

A Song for the Asking
The Electronic Newsletter of
EarthSong Photography
and
EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty

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Hello to All:

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When Enigmas Come Wrapped in Riddles

Once when he was asked to give a speech, so the story goes, he was asked how long he might need to prepare the text; and his response to the



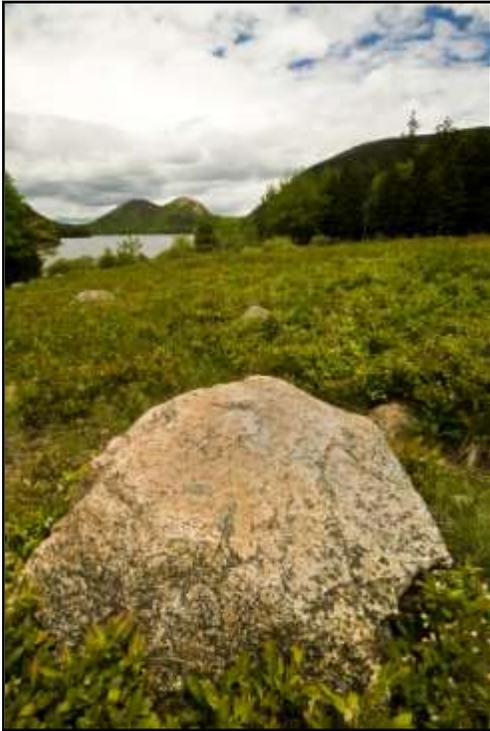
question is instructive. He replied, “Well, that all depends on how long you want me to talk. If you want me to speak for fifteen minutes, I’ll need about a month. If you want me to speak for thirty minutes, it will take me about two weeks. But if you want me to talk for an hour, hell, I’m ready now.”

If it is true, and I am inclined to believe that it is,

Sinking the Rock Ship

it is somehow illustrative of the man we know as **Theodore Roosevelt (TR)**, the unique child who was born into great wealth, who grew up to become the 26th President of the United States, and who in between and thereafter became one of the staunchest and most ardent conservationists in the history of our country: an enigma within a riddle, both then and now.

Yet, possibly, even more instructive is the line from **Wordsworth's**



powerful ode to nature, ***My Heart Leaps Up***, “...*The child is the father of the man...*,” perhaps because TR himself seemed so convinced, even as a child, that who he would become as a man hinged so heavily on what he made of himself as a boy, a perspective that is, in my mind, unfortunately, not well-steeped within the common experience of boyhood today. For much of my adult life I have been markedly unsettled toward TR, and I could not understand why; but recently I have chosen to confront my ambivalence because I have felt a need to resolve the enigma of him as completely as I can, so that I can give him a more fixed place in my understanding of the history of conservation and preservation in our

Tiny Bubbles and Berries culture.

Two perspectives have been extremely helpful in that regard: I resolved, as should be the case in all historical analysis, to evaluate him only within the context of his own place in time – Victorian, manifest destiny, expansionist-driven, nineteenth-century America; and, secondly and more importantly, to remember at every point that it is quite possible for a person to enter adulthood with one set of attitudes and perspectives toward the larger world and one’s society, and for those attitudes and perspectives to deeply and sincerely be altered in many significant respects as one proceeds through life. The child may be the father of the man, but the man has the power to give a more finely nuanced interpretation to the world at which the child could only imperfectly and incompletely hint.



Dark Rose the Forest

It seems to me that the more sensitive we are to the larger world, as children, the more likely we are, as adults, to be open to allowing ourselves to re-interpret the truisms of that world as we live in it; and TR, if anything, was an extremely sensitive child. In this, too, it is always helpful to remember that there is a difference between merely changing one's mind to be in alignment with the ever-shifting cultural or political winds, and changing one's mind after due and thorough



evaluation of a situation or condition, based on observable facts one had not previously known or considered. We should all be able to change. Who, then, was this child who learned to find his way by walking through the world talking softly and carrying a big stick?

Don't Take My Kodachrome Away



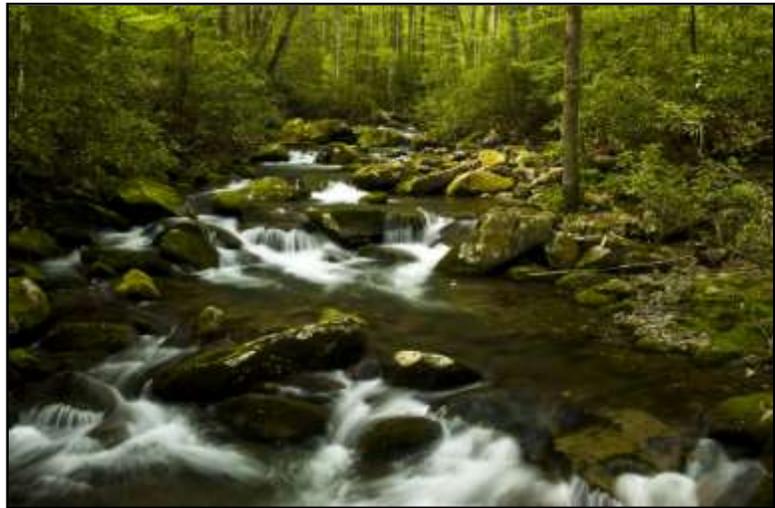
Buttermilk

his mission, Miles, who would meet an untimely death four years on, in the opening engagements of the Civil War as the commanding officer of the Federal installation at Harper's Ferry, wrote in describing Canyon de Chelly, "No command should ever enter it again." It would be another six years before troops under the command of the legendary **Kit Carson**

In October of 1858 an American army colonel, **Dixon S. Miles**, was leading a scouting party of regular troops through a portion of one of the most amazing canyon systems on earth, a place of such awesome physical and spiritual beauty that it was the most sacred site on the planet to the **Diné (Navajo) People**. Of his feelings in assessment of

would again penetrate the mystery of de Chelly to end the aura that had surrounded it and send the Diné on that other great American forced exile, the infamous Long Walk, to Bosque Redondo in southeastern New Mexico. The same month that Dixon Miles was despairing over the vastness of Canyon de Chelly, back East in New England **Henry David Thoreau** was journaling his thoughts about uncertainty in man and nature; and man, as might be expected, came up short. “The leaves of the azaleas are falling, mostly fallen,” he wrote on October 12th, “and revealing the large blossom-buds, so prepared are they for another year. With man all is uncertainty. He does not look forwardly to another spring. But examine the root of the savory-leaved aster, and you will find the new shoots, fair purple shoots, which are to curve upward and bear the next year’s flowers, already grown half an inch or more in the earth. Nature is confident.”

On the 27th of October, in the third-level bedroom over the parlor, in a five-story brownstone at 28 East 20th Street in New York City, an event occurred which could have hardly held any significance then for either the Navajo or Thoreau, but which would one day complete a circle that would be inclusive of both.



As Long as the Rivers Flow...

On that day a first son – the second of four children – was born to **Theodore Roosevelt, Sr.** and his wife, **Martha (Mittie) Bulloch Roosevelt**; and no small significance should be made of the fact that his father was a son of one of the wealthiest families in the city and his mother was a Southern beauty and member of one of the most prominent and historically-connected families of the State of Georgia, for this benign antagonism in his heritage manifests itself again and again in the seeming dualities that mark many of his life’s episodes. Theodore, Sr. was a large, exuberant, and cheerful man; and in the seven proud generations of Roosevelts that had lived on Manhattan beginning in 1649, there were none, it seemed that were a better model of character, probity, and upright conservative self-control. Moreover he was, by any standard, a quite handsome man. And though his only forms of athleticism,

apparently, were hiking and horsemanship, in his appearance he was very much athletic. If there were ever a blemish on his father's sterling name in the eyes of young Theodore, it would be the fact that during the Civil War his father, as did so many of the one-percenters of his day, hired a substitute to serve for him. Still, as an adult the younger would say, "My father, Theodore Roosevelt, was the best man I ever knew." Indeed, though he eschewed becoming a soldier, Theodore, Sr. worked tirelessly to promote the welfare of those who were. He spent months in Washington, D.C.



lobbying for the passage of the Allotment Act, whose legislative import was to allow monies to be sent to the families of soldiers directly from their pay on a regular basis at no cost to the family or the soldier. And when the act was passed, he became one of New York's Allotment Commissioners, whose task it was to both promote and oversee the program.

