

FIELD & STREAM

Field & Stream
47 Ann Lee Road
Harvard, MA 01451
(508) 772-2617

William G. Tapply
Contributing Editor

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Dear Datus:

The section of WALDEN that the quote comes from is called "Higher Laws," about 2/3 through the book. You'll see that what I quoted, in context, is much more ambiguous than it sounds without context. It might be Henry's idea of a joke. It's in this section where he explains how he has given up hunting and fishing -- as you said, more to enhance his own powers of observation, apparently, than out of humane considerations.

The quote from this section I like the best comes earlier: "Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favorable mood for observing her, in the intervals of their pursuits, than philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation."

That's how I answer those who wonder why I don't sell my shotgun and carry a camera afield.

Later in the section, regarding hunting and fishing: "Yet notwithstanding the objection on the score of humanity, I am compelled to doubt if equally valuable sports are ever substituted for these; and when some of my friends have asked me anxiously about their boys, whether they should let them hunt, I have answered, yes, -- remembering that it was one of the best parts of my education, -- make them hunters, though sportsmen only at first, if possible, mighty hunters at last . . ."

A complicated man.

Duck season is upon us here. It promises to be better than the upland season has been, but we shall see.

Too bad about our woodcock, because my Brittany looks like a winner, and it pains me not to be able to find more smells for him.

Best to Anna and yourself,

Bill

 Times Mirror
Magazines

Epigraph 110

ourselves. That's a phrase that defines a period.

^{h-gather}
The old myth is eternally current for hunters and fishers, too. Angler/Philosopher A.A. Luce drew on the whole of history and prehistory when (as see the July Chapter) he wrote of "the hunter's justification" for killing and eating trout.

^{not that we sense}
The hunter's myth has many names and no name at all. It is what we feel. The feeling is so universal that it may reflect properties of the human brain, as do our language skills. In contrast, the land ethic is still groping for a language and coming up with words that Václav Havel might not like -- the kind that end in ism.

^{h-gather} ^{has}
The old myth has, however, had tragic consequences. It has showed humans how to love Nature but not how to save her.
^{Human migrants}
~~Hunter-gatherers~~ from Asia would have hunted each mastodon with respect, no doubt, and eaten it gratefully, and propitiated it in death. But the species went extinct.

use another
example. Repet. July.

The Savage in Man

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavor. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

Shakespeare, The Tempest

You feel that you are "letting being be" when you spare a deer's life. Edward Abbey says so, and millions of vegetarians -- drawing on an intuition evolved in the centuries before science.

from the industrial accidents at Bhopal and Chernobyl to topsoil loss, deforestation, and extinctions is a result of the human race having fallen "out of balance," not only with nature but with our inner selves.

Stephen Budiansky, p. 20.

It's dogged as does it.

Charles Darwin

Is not your time
as irreversible as that same river
where Heraclitus, mirrored, saw the symbol of
fleeting life?...
Know that in some sense you are already dead.

Jorge Luis Borges²⁰

A man is never happier than when he is going
hunting.

Margaret Mead [not confirmed]

Between the traveller and the setting sun,
Upon some drifting sand heap of the shore,
A hound stands o'er the carcass of a man.

Thoreau [note]

august? (

To interpret Nature is not to improve on her: it
is to draw her out ... and reproduce her tinged
with the colors of the spirit....if I relate the
bird in some way to human life, to my own
life,--show what it is to me and the landscape and
the season,--then do I give my reader a live bird
and not a labeled specimen.

John Burroughs, Wake Robin²¹

All of the North American mammals that became
extinct ... camels, woodland musk oxen, mammoths,
mastodons, stagmoose -- were descendants of lines
that had evolved on the North American
continent.... That the Indians and their fellow
ecological saints of antiquity were quite capable
of hunting species to extinction is no longer
seriously questioned by specialists.

Stephen Budiansky, Nature's Keepers²²
[Similar epigraph by Jared Diamond used in Jan]

We may know immeasurably more about the universe than our ancestors did, and yet it increasingly seems they knew something more essential about it than we do, something that increasingly escapes us.

The same is true of nature and of ourselves.... we enjoy all the achievements of modern civilization that have made our physical existence easier in so many ways. Yet we do not know what to do with ourselves, where to turn.

Václav Havel²³

The savage in man is never quite eradicated.

Thoreau, Walden

With beauty blessed
We fouled our nest
And then chopped down the tree.
Ed Zern [from memory]

- (1) San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986. p.253.
- (2) Field & Stream, October 1996.
- (3) For a Handful of Feathers. NY: Atlantic, 1995. p. 29.
- (4) The New Yorker, April 10, 1995.
- (5) This turned up in the American Heritage Dictionary when I looked up "purpose."
- (6) From a report on the life-insurance industry in the New York Times, Feb. 1, 1996.
- (7) Cited in The American Heritage Dictionary.
- (8) Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920, p.252.
- (9) Sonoran Desert Summer. Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1990. p.108.
- (10) Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum, 1990. p.194.
- (11) As reviewed in the New York Times, 2/17/95.
- (12) "A Letter to Granddad" New York Times, August 18, 1995.
- (13) Camden, Maine: Ragged Mountain Press. 1993. p.185.

- (14) Overfield, T. Donald. G.E.M. Skues: The Way of a Man with a Trout. London: Benn, 1977. p.74.
- (15) NY: Harper & Row, 1988. Historical Atlas of World Mythology, Vol. II, Part I. p. 39.
- (16) Historical Atlas of World Mythology, Vol. I Part 1, p.9.
- (17) Cambridge: Harvard, 1984. p.1.
- (18) From a speech at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on July 4, 1994. Reported in New York Times 7/8/94.
- (19) Nature's Keepers. NY: Free Press, 1995. p.249.
- (20) "To Whoever is Reading Me," translated from the Spanish by Alastair Reid in The New Yorker.
- (21) pp. xv-xvi.
- (22) NY: Free Press, 1995. p.114.
- (23) From remarks at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on July 4, 1994. As reported in the New York Times 7/8/94.

11/6/97

(EPIGRAPHS)

... here you get an explosion of life,
particularly life with specialized cells that
build strong shells by oozing out some calcium
compounds.

William H. Calvin, The River That Flows Uphill¹

It has taken me forty years to figure out
that the way to get a glimpse of the male
psyche is to go fishing with it.

K.M. Kostyal²

Perhaps no one dreamed of snipe an hour ago, the
air seemed empty of such as they; but as soon as
the dusk begins, so that a bird's fight is
concealed, you hear this peculiar
spirit-suggesting sound....

Thoreau, Walden

"May the countryside and the gliding valley
streams content me. Lost to fame, let me love
river and woodland." Virgil, Eclogues

Those who do not want nature modified in any way,
particularly for the benefit of specific species,
feel that the biological development of the planet
is a continuous mutation of life, encouraged by
natural occurrences....

Guy de la Vald ne³

I am nervous about going into debt to show how
well-heeled I am.

Russell Baker, New York Times

used
Feb

Western market economies excel at what they are
asked to produce, and, increasingly, the market is
being asked to produce conservation.

A Wild Place

Managing Wilderness

Gregg Easterbrook⁴

And ever those, who would enjoyment gain
Must find it in the purpose they pursue.

