

EDITORIAL

Wilderness and The Biosphere

At the 3rd World Wilderness Congress, held during 8–14 October 1983 at Findhorn in northeastern Scotland, several attempts were made, by formal or informal speakers, to define the term 'wilderness', but all that we heard seemed abortive. So we came to wondering whether precise definition of this somewhat nebulous concept is really necessary, desirable, or even possible—whether, because of its being in some respects a figure of the imagination that differs considerably in different people's minds, and can moreover vary according to their mental moods and physical fitness, it is not best left to each interested individual's choice to decide what constitutes wilderness. For is it not to those extents an abstraction comparable with that of a deity, and for some as important to maintain in its undivided wholeness and unanalysed integrity?

Consultations of 'Oracles'

This dilemma being unresolved in our circle, we came to wondering whether any of our usual works-of-reference could help us. Trying first the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, we found that it fails to treat wilderness as a special topic, though using the word widely in an adjectival form, or sometimes as a substantive in such phraseology (under **wild flower**) as 'With the growth of cities, the country becomes restricted, and the more remote wilderness tends to disappear. Some wilderness and some wild flower areas have been preserved in national, state or provincial, and local parks and monuments, particularly in the U.S. and Canada, but in general the once vast areas of flower fields have not been preserved. These tracts of land were most vulnerable to civilization'. Or again, describing the 'Battle of the Wilderness' in the American Civil War: 'The confrontation occurred in dense thickets, called the Wilderness, where orderly movement was impossible, cavalry and artillery were almost useless, and where burning brush killed many of the wounded.'

We then turned to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (unabridged), where we find '**wilderness**... a tract of land or a region (as a forest or a wide barren plain) uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings... an empty or pathless area or region... a part of a garden devoted to wild growth...' with '**wilderness area**... an area (as a national forest land) set aside by government for preservation of natural conditions for scientific or recreational purposes'. In this last connection it should be added that, among resolutions passed by the 3rd World Wilderness Congress, was one 'urg[ing] the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources to add *Wilderness Area* to its categories designated for conservation management.'

Finally, our usual guiding source, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, indicates in the *Shorter* version '**Wilderness**... (without article) wild or uncultivated land... A wild or uncultivated region or tract of land, uninhabited, or inhabited only by wild animals... A piece of ground in a large garden or park, planted with trees, and laid out in an ornamental or fantastic style, often in the form of a maze or labyrinth 1644... A waste or desolate region of any kind, e.g. of open sea 1588... Something figured as a region of a wild or desolate character, in which one wanders or loses one's way; in religious use applied to the present world or life as contrasted with heaven or the future life' (Middle English); also 'wilderness, uncultivated condition—1667'. The full *Compact* edition of the OED, from which most of the above and a few other meanings had evidently been taken, gives in addition 'a tract of solitude and savageness', and 'A waste or desolate region of any kind, e.g. of open sea, of air...' and 'Wilderness of character, licentiousness... Belonging to the present world of life'. Here we are reminded of Shakespeare's delightful 'wilderness of monkeys', which recalls the OED's meaning of 'A mingled, confused, or vast assemblage or collection of persons or things'.

Wilderness Areas Definable

The variety of these and other uses of the familiar and intriguing term 'wilderness' from three sources alone tends to consolidate our above-mentioned feeling that the term might best be left undefined, but that if, for example, IUCN should come to act on the 3rd Wilderness Congress's resolution (*see* above) that they be urged to add 'wilderness area' to their 'categories designated for conservation management', they would need to define its meaning and circumscribe its use very carefully, and perhaps rather narrowly. In such a context the term might well be useful, being already dignified in the titles of worthy organizations such as—in environmental connections in North America alone—the Wilderness Society, the American Wilderness Alliance, Wilderness Watch, and Wilderness Flyers. It is also widely used in the names of, for example, the so-and-so Wilderness; yet by some authorities it is apt to be referred to as merely 'a state of mind'.

Whether or not any official designation of wilderness areas should be established, there can be no question that the concept of wilderness is firmly ensconced in the consciousness of Mankind. Indeed in many instances throughout the world it is a matter of deep conscience and quasi-religious fervour to maintain some vestiges of wilderness—even though their type, meaning, and value, may be very different in actuality, and then again quite different in various people's understanding and appreciation.

Desirability for Biospherical Stability

Whether defined or not, the preservation of wilderness areas—for example in national parks or otherwise protected reserves—can be vitally important for the conservation of natural ecosystems and their contained gene-pools, being in these and other ways ultimately necessary for the maintenance of biospherical stability. Internally, for actual visitors, they are *inter alia* the scientific study-areas for observing what Nature does when left alone, and for deriving the inspiration of communion with Nature in solitude, while the external or *in absentia* values (to be dealt with in our next issue*) can be even greater.

It has long been our conviction, stemming from a similar contention of our lamented mentor the late A.G. Tansley, that a scientist can derive from his or her work, at least when it is successful in elucidating some hitherto-unrealized

truths, the kind of deep satisfaction that an artist surely derives from the creation of a fine work-of-art. Is it not, then, to be confidently expected that the success of a scientist's work, and any pleasure that may be derived from its consummation, will be all the greater if it emanates from a setting of sublime wilderness—whence, through the discovering scientist, the resultant happiness and maybe further benefits will be likely to radiate widely to others? We believe so, and that this may be a further vicarious bonus of wilderness areas.

A World Wilderness Alliance?

Concern for The Biosphere and its components of wilderness being surely shared by thinking people increasingly as population pressures build up and the state of the world deteriorates concomitantly or even synergistically, we wonder if the time is not ripe to recommend, as we proposed already at the 3rd World Wilderness Congress†, that 'urgent consideration be given to the organization and establishment of [what might be called] a World Wilderness Alliance... Coupled with the suggestion that this might, with foreseeable mutual and also world-wide advantage, somehow be linked to the recently instituted World Council For The Biosphere... and the parallel and secretariat-sharing International Society For Environmental Education'.††

Such an Alliance could prove a valuable force for conservation and global stability, for example when any member or affiliated area was threatened with unwise 'development'. Recent instances have included the wilderness of South-West Tasmania**, and Silent Valley which contains India's last-remaining tropical rain-forest.††† Both appear to have been saved only 'at the last moment' through pressure from concerned environmentalists and conservationists, whereas concerted action from the beginning of a threat would have been simpler and far surer. Meanwhile we would like to see films and posters from Australia and India, showing what each has done for our world and The Biosphere by saving those unique wilderness areas.

N. P.

*Pearsall, S.H., III, 'In Absentia Benefits of Nature Reserves: A Review', to be published in our Spring 1984 issue.

†See our account of the 3rd World Wilderness Congress, published on pp. 366–7 of this issue.

††See Professor Craig B. Davis's account of 'The World Council for The Biosphere/International Society for Environmental Education', published on pp. 353–4 of this issue.

**See Drs Hugh Saddler & Andrew K. Dragun's comment 'Australian High-court Decision Ensures Preservation of the South-West Tasmania Wilderness', published on pp. 355–6 of this issue, and accounts or comments by Dr Dragun, Kedar N. Baidya, and Roger de Candolle, in earlier issues of *Environmental Conservation*.

†††See Dr G.M. Oza's 'Save Silent Valley as a World Heritage Site?', published in *Environmental Conservation*, 8(1), p. 52, 1981. As we go to press we have received, from Dr Oza, clippings from the *Indian Express* of 7 and 8 November 1983 with such headings as 'Silent Valley Project Scrapped' and 'Decision on