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WILDERNESS KEEPING BY WILDERNESS EDUCA-  
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Twenty-five years ago Joshua Miner, a founder of Outward Bound USA, wrote that "We train *through* the mountains and not *for* them..." (Miner, 1964). Outward Bound aimed to use a wilderness experience to help its students grow in confidence and personal competence. Whether they learned anything about mountains or wilderness was incidental. The quarter century since Miner wrote these words has witnessed a large growth in the use of mountains and other wildlands for such education. Tens of thousands of people enter the wilds in organized schools searching for insights into themselves.

While Miner and his colleagues were building their school, conservationists were battling for legislative protection for the "mountains" so important as a resource for education. They achieved a measure of this protection in 1964 with passage of the Wilderness Act in the U.S. As of 1990, there are more than ninety million acres of official wilderness in the U.S., yet even as these acres are protected from mining, logging, and other development, there is concern for the wilderness values such as naturalness and solitude for which these lands are protected (Cordell and Hendee, 1980).

Wilderness lands are, in many places, being used and degraded by people who love and value them. Fragile vegetation is trampled by too many lug-soled boots. Limbs are stripped from trees to fuel campfires. Trails widen in moist meadows until they become large, ugly brown scars. Water pollution increases and solitude is often impossible because of too many noisy and thoughtless wilderness neighbours. Some users even want a tame wilderness. In Washington's North Cascades, for instance, an argument rages over whether to encourage the return of the grizzly to a large block of grizzly habitat from which they were driven decades ago. The debate is fuelled by concerns of some wilderness travellers that grizzlies in "their" wilderness will increase danger and reduce their ability to enjoy themselves. Such threats to the integrity, beauty and wildness of wilderness indicate that this scarce and limited resource cannot be protected only by laws and boundaries.

Management agencies like the U.S. Forest Service are responding to the problems created by too much use and ill-behaved users. Fires are increasingly being banned, numbers of users limited, and permits required. Recently, for instance, the author arrived at a trailhead only to be greeted by a prominent sign informing him that *day use* permits were required. Elaborate signs are increasing in size and number at trailheads as managers try to send people where they want them and to educate them about good backcountry behaviour. Managers call

this the "indirect" approach to management of wilderness users - inform and educate rather than control and direct. Increasingly, though, control and direction occurs, and casualties of this situation are not only the accessible beauty spots of wilderness and the experiences of silence and solitude, but also the very "freedom of the hills" which so many seek there.

Experiential educators are a large, important and growing wilderness user group, and the time has come for them to teach *for* the mountains as well as *through* them. They must teach responsibility for nature and wildland values. They must help their clients learn the special lessons about nature and human nature which may be revealed in wild places, lessons which may help them back home to do their part to assure sustainability of nature and civilization. Education in wilderness can help build ever greater appreciation of the values preserved in wild nature such as biological diversity, ecological stability and the wonder and excitement that came with encounters with "vast and titanic" nature, as Henry Thoreau called it in *Walden*. Such education can provide perspective on how humans can and should relate to the underlying nature which nurtures them. Students can learn the meaning of conservation, stewardship, and sustainability, and all of this can be done while pursuing the personal knowledge that Miner viewed as the primary purpose of the Outward Bound experience (Miles, 1987).

Educators who use wild places for teaching can do much to assure that such places remain wild and beautiful, healthy natural systems which support plants and animals threatened nearly everywhere else by human activity. They can and must educate themselves, their students and land managers on how to use wilderness while nurturing wildness there. Offered here are suggestions gleaned from the author's personal experience and from the growing literature devoted to this problem.

## Basic Principles of Teaching For Wilderness

1. Wilderness is a finite resource requiring constant care and stewardship by all who go there. As Will Rogers said of land, "They ain't making any more of it." The National Wilderness Preservation System is growing, but the actual wilderness acreage is declining. There will likely never be more than at present.
2. The opportunity to teach in wilderness is a privilege, a rare gift, and thus carries with it great responsibility. Those who travel in wildlands must care for them. If they do not, then who will?
3. Wilderness should be used for education only when the lessons to be taught can best be learned there. Programs must be matched to places.
4. The ultimate salvation of wilderness lies in caring for Earth generally. Students must learn that their actions on the environment at home bear

directly on the future of wilderness. Islands of naturalness surrounded by degraded environments cannot endure.

5. Use of a wild place inevitably creates an impact upon that place. This impact, even when the user consciously tries to minimize it, is a small increment in the long-term change and degradation of wild places. One solution to this is to consciously seek ways to mitigate these incremental impacts through good works for wilderness, such as restoration, clean-up and similar positive actions in the field. Wilderness educators must teach the mitigation and "no net-loss" approaches to wilderness use (Miles, 1988).