Sara Josepha Hale⁵

This topic is buried under layers of denial....
Over the last decade, the insurance industry has
found mortality to be an increasingly difficult
reality to sell.

Kenneth N. Gilpin⁶

"Because of their age-long training in human
relations -- for that is what feminine intuition
really is -- women have a special contribution to
make to any group enterprise."

Margaret Mead⁷

Alpheus was ... a hunter who one day decided to
become nature.

Roberto Calasso [174]

The center of the sanctuary [of Zeus] was an oak,
protected by tripods. It looked out over a broad,
flattish valley. At each side of the valley rose
long, rolling hills.... Zeus is flat, accepting
and welcoming everything.

[318/9]

[Why don't we build churches like that?]

(Poplars are "daughters of the sun", destined to die by
burning. 59. used in October? Sept?)

[don't forget Xenophon]

I shall not be imprisoned in that grave where you
are to bury my body. I shall be diffused in great
Nature, in the soil, in the air, in all the living
and flowing currents of the world

John Burroughs, Accepting the Universe⁸

(From Lutts)

He taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward.

William Faulkner, The Old People

August (Many people believe that humans are an exemplar for all living things, offering an absolute goal of advanced sociality toward which all birds and mammals, insects and arachnids are slowly moving.

John Allcock⁹

The plight of the trapped whales became the focus of international attention.... The rescue effort reflected the very attitude toward nature that created our environmental crisis. And what was the whale's problem? They were dying. This points to the ... tacit attitude: There is no place for death in nature. Prevent it when you can. However, in an ecological world there can be no life without death, and efforts to eradicate death from nature are also efforts to eradicate life.

Ralph H. Lutts, The Nature Fakers¹⁰

[Death for one = life for another.]

The life of a wild animal always has a tragic end.

Ernest Thompson Seton. (Lutts p.34)

[already used somewhere in text?]

I stumbled blind
Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light;
Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.

[check punctuation]

Man is hunter. Man want shirt, man go to mall,
kill it, drag it home. Woman is gatherer. Woman
want shoes, go to mall, stop in Crate and Barrel
to look at coffee cups....

Rob Becker in Defending the Caveman¹¹

aug
... the civilized man has the habits of the house.
His house is a prison.

Thoreau, Walden [p.475/6]

O beautiful for spacious walls
Without a print in sight,
For windows empty of doodads
That only block the light.

With apologies to ?

Consumption as addiction, as monogamy, as
faith.... To be an American is to live within such
push-pull battles of profit, promise, and
jeopardy.

Allan Garganus 12

MARCH

When March is kind, how much her slightest favors
count!

John Burroughs. [p.219]

MAY

Blue Dun; number 2 in most rivers
for dark days, when it is cold
A starling's wing will give you the colour
or duck widgeon, if you take feather from under the wing
Let the body be of blue fox fur, or a water rat's
or grey squirrel's. Take with this a portion of mohair
and a cock's hackle for the legs.

Ezra Pound []

Aphrodite gave Harmony a necklace with snakes and eagles.

JULY

Angling has a psychological basis in the hunting instinct; that is why it appeals so strongly to many folk; that is why its tendencies need watching. If in accordance with usage we call angling a sport, we certainly ought not to sport with the lives of God's living creatures as we sport with a lifeless ball.... the angler's justification for taking life and inflicting pain.... are simply that the angler is killing fish for food.

A.A. Luce, Fishing and Thinking¹³

The imitation may be
Impressionist,
Cubist,
Futurist,
Post-impressionist,
Pre-Raphaelite, or
Caricature
The commonest is Caricature.
It therefore catches the most fish.

G.E.M. Skues¹⁴

SEPTEMBER

There is health in thy gray wing

Thoreau (on the marsh hawk)

DECEMBER

[use following w/ Mt. Olympus story]

In classical iconography the dog is the animal of Hermes, guide to the knowledge of iconography. With its nose to the ground it follows an invisible trail, and such a trail, by analogy, would be that of the Mystic Way (Sanskrit, mārga, from the verbal root mrq, to hunt by trailing)

Joseph Campbell¹⁵

The mode is consistently of the light world, Apollo's realm

same, p. 72.

Apollo is of the light world, the sun, the wonder and beauty of separate things in the the field of space and time.... Under the life conditions of a hunting race, where the fundamental fact of life is the confrontation of the hunter and his prey, the mystical experience out of which religious forms arose was necessarily of this light world

same, p.76

The landscape of the "Great Hunt," typically, was of a spreading plain, cleanly bounded by a circular horizon, with the great blue dome of an exalting heaven above, where hawks and eagles hovered and the blazing sun passed daily....

Joseph Campbell¹⁶

ROMANTICISM

[or church & state]

If I've learned anything in the garden up to now, it is that the romantic's blunt opposition of nature to culture is not helpful. The romantic metaphor offers us no role in nature except as an observer or worshipper; to act in nature is to stain it with culture. (Consider the popular usage: land is "virgin" until men "rape" it.) The romantic idea might encourage me to revere and preserve what trees I had, yet it didn't offer much incentive to plant new ones.

Careful: romanticism is a way to see nature that is unavoidable, for some of us. But it is no way to help nature.

[from Lutts p. 9]

How adapted these forms and colors to my eye! A meadow and an island! What are these things? Yet the hawks and the ducks keep so aloof! and Nature so reserved! I am made to love the pond and the meadow, as the wind is made to ripple the water.

Thoreau. Journal, November 21, 1850

... a single word, biophilia, which I will be so bold as to define as the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes.

Edward O. Wilson, Biophilia¹⁷

Church & State

[We need to separate church and state, then, not to save one or the other but to save both.]

Classical modern science described only the surface of things, a single dimension of reality.
[see rest of quote in clipping.]

Václav [] Havel.¹⁸

ENVIRONMENTALISM, etc.

Environmentalism has bequeathed us with a paralyzing sense of species guilt that has left us believing that the only proper way to approach nature is not at all.

Stephen Budiansky¹⁹

Environmentalism has ... left us believing that the only proper way to approach nature is not at all.

Stephen Budiansky, p.249

[Contrast with Thoreau on Contact!]

UTOPIA

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

Shakespeare, As You Like It

We are one of only a handful of creatures with the capacity to deliberately alter our environment. To simply renounce that power -- isn't that in some sense to renounce our humanity? Our nature?

[Pollan p.59]

The mystical expression of the belief in the "natural balance" is also found in a growing number of statements to the effect that everything

About 6450 words

MT 6

See his comment on p. 22.

— Maybe I should boil this down
to one theme per chapter?

— Or drop the month-by-month organization?

*Just was
an easy head*

MARCH

2 million 2 million
[something] has

[Picture: Dog or stream repair]

PUSHING THE SEASON

A COMMON LANGUAGE

THE INDISPENSABLE DOG

BRAINS

COMPATIBILITY QUIZ

HUNTING WITHOUT SHOOTING

MANAGING NATURE

will & man

STREAM REPAIRS

1/27/98

changes made

2/4/98

PUSHING THE SEASON

X
needs
better
word

Spring comes first to the sky. Ravens start the display, waltzing in three dimensions, and then one day you hear clouds talking, look up, and spot Canada geese along an edge between cold Montana blue and warm chinook front. But ravens and geese are pushing the season. You can count on a change when you see two gorgeous mallard drakes chasing a female in flight, even if the loser has to sit around moping on the snow. And when a magpie comes bob-bob-bobbing along with a stick in his beak, you know that the ground will be bare soon. Magpie looks psychedelic in that black-and-white suit but he is a year-round resident, like us humans, and he is making a solid investment in shelter. He will give his mate the twig, fetch another, and so on till the pair has built an impregnable nest in an impenetrable thicket of buffalobrush.

