

NATURALIST'S CORNER

REMEMBERING OUR NATIONAL MONUMENTS

March 1979. Mike and I throw our camping gear into the back of his truck, then head across campus to pick up two other companions. We are heading across the Rockies from Fort Collins, Colorado to Mesa Verde National Park. With the exception of Mike, we are all Easterners who have yet to see the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde. We spend a couple of days exploring the spectacular area and then drive down to The Four Corners, another spot none of us but Mike has ever visited. On our way, we see a small sign along the highway, pointing down a gravel road to Hovenweep National Monument. *What the heck.* We take the turn.

The road is in dramatically poor shape, but being adventurous college students, we push on. Eventually, after crossing small arroyos, some of them dry, some muddy, and some running with spring snowmelt, we reach a cattle guard, a barbed-wire fence, and another of the small signs welcoming us to Hovenweep National Monument. That is it. Nothing else. No visitor center, no fee booth, nothing. The road continues, so we do too. We eventually come to a small trailer at the head of Hackberry Canyon. We park, knock on the trailer door, but still nothing. Must be the ranger's day off. A trail leads us a few hundred yards to the head of the canyon and an ancient stone structure called Horseshoe Tower.

To me, it was amazing to sit in a national monument essentially alone. Our small group sat down by the tower, looking down into the canyon. Who had built this tower? Was it the Ancient Puebloans (Anasazi) who had also built the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde? There was no interpretation at the site, so all was left to our imagination. I wondered, was the tower spiritual, for defense, or perhaps a navigational landmark? Whatever its purpose, it felt special to be here, especially alone, without a throng of tourists.

I have never been back to Hovenweep, but I think about it from time to time and thank the people who had the foresight to preserve this ancient landmark. I learned later that President Warren G. Harding had used the Antiquities Act in 1923 to establish the national monument. The Act was the brainchild of Congressman John F. Lacey of Iowa, whose Lacey Act prohibits the trade of illegally gotten plants and animals. He traveled out West with anthropologist Edgar Lee Hewett, who showed him how "pot hunters" were raiding sacred Native American sites.

Passed by Congress in 1906, Section 2 of the Antiquities Act states: "That the President of the United States is hereby authorized, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments." It goes on to say that the president may also accept private donations of land as national monuments as well. President Obama did this last year when he accepted 87,563 acres of land from Roxanne Quimby of Burt's Bees, who purchased land in Maine and then donated it with an endowment of \$40 million as the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

As a former Maine canoe guide, I can attest to the significance of the Maine Woods, but Henry David Thoreau is a much better writer than I, so I will defer to him. In *The Maine Woods*, he wrote: "The tops of mountains are among the unfinished parts of the globe." This national monument provides access to these mountains and to the rivers that run from them. Viewing logging operations as a conservationist, Thoreau went on to say, "The mission of men there seems to be, like so many busy demons, to drive the forest out of the country."

This is where I need to come back in. Thoreau is writing about the logging companies whose rich history I have interpreted for many groups. Thoreau talks of running logs down rivers, scouring the shore and beds. He meets with boatmen who hurtle themselves down waterfalls to save time on the drive to the mill. He talks about the destruction of the forest, the trout, and the moose. What Thoreau has not witnessed, however, is that by now logging companies are all but gone. The forests have been logged out and it will be 100 years before the trees are economical again. Moose and trout have come back and, with them, the tourists. So now the logging companies are selling land for second homes.

In the 70's I used to bring groups to a small northern lake called Round Pond. A campsite on its north shore gave us access to a trail leading to a fire tower atop Allagash Mountain. From there you could look out across thousands of acres of woods and water and see not a single home. In 2008, I took my scouts to Round Pond. We got up early and paddled up Ciss Stream in a light rain. There were half a dozen fishing cabins along the shore of the pond. Thoreau would have loved this paddle, for along the way we came across 27 moose grazing in the shallows.

Like many of you, I have been reading (thanks, Dave L.) and thinking about Teddy Roosevelt recently. He used the Antiquities Act to preserve 18 National Monuments, the first of which was Devil's Tower in Wyoming. Congress later turned 5 of these into national parks, including Grand Canyon National Park, which at the time was being explored for copper and other minerals. Roosevelt visited the canyon in May of 1903. Here is a bit of what he had to say:

In the Grand Canyon, Arizona has a natural wonder which, so far as I know, is in kind absolutely unparalleled throughout the rest of the world. I want to ask you to do one thing in connection with it in your own interest and in the interest of the country to keep this great wonder of nature as it now is. I was delighted to learn of the wisdom of the Santa Fe railroad people in deciding not to build their hotel on the brink of the canyon. I hope you will not have a building of any kind, not a summer cottage, a hotel, or anything else, to mar the wonderful grandeur, the sublimity, the great loneliness and beauty of the canyon. Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it. What you can do is to keep it for your children, your children's children, and for all who come after you, as one of the great sights which every American if he can travel at all should see.

We have gotten past the stage, my fellow-citizens, when we are to be pardoned if we treat any part of our country as something to be skinned for two or three years for the use of the present generation, whether it is the forest, the water, the scenery. Whatever it is, handle it so that your children's children will get the benefit of it.

On April 26, 2017 President Donald Trump signed an executive order asking Secretary Zinke to review national monument designations since 1996 that are over 100,000 acres or that the secretary deems did not have adequate public outreach or support (this includes Maine's Katahdin Woods and Waters). Although no president has ever declassified a national monument and the Supreme Court has upheld the law whenever the size of a national monument was questioned, it seems that the Trump administration is willing to rethink the Antiquities Act. This law has helped preserve America's natural and cultural resources for all Americans, now and in the future. It needs our help. Please consider writing your senator or representative about this issue.

~ Tom Condon