Another necessary part of the solution involves political action, for forces are at work to reduce wilderness, to convert the wild to the "useful" (read, "economically beneficial"). Political action has been critical to protecting wilderness up to the present, and may be even more crucial in the future. The political story can be told and students urged to use their growing personal power (such as the empowerment gained from their wilderness experience) to work in political arenas on behalf of wilderness and the environment in general, as well as on other important political issues.

## Preserving Wildness and Minimizing Impact

After the boundary is drawn around a piece of wilderness, the paradoxical enterprise of wilderness "management" must begin. The managers are usually government people, and their aim is to allow use of the wilderness while maintaining the values for which the wilderness area was established. Their greatest challenge is to do this management without reducing the quality of the experience for the wilderness user who often goes to wildlands to escape management.

Wilderness educators can and must work with these managers. Education is, in fact, one of the major tools of management, and a very desirable one (Fazio, 1979). In theory, the more users understand what they must do to maintain wilderness values, the more likely they will be to voluntarily care for them and the less managers will have to resort to active regulation. A goal of both users and managers is self-regulation.

The following are suggestions as to how wilderness educators might work with managers:

1. Adopt self-regulation as an organizational goal. This involves learning what managing agencies think are the best practices for responsible wilderness travel. A wilderness program might, for instance, adopt a policy of no campfires in sub-alpine regions under any but the most dire emergency

situations. Discussion with managers and constructive criticism of their programs as well as thorough organizational self-examination may be part of this self-regulation. The educational organization and the agency must see themselves as partners in using and maintaining the scarce wilderness resource.

2. Insist on consistency of management between agencies and throughout the Wilderness Preservation System. The National Park Service and Forest Service, for instance, should be consistent in the requirements for visitors, especially in areas where wilderness units under their management are adjacent to each other. Different wilderness environments (lakes, deserts, seashores, mountains) require measures specific to them, and users and managers must work together to understand the special requirements of each place and establish fair and effective approaches (Hampton & Cole, 1988). Users need consistent and predictable approaches and must work with managers to achieve them. Educators can assist agencies in developing consistent *educational* approaches throughout the system.
3. Knowledge of wilderness problems and solutions to them is at an early stage of development. Managers need help in acquiring resources to do research necessary to identify the most effective ways to avoid and to mitigate degradation of wilderness. Wilderness educators must work together to assure that more resources are allocated to wilderness research. At the same time, they should insist that wilderness management agencies raise wilderness research in their list of research priorities.
4. Training of staff for wilderness schools should include an extensive element about how to travel responsibly in wilderness and how to teach students about doing so. Agencies should require such training as a condition of issuing special use permits, and should devise ways to assess the effectiveness of staff training about responsible wilderness use.
5. Many of the most experienced wilderness travellers are instructors for wilderness schools. They know from experience what needs to be done to reduce and mitigate impacts. The National Outdoor Leadership School has taken the lead in developing and disseminating information about how to travel responsibly in wilderness. *Soft Paths* (Hampton and Cole, 1989) is an excellent example of such work. Wilderness schools should go a step further and work with agencies to develop guidelines on how users might work to mitigate their inevitable impacts. These guidelines should be published and distributed by the agencies when they issue permits.
6. Wilderness educators might work with managers to develop regional wilderness education teams to tailor training schemes to the particular challenges of specific regions. Such teams might include representatives from management agencies as well as resource people from outside agencies. Experienced educators from wilderness schools should serve on these teams.

This service function is a direct way schools can work toward the reduction of their impacts. The teams should work with schools, youth groups, outdoor recreation clubs and other organizations who use wilderness.

## Finding the Lesson in the Field

The educator training *through* the mountains can educate; for them without sacrificing the program's personal growth goals. Incorporating this goal into the program mission is the first step. Once this goal is affirmed, many opportunities will present themselves. Effective education for wilderness is always a combination of planned and serendipitous programming. No comprehensive list of techniques for accomplishing the goal can be presented here, but several general suggestions are offered:

1. A central lesson to teach is that wilderness is not just a "resource" for humans but a living community with its own needs. What animals and plants live here, and why are they here rather than somewhere else? What do they need to survive? There is the possibility, for instance, that grizzly bear and gray wolf populations might be restored to the wilderness areas of the North Cascade mountains of Washington state. Should this be encouraged? Why or why not? Nearly every wild area sustains species which depend on the naturalness of the place. These can be described as a way of pointing out that wild places serve purposes other than the satisfaction of purely human needs.
2. Another lesson which can be taught effectively in wilderness is that humans are an integral part of, dependent upon, and responsible for the welfare of the biotic community. The wilderness experience involves briefly stepping out of the human-built and dominated environment where people believe they are separate from and in control of nature. In wilderness, new views of nature can be examined. Native people at one time lived in many of today's wild areas. How did they view nature? How did their view differ from ours today? What part of their view might be usefully adopted today so as to assure the "beauty, integrity and stability" of the environment. What does this last phrase, used by Aldo Leopold to describe the goal of lands ethics, mean to us? Emphasis must be placed on transferring these ideas back home so that students have a changed view of the human relationship to the natural world. Wilderness experience can thus be a powerful element of a person's overall environmental education.
3. Once students have been introduced to the idea that they are citizens of the biotic community, they must be helped to understand the responsibility that goes with such citizenship. This can be explored in terms of their responsibility in this unusual setting - wild nature - in which they

find themselves. Practicing minimum impact techniques for camping and travel in wildlands is being responsible there. The idea of minimizing impact upon the environment in general is a simple and powerful one. Students can learn that minimum impact behaviour is no less important outside the wilderness boundary and can be helped to explore its meaning in all aspects of their lifestyle.

4. Reflection is a powerful tool used to address many of the primary goals of experiential education. So too with wilderness education. As many teachers have discovered, wilderness is an especially good place for reflection. The solo experience is the most commonly used vehicle. Students may be urged to observe their environment and reflect upon what they find there. They may be given tasks to focus their observation, such as inventories of natural creatures they see (perhaps using field guides and keys), writing assignments aimed at challenging them to focus their awareness on specific elements of their environment, or philosophical prompts such as quotations which may focus their thought; o; particula; problem; o; ideas(r) Educator; some-time; thin; th; plac; i; th; teacher an; ofte; i; is bu; ther; i; stil; &; n; fo; &; progra; t; se; u; experience; whic; forc; studen-t; t; t; (Stremba 1989).
5. Wilderness educators can and should be models of curiosity and caring while in the field. They should go into the field knowing as much as they can about the natural and human history of the wild place they are visiting. Leaders should be hired not only for their technical and interpersonal skills, but also for their desire to learn about and knowledge of place. When the students wonder about a plant, tree, cloud, or animal track, etc., the leader may share what she knows. Or, she may say "I don't know, but I want to find out. How might we do it?" People often take their natural setting for granted. A wilderness education experience can be a powerful reminder that nature can be an infinite source of wonder and discovery. A teacher interested in this wonder and discovery is essential to awakening these processes in students.
6. Nature is full of surprises. Leaders go out with plans, with carefully developed learning programs, only to encounter many unexpected circumstances which upset the schedule. One of the virtues of wilderness is its unpredictability. The challenge is to make this into an asset. Understanding the virtues of the "teachable moment" is particularly useful to wilderness educators, simply because more such moments seem to appear out there than in other learning settings.

A classic case in the author's personal experience was the eruption of Mount Saint Helens in May of 1980. Students were in the middle of a wilderness

field trip, two hundred miles north of the mountain when it erupted. At first there was uncertainty about what the series of concussive explosions that broke the morning silence might be. No jets in sight. No clouds. The group knew the mountain was acting up - "Could it be the mountain," they asked. Most went on solo that day and watched the sky turn gray as the ash cloud spread overhead. The leader confirmed, from a Forest Service person who hiked in bringing the big news, that the mountain had indeed erupted, and left word at solo checks that this colossal natural event had occurred. Reflect on it, he urged them. They did, and when the solos were over, there was exciting processing of their experience of this unusual natural event. The group gazed south off toward the mountain, over tens of thousands of wilderness acres from their discussion site high on a ridge, and reflected on the nature of nature and their experience of it. They were humbled and impressed by the scale of the event, struck by the fact that while humans generally feel in control of nature, here was a clear indicator of the limitations of that control. This is an exceptional example of an unplanned opportunity for teaching, but multitudes of less dramatic teachable moments have occurred during the author's twenty years of teaching in wilderness settings. The importance of being flexible and alert to the spontaneous learning opportunity has been revealed time after time.

Wilderness education can and should be the vehicle for an educator to humbly share himself or herself to a degree unusual in conventional teaching. It is an opportunity to serve as a Socratic midwife, working with an environment of great power to help learners bring forth their potential as persons. If the importance of wilderness education as a complement to conventional schooling is recognized, and if wilderness places are respected and cared for, as they must be to survive, then teaching and learning in wilderness will continue to play an important role in educating responsible biotic citizens of the future.

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