The stream's metabolism revives next. A mayfly lands on our sunny south window -- not much in herself, but you know that many nymphs will be active underwater for every dun that reaches the porch. (And on the pond, a muskrat's vees are lapping against patches of ice.) Even the trout are beginning to ^{rise} swirl, not feeding, I think, but exploring their lost dimension.

The news from land is bad or good, depending on your situation. If you are a vole, your dim-lit world is melting under a horrid sun; your tunnels are turning into mere doodles on the lawn; and your thatched nest is becoming a sodden mound of grass. If you are a magpie, on the other hand, the spring thaw is a harvest festival, and voles are ~~part of~~ the feast.

a swirling trout
is a neg image
to me (swirling disease)
is an otherwise positive
flow

A COMMON LANGUAGE

The true ethologist must be evolution-minded. After all, he is a mammal. To give the fullest possible interpretation of behavior he must have recourse to a language that will apply to his fellow-mammals as well as to his fellow-man.

Julian Huxley¹

A rabbit is on the west porch and Huckleberry is watching through the glass door and quivering. Yet he is a bird dog. In the field, where there are better things to occupy his mind, he ignores rabbits. But from here inside, that looks like the bunny of the month.

I am behind the glass ~~door~~ too. I could open it and walk outside with my dog -- but not just yet. Maybe later, when the frost melts. Maybe when it's comfortable outdoors we'll stretch our legs.

Huckleberry is not one to temporize. He runs to Anna, wags his tail, runs to the front door -- his usual exit -- and she lets him out. (You will understand who is training whom in this family.)

Ten minutes more and our dog has not returned. He must have run off with the neighbor's bitch, Anna says, leaving pretty little Tess at home. Alone. By herself, hear?

"Ummm," I mutter. This is to acknowledge that I have the message and would focus on it, but for more pressing work.

"Off with you," says Anna, so off I go, bouncing down Cactus Road in my truck.

Pay attention, young man, for you are being given the secret of marriage in the marsh. You can ask a nice girl to live out here but, if she concurs, you must make a point of nodding agreeably when she asks you to do something. Implementation is negotiable. It might be, for example, that you could put off hanging screens till October, when a frost will kill the insects, most of which do not bite anyhow. But never refuse chores on principle. Most wars are fought over principles.

And of course there may be times when you should follow through promptly. Huckleberry is a creative dog and you don't know what he might think up after his lark with Mitzi, so you drive down Cactus Road as fast as the ruts will allow.

As to why the road is named for a cactus, I can't say -- never saw a prickly pear in this damp vicinity. The name is real Montana, though. You can tell because a road is a Road around here unless it's in town, in which case it's a Street. One day they will grade Cactus Road and call it Daffodil Drive and some developer will have a deal for you, but for now there are just tracks of one doe and one dog along the edge in remnants of snow, his prints on top, headed straight for the Thompson place and its watchdog.

Do not think of Mitzi as a frivolous bitch. She is, on the

contrary, a bright creature with a dull task which she carries out faithfully even when, as now, she is inconvenienced by her male friend. She barks and moves toward me with Huck coming right along. He can't help it. The two are joined in wedlock.

This affair is highly irregular under the normal canine rules of engagement, which are as follows.

- The bitch emits a scent that is detected by dogs, for whom love comes in at the nose. (But Mitzi has been spayed and must be low on pheromones, because Huckleberry is her only suitor.)
- The heat cycle comes every six months, and at other times the bitch is bitchy. (But not to Huck. He pays a call, prances like Nureyev without knickers, and is well received.)

Perhaps I could have arrived sooner, if I were less sympathetic. Mitzi is talented, energetic, and obsolete. Her ancestors and their jobs evolved together over the centuries until, suddenly, during what humans called a green revolution, there were no more sheep for German shepherds to herd and no more carts for keeshonds to pull. There was just a bright crossbreed named Mitzi and this lonely, repetitive, remnant of a life. Enter Huckleberry.

Tessie, on the other hand, can't get the hang of it. She dotes on Huck. Grooms him with little tweezer teeth till he is free of mud, blood, and thorns. Eats any burr that might cling to his shiny hide. Lets his big head snooze on her little rib cage.

As for the one thing Huck really wants, however, she cannot manage. Tess was spayed at six months of age, before her first estrus, and never developed her reproductive apparatus.

Scientists have tried to reconstruct the evolution of our odd human ways with reproduction -- or rather sex -- and found clues among other primates, bonobos especially. An ethologist who cannot afford airfare to Africa, however, might find something in the story of three primitives named Mitzi, Huckleberry, and Tess.

THE INDISPENSABLE DOG

A really companionable and indispensable dog is an accident of nature. You can't get it by breeding for it, and you can't buy it with money. It just happens along.

E. B. White

One week later. Tessie and I are on a rug by the woodstove, she curled up close, me breathing a secret. Pheromones or whatever -- she has not bathed since the pond froze in November and her shiny pelt smells of comfort.

Tess and Huck are German shorthaired pointers of American breeding: fast, skinny, and in his case reliable. But there is a latitude for beauty. Tess looks like a Somali model, legs long and waist you could circle with your hands. She is bashful too, eyes glancing sideways, body vibrating. She cannot imagine why I would waste time reading but, when I persist, she stands, shakes herself, nibbles my ear, and reclines in the pose they used to teach in girls' schools, legs crossed at the ankles.

The tea-kettle begins to mutter and I open the bedroom door so that Tess can fetch Anna. Presently the two of them come down the hall hand-in-mouth, human giggling and puppy making little chirping growls. Huckleberry, not to be outdone, scoops up my moccasin and presents it to the wrong person. "Thank you," says

*Sometimes I think
there is no human contact
in town*

Anna. And then she gives us old guys a hug.

Everybody needs a snuggle. This is the first law of emotion and the main reason for puppies. Perhaps we need them more in the country, where there ~~is less human contact than in town.~~ *are few human*

But puppies grow up. Within weeks they need work and within months yearn for it, and lacking a job get bitchy. Want to meet a spacey alien? Try living with a terrier deprived of terra firma. You still want a snuggle but her genetic code is giving terse instructions: Find burrow. Extract occupant.

No wonder, then, that E.B. White had trouble finding a companionable and indispensable dog. A dog becomes indispensable when she does something you need, and companionable when the two of you work together. Your ancestors and hers shared life till that last split-second of history, when you stopped herding sheep and digging rabbits out of holes. Too bad about the pup. You told her that you loved her and ~~she meant~~ *fell for* it.

Only God, my dear,
Could love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair.