Tide Rolling In

Even as a child, TR was drawn to adventure and to nature; and it has been suggested that, in this regard, he resembled much more his mother's side of the family tree than the Roosevelt side. He and his siblings could sit breathless and enthralled for hours as Mittie Roosevelt, whose grandfather **Archibald Bulloch**, as governor of the state, had read the Declaration of Independence to the citizens of Georgia, spun out adventure upon adventure of her family's deeds along the Southern Coast, or the deep forests of Georgia's interior. In present time, the fourth-level piazza of the house on East 20th had been converted into a children's open-air playroom that looked out over the garden – one of the largest such private spaces in the city – of the **Goelet** mansion on 19th Street. There, exotic, clipped-wing birds in a variety of species roamed "freely." Every day the weather permitted, the children were allowed to put on their piazza clothes and go there to play.

Perhaps even more exotic was the fact that their own brownstone adjoined that of their uncle, **Robert B. Roosevelt (RBR)**, who was in many ways the antithesis of his younger brother, Theodore. Robert, a lawyer, was also a

writer, a gourmet chef, and above all a lover of wildlife, especially fish. He is considered by more than a few to have been the great American conservationist of the period between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, roughly 1865-1895. His lifestyle could easily be called bohemian for many reasons; and in his home along with his wife, **Elizabeth Ellis Roosevelt (Aunt Lizzie Ellis)**, he kept guinea pigs, chickens, pigeons, a parrot and a monkey. Robert B. remained a lifelong Democrat even after the Civil War when the rest of the Roosevelts had become Republicans, and there are stories in Roosevelt folklore that Theodore, Sr. eventually moved his family to a new home on West 57th Street to get his children away from the influence of his brother Rob. However, the historian **Douglas Brinkley** in his interesting and well-researched volume, ***Wilderness Warrior, Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America***, bluntly suggests that “RBR, more than any other direct influence, turned Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. into a conservationist as a teenager.” So apparently the influence had already been made. However, the older Theodore’s place in the eyes of his family could never have been compromised: they called him “Greatheart” and they adored him.



Before the child could be anything, however, it was going to be necessary for **Teedie**, as he was called by the family, merely to survive. His older sister, **Anna**, who was called **Bamie**, later described TR as a “great little home boy.” He was extremely frail and undersized even by the time he was ten; he was nervous, timid, and often solitary. His color was bad and he went about with what his mother described as a “quiet, patrician air...his large blue eyes not looking at anything present.” And, to make matters infinitely worse, he was severely asthmatic. His attacks began sometime about the age of three and from then until he went to college his condition had an effect on the entire family that was more than profound. In addition to being asthmatic, TR suffered chronic stomach problems, headaches, colds, fevers, and a recurring nightmare that a werewolf was

coming at him from the bottom of his bed.



In the City

abandoned by the mother, or of any form of rivalry for her affection. In a family as obviously connected and loving as TR's this may seem implausible, but in fact may simply point to the degree of innate sensitivity in this young boy. We do know that he was extremely connected to his mother with an abiding sense of both physical and emotional attachment, and that her love and attention were magical to him. This reality appears time and again in the family literature.

It is interesting, then, that, much more often than not, it was Theodore, Sr. who would gather the child in his arms and walk the floor with him, or bundle him up in the dead of night and take him in the carriage through the dim streets of the city until the attack subsided. As TR grew, it was Theodore, commonly, who took the boy away from whatever immediate surroundings the family might be in and out into the world of nature and a different, fresher, air. These frequent jaunts combined a dual factuality: he had his father's complete and undivided attention, and they were together on an adventure out in the natural world. Once the symptoms abated, it must have seemed like the most wonderful of times possible.

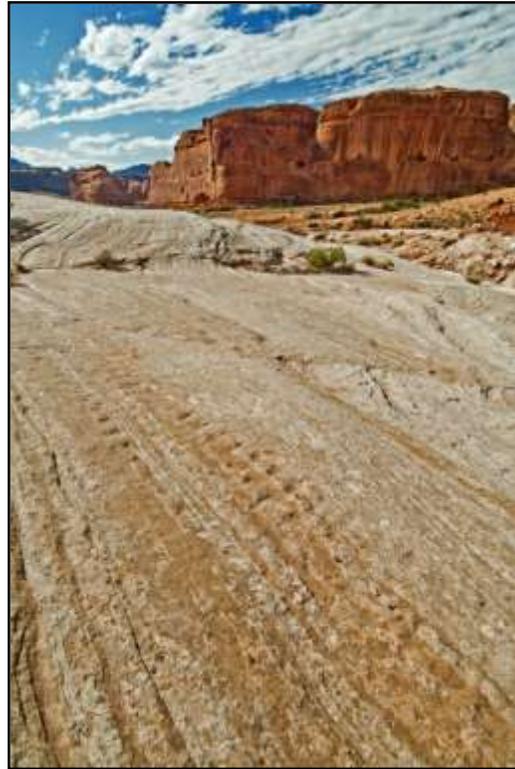
In his National Book Award-winning *Mornings on Horseback The Story of an Extraordinary Family, a Vanished Way of Life, and the Unique Child Who Became Theodore Roosevelt*, David McCullough, whose

impeccable research has captured the essence of TR's childhood, observes: "The inclination, as time goes on, is to demand more and more attention – if not through asthma, then through other means. Inevitably, as part of his way of coping with the world, the asthmatic also acquires a highly sensitized feeling for his surroundings. Of necessity he becomes acutely cognizant of the size and shape of rooms, the nearness of people and their comparative size, the whole look and feel and smell of places small and large, of fresh air, of skies and winds...He has learned at an early age what a precarious, unpredictable thing life is – and how very vulnerable he is. He must be prepared always for the worst. But the chief lesson is that life is quite literally a battle. And the test is how he responds, in essence whether he sees himself as a helpless victim or decides to fight back, whether he becomes extremely tenacious of life."

The Roosevelts would almost surely have known through their doctors, including brother-in-law **Hilborne West**, of the book written in 1864 by **Dr. Henry H. Salter, *On Asthma***, a very important early volume on the causes and treatment of the condition. In it, Salter extols the value, indeed necessity, of exercise as part of the therapeutic regimen. "Organs", said Salter, "are made for action, not existence; they are made to work, not to be; and when they work well, they can be well." Much the same advice as Theodore, Sr. might have given his son.

That it was Greatheart with whom TR endured most of these experiences is of inestimable significance; for as he watched his father and basked in his attention, the companionship they sustained, the confidence older man inspired, the strength he encouraged in his son, and the adventures they shared in the process, all came to have lasting effect on this fearful young man.

The role of asthma in TR's life cannot be overstated; however, its experience, more than anything, may have been the catalyst for the other great outpourings of Teedie's childhood: his great love of nature and his



Lines in the Sand Rock

acutely heightened sense of adventure.

Perhaps, in part, on account of the uncertainty surrounding TR's asthma attacks, as well as the desire to shelter their children from the work-a-day world of New York City, the Roosevelt kids never attended any sort of public school. In fact, they never attended a private school either, other than for a period of about two months, and then one only within shouting distance of the home on East 20th Street. They were all tutored by a succession of instructors, including adult family



Navajo Sandstone and White Tops members such as **Aunt Anna (Gracie)**, Mittie's sister, who, along with **Grandmamma Bulloch**, Mittie's mother, lived with the family until her marriage to **James Gracie** in 1866.

In addition to all of his mother's exciting stories, his exposure to Uncle Rob, and the adventures he shared with his father, TR was exposed to books from an early age. None made more of an impression than the stories of "**Captain**" (**Thomas**) **Mayne Reid**, the Irish-American novelist among whose works were a series of books that developed great appeal among boys in the middle part of the nineteenth-century. Teedie read ***The Boy Hunters***, set in Texas and Louisiana, over and over, dreaming that one day he would have the opportunity to undertake just such an adventure. The book has been described as a "juvenile scientific travelogue"; and young Roosevelt, already a self-described naturalist and scientist by the time he was ten, was particularly drawn to Reid's use of binomial nomenclature in his descriptions of flora and fauna in his writings.

