

Why Not a Multiple NON-Use Plan?

One of the highest uses of wilderness is to simply let it be.

Aldo Leopold

Calvin Rutstrum has been writing about the Canadian bush for so many years that you simply assume that he's been around forever.

It's a little surprise to learn that he is only in his seventies when you had him figured for his hundreds. He's like a treasured willow creel. Ancient. Creaking. And thoroughly wondrous.

An old professional who's spent over half a century canoeing the wild country, he agrees with Aldo Leopold.

"The most scientifically sound wilderness plan," Rutstrum writes, "is to leave it undisturbed to perpetuate itself. The least sound in principle is the pseudoscience of 'multiple use.'"

Rutstrum contends that if we carry on the "fatuous" premise that all wilderness areas must be developed—which has in the past invariably resulted in industrial ravage—"the chances are imminently great that the forces of nature will destroy mankind before mankind wholly destroys the wilderness."

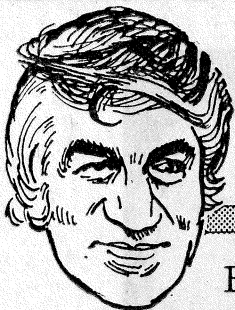
You see, Rutstrum doesn't really believe that man can destroy nature. He feels that all the world, no matter how developed, no matter how urbanized and ravaged is still **potentially** wilderness. He believes that laws operate to reduce everything to a natural state through erosion, decay and disintegration.

Only man's continued maintenance of his construction delays this work of nature.

He cites the perpetual, never-ending painting of bridges as one case in point but he could as easily have cited the encasement of dead human bodies in copper lined caskets for another.

Rutstrum says most of the structures of his youth are gone, decayed, razed and replaced by newer structures: "Replacement, replacement ad infinitum." And unless the replacement were **incessant**, the world would **eventually** flower everywhere without a single artificial edifice in existence.

The old guy, as you know if you've read him in the past, can be



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by Calvin Rutstrum

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cantankerous as hell on occasion, particularly in the choice and use of wilderness equipment.

- He laments the passing of the tumpline, a leather head strap for pack carrying which reached its zenith during the fur trade days of the voyageurs.

- He regrets the declining use of paddles, lashed across the thwarts of a canoe as a carrying yoke.

- He mourns the Peterborough toboggan, upswept in the forward end to better mount the Canadian drifts. The Peterborough fell victim to the snowmobile and that hits Rutstrum like an angry tooth.

"In all sincerity," he writes, "I would crank out of existence the internal combustion engine, which tends to destroy profound wilderness values."

Despite the engines, Rutstrum maintains that "a great wilderness" remains.

Much of the hue and cry about the wilderness being gone, he says, comes from those who would reach wilderness solitude with a car.

"One must realize," he explains, "that where one can go in a car without physical exertion, all others can go without exertion, and the chances are that a host of people will be there without exertion when one arrives."

Rutstrum believes that the greatest inhibitor of rugged wilderness travel today is enervation of body vigor. Most of us have simply become too "comfortized."

Most of us don't like primitive conditions—bugs, bad weather and physical exertion to boot. (As Henry Martell put it once: Even the Indian is getting like the white man. "If you can't reach it by car, to hell with it.")

Yet if you're willing to toughen your body and pack in, Rutstrum feels you'll find what Estwick Evans found when he wrote in 1818: "There is something in the very name of wilderness which charms the ears and soothes the spirit of man. There is religion in it."

Rutstrum allows he's puzzled why only a small percentage of the human population love our natural environment, while the vast majority hate it, fear it and run from it.

"Less than one-half of one per cent of the population," he admits, "enter the wilderness to enjoy, defend and protect it. The majority are bent on ravaging it completely."

It's upon the small percentage that we now depend to save our remaining wild areas.

We cinch up our pack and watch them with interest. Rutstrum and Sigurd Olson. Loren Eiseley. Jim and Libby Zimmerman. George Knudsen. Mel Ellis. And that nameless old bush rat north of Nakina who said, "Most men do not want to be alone, sitting in silence like a stone. Fearful, then, of what they would hear."

Calvin Rutstrum is the author of *Paradise Below Zero*, *North American Canoe Country*, *The Wilderness Route Finder*, *The Wilderness Cabin* and *The New Way of the Wilderness*, all available from the Macmillan Company.