William Butler Yeats

We Americans did not invent the blonde thing; it has been going on since ancient Greece. But coifing the dog? We have bred Irish setters for their red hair, golden retrievers for the right shade of bullion, and English setters with three colors mixed. Of these breeds, only the last still has numerous sound individuals,

and then only if you select for function rather than pigment. Fortunately, a dog is one member of your family whose ancestors you can choose.

- Don't start by looking at puppies. For us humans, love comes in at the eye (Yeats again) and all puppies are lovable. Especially baby dachshunds.
- Avoid show dogs. Konrad Lorenz, who won a Nobel prize for his work on animal behavior, called them "evil caricatures of the original strain." Sounds like my dachshund puppy when it grew up.
- Consider what work you have available, and whether a breed that can do it is really what you want. Dachshunds, for example, were bred to fight badgers -- a job for which brains are inconvenient.

No job available? Then how about a kitten? You could find one that looks much like its wild, beautiful European ancestors yet will be content indoors, where it belongs. Outside, it would hunt alone, and research has made clear the dangers to wildlife. A cat is always a cat.

I would have used the word feral -- just like the word

A dog is what it does -- and humans choose the task by breeding for the right qualities. A hound pursues game by scent or sight. A pointer hunts by scent and stops when game is close. A springer spaniel flushes the bird without pointing. Both pointers and spaniels should fetch dead game from land or small water, but a retriever can live up to its name amid ice floes in the Missouri River. There is, in short, a dog to do almost

anything with you. But a dog that wants to do nothing is hard to find.

Some farmers still have work to share. Up Dry Creek Road, for example, lives Joe Skinner, tall, dark-haired, and determined -- the kind of neighbor you might expect to see bulldogging a steer in a rodeo. But an Australian shepherd one-third of Joe's size helps him with stream conservation. The two herd cattle into a creek-side pasture, leave them there just long enough to eat all of the vegetation -- including weeds -- and then push the cows out before they break down the stream's banks. The method mimics grazing patterns of native bison, but domestic cattle make intensive management easier, and safer. (Nobody bulldogs bison.)

You have heard of cattle-dogs -- but did you know that there are also tractor dogs? Mike and Joy Kreikemeier, across the road from us, got a puppy who took to Mike's John Deere as if it were a carriage in old Dalmatia. Casey follows Mike furrow by furrow, kills and buries the gophers he plows up, then follows the tractor home and guards it by night. But it takes a tractor and a big field to keep Casey happy, and most Dalmatians today are not so lucky.

Sled dogs ought to be banned for subversion. Real working huskies and pointers have the same bone-structure, weight, and enthusiasm for a job that could just as well be done by internal-combustion engines. Why, when it is so easy to leave a trail of hydrocarbons, should humans prefer to glide over silent snow behind wagging tails? I regret to report that this

anachronism is reviving, especially since I can't participate. Our place does not get enough snow.

We do have a ramshackle blind on a point of land with water on both sides. I could hide there and wait for Canada geese and mallard drakes, which are in surplus, and give some big dog a purpose in life. Labrador and Chesapeake Bay retrievers have saved vast acres of marsh by training humans to love duck habitat. But you have to sit still in a blind, and I can't.

Let's design a dog. It is for me, so it will need a retriever's patience, but only while standing on point. On scent, my dog should have a hound's determination; on search, a husky's hunger for distance. And if the pheasant will not stop running, my pup should run a circle to head off its prey, much as a sheep-dog would work its flock. External don't matter much, but let's choose a Dalmatian's short coat to dissipate the heat generated by long runs in sunny grasslands.

And, above all, let's have the wolf's intelligence.

BRAINS

There is something quaint about wielding animals to affect animals. We do not train squirrels to drive rabbits, or kangaroos to corral koalas. The shepherd, it is true, may use a dog to nip at a sheep's heels, but dogs are very bright....

Gary Wills²

"He's been here before," Anna said. Huckleberry, age four months, had returned to us with two quills in the tip of one toe. He had found his first porcupine and investigated with his forepaw, as a human might use a hand. His suspicion was inherited -- and one cautious probe taught him all he needed to know. In succeeding years, he must have scented hundreds of other porcupines, but he has never again picked up a quill.

In contrast, Tess got in trouble three times. The first two porcupines stuck quills in her mouth and the third caught her by surprise, swinging its tail into her hind leg as she touched down from a leap over the grass.

The porcupine test measures a quality described in The Intelligence of Dogs -- a book by Stanley Coren.³ "Learning ability," he writes, "is usually defined as the number of experiences needed for an individual to code something as a relatively permanent memory."

A different test measures what Coren calls "problem-solving ability." Huck and Tess were each about six months old when they began pointing pheasants, and not much older when they began trailing by scent. But Huck was quick to put the two skills together. By seven months, he was pointing, breaking point when the pheasant moved on, then trailing and pointing again when his bird was willing to hold. Perhaps I should be ashamed to confess that I did not teach him even the whoa command, but he did not need it. Tessie does.

Learning ability (the porcupine test) and problem-solving (the running-pheasant test) are components of what Coren terms adaptive intelligence. This is what you and I have in mind when we speak of another human's intelligence quotient, or I.Q. The canine tests are, of course, less intricate than those for humans, and the scoring system we use may not apply at all. If there were a dog scale, however, Tessie's I.Q. might be 100, or average, and Huckleberry's ¹⁵⁰~~140~~. On the wolf scale, which is much tougher, Huck might reach 100 and Tess -- well, she would not pass the test of survival in ⁶~~the~~ wolf's wild world. We would love to start a line of dogs with her physical gifts, but she is not bright enough to breed. *Well U are not kennel blind*

There is another method by which dogs (but not humans) are measured. Coren calls it "working or obedience intelligence" -- the ability to follow human direction. Springer spaniels, retrievers, and cattle dogs are bred to obey commands promptly, and some sheep dogs are responsive to a degree that would be

striking even in human athletes. Anyone who has read Donald McCaig's books will want to watch border collies at work, re-enacting pastoralism with a predator's bright eye: double anachronisms, doubly exciting.

Sheep-dog and bird-dog are alike in conspicuous ways:

- Both need speed and energy, so their structures are similar.
- Both hunt, but neither kills.
- Each holds its prey from a distance.

With these similarities, sheep-dogs and bird-dogs might be expected to think in similar ways -- but they don't, because they are bred to deal with different creatures. What you notice in collies is their quick response to commands: useful for working sheep, which are visible to both dog and human. A pointer's prey, on the other hand, is invisible, so the dog must work on its own initiative and by scent alone: like a wolf, not a collie.

*What happened to the Coyote here?
Mark Twain's "Allegory of Greed"*

*(Surprised that any pointer could be used in
"Audience trials")*

Finding the Door

Ma

*I wish I could find
the old Appalachian dog ballad
which stalks out
the final line is
boy had Diabetes*

Delete ?

COMPATIBILITY QUIZ

*WALKED
a country dog oaked
its ~~tail~~ ^{tail} ~~its~~
Christian name was Rex
brella*

1. Where do you live?

You could buy a pup to fit your dream and train it to fit your reality. But visit your local dog pound first. Walk the rows of cages full of other people's failed fantasies.

Most Americans live in cities now, and a town-dog is the hardest kind to find. Anna's family had several wretched show-bred cocker spaniels, then got a sound Pembroke Welsh corgi from a working strain. It had short legs and a big brain, which let it adapt to life on pavement.

2. How much of yourself can you spare?

Ignore a border collie and you may find it at the end of your driveway, trying to herd passing trucks. A pointing dog will be just as bad, going on endless desperate searches within your chain-link fence. Such dogs need more than country air. They need to work out with their ~~humans~~ *active human*

Labrador retrievers are intelligent too, but they have been bred for patience -- lying in duck blinds, waiting for something to turn up. Out of season, you can exercise your pal Micawber by throwing things for him to retrieve. And no other dog will surpass him in good humor.

Of course there are trade-offs. The Labrador is big in everything. It is the biggest-selling breed in the country at this writing, and may, by no coincidence, have more genetic defects than any other. So do your research.

1 B

3. Like to be in control?

Then get a dog ^{breed to follow} that ~~wants~~ commands: a working collie, say, or a retriever or spaniel. But if you crave wild ^{open} country -- and live where there is space for your habit -- then a pointer could show you what's out there.

Things you don't know.

I like this TP

HUNTING WITHOUT SHOOTING

... as you know, the most important reason for going from one place to another is to see what's in between....

Norton Juster, The Phantom Tollbooth⁴

Forget distance: Most wildlife is not only off-road but off-trail, where you cannot measure the miles. Ignore time, too. Your legs will tell you when you should turn around. And above all, avoid chattering groups. One human friend is a comfort, if you know one whose feet don't blister, but the more people you have with you, the less you will see of the rest of evolution. Nature is not a party game.

The pointer comes into this as a force-multiplier, covering many times your distance, and a sense-multiplier, providing a nose for nature. You may hear cranes returning and taste a buffaloberry dried on its stalk, but you cannot begin to perceive what a dog smells. Nothing else -- no human, no beast, and so far (thank God) no electronic sensor -- can tell you so much about wildlife and how it came through the winter, which is your excuse for being out on the foothills in March. *or OF March*

What I want to say next may be harder to follow, but stay with me.

Dogs deconstruct civilization. My assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth do not apply to their world. I see grass; they detect scent. Distance is linear for me, meaningless to them. They understand some of my words. I cannot comprehend their way, which is not even a way but a place where scent leads, and not even a place but a quarry. *the ^{scent} more cone of a quarry?*

I have been wondering for some time whether the deconstruction movement is going anywhere and am pleased to report that it has caught up to my bird-dogs. *++*

So we have come to a monumental but inevitable paradox: the fact that man hunts presupposes that there is and has always been a scarcity of game. If game were superabundant there would not exist that peculiar animal behavior which we distinguish from all others with the precise name "hunting."

José Ortega y Gasset⁵

why do we call it game?

Huck and Tess sweep an invisible world between me and the next ridge north. My mind is in the sky, watching the first red-tailed hawk of the year. They hit scent here on earth, look to me, and we work together without commands. Huck points and holds. Tess backs, meaning that she points Huck. I flush the partridges. The dogs do not chase. They do not pursue the deer, coyotes, foxes, or hares either, but all show themselves when they know that dogs are on the job. These vast, luminous places look empty to me and smell full to Huckleberry and Tess.

One thing is missing: passion. The season for shooting has

long been closed, relieving me of gun, sweat, and consequences. No need to walk till it hurts, as I did last fall. I can enjoy just being here, seeing what wildlife is here with me, and getting my endorphins pumping.

Last September, when shooting was legal and the days were hot, I had to carry water for the dogs, a gun for game, and a dozen shells, though I never used half of them. The population of gray partridges was large -- but they knew how to make themselves scarce. We might find a covey in one mile, ten miles, or not at all, and having found it I might make both shots, one shot, or neither. In September, partridges came as grace. The dogs added shivers: theirs, on point, and mine down the spine.

None of this makes sense today. Two evolutionary biologists have suggested that the domestication of dogs may have occurred as long as 135,000 years ago, before humans had language as we now know it. And archaeologists have found the bones of wolves -- probably tame -- in settlements up to 400,000 years old.⁶ But ~~tame~~ ^{May} ~~is~~ not be the right word, because humans themselves were not yet domesticated. Dogs not only evolved in the long hunt, like my ancestors, but in the same pack.

Query: If the life we now lead is trivializing our dogs, what is it doing to us humans?

I like Joyce's
"heavy footed feet"
for my shorthairs

Could you say more about
"reading" your dogs? -- i.e.
knowing from their cat walking,
head up or down etc
more cones

MANAGING NATURE *(will) never oxygenation?*

In the West, one to five percent of the landscape is riparian, yet seventy-five percent of the wildlife is associated with riparian areas.

Paul Hansen, University of Montana⁷

The best part of public lands is that somebody else is responsible for them. Here on the home place, Anna and I are in charge of consequences. Have the tree sparrows and finches moved north? Then the bird-feeder must come down before it attracts an artificial concentration of neotropical migrants, which would raise young, which would splat on the big window under the aspens. Here it is only March and I am worrying about the maiden flights of yellow warblers in June. Not that a few baby birds would matter much, in the big picture. *The Lord makes the fall of a sparrow*

Water matters. Anna and I are living on top of a lake that has no coliform bacteria, no lead, and no arsenic -- but plenty of calcium and magnesium to strengthen our bones. In this sense, our subterranean reservoir is even better than the Catskill watershed, which saves residents of New York city from spending four billion dollars on a water-treatment plant.⁸

I ought to get more than a Bronx cheer for growing aspens, cattails, iris, and asters on our buried lake. These plants (or close relatives) have been used elsewhere to remove sewage and heavy metals from water. Research has not been done on much of

our other greenery, but chances are that it too filters bad stuff, if any of it gets here. *helps to keep the water pure*

The submerged reservoir has other virtues too. It is cool in the hottest summers, does not evaporate like a lake exposed to the sun, and maintains its level when used for flood irrigation. Gallatin Lake is, in fact, this valley's buried treasure. Trout swim in its outlets, crops reach down to it, housing developments draw from it, and almost everyone takes it for granted.

can't. Damage to
~~Not me.~~ I am out on the spring creek in March, working on reservoir maintenance. The wing-dams I build will hold back water in June, and then in September, when headlines tell of drought, the high, clear flow from this wet place will be worth something to citizens downstream. Yet pure water makes no money for me and is not encouraged by a tax break, like my barley and hay. America should look to her incentives.

This groaning is a natural byproduct of the stream-repair season. The banks have thawed now; the water is low enough to make grunt-work possible; and there is no watercress yet to hold back the mud. My excuses for work-avoidance have run out.

*Is this Chapter then
 Mismanaging Nature?*

... to do nothing is to make a "management" decision by default. No matter what we choose to do, nature is being shaped by man... The thing we cannot do is remove human influence simply by closing our eyes to it.

Stephen Budiansky⁹

Humility Creek is no longer in its original binding. Cattle

chewed on the streamside vegetation that held the banks together, then trampled on the soil till it sloughed into the water and washed downstream. Rich black dirt that had built up on this place over hundreds of summers is now sediment filling a reservoir in the Missouri River, *for downstream*.

our efficient economy involves crowding from the same species

It did not have to happen. The banks had always been grazed by bison and elk -- but these wild ungulates were free to roam, and they did not stay in one place long enough to damage it. The domestic cattle that caused the damage were kept in place by fences and not rotated between pastures as Joe Skinner manages his herd today.

