

LISTENING IN/George Vukelich

Steppin' Out

Walkin' Jim Stoltz is a singer-songwriter from Big Sky, Mont., who has been described as a folksinger in the grand tradition of Woody Guthrie. Born in Detroit in 1953, he tried college for a year and a half, then worked in a lumberyard and in a drugstore. He planted trees for a time, did a stint as a janitor, and in between did a lot of street singing. 1972 was the year he started to make music; he now has his own record label, Lone Coyote Records. His first LP, *Spirit Is Still on the Run*, appeared in 1984; his second, *Forever Wild*, will be released in late December. Stoltz is called "Walkin' Jim" because over the past 12 years he has logged over 15,000 miles, crisscrossing the U.S. on numerous pairs of Red Wing boots.

*and the deer so meek and mild.
It's in the rise of a mountain.
Let it stay forever wild.
Forever wild, forever wild
Let it stay forever wild.*

"And it goes on from there. When I'm out there, 99% of my walking in the back country is solo—and hell, I sleep better out there than I do anywhere.

"I was telling the kids a story today about one time I was bedded down, just about to doze off, no tent. I usually don't use a tent unless it's snowing or raining, so I was about to doze off when something comes running through the woods and jumps over me.

"I sat up and couldn't see what it was.

It made me a little nervous, you know. I lie back down, was just asleep and something pounced right on my chest and ran on. Now, I was still nervous, but I stretched back down and kept one eye open, and this critter came running back, hopped over me *again*, and then *another* one hopped over me and I was looking up right into the faces of two big jackrabbits—and they kept that up all night long.

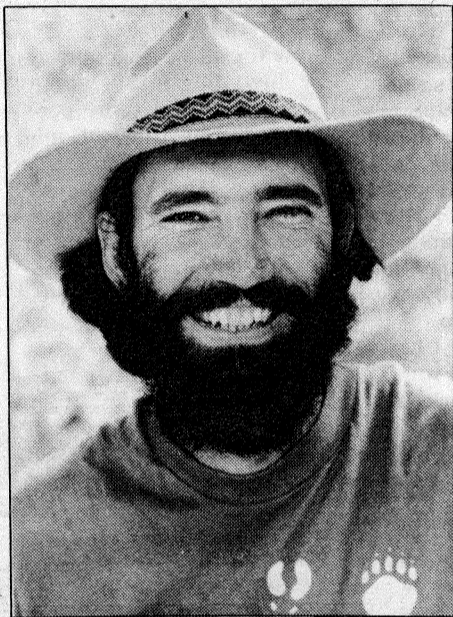
"What that teaches me and what I try to put into my songs is that man isn't the only critter on this earth. There's another world out there, with trees and flowers and animals that have no place in the cities, and there are places out in the wilderness where man doesn't fit in.

If we can get city folks to realize that—at least a few of them—maybe we can save some of the wilderness areas, some of the grizzlies and the wolves.

"I see a little bit of God in every piece of the earth that I walk over and in every breath of air that I breathe. Especially when I'm on the trail, I feel very close to God. I think Mother Earth and God are the same.

"I'm very lucky because my lifestyle has evolved to take advantage of what society has to offer, and yet, at the same time, I can walk my own trail.

"That's what I'm doin'—and I've learned through my walking that I can do anything if I set my mind to it. We all can." ■



BRENT NICASTRO

Walkin' Jim Stoltz

"I don't walk on the roads. I walk in the back country, through the mountains, the deserts, on the trails. Where there aren't any trails, I'll shoot my compass. I'll go four, five months at a time. Stop at a town every two weeks or so, pick up my mail, pick up some food, maybe play a concert in a school, buy some ice cream.

"Just my backpack and my beat-up guitar, Stella. I write most of my music on the trail, so I can't help but pick up that flavor, that mood I feel when I'm out there.

"I started walking 12 years ago. I walked the Appalachian trail from Georgia to Maine. It took me about six months and I got so into it that I spent the following winter planning a coast-to-coast walk. That walk took me a year and a half from Atlantic to Pacific. I spent a few months on snowshoes coming through Wisconsin and Minnesota.

"After that, I walked the Continental Divide trail that runs over the main ridge of the Rockies from Mexico to Canada.

"This summer, I spent four months walking from the Grand Canyon back to Montana, across Nevada and Idaho.

"I usually save up money ahead of time and then just go. This last walk, I did three concerts along the way and a couple of 'kid' shows. Some are planned, some just happen. I met some people who were connected with schools and they asked me to come over and sing.

"In Madison, we did four school programs and a benefit for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. For the kids, we do a few songs with slides. We do a song about litter. And we do sing-alongs.

"This trip, I'm traveling with my sister, Susan Grace, from Alaska. She sings too, and she comes up and joins me on a few songs. We do a little skit about wolves—I'm the wolf and she's Red Riding Hood—and we make up a whole different story. We present a good image of the wolf.

"Our adult concerts are a little more serious. We play songs like this, the title song of our new album *Forever Wild*. The chorus goes:

*"There's a magic in the air
that I feel when I am there.
It's in the cry of an eagle*