When he was seven or eight, he had seen a dead seal laid out in a market on Broadway. So attracted that he returned to view it day after day for several days, he was ultimately given the skull, and with it he began the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History, later in the year to be joined in the effort by his cousin, **West Roosevelt**. The "museum" was housed on the fourth floor of the house on East 20th. It was the seal, he later said, that settled his mind on the idea of becoming a scientist. Mittie, especially, understood his

seriousness and curiosity, and encouraged him to enlist the knowledge of Uncle Hil West in Philadelphia. Uncle Hilborne had spent part of every summer with the family for a number of years and is said to have been responsible, perhaps more than anyone, for the first stirrings of intellectual curiosity in all of the children. It was Hilborne West who introduced Teedie to **Darwin's *On the Origin of Species***, which had only come to print in 1859, but had caused such excitement in Europe that an American edition was brought out in 1860. By the time he was barely ten, TR had read and apparently comprehended Darwin's primary tenets, which he applied earnestly to his burgeoning interest, especially in birds, but to other forms of wildlife as well. The great English biologist would become, for him, a personage of nearly mythic proportions. Even as an adult, he would commonly carry a copy of *On the Origin*



of Species in his saddlebag or gun case when hunting; however, in true scientific fashion he would always concede that while he believed evolution to be a fact, he also believed that the mechanism of natural selection required continuous scientific experimentation.

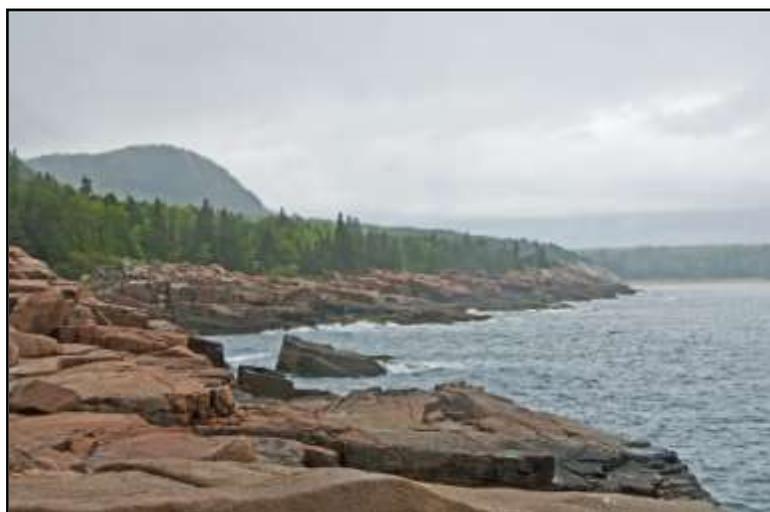
Where Are Those Keys?

When Teedie was not yet eleven, Theodore and Mittie determined to take the family on a grand tour of Europe. They would be away for exactly one year, during which time they would visit Great Britain as well as eight countries on the continent (including Monaco). They would stay in sixty-six different hotels. And though cultural enrichment and the children's benefit were given as primary reasons, there can be no doubt that Teedie's health was also a consideration. They would visit all the important historic and cultural sites: the museums, and galleries, and cathedrals, as well as the natural attractions such as the Swiss Alps, the English Lake Country, the Scottish Highlands, southern France, and the Italian countryside; and through it all TR's asthma provided a regular disruption. To say that the whole was a marvelous experience would be understatedly true; to say that the whole was tempered by TR's recurrent bouts of respiratory trauma

would be more accurate; but everyone survived, and the experience was, in sum, recalled very fondly by all as time went by.

Teedie was the diarist of the trip and one cannot read his coverage of the sojourn without seeing in it a growing desire to set himself apart from the others – to be the first to see or do something, to distinguish himself, to be out front, or simply to be alone with his thoughts.

One of the highlights of the trip, in addition to the time TR spent recovering from an attack by hiking with his father in the Alps, was the chance to meet Mittie's brothers, **James** and **Irvine Bulloch**, living in England, and especially Uncle Jimmie. For their roles in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy they were not eligible to be paroled, and so they were living as expatriates. Uncle Jimmie had been the chief foreign agent of the Confederacy in Europe and had overseen the building of the **CSS Alabama**, the commerce raider that had caused so much destruction to



Union shipping before being sunk in the harbor of Cherbourg, France by the Union warship **USS Kearsarge**. And it is interesting that in spite of having developed and expressed such strong pro-Union convictions even as a child, TR and Uncle Jimmie would develop a truly devoted bond, so that TR would recall his uncle in later life as, “blessed...as

Just Rock, Beautiful Rock

valiant and simple and upright a soul as ever lived...one of the best men I have ever known.” Uncle Jimmie's naval adventure stories must have provided many thrilling moments for his adventure-loving nephew; but more than that, James Dunwoody Bulloch would prove to be invaluable to TR's first serious effort at writing history: His ***The Naval War of 1812*** (1882) was published to excellent reviews and was eventually ordered by the government to be kept on every American sailing vessel.

When they arrived home to New York in May, 1870, the family took up much where it had left off. Teedie was particularly well during the first few months, but by July his attacks returned with apparent vengeance; and by September it seemed that both Theodore and Mittie had reached the end of

their endurance. The story of what happened next came through Mittie, who described that Theodore, Sr. called TR to him and addressed him as Theodore. “Theodore, you have the mind, but you have not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must make your body...It is hard drudgery to make one’s body,” his father said, “but I know you will do it.”

As the story continues, TR’s response to this was to throw back his head



and declare, “I will do it.”

John Wood, who operated Woods Gymnasium, had trained the sons of some of the city’s most prominent families, and now he had his chance with Theodore. For three months Teedie worked daily at the gym, and at the end of it Mittie brought John Wood to East 20th Street so that he could design in their

A Snow Comes to Fines Creek

piazza under her direction what would become famously known as the Roosevelt Family Gym.

Though TR persisted at his makeover task with dogged determination, change came slowly; so that even after two years of consistent work he would still tell the story of his first solo trip to Maine’s Moosehead Lake, at age thirteen to recover with an asthma attack, of being taunted as a sissy by a pair of local boys, each of whom handled him physically with such ease that they could torment him without really doing serious harm. Rather than being angry at, or resentful of, his tormentors, he envied their prowess and strength.

As he sat in the lakeside lodge at Moosehead, he made a pact with himself that he would never allow himself to be put in such a position again. He would do whatever amount of training it would take to build in himself the same vitality.

That same year, near the end of summer in 1872, he received two gifts from his father that would change his life completely. The first was a 12-gauge, double-barreled, French-made shotgun that carried a powerful kick. In shooting this treasure he discovered that he could barely see targets that

other seemed to see easily, and this led to the second gift: a large pair of spectacles. As he would later say, “They literally opened an entirely new world for me.”

Now his birding, as well as his Darwinian scientific inquiries could be taken to an entirely new and different level; but his application of its tenets in North America would have to wait because in October, 1872, the family embarked on the second of its tours abroad, this a longer trip to Africa and the Holy Land. In the nineteenth-century those new biological tenets began and ended with the word “collect.”

It has been said that the great ornithologist, John James Audubon, probably killed more birds than any man in history, such was his zeal for



Wood Stork Ballet

collecting and understanding his chosen subject; and TR was a budding naturalist of the same school. It was simply the way things were done, and while there were voices that suggested it might be more appropriate to view wildlife for its own sake – Thoreau at Walden Pond comes to mind – those voices were not the ones that ruled the approaches to the study of nature.

On December 13th the grand houseboat chartered by Theodore, Sr. headed upriver from Cairo, and Teedie killed his first bird, a warbler. It seemed to release within him a frenzy of collecting desire so intense that even his father, who had never been known to relish killing anything, joined the hunt. The fact that the Nile River Valley was a veritable kingdom – both flyway and

winter haven – of birds only added to his excitement and served to hold Teedie’s attention to an almost unimaginable degree. As a scientist he felt obligated to do more than merely look; he was compelled to collect. There was no objection to this from any quarter and he saw it as “splendid sport.” It should be noted that during the weeks that the family sailed the Nile, TR’s asthma was non-existent; and it should be noted, as well, that now at fourteen, the changes that hail the onset of a growing body’s physical maturity were beginning to be obvious.

On the boat at the end of a day’s collecting he delighted in getting out his

taxidermist's kit and attending to the tedious steps of stuffing and mounting his collections in the hot air of the open deck. The total of birds killed during the Nile cruise amounted to somewhere between one hundred and two hundred. He lost count.

Part of the reason for the extended stay abroad on this second trip was the fact that Theodore, Sr. had decided to move his family from East 20th Street to a new home that was being built at 6 West 57th Street, just west of Fifth Avenue and two blocks from Central Park, a virtual palace, even by the standards of that gilded day. He would now be next door to another brother, **James Alfred**, who was building uptown, as well. On the top floor, a fully equipped gymnasium took up residence and above it, in the attic, Teedie's natural history museum also found a home. The new residence would not be completely finished until after the family moved in



Homeward Bound

on November 5, 1873. By now the severe economic downturn known as the Panic of '73 was fully loosed on the country. Railroads and banks failed and misery among the work-a-day people spread. From all of this the Roosevelts were spared. In order to keep the three younger children on their educational track, Theodore hired a new tutor, a young Harvard graduate named **Arthur Cutler**. After several months of working with all of them, including Cousin West, it became obvious in the Summer of 1874 that Teedie was pulling away in his lessons; he was spending six to eight hours every day at his studies; and thus it was determined that he should go to college. Cutler's efforts with TR began to focus wholly on preparing him to pass the Harvard entrance exam. That early great American naturalist **Louis Agassiz** had transformed the study of the natural sciences in Cambridge. It was "the place" to go if you wished to become a man of science, and that is what Teedie fervently wished. Between that summer – 1874 – and the fall of 1876 when he would leave for Harvard, Teedie, or **Thee**, as he had begun referring to himself, was in constant motion, often alone, usually in search of some activity that would

bring him into the natural world and in the company of wild creatures, especially birds. He was no less inclined to “collect” them than he had been since his first kill; but with each experience his seriousness in studying them, searching always to glean some new understanding of why they were the way they were and why they did the things they did, grew. His journals reflect an increasing acuteness in the clarity and subtlety of his observations. He saw to their nest building habits and materials, to the individual notes and phrases of their singing, to their flight habits, and especially to their physical structures and anatomical designs. Cutler, himself, observed, “The study of Natural History was his (TR’s) chief recreation then, as it continued to be....In his excursions outside the city,



his rifle [shotgun] was always with him, and the outfit of the taxidermist was in use on every camping trip.”

By the time his acceptance to Harvard was officially received in the spring of 1876, TR was dead certain about his career path, even though his father had offered him a serious consideration that a life in science would probably not be nearly as glamorous as he had envisioned, and that he would most certainly face periods where he would be required to spend long hours in a laboratory rather than being in the nature’s open spaces doing collecting. Of himself at that time he later said in *An Autobiography*, “When I entered college, I was devoted to *out-of-doors* natural history, and my ambition was to be a scientific man of the [John J.] **Audubon**,

How Does My Hair Look? or [Alexander] **Wilson**, or [Spencer F.] **Baird**, or [Elliott] **Coues** type...”

It is important to note that at this same time in his life TR was fairly disdainful of politics and politicians. This was so even though his father had become caught up in the frenzy of reform that was swirling around the Republican Party; and for the first time in his life was actively engaged in supporting the candidate who seemed to embody those ideals, **Benjamin Bristow** of Kentucky. Even though Bristow did not succeed in his bid to be the nominee, Theodore and his group were successful in keeping the

nomination from **Senator Roscoe Conkling** of New York, a man they associated with all that was wrong with politics in the country. In the end the Republicans had nominated **Rutherford B. Hayes** to run against the Democrat **Samuel Tilden**. Thee had nothing good to say about either of them; he observed that both men were contemptuous of the teachings of the naturalists like Coues and Darwin.

When he entered Harvard in September of 1876, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. was all of five feet, eight inches tall – as tall as he would ever be – and he weighed 124 pounds. He would continue to work out and to train religiously, and would even become the runner-up in the Harvard Light-weight Division Boxing Championship in 1879. He would carry his major, Natural History, all the way through to a degree in 1880 and on the way would become a member of Phi Beta Kappa and would graduate magna cum laude, finishing twenty-first in a class of 177. He would become popular with his classmates, who seemed to appreciate him for his determination, his enthusiasm, and his sheer love of life. He would be elected to several fraternal organizations, including the Porcellian Club and Delta Kappa Epsilon. As far as his scientific activities were concerned,



Just Practicing Dancing

he was breezing through his natural history courses; and between his freshman and sophomore years he spent weeks camped in the Adirondacks with a friend, **Henry (Hal) Minot** conducting the most serious bird collecting adventure of his life, which would result in his first detailed study and was entitled ***The Summer Birds of the Adirondacks***. It lists both he and Minot as authors, but is considered primarily the work of Roosevelt. This work received high praise from **Dr. C Hart Merriam**, who, only twenty-two, was already one of the country's most respected naturalists; and it resulted in Theodore being saluted as an up-and-coming naturalist of the Ivy League and garnered him a listing in the 1877 ***Naturalists' Directory***.

It was during this period, however, that a tide began to turn within him,

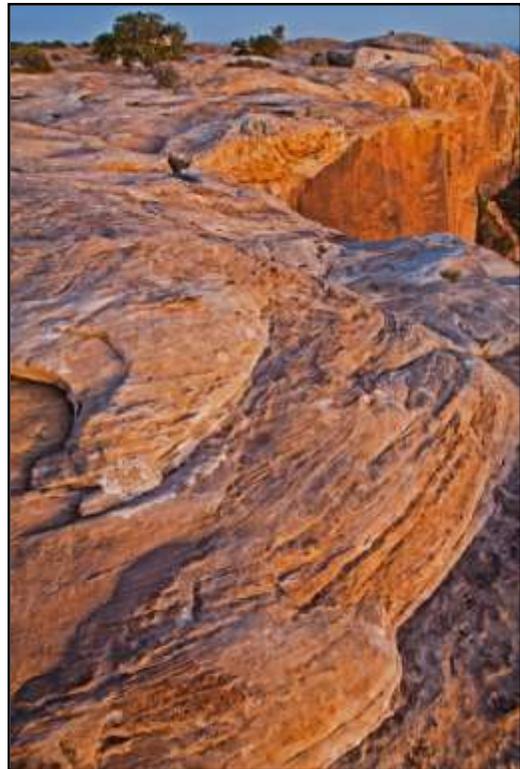
urged on by events he could not have foreseen and could not control. In the fall of 1877 his father, the central focus of his existence, was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Theodore Sr. would pass away on February 10, 1878 and be mourned by hundreds, if not thousands, of New Yorkers who had known his honesty, integrity, and generosity. TR's friend, Hal Minot, withdrew from Harvard in the middle of the year, to become a law clerk, arguing to Roosevelt that it was better to make a lot of money and be a field ornithologist than to waste time in Cambridge. Although TR was doing well in his courses, he was struggling against his growing impressions of what it really meant to be a biologist: he was becoming disillusioned with his professors and the curriculum because, as he put it, they "utterly ignored the possibilities of the faunal naturalist, the outdoor naturalist and observer of nature. They treated biology as purely a science of the laboratory and the microscope.

Just as Thoreau had left Concord, seeking in Maine on the slopes of Mount Katahdin, a rebirth of spirit, Roosevelt, who would never become a Transcendentalist, also sought out the Great Northwoods for its therapy of wilderness. Years later in his ***Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter***, he would praise Thoreau for writing ***The Maine Woods***, but would temper that praise by noting Thoreau's deficit as a hunter. It was in Maine that TR came to understand the necessity of acquiring the outdoor skills needed to survive, or else succumbing to the elements or quitting the effort; and the latter two choices were simply not acceptable.

TR would eventually come to see himself as segue between the Darwinian naturalists and the big-game hunters and explorers of his and earlier times: the go-between of natural history and the humanities. He did not intend to quit Harvard; but as 1879 rolled over into the new decade he wrote a letter to Hal Minot outlining his thoughts. In February he had become engaged to "the love of my life" **Alice Hathaway Lee** of Chestnut Hill, outside of Boston, and to Minot he writes, "I have made everything subordinate to winning her, so you can perhaps understand a change in my ideas as regards to science." If there is a note of uncertainty in this, it should be revealed that he had originally proposed in June of 1879, but Alice had put him off for eight months. Going further he reveals to Minot that he has lately been considering a career in politics for the first time and is seriously interested in public service in New York as a way to "keep up the family name." As biographer **Carleton Putnam** put it in ***Theodore Roosevelt: The Formative Years***, "Natural History was to remain a genuine avocation, but it never loomed again as a feasible career."

The man of science was choosing, instead, to become a man for the people. In October of 1880, on his twenty-second birthday, Theodore and Alice were married in Brookline, Massachusetts. They would ultimately move into the house on West 57th Street with Mittie, and it was then that natural history began to truly take a back seat to politics. TR's diaries show a moving drift away from bird sightings and hunting. In the late summer and early fall before his marriage he had taken an extended hunting trip through the Midwest with his younger brother, Elliott, and he had returned from that adventure perhaps more of a big game hunter and less of a birder, although birds were by far the major targets of their efforts.

In concert with his marriage, he enrolled in Columbia Law School, but in the summer of 1881 he followed through on his promise to take Alice on a honeymoon to Europe. When they returned home he threw himself into his first political race, and in November he was elected to the New York State Assembly as the representative of the Twenty-first District, taking office in January of 1882. It is illustrative of his movement away from being a professional naturalist that three months after being elected he would write to Elliott Coues offering to donate the bulk of the "Roosevelt Natural History Museum" to the Smithsonian Institution.