Let's skewer somebody. A human was in charge of the cattle that widened the spring creek's bed, so let's hold him responsible for stream degradation. But he was working for us -- the tight-fisted public -- and we were paying him to raise cattle, not trout. He would not have survived in his low-profit, high-risk business by arguing with the customers. *(Same going on today when we don't see the consequences)*

You should know that I am reconstructing the history from fragmentary evidence. I lived nearby when some of the damage was being done, but my home stream then was the Gardner River in Yellowstone Park, where stream banks were sound. I assumed, then, that only public management could protect wild places. *consequences of their dict.*

Leap ahead forty years. My new home stream is recovering year by year, but my old home stream in Yellowstone has been damaged by swollen herds of ungulates -- in this case, bison and elk rather than domestic cattle. The Park's managers have

Mismanagers

responded to their public, which wants to see wild America from car windows. *and I must notice damage to ~~the~~*

The Gardner River
I will blame neither ranger nor rancher for giving customers what they want -- but rodents beware. My task this week is to plant new willows to replace the dozens that just one beaver cut in two nights last summer. The stream needed those trees to stabilize its banks. Beavers might play a role here again, some day -- but not yet, please, not yet. Spare us from long teeth till the ~~willows~~ *aspens* have formed dense thickets with massive roots that can regenerate what the beavers chew down. Another fifty years should do it. *What were Stegner's "Wolf Willows" has nice ring to it*

The trees I am planting are golden willows: an exotic species willing to take root on this farm. The local willows I tried to transplant failed, as did the native long-leaf cottonwoods. Yet when the river flooded David King's bottomland, just a short walk across the fields, thousands of native willows planted themselves and grew into a jungle, with no human help whatever. It turns out that the shoots of our native cottonwoods and willows cannot tolerate shade but thrive when they fall on bare, moist, mineral soils -- the kind deposited after floods. Perhaps some flood long ago covered even our farm. Or perhaps the right conditions were created when trappers caught all the beavers, leaving behind bare mud. *a few* The cottonwoods and willows sprouted, in any case, and from then on may have propagated by sending out suckers.

The story of the aspens differs in detail. They were gone,

when Anna and I got here -- probably because cattle had finished them off -- and would have needed a hot fire to reseed themselves. (What floods do for cottonwoods and willows, fires do for aspens.)

The natural history of this valley, then, is one of multiple competing catastrophes ranging from volcanoes, earthquakes, glaciers, floods, fires, and beavers ~~down~~ ^{and humans} through such lesser disturbances as those of muskrats and ground squirrels. All were good for the land, in the long run.

++
our
first
wife
had?
In the long run, however, we'll all be dead. And in the short span of human life, calamities (however natural) are not welcome. I sneaked this point in with the beavers because I do not care to stalk around between sandwich boards warning that the end of the world is nigh. But it is. Or at least the world our ancestors knew is disappearing, and I wish to leave us all with a burden of guilt, and here it is. We have trivialized our dogs. We are trivializing ourselves. And we will trivialize nature if we can.

- We feel worse about one dead baby warbler than about heavy developments threatening whole species of birds at both ends of their migration.
- We release the trout we catch, then go home and boil our pasta in six quarts of water heated by cheap electricity, which is generated by dams in the Columbia River Basin, which are killing off whole races of salmon.
- We worry more about Yellowstone's bison and elk, which are

starving in March, than about the health of the range that would keep them alive if we had not allowed them to overpopulate. ~~o sea~~

We have, in short, ~~no~~ sense of proportion.

There are some sins of omission that I will put right, if you give me a chance. I will vote to take out the big dams, even though electricity will cost more and may involve nuclear power. I will support programs to control excessive populations -- of both animals and humans. But I won't welcome Apocalypse on these sixty acres.

This is where management comes in. Beavers, warblers, bison, elk, and trout must all now live with the unnatural disaster called Homo sapiens. We had better be sapient enough to understand our influences, small and large, intended and unintended.

My knowledge is small, my skills limited, my tools feeble. I will watch the stream with a disposition to save myself work. I will not act on principle -- but neither will I avoid action on scruple. I will put a wing-dam in what is now a mud flat and make a clean spawning riffle.

Never mind who broke what. I know who is in charge of repairs.

STREAM REPAIRS

Authorities darken counsel. An authority is a person engaged in the invidious business of stereotyping and disseminating information, frequently incorrect.

G.E.M. Skues¹⁰

"Here's what you should do," writes the authority, and offers a nostrum.

"Here's what you should do, says the farmer, and hands the writer a maul.

Comes an afternoon in March when I put the maul to work building wing-dams. It is grunt work -- the kind I would pay someone else to do, if anyone else would do it for my price. The worst part of owning a place is that the cheap labor is me.

My goal is not to restore the spring creek to whatever it may have been in the time of Lewis and Clark. For one thing, I don't know. Some of the area would have been dry grassland even in 1806, but there was a cycle: Trees down, beavers out, trees up, beavers in. At any given time, they could have been working in what I now call the old growth, where three small streams join the main creek.

Let's choose a different picture, then -- one by Norman

Rockwell, just a little too good to be true. Let's pick a time long after the beavers were trapped out and a little before ~~muskrats~~ cattle knocked down the banks of the spring creek. At that time, the main stream would have looked like a larger version of its tributary, Snipe Creek, and trout would have had shelter of three kinds.

Depth: Most of the pools were deeper than a heron could wade.

Shade: Willows, alders, snowberries, and grasses overhung the water, hiding trout from ospreys.

Current: Water ran faster in the narrow channel, and the miniature rapids may have discouraged pelicans.

I would love to recreate the creek as it was then, but it evolved without seasonal floods and is not as resilient as a river contained by gravel and rock. My assets are the water -- fertile as ever -- and a bed that can be restored to something like its original riffle-pool-riffle sequence. I can help by planting vegetation to secure the channel and shade the water. The job will take time, but I know now that one sapling in a wire cage is better than one hundred destroyed by beavers or deer.

A tracked backhoe happened to be working nearby a few years ago, and we hired it to crawl across our place, lower itself into the creek, and lift massive scoops from the bed. The process was dirty, smelly, loud, and violent. But the operator restored the Home Pool and its spawning riffle, then tapered the bank into a natural, stable profile and armored its base against erosion with

a layer of rocks from the stream's bed. The last step was to cover the reshaped bank with sod that the operator had set aside.

One day later, trout had moved in. Two years later, visiting anglers saw nothing but a stream winding through a grassy meadow, mayflies hatching, trout rising. The backhoe, intrusive as it seemed, had done the best possible job of restoring trout habitat.

....the philosopher Karl Popper developed his argument that there could be no such thing as universal fixes -- that the most society could or should hope to do was to correct specific abuses.

The New Yorker¹¹

My method (like that of the backhoe) is to try something, see how ^{very fix} it works, and try again till the flow is right. The site is, typically, a wide, slow, muddy shallow. The objective is to make:

- A bright riffle with clean gravel bottom. This is where most aquatic insects will live, and where trout will spawn.
- Below each riffle, a deep, mud-bottomed pool. The current will slow here, perhaps eddy, and trout will wait for insects drifting down.

The wing-dams are just old boards angling downstream across perhaps one-third of the channel to narrow -- and therefore deepen -- the flow without backing it up. I secure the boards by

pounding posts in on each side, then hold the posts together with baling wire. Mud settles out below the wings. Watercress stabilizes the accretion. There are no floods to tear out the dams or scour the bed, so the process continues all summer. Soon a vegetated point protrudes into the creek, forming riffle and pool.

Mind you, running water cannot be designed in the way George Mattson drew plans for this house. A reservoir, yes. You could draw up specifications for a dam and the pool behind it, but the stream has no straight lines and no regularity in its curves. You have to narrow it a bit here and curve it there, then wait to see where the silt settles and nudge some more. There are now a couple of good books on stream restoration,¹² but Humility Creek is unusual, or at least unlike streams I have fished elsewhere, and I have learned by trying, falling short, wiping the mud off my face, and getting back to work.

Next March I will try straw bales instead of boards for the wing-dams, straw being cheaper. The idea came from a newspaper photograph of people near the Missouri River preparing for a flood. Stream repairs made of straw will not last long -- but that's the point. If the bales do their job and rot away, they will save me the work of removing them.

Permanence would be illusory in this soft land, anyhow. The stream evolved as a means of distributing silt while Gallatin Lake turns to valley. In the time before time started, water would have run all over the flood plain as channeled by beaver or

coincidence.

My asset is consistency. Nature has no purpose but I do, and my small, repeated, nudges add up to a program of therapy. If an impartial professor were passing out grades for mud-management, my wing-dams might deserve a B. Maybe even a B+, considering the low cost. In real life, the stream lets me know how I'm doing.

Anna and I planted cottonwoods on the bank last summer, scooped water for them from a riffle, and noticed squadrons of nymphs in our buckets. They were beautiful, and we had helped them by providing better habitat. We put them back in the stream, tried to get water without nymphs, and found it almost impossible.

When you find yourself scooping hundreds of mayfly nymphs by accident, it comes as no surprise that big trout take small flies. Innocence, no: This is not the Norman Rockwell picture. But you can look out through the glass doors and see ^{the} a stream that ~~is~~ getting a little better, year by year.

add "Merry at her Ease"

MARCH

- (1) From Huxley's introduction to Joy Adamson's Living Free. I borrowed this from a book review by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in the New York Times 5/15/95.
- (2) Civilization magazine, November/December 1995. p.63.
- (3) NY: Free Press, 1994. p.118. This book would be useful to anyone looking for a puppy.
- (4) NY: Scholastic, undated. p.117.
- (5) Meditations on Hunting. NY:Scribner's, 1972. p.67.
- (6) Wade, Nicholas. New York Times June 13, 1997. The report summarizes work led by two evolutionary biologists: Dr. Carlos Vilà and Dr. Robert K. Wayne.
- (7) Montana Outdoors, May/June 1997, p.3.
- (8) William K. Stevens. New York Times, May 20, 1997. Other estimates run as high as six billion dollars.
- (9) Nature's Keepers. NY: Free Press, 1995. p. 20.
- (10) The Way of a Trout With a Fly. London: Black, 1928. p.ix.
- (11) Opening editorial, joint edition of 4/28 and 5/5, 1997.
- (12) In order of publication:
 Hunter, Christopher J. Better Trout Habitat. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1991.
 Hunt, Robert L. Trout Stream Therapy. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

MARCH

I stumbled blind
Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light
Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
There cannot be, confusion of our [] sound [] forgot,
A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry. [confirm]

W.B. Yeats, "Pandeus" []

We've had spring most days, this March, and winter most
nights.

Spring in Montana is so nice that we have one every week.

ANOTHER TIME AND PLACE

(About 2000 words)

Spring begins where you would least expect it.

[Montana, as every fisherman knows, is bounded by the Bighorn River on the east, the Beaverhead River on the west, Memorial Day at the beginning and Labor Day at the end. The angler's Montana is the Greater Yellowstone Area and summer.]

The trout's Montana [is broader. It] begins with the vernal equinox in a low, warm valley between high, cold mountains. A river called the Bitterroot runs down there and I run down the river in a big rubber boat. It drifts past boulders that, from the looks of the country, might have rolled a mile down from Trapper Peak. My fly floats on clear, low water and is the prettiest thing since the world thawed out. A hundred yards downstream a trout-snout rises straight up and absorbs the fly: no splash, no noise, no waste motion. Old brown trout are efficient like that. We in the boat are only human so on our part there is frantic reeling and rowing and groping for net. John Adza pulls the boat up on shore while I land the fish and cradle it between two hands and rock it like a baby. I congratulate myself while John fidgets. Then I slide the trout back in the water and take the oars while he sits in the bow seat and lengthens his fly-line with urgent strokes of a long rod. This, he says, is the time of year when he really wants to fish.

It seems unfair that Montana has not only the summer fishing that all anglers know about, and the fall fishing that half of all anglers know about, but also the spring fishing that nobody knows about. There are so few tourists around in April that John is reduced to fishing with other guides and with local characters emerging from hibernation, like me.

This is our reward for surviving January, an apology from

April

the mountains. Having made January what it was, they turn right around and give us paradoxical early-spring fishing. It starts in the Bitterroot by March 20, sometimes earlier. When I lived back east, the best of the fishing did not start till mid-April in Virginia, later than that in Pennsylvania and New York. Opening day meant high water and deep nymphs. It was better than not fishing. It was not as good as trout-noses sticking up out of clear water for floating flies.

Relief explains the difference. I refer here not to the relief felt by cabin-happy anglers, which is the same everywhere, but to the difference in elevation between mountain-top and valley floor, which is greater in the Rockies. My first trout's residence was exactly 6,204 feet lower in altitude than the mountain shading it. This kind of relief means that the valley gets a lot of spring, and perhaps a little summer, before the peaks warm enough to pour snow-melt into the river. You can follow this low-water spring to other streams, enjoying one while another is high and muddy. The Bitterroot happens to be first on the circuit for reasons that become clear when you drive down to it.

Every way is down, unless you thread your way into the valley from Missoula. Up on the passes there is winter, cars with ski-racks, rivulets narrow with ice. As you drop, the snow thins, but not much. It ends abruptly where mountains level into valley floor. Down here cliffs push into the river and ponderosa pines crowd as close as they can. This valley is all edges and masses and snug. There is no big sky, no emptiness. There is green grass at a snowdrift's edge. There are buttercups popping from roadside

banks and aspens flirting their catkins. Wood ducks are squealing through the cottonwoods, geese are honking from every field, and John Adza is pacing around his pickup, wondering what is taking his guest so long.

By the time John got me organized, two other guides had joined us. They floated the stream behind our boat, giving me first shot at the water, though everyone else deserved it more. Chris Pagnell rowed the second boat while Dave Odell cast. Dave wore a short-sleeved shirt infested with Hawaiian vegetation, making the point that this was Tropical Montana. The rest of us became believers. We peeled flannel as the temperature climbed to the mid-seventies, and we caught trout: mostly browns, some rainbows. The biggest was twenty inches long on a non-stretch steel tape. Few were below fourteen. The trout jumped high, pulled hard, made seasoned guides yelp and groan.

Guides should not be allowed to enjoy themselves so much. Violates the Code of the West. Fun is my department.

Time was when guides were grizzled codgers. You could depend on a guide to spit tobacco juice in the water when you tied on a fly. He would admit to being nonplused (not in precisely that language) when a trout was stupid enough to eat feathers. For lunch he would serve fried meat. Nowadays John Adza serves sandwiches of smoked salmon with chilled white wine. He is President of an association of western Montana river guides and has two college degrees. All of his associates seem to have at least one, which may account for their peculiar behavior. Dave keeps statistics, for example. He told me that only ten percent of his guided float trips are in the spring, but they produce

fifty percent of the trout over eighteen inches. This means (if I remember freshman algebra) that chances of catching a big trout are nine times better in the spring than during the rest of the season.

There is a reason. The Bitterroot River has a spring-hatching stonefly named Skwala parallela in Latin and nothing particular in English. The name lends itself to levity but the Skwalas are not squalid -- just different. The males have short, useless wings and must crawl around in search of the larger, long-winged females. These, being liberated, take all the risks. They swim out from the rocky banks and are carried downstream near shore, laying eggs. They seem content paddling around like little boats in the water. I suppose that the insects could travel miles downstream, except for the trout. Picture the reaction of trout to a line of fat, brown flies being carried downstream one at a time. This is another way in which Montana is compensated for a winter that is (to be frank) stressful to banana trees.

It is hard to believe that so perfect an angler's insect exists or that, if it does, it can survive. I kept a few of the Skwalas as evidence. I put them into a clear solution in a glass vial, preserving them forever.

The artificial fly that worked was, of course, an inch-long imitation Skwala. (Just to be contrary, I tried others, which did not work.) The imitation had to be fished like the real thing, too. Once in awhile we would see a rising fish, get out of the boat, and catch it. But drift-boats and Skwalas were made for each other. The boat lets you cover miles of banks with few

casts, building suspense, waiting for a trout's neb to lift serenely beneath the fake insect. The mix of laziness and excitement seems right for April.

When you eventually have to cast, you want to fire the fly back to the trout-zone as quickly as possible, missing not a foot of shoreline. For speed and accuracy, you choose a line that is heavier than average for dry flies, these days: a 5- or 6-weight. Then you use a 7-pound-test tippet made from one of the new leader materials. This may be strong enough to retrieve the fly from an occasional grabby alder. Its .008" (3X) diameter is also right for turning over a size 8 fly on a standard-weight hook. If you have a 9-foot rod, use it. It will keep the fly above the guide's ears on your backcast, most of the time.

Guides learn to row with their heads down, though. John says that the ideal guide fits a size 48 jacket and a size 4 cap. He likes people to laugh. About rivers, however, he is serious. He describes water as the blood that keeps Montana alive. For a fly to float on living rivers he wants wings of something real: hair of elk, which lives even after its owner dies. Magic. You need that for trout. They rise because they can feel it.

I feel it too, occasionally. One morning, after an hour when the trout would not move, the weather changed a little and I felt the thing. I said so to Chris. It was his turn to cast from the bow-gunner's seat and he rose three fish right away.

Spring is fickle everywhere, and there are preparations to be made if you do not wish to tempt fate. Expect some weather for Hawaiian shirts and some for raincoats. Do not sleep out under the stars, which have a way of turning flaky after midnight,

making you wait for dawn in the back seat of your car. I stayed at the Bitterroot River Lodge, which was much more comfortable than the back seat of my truck. The river ran near enough to my window that I could sleep to its sound, then wake up and rush out to see if the water level was still all right. There came a morning when the crocuses bloomed outside the lodge and the Bitterroot was cloudy from snow-melt. If I had arrived then, my friends would have told me that I should have been there yesterday.

"There," on the map, was Hamilton, Montana, heart of the banana belt. It is a well-ordered town. It has motels and good places to eat. It has a service station with a big lot where teenagers dance to boom-boxes on warm April nights. They do not have anywhere else to dance. On the other hand, Hamilton has three fly shops, which is three more than there were in all of Washington, D.C., when I was living there. You will have no trouble finding all the flies you need in Hamilton. Here in Montana we keep our priorities straight.

One of the priorities is watching a new season wedge into the mountains from the bow of a drift-boat. You cannot step into the same river twice but you can float on top of the same one for a long time. Oars drip beads through clear air to clear water. Long rods paint yellow lines on blue skies. You wait for a trout to rise, ignoring the killdeers that flutter from every point of gravel, voices merging with the slow talk of current. Mountains move by. River and boat and anglers stay in place, preserved, floating in solution of springtime.

More Information

Timing: the Skwala stoneflies may hatch as early as the first week in March. Count on them by March 20. Peak fishing is likely to be in the first week of April, lasting till the Bitterroot run-off begins, usually between April 7 and 15.

Regulations: All trout must be released during the special early season. (One reason why the spring fishing is so little known is that it was not legal till recently.)

Clothing: Hats, sunglasses, raingear, and waders with felt soles.

[dry fly]

The dries also catch difficult fish. I lived a total of eight years in two European countries where the brown trout had been educated ever since the first humans followed retreating glaciers. Streamers rarely work today; wet flies and nymphs work sometimes; dry flies catch trout consistently. They sometimes catch fish the locals can't move with bait (and the Europeans have some tricks with bait that I hope Americans never learn). Our fishing is increasingly coming to resemble that in Europe, so I would expect the dry fly seems to remain important.

[The dry fly is a child of the English language. English is as obvious as a floating fly: you don't have to worry about things like case and gender or strike indicators. There is a straightforward logic and a basic vocabulary that beginners grasp quickly. But then there are irregularities, pitfalls,

subtleties, the weight of history, the optics of the surface, the problem of drag, and twice as many words [] as any other language. You get proficient here and there, but you never learn the whole thing.]

A recent poll discovered that only five percent of Americans are "scientifically literate." Perhaps a poll of fly-fishermen would have shown more grasp of the scientific process, because our flies increasingly make use of it. We postulate that trout take these flies because they look like natural food (a theory not widely accepted in other kinds of fishing with artificial bait). We offer both imitative and non-imitative flies to selective trout -- which is testing the theory empirically against nature. We write volumes on our results. We have not proven the theory, but then respectable theories are not supposed to be easy to prove.

Dec 7
Move to January
Feb 2
(APRIL)

LARK IN THE MORNING

May the countryside and the gliding valley
streams content me. Lost to fame, let me love
river and woodland.

Virgil, Eclogues

A man has no ears for that to which experience
has given him no access.

Nietzsche, Ecce Homo

Walked out this morning into a song that would have been an
assault, if it had not been gorgeous. The meadowlark is at full
volume in April, and I suppose that so loud a refrain must come
from the male of the species. His music is literally breathtaking
in the sense that you, the human, stop your lungs to listen for
the angel.

The meadowlark has an angel in mind too, as males commonly
do when they sing loud. [] He is showing off for his mate, or
intended mate, and making himself equally conspicuous to the rest
of us. He may not think of himself as a decoy but he stands with
chest puffed out like the Barber of Seville, and if the