherwood Anderson, in a letter to Waldo Frank in the 1920s, said it better than I can. "Is it not likely that when the country was new and men were often alone in the fields and the forest they got a sense of bigness outside themselves that has now in some way been lost. . . . Mystery whispered in the grass, played in the branches of trees overhead, was caught up and blown across the American line in clouds of dust at evening on the prairies. . . . I am old enough to remember tales that strengthen my belief in a deep semi-religious influence that was formerly at work among our people. The flavor of it hangs over the best work of Mark Twain. . . . I can remember old fellows in my home town speaking feelingly of an evening spent on the big empty plains. It had taken the shrillness out of them. They had learned the trick of quiet. . . ."

We could learn it too, even yet; even our children and grandchildren could learn it. But only if we save, for just such absolutely non-recreational, impractical, and mystical uses as this, all the wild that still remains to us.

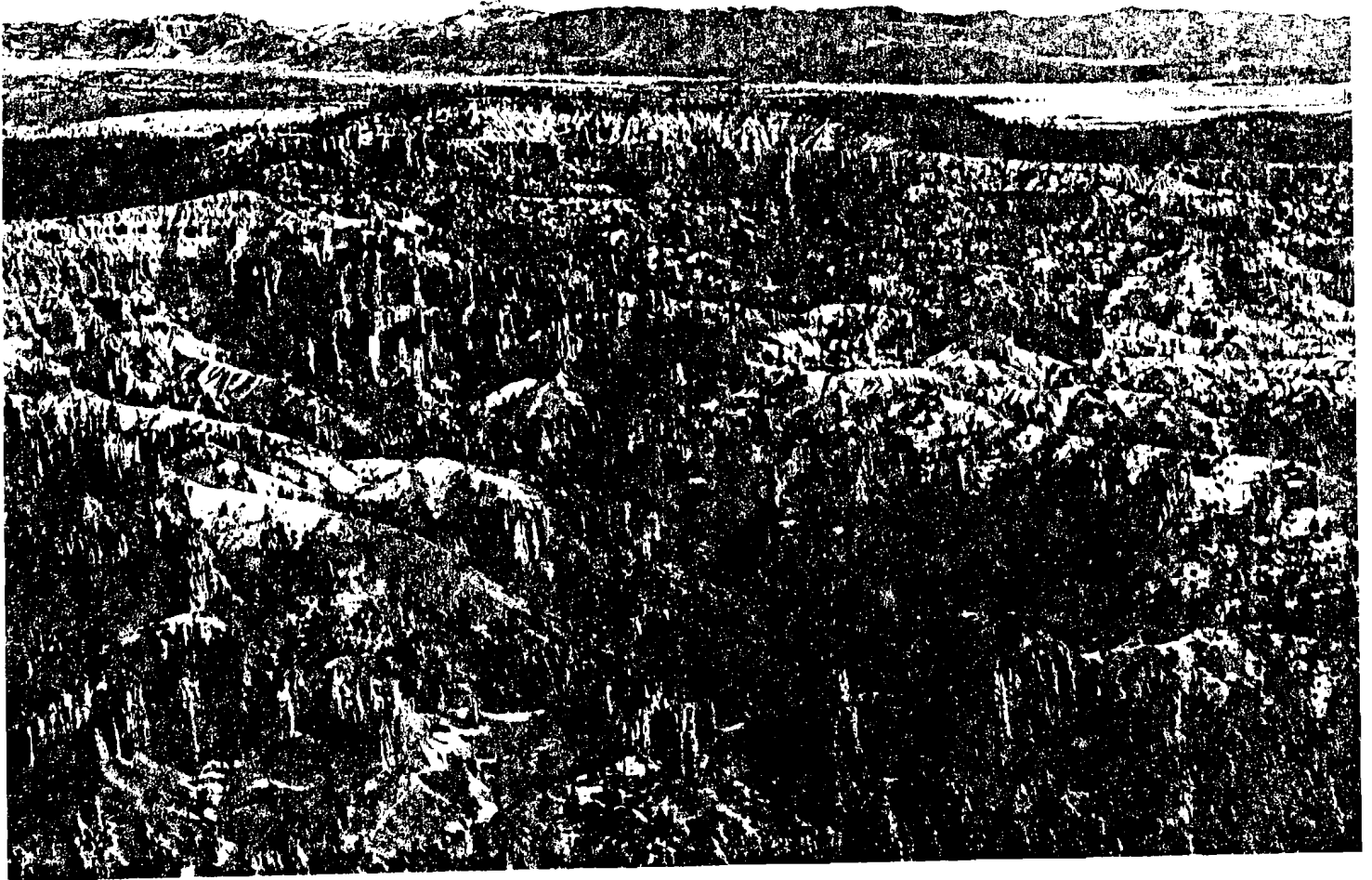
It seems to me significant that the distinct downturn in our literature from hope to bitterness took place almost at the precise time when the frontier officially came to an end, in 1890, and when the American way of life had begun to turn strongly urban and industrial. The more urban it has become, and the more frantic with technological change, the sicker and more embittered our literature, and I believe our people, have become. For myself, I grew up on the empty plains of Saskatchewan and Montana and in the mountains of Utah, and I put a very high valuation on what those places gave me. And if I had not been able periodically to renew myself in the mountains and deserts of western America I would be very nearly bughouse. Even when I can't get to the back country, the thought of the colored deserts of southern Utah, or the reassurance that there are still stretches of prairie where the world can be instantaneously perceived as disk and bowl, and where the little but intensely important human being is exposed to the five directions and the thirty-six winds, is a positive consolation. The idea alone can sustain me. But as the wilderness areas are progressively exploited or "improved," as the jeeps and bulldozers of uranium prospectors scar up the deserts and the roads are cut into the alpine timberlands, and as the remnants of the unspoiled and natural world are progressively eroded, every such loss is a little death in me. In us.

I am not moved by the argument that those wilderness areas which have already been exposed to grazing or mining are already deflowered, and so might as well be "harvested." For mining I cannot say much good except that its operations are generally short-lived.

Wilderness Letter

The extractable wealth is taken and the shafts, the tailings, and the ruins left, and in a dry country such as the American West the wounds men make in the earth do not quickly heal. Still, they are only wounds; they aren't absolutely mortal. Better a wounded wilderness than none at all. And as for grazing, if it is strictly controlled so that it does not destroy the ground cover, damage the ecology, or compete with the wildlife it is in itself nothing that need conflict with the wilderness feeling or the validity of the wilderness experience. I have known enough range cattle to recognize them as wild animals; and the people who herd them have, in the wilderness context, the dignity of rareness; they belong on the frontier, moreover, and have a look of rightness. The invasion they make on the virgin country is a sort of invasion that is as old as Neolithic man, and they can, in moderation, even emphasize a man's feeling of belonging to the natural world. Under surveillance, they can belong; under control, they need not deface or mar. I do not believe that in wilderness areas where grazing has never been permitted, it should be permitted; but I do not believe either that an otherwise untouched wilderness should be eliminated from the preservation plan because of limited existing uses such as grazing which are in consonance with the frontier condition and image.

Utah's Aquarius Plateau viewed across a portion of the spectacular rockscape of Bryce Canyon National Park.




Let me say something on the subject of the kinds of wilderness worth preserving. Most of those areas contemplated are in the national forests and in high mountain country. For all the usual recreational purposes, the alpine and forest wildernesses are obviously the most important, both as genetic banks and as beauty spots. But for the spiritual renewal, the recognition of identity, the birth of awe, other kinds will serve every bit as well. Perhaps, because they are less friendly to life, more abstractly nonhuman, they will serve even better. On our Saskatchewan prairie, the nearest neighbor was four miles away, and at night we saw only two lights on all the dark rounding earth. The earth was full of animals—field mice, ground squirrels, weasels, ferrets, badgers, coyotes, burrowing owls, snakes. I knew them as my little brothers, as fellow creatures, and I have never been able to look upon animals in any other way since. The sky in that country came clear down to the ground on every side, and it was full of great weathers, and clouds, and winds, and hawks. I hope I learned something from knowing intimately the creatures of the earth; I hope I learned something from looking a long way, from looking up, from being much alone. A prairie like that, one big enough to carry the eye clear to the sinking, rounding horizon, can be as lonely and grand and simple in its forms as the sea. It is as good a place as any for the wilderness experience to happen; the vanishing prairie is as worth preserving for the wilderness idea as the alpine forests.

So are great reaches of our western deserts, scarred somewhat by prospectors but otherwise open, beautiful, waiting, close to whatever God you want to see in them. Just as a sample, let me suggest the Robbers' Roost country in Wayne County, Utah, near the Capitol Reef National Monument. In that desert climate the dozer and jeep tracks will not soon melt back into the earth, but the country has a way of making the scars insignificant. It is a lovely and terrible wilderness, such a wilderness as Christ and the prophets went out into; harshly and beautifully colored, broken and worn until its bones are exposed, its great sky without a smudge of taint from Technocracy, and in hidden corners and pockets under its cliffs the sudden poetry of springs. Save a piece of country like that intact, and it does not matter in the slightest that only a few people every year will go into it. That is precisely its value. Roads would be a desecration, crowds would ruin it. But those who haven't the strength or youth to go into it and live can simply sit and look. They can look two hundred miles, clear into Colorado*; and looking down over the cliffs and canyons of the San Rafael Swell and the Robbers' Roost they can also look as deeply into themselves as anywhere I know. And if they can't even get to the places on the Aquarius Plateau where the present roads will carry them, they can simply contemplate the *idea*, take pleasure in the fact that such a timeless and uncontrolled part of earth is still there.

These are some of the things wilderness can do for us. That is the reason we need to put into effect, for its preservation, some other principle than the principles of exploitation or "usefulness" or even recreation. We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.

Very sincerely yours,



Wallace Stegner won a 1972 Pulitzer Prize with his novel "Angle of Repose" and has received numerous other awards. His many books include "The Uneasy Chair," a biography of conservationist Bernard DeVoto. "The Sound of Mountain Water," a book of essays including the wilderness letter, was republished this year (Dutton, \$6.95 paper).

*Not any more, thanks to the power plants at Four Corners and Page. —W.S.

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