Navajo Sandstone at Dusk

The offer was ultimately accepted by the Smithsonian's great naturalist director, Spencer Baird, who, once he saw the collection, was not only impressed with TR's taxidermy but with the breadth of the number of species donated as well.

Though politics now consumed him, the trip west with Elliott had shown him that there was a West beyond what he had seen that, recalling his childhood love affair with Mayne Reid's books, beckoned to his senses now as a hunter. In the Spring of 1883, Theodore and Alice spent a lot of time at the family's estate on Long Island, Oyster Bay. There he read the *History of the Northern Pacific Railroad*, which appealed greatly to his expansionist, manifest destiny sensibilities, as well as his big-game-hunter

love of wildlife; and he was stung with the desire to hunt buffalo, while there were still wild buffalo to be hunted.

In September of that same year he made a trek to the Badlands of the Dakota Territories (They weren't states yet). He had decided to invest as part owner of a cattle ranch located in the valley of the Little Missouri River, and once he had seen its operation he planned to find a guide who could lead him to a buffalo. On seeing the Badlands for the first time Roosevelt had been transported into a state of awe that he had never experienced; quite simply put, he fell in love with the landscape, and though he did succeed in bagging his quarry, he was somewhat defensive as he wrote from his hunter's perspective about killing an endangered species. But the story of the hardships he happily endured on the hunt is the story of a man who begins an experience with one view of himself and comes out the other end with a view that is altogether different: the change from a Harvard-educated dandy to an all-American buffalo hunter.

By the beginning of October he had returned to New York and to Alice full of awe for the West he had seen and experienced; but in greater awe, still, over the fact that Alice was now five months pregnant, and he was soon to be a father.

His wide-eyed romance with the cowboys had to take a back seat to the politics of reform that kept him busy in the State Assembly in Albany, and it was there he found himself on February 13th when the telegram arrived from the City saying that Alice had given birth to a girl. His great exhilaration and joy were, sadly, short-lived, for a second message arrived soon thereafter saying that both Alice and his mother were gravely ill, nay, dying.

Rushing back to New York as fast as the train could get him there, he arrived around midnight, in time to be with Mittie before she passed about two o'clock in the morning, and then to watch, helpless, as his beloved Alice slipped away some twelve hours later: mother and wife, both, on Valentine's Day; Mittie from typhoid, Alice from Bright's disease, a horrible affliction of the kidneys, probably undiagnosed because of her pregnancy. He wrote for the first time in months in a diary, "The light has gone out of my life."

As he had quickly done following the death of his father, he bottled his emotions and plunged into his work, and other than the few diary entries he made, he never revealed any emotions for others to see. He never mentioned Alice in *An Autobiography*, seeming to feel that silence was the greatest form of respect he could offer up.

There is no saying what might have been if this tragedy had not struck, nor how TR, or his family, might have been different; what we do have is the history that followed. In many ways it is one of the most enthralling political stories ever written.

At the end of his term – the second – in the Assembly, Roosevelt declined to run again. Following the Republican National Convention in Chicago in the Spring of 1884 he returned to the Badlands as quickly as he could. His choice – and that of the other reform-minded Republicans – of a nominee had been defeated, but rather than leave the party as many of the reformers did, he chose to remain, for which act he was roundly blasted in the press. His thinking on the matter was ultimately pragmatic: he could accomplish nothing if he left; only if he remained and learned to take what victories he could and absorb what defeats he suffered as part of the price of the accomplishment of something – the rules by which politics has always been played.

He would remain in the Dakotas off and on for the next two years – but never away from New York for more than a few months at a time – rebuilding himself physically and emotionally



Valley of the Colorado

as a “ranchman,” during which time he wrote three volumes, two of which are still memorable on their scope and detail: *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* and *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*. On his complete return to the City – following the disastrous winter of 1886-87 in which entire herds of cattle on the Northern Plains were wiped out and his total losses were eventually estimated to be about \$700,000 in today’s dollars – he was almost immediately asked by the Republican Party to run for mayor. He finished third, but went on to serve as a Civil Service Commissioner under two presidential administrations, Harrison and Cleveland, followed by two years as the Police Commissioner of New York City, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy until resigning to become a colonel in the army and hero of the Battle of San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War. After the war he served as Governor of New York until being tapped as the vice-

presidential running mate for **William McKinley**'s successful presidential bid in 1900. With the assassination of McKinley in September of 1901, Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in at the age of forty-two as the youngest president ever to serve in that office. He would be re-elected in 1904 and decline to run again in 1908. On leaving office he set out on a safari to Africa and a tour of Europe, but upon his return to America he became involved in a rancorous dispute with his chosen successor, **William Howard Taft**. When his attempt to wrest the presidential nomination of the Republican Party from Taft failed in 1912, he founded the short-lived Bull Moose Party. In the ensuing election he became the only third-party candidate to ever finish second in a presidential race, outpolling Taft, but losing to Woodrow Wilson.

After this loss Roosevelt set out on an expedition to South America, from which experience derived his popular book, ***Through the Brazilian Wilderness***. Perhaps the most ambitious goal of this trek was to find the headwaters of the Rio da Duvida, the River of Doubt, and to trace it north to the Madeira and on to the Amazon. Ultimately the river would be renamed Roosevelt River in his honor.

He had contracted malaria in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and in Brazil a leg wound led to a tropical fever that resembled malaria. The experience probably reduced his life by several years. However he did survive, but the aggregate of a lifetime of intense physical activity and its attendant ailments began to take its toll.

When World War I began TR spoke vociferously on behalf of the Allies and against any appeasement of Germany, which meant that he denounced the policies of President Wilson. His strong campaigning in 1916 and his denunciations of Irish-Americans and German-Americans as unpatriotic for putting the interests of Ireland and Germany ahead of America's by supporting neutrality, led in 1918 to a Republican mid-term election sweep of Congress, and he was considering another run for president in 1920.

Time, however, had run out, and the bell caught up with him. On January 6, 1919, Theodore Roosevelt died in his sleep from a heart attack.

There is so much more that could have been said about this man who never seemed to understand the meaning of slowing down or even hesitating in life. Though he might be accused of making many mistakes, he could never, never be accused of doing nothing; and, as might be expected from such a life, there is much with which one might find to agree and much with which one might find to disagree. And that is how I am left with him, even in the wake of my initial promise to see him within the context of his times and to

be open to allowing him to change through time: much to agree, much to disagree.

There are three aspects of his life that I look to for guidance in this: his love of nature and the natural world; his rugged, boot-straps individualism; and his strident, one-America-fits-all nationalism.

To begin with the latter of these, a single nation of diverse individuals is certainly possible in my mind, but its likelihood of actual existence is decreased to the extent that a dominant culture fails, and refuses, to take into account the realities of subordinate cultures in the integration process toward unification and tries to force everyone to “be like me.” What seems more plausible is a process that encourages minority cultures to appreciate their differences from the dominant culture while embracing a larger set of values of inclusiveness that speaks to a shared purpose and vision of what a nation can be for all of its citizens. After all, this land belonged to first-Americans long before it belonged to any Europeans, and they were quite fine with that. To then say that they should seek to become Europeanized in the face of conquest and eschew thousands of years of cultural evolution seems a bit ludicrous and short-sighted. To say, on the other hand, that there might be ways for those two cultures to exist side by side, or even overlap, given flexibility in the dominant culture toward tolerance, is something different. To demand all-or-nothing acclamation is to bury a seed of resentment that must one day germinate into a disease in society that can only threaten its continuance. Does Wounded Knee ring a bell? To offer a concrete example: In 1906, during Roosevelt’s full term as president, Congress passed the notorious Burke Act, or as it was also known, the Forced Fee Patenting Act, which was designed to correct certain deficiencies in the even more infamous Dawes Act of 1887. These acts together were aimed at destroying the reservation system of land ownership under which the tribes had lived not only during the reservation period, but from time immemorial, that is, ownership in common. The idea was to create allotments of land for each individual, or family, so that ownership in this vein could be established. The unstated, but well-understood truth, of this law was to make it easier for whites to encroach onto reservation lands by buying from individual owners, who, because of their unfamiliarity with laws and customs, would be facile targets for speculators. It is somehow interesting to me that historians typically rank TR as one of our country’s top five presidents, while Native Americans, on the whole, usually rank him as one of the top three Indian-hating presidents after Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison.

With respect to the notion of rugged, boot-straps individualism, there is much to admire in TR's own struggle for survival in the face of his youthful infirmities, and especially the asthma which haunted him nearly all of his life. It took great courage on his part to face the challenges he faced and to rise above them in the ways that he did, and nothing should ever be taken away from his effort in that regard.



How he pushed himself and willed himself to endure should be a lesson for all of us to admire and emulate. But let's face it, TR was a son of great wealth, and, as such, could at least consider – even if not expect – that any opportunity to help himself would be made available to him. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all afford a family gym and to spend our lives in relative leisure touring the world's exotic places, and spending our summers on the coast or in the mountains? It is not my purpose to offer sour grapes, but if more people had TR's opportunities, I truly believe we would see a much greater flourishing of our society for the good. And perhaps the individualism that would flow from that would likewise take into account the importance of the greater good for the whole.

Water Eventually Breaks Rock

I think, also, that one of the outgrowths of such an individualistic worldview is the tendency to view others strictly as individuals and to be inclined to judge others solely on the basis of individual effort and merit. TR once said, "...the only wise and honorable and Christian thing to do is to treat each black man and each white man strictly on his merits as a man, giving him no more and no less than he shows himself worthy to have." Such an approach, if it were strictly adhered to, would be an enticing meritocracy that I would be quite interested to see.

Lastly, concerning Theodore Roosevelt's love of nature, I stand in real awe. From the child who loved birds and wished to become a Darwinian scientist and outdoors nature observer, there came a man who loved the outdoor life and worked ceaselessly to protect it from those who in their lack of caring or understanding would seek to wreck the natural world merely for the

profit it could provide in the short term. He held fast to the belief that Mankind has a sacred obligation to protect its natural wonders and diverse species. From his elevated view as president Roosevelt was in a unique position to see and evaluate the destruction of the natural world that was steadily taking place in all parts of the country as America rushed headlong into the Twentieth Century, and he was determined to do something to confront it.

The list of his accomplishments in that regard is staggering:

In 1903 he created the first National Bird Refuge to protect brown pelicans and other species at Pelican Island,, Florida. This was the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge System. By the time he left office he would create fifty (50) more of these refuges.

His administration ushered to passage the American Antiquities Act of 1906, which gave the President authority to preserve important sites as National Monuments without having to obtain the approval of Congress. In all Roosevelt created eighteen (18) national monuments including the Grand Canyon, which he established when he was unable to get it set aside as a national park.

In 1887 while weighing his political options and considering a run for mayor of New York, he and **George Bird Grinnell**, editor of ***Forest and Stream*** magazine had founded the Boone and Crockett Club to promote good hunting practices, but also to urge scientific forest management, clean water, and restricted use of natural resources. As President, under the Forestry Reserve Act of 1891 he set aside 150 million acres of American forests for future use and enjoyment; and in 1905 he established the Federal Bureau of Forestry under Gifford Pinchot. This was the beginning of the U.S. Forest Service.

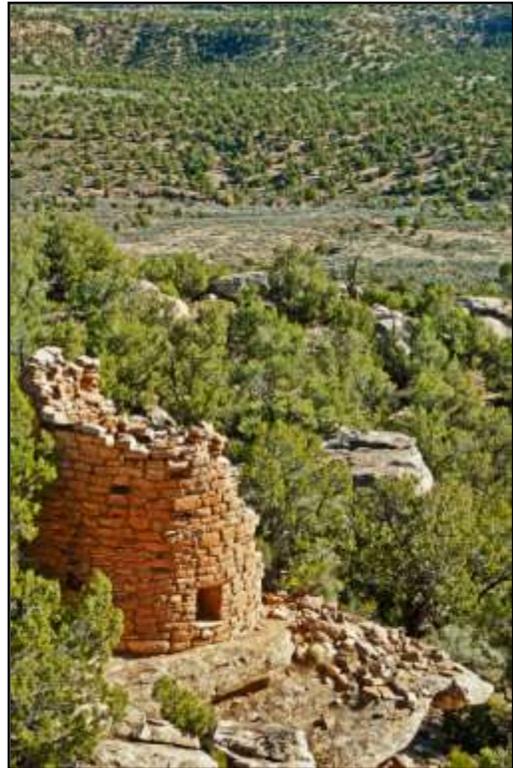
Under TR's leadership five (5) new national parks were established, including Mesa Verde and Crater Lake. In all, according to Douglas Brinkley, Roosevelt was responsible for the conservation of 230 million acres of American land: An incredible body of work on behalf of the natural world and its preservation for us all to enjoy.

And what about Canyon de Chelly? By 1868 it had become obvious that the Bosque Redondo experiment in internment was not working; and so the government, at length, concluded that the Diné could return to a reservation created on their traditional homelands within the bounds of the four sacred mountains. On June 18, 1868, the disparate Diné bands began the long trip home to the 3.4 million acres they had been given by the Treaty of Bosque Redondo. Within those boundaries lay their beautiful

Canyon de Chelly.

It was not until the 1880's, however that the scientific world began to appreciate the extent and significance of the archaeological world that lay within the canyon, and by the early 1890's already treasures were being lost to looters and vandals. Of equal concern was the peril that many of the sites faced due to natural processes, primarily erosion caused by Rio de Chelly, the stream that drained the area.

The urging for preservation did not begin until 1903, but neither the Diné, nor the Indian Service (Bureau of Indian Affairs), were in a position to do much of anything in that regard. It was not until 1919, when **Herbert Gleason** made a re-recommendation of an earlier suggestion (not his) that the area be set aside as a National Monument that action began to be seriously undertaken; and in 1931, President **Herbert Hoover** took the ultimate step to create Canyon de Chelly National Monument. The authority for his action was the Antiquities Act that TR had shepherded into being in 1906. In all, the Antiquities Act has been used more than a hundred times since its passage. The list of those sites of history and natural history and natural beauty that have been preserved through this wonderful piece of legislation read like a bucket list of special attractions: places for every American to cherish and to visit; and every time you hear that more of that beauty has been preserved for us and our children's children, pause for a moment and thank Theodore Roosevelt for his love of the natural world.



Land of the Ancients

What's Now?:

In the Time of Early Arrival

On February 14th Bonnie and I continued our Valentine's Day tradition of taking a hike, and although the Kephart Prong Trail in the Oconaluftee River watershed is one of our favorites, we had hiked it in January, and so decided that somewhere else was in order. We settled on the Kanati Fork

Trail. Kanati Fork is a gathering of smaller streams that flow off the slopes of Thomas Divide as it arcs southeast and then south from the crest of the Smokies just west of Newfound Gap. It reaches Beech Flats Prong from the northwest just barely ahead of Beech Flats' confluence with Kephart Prong where the Oconaluftee River is born. Kanati Fork's namesake trail is a 2.9 mile path that marches steadily uphill from the trailhead on US 441 to its junction with ridge-running Thomas Divide Trail, 2150 vertical feet later. It is a beautiful climb.

On Valentine's Day there was a fair dusting of snow from two days earlier still on the ground at the trailhead.

If you fail to work in public life, as well as in private, for honesty and uprightiness and virtue, if you condone vice because the vicious man is smart, or if you in any other way cast your weight into the scales in favor of evil, you are just so far corrupting and making less valuable the birthright of your children.

Theodore Roosevelt

As we climbed, however, the dusting became a covering and by the time we had reached the junction we were in pea soup and walking in about 4" of unbroken powder. It was a beautiful world and I was thankful that I had decided to put on my trail runners in favor of my Chacos.

Four days earlier we had photographed daffodils (*Narcissi obvallaris*?) blooming in Cades Cove. On February 28th I engaged in another of my annual rites by going to Cove Hardwood Nature Trail to check of the condition of the early-blooming species there.



Someone's Front Yard When?

Over the years I have found the flowers, especially the sharp-lobed hepatica (*Hepatica nobilis*) on that trail to be fairly accurate harbingers of the advent of spring, and given what I had seen in Cades Cove I was curious to see if the cooler weather around Valentine's Day had slowed down the on-rush of the season. Our winter in the Southern Appalachians has been

exceptionally mild. In Asheville this winter, so far, there has not been a snowfall in excess of .7' and the total for the city in this hibernal season of 2012 has been 1.5". Pictures from the storms of 2009-2010 come to my mind.

Yesterday, the hepatica on Cove Hardwood Nature Trail were as bloomed out at this point as I can ever remember except for 2007, and you may recall what happened that year with the blossoms that had advanced as far as they had only to be devastated by the snow/freeze of April 2nd. I hope we are not in for a reprise. Yesterday, there were also trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*) leaves showing. There were even some yellow trillium (*Trillium luteum*) leaves up, which I could not ever remember seeing so soon in the year.



Yes, unless the season turns decidedly cooler for an extended period, there's going to be an early spring. We can only wait to see how, in the end, it will all play out; but in the absence of a cool turn, my guess would be that we'll see species in flower from ten days to two weeks ahead of "normal."

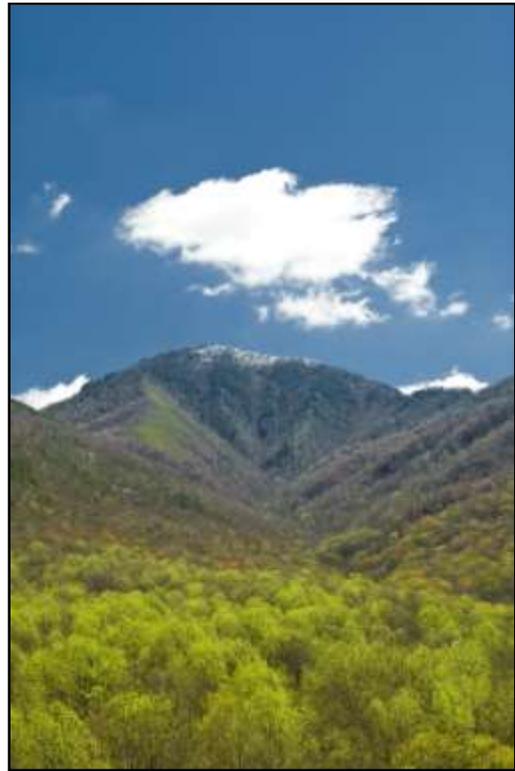
My Own Harbinger

Water level in Smokies' streams is about what you would expect it to be this time of year, mid-way through the rainy season. There has neither been an abundance, nor a dearth, of precipitation. Some watersheds, like Walker Camp Prong, appear to be a little low, but that could change within a short period.

One of the beautiful opportunities to consider over the coming weeks will be the moss in many locations. Greenbrier and Roaring Fork on the Tennessee side come to mind, as do Kephart Prong and Bradley Fork in the Oconaluftee drainage. There has certainly been enough moisture that the moss in general is lush and vibrant.

Within the next two to three weeks the bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) will be blooming in the lower Oconaluftee watershed especially near the visitor center. Soon thereafter some of the early violet (*Viola*) species will begin to appear, especially early yellow (*V. rotundifolia*), halberd-leaved (*V. hastata*), Canadian (*V. canadensis*), woolly blue (*V. sororia*), bird's foot

(*V. pedata*), and long-spurred (*V. rostrata*). I suspect that white trillium (*T. grandiflorum*) and Catesby's trillium (*T. catesbaei*) will also appear before the first of April in the lower to lower-middle elevations. Of course, spring beauty (*Claytonia caroliniana*) and the early *Dicentra* species, squirrel corn (*D. canadensis*) and Dutchman's britches (*D. cucullaria*) will also appear in March in the same elevations. And there will likely be spreads of fringed phacelia (*Phacelia fimbriata*) by the end of the month. At this point my best advice is "think early, go early; spring is on its way."



In the lower elevations the early color that is the budding of the hardwoods could well be here by the end of March; so, again, be prepared to get out earlier than you may have in the past couple of years.

Realm of the Possible

On March 31st, Clingman's Dome Road will open for the year barring some unforeseen circumstance, and from then until the latter part of April the Dome will be the place to be for both sunrise and sunset. Beginning in late April, Morton Overlook becomes the other best choice for a sunset, and Luftee Overlook is always another good choice for sunrise.

Sunrise/sunset times for March – May, 2012 (Oconaluftee Visitor Center) are:

| | March 1 | March 10 | March 11 (DST) | March 31 |
|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Sunrise: | 7:03a.m. | 6:51a.m. | 7:50a.m. | 7:21a.m. |
| Sunset: | 6:28p.m. | 6:36p.m. | 7:37p.m. | 7:54p.m. |

| | April 1 | April 30 | May 1 | May 31 |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Sunrise: | 7:20a.m. | 6:43a.m. | 6:41a.m. | 6:19a.m. |
| Sunset: | 7:54p.m. | 8:18p.m. | 8:19p.m. | 8:42p.m. |

With spring coming on as quickly as it seems to be something to always keep in mind is the possibility of a late frost that can be photographed in

conjunction with early spring green. The western Blue Ridge Parkway, especially from Wagon Road Gap to the end of the Parkway, and in the Smokies, Cataloochee Overlook, Thomas Divide, Morton Overlook, and Campbell Overlook can be excellent locations to do this kind of work.

By the end of May the ferns will have unfurled their fronds in the lower and middle elevations and there will be forests of them in many places. Porter's Creek Trail in Greenbrier and the Oconaluftee River around Collins Creek Picnic Area are good choices for locations. The Bradley Fork Trail along that stream from Smokemont Campground upstream for several miles is also a great location for ferns.

As the season turns to green one of the ideas to keep in mind is the notion of wabi sabi, the Japanese art of imperfection. Many of last year's beautiful colors are now just a network of desiccated veins amid the new growth of the forest floor. Many times they are treasures in themselves.



Stonecrop Wabi Sabi

There is a time to come; it is almost here. It is a time before the green has taken hold completely and launched the new year, the new growing cycle in all of its frenzy; and it is a time after the death and dying of winter's harshness has nearly ceased: a time when these two great forces exist in a quiet harmony. To those who seek it out it is a time of great beauty for in it can be found the dreams of yesterday and the visions of tomorrow.

A Tip is Worth...?

Steps: Landing on Three Legs and Looking Around

Things are because we see them, and what we see and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one see its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence.

Oscar Wilde

In the last issue of “*A Song...*” I spoke more about Steps 3 and 4 of the Eight Steps on taking a photograph that I have distilled out over the years and which have always been helpful to me in the process of crafting images. Now I’d like to talk further about **Steps 5 and 6.**

By the time you’ve arrived at **Step 5: “Determine camera placement, then set up your tripod. Check the background for clutter. Have you chosen the best subject example available?”** you have already had that sense of emotional attraction to something in your visual field that has motivated you to want to create an image. Moreover, you have identified the source of that attraction and have made some fundamental considerations about light and the timing of your presence with your subject. You have concluded that you are there at the right time to photograph the subject you have chosen. You have gone even further and identified the elements of graphic design that are present in your scene/subject, and you have considered the optimum focal length lens to provide depth-of-field, background control, and angle of view, perspective, and image size that will allow you to say what you wish to say about this subject.



Don’t reach for your tripod yet; it’s almost time, but not quite. Before you do, take your camera and move around your subject. If it’s a landscape move in the scene and as you do study the many possible angles and perspectives for which you might photograph. Composing with your feet always gives rise to a better understanding of where you want to be, especially if you do it without your tripod. Tripods tend to get plunked down in one place and become stuck there. Before that happens, move around to make sure the place you shoot from is the place that best tells the story you have in your mind to tell. Sometimes even slight changes in location will open up a much richer or more dramatic view of the scene you have chosen: mergers will be avoided, relationships will be clarified, individual elements will become more strongly presented: all within a few feet. And with camera in hand, you have

Lining Up the Elements

a tool to help you in the process.

If you are creating a macro image the same procedure will be true, just on a smaller scale. Like football, it's a game of inches.

Before you make any final decisions you might want to ask yourself this question, especially if you are doing close-up intimate landscapes or macro work, "Is the subject example I have chosen the best subject example that is available to me here and now?" While you're about it, also check the background for clutter, or other distracting elements, and decide how best to work with them. Can they be safely removed; can you work with them using depth-of-field? It's much better to do these things now than to get all set up only to discover in the viewfinder that there's something you should have accounted for, but didn't. Now take your tripod and decide how to configure those three legs so that your camera is as close as possible to the place that said, "Yeah!" when you were looking around. If you own a tripod that will not allow its legs to operate independently, or won't let you get nearly flat on the ground, the first action you need to take when you get back home is to buy one that will. Your tools should always work to help you do what you need to do as an artist and not work so as to make what you do impossible.



Got Wet?

Assuming you've done that, remember that not only do the legs work independently, they also collapse independently as well; so if you need to extend one leg all the way out, for whatever reason, and leave the other two collapsed in order to stabilize your camera, don't hesitate to do it. Stability means just that: stable; and stable doesn't necessarily mean flat on the ground. If you can achieve stability with one tripod leg resting firmly across a fallen log, that's fine, do it. Remember that your tripod is the second most important piece of equipment you own after your camera, and invest in it with that thought in mind. And whenever you can, remember to perform maintenance on it regularly: clean it thoroughly and store it properly.

In **Step 6** your composition comes together: **Check your composition – vertical/horizontal, subject positioning, points of power, balance and visual flow. Scan the frame edge, is a filter needed? Are the relationships among the elements clear? Have you used foreground effectively? Have you used contrast to your advantage?**

It seems like an awful lot to think about; and it is...but, the more you practice it, the more and more automatic it becomes, until suddenly one day you realize that you're doing it and you haven't even really been thinking about it. It's just happening.

The question of whether an image works better as a vertical or a horizontal is perhaps the most fundamental compositional question that can be asked, and yet it goes unasked time and time again. To ask it is also to recognize that some images can work quite well both ways and to go forward in that recognition. Close behind would be the question of where in the frame the subject, or primary elements, are best placed to most effectively carry the story, excite the senses, or create the dramatic impact. One of the best ways to learn this is to look at pictures, lots of pictures; decide in each one where the photographer chose to place his/her primary components; and then decide if the desired impact was achieved and how it might have been done differently for better results. As you do this, you'll find yourself doing it in your own images.



Headed to Louisiana

Part of this process is also to recognize that there are design principles as well as elements, at work in every image and to consider how your image is using those principles. For example, is there balance among the elements? And does the eye experience a sense of visual flow as it moves through the elements? Are the relationships of the elements to each other and to the frame of the image clear and meaningful?

Another basic compositional question is to ask if the foreground has been used effectively. The old, time-honored adage that effective use of

foreground adds depth and drama has been verified on countless occasions as photographers work to make their viewers feel that they were there, that they were present at the creation. Of course, not every image requires that



sort of depth, but whether the foreground has or should be used and to what extent should always be part of your internal dialog.

Likewise is the question of contrast. For just to understand that the eye has certain predictable responses to light and dark areas in an image; and to know that the eye will predictably seek brightness

Just Shootin' Light

and warmth is to understand that the contrast between highlight and shadow, and cool and warm tones and colors, is a powerful tool for the construction of a memorable image.

To remember to scan the perimeter of the frame as you look through the viewfinder and to remove, or recompose, any unwanted elements you may find there is to save yourself the time, later on, of having to decide how you may need to crop an image because there is a distraction on the edges that you failed to notice when you were in the field. Composing with that sort of eye for care is just part of the notion of being fussy that can ultimately make all the difference between an image that is art and one that will forever be only a document.

And, of course, the question of filtration has to be asked. In this world of digital everything some photographers have decided that filters are unnecessary evils that should be consigned to the dust bin of photographic history. They have embraced the use of processing software for all their filter needs; and that's perfectly fine. I am of that old school that somehow hangs on the notion that there are approaches to image creation that just work better with real, in-hand, on-camera filters like polarizers and neutral density (and graduated neutral density) filters. And so, whenever I am going about the craft of image creation, I still ask myself that anachronistic interrogatory: Is a filter needed in this image and for what purpose would I use it?

If I have gone through this process I am pretty confident that I have done everything I can as a creator to help my pictures be images that will be remembered by folks who view them. Of course the individual preferences that each of us brings to the decision of what we like, and don't like, will always ensure that some of my images – and yours – will be admired and others will not. It's part of that marvelous uniqueness that leads to the diversity of creativity that makes photography the great art form that it is.

As for EarthSong/Walking in Beauty...

Walking in Beauty

As I walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above
Beauty is on every side
As I walk, I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

In the beginning was the dream. In the eternal night where no dawn broke, the dream deepened. Before anything ever was, it had to be dreamed. Everything had its beginning in possibility. Every single thing is somehow the expression and incarnation of a thought. If a thing had never been thought, it could never be. If we take Nature as the great artist of longing then all presences in the world have emerged from her mind and imagination. We are children of the earth's dreaming.

John O'Donohue
from *Eternal Echoes*

It seems hardly possible that we are almost in March. Not only is spring coming in with a bang, but the time for spring workshops is almost here. Before I talk about them, however, I want to mention the new feature on

the website, www.EarthSongPhotography.com, that was launched on January 1, 2012 and has continued to gain positive responses as the weeks have passed. The new feature is a blog/shared comment page entitled **“Image for the Asking”** and can be found under its own tab on the Home Page. Each week, on Sunday, I post a new image that is titled **“This Week’s Image”** with a description of the creative process which resulted in the image. Previous images can also be found under the same tab in the location **“Monthly Archive”** along with the comments that were posted with it. It’s all about the joy, beauty, and creativity of the photographic process. It has been a truly enjoyable experience that has allowed me new insights into the ways in which we all see so uniquely and creatively. If you haven’t done so, I invite you to check out what’s going on every week with the Image for the Asking.

There’s no better way to tune up your creative photographic skills than with a workshop. Workshop events bring people together in beautiful places for a focused, shared experience of fun, friendship, and photography (and the food is usually pretty awesome as well).

There is still time to join us for the **Charleston, SC Workshop, April 1-6**. This event takes place in one of the most beautiful cities in the country, known for its charm, its architecture dating back to the 1600’s, and perhaps most of all for its awesomely beautiful gardens: Magnolia, Middleton, and Cypress. The Low Country in spring is an experience never to be forgotten, but time is running out to register. Contact me at don@earthsongphotography.com, or (828) 788-0687.



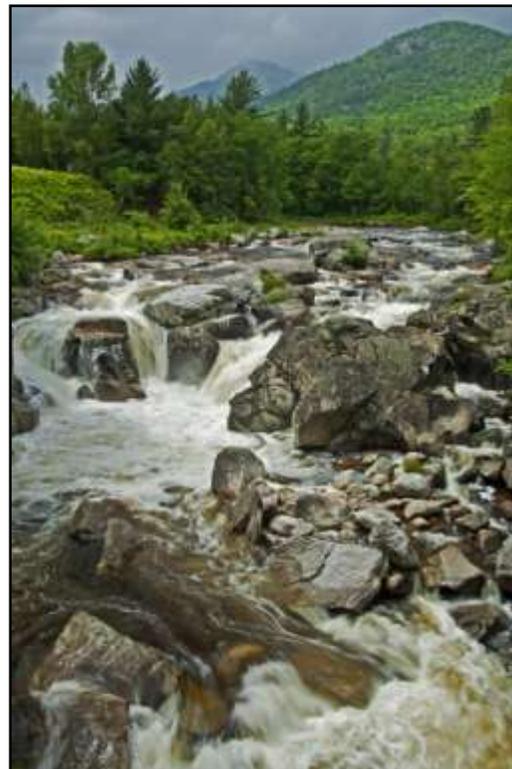
Also coming up is the **Acadia/Mount Desert Island Spring Workshop, June 9-15** in beautiful **Southwest Harbor, Maine**, the thoughtful side of Mount Desert Island. Most folks typically think of Acadia National Park as being a place to go for fall color, but the Downeast Coast of Maine is so very much

more. Spring on the island is a wonderment of wildflowers that includes incredible displays of lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*), Clinton's lily (*Clintonia borealis*), and one of my extreme favorites, bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*). All this and the amazing light show that is the Maine coast from Ocean Drive to Otter Cliffs, and from Beech Cliff to Ship Harbor. Acadia/MDI in



spring is one of the most magical places on earth. And of course there's all of the instruction and image critiques you would expect. We'll cover light, composition, exposure, panoramas, digital workflow, image processing and management, as well as gear and equipment. So join us for all the beauty that is Acadia.

The other workshop that I want to mention is the [Adirondacks High Peaks Splendor Workshop, June 17-21](#), in the beautiful [Olympic Village of Lake Placid, NY](#). Last year John DiGiacomo and I introduced a group of workshop participants to the incredible natural beauty, diversity, history, and charm to be found in the Adirondacks High Peaks area in the warm days of spring. The High Peaks are the heart of Adirondack Park: a place of lofty mountains, lush forests, rocky rushing rivers, serene lakes and wetlands, and beautiful flora, all rolled into a single experience. Forget what you think about Lake Placid as a winter wonderland, or a prime location for fall foliage. Yes, it is that; but it's also so very much more. Spring in the High Peaks will completely change the way you see the Adirondacks.



Information on all EarthSong Photography Workshops can be found on the website, www.EarthSongPhotography.com. On the Home Page, under the “Workshops” tab select “Full-Week” for a complete description as well as a download-able .pdf file of the 2012 brochure. We do more than teach photography; we inspire the creative journey.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

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Black Balsam Dawn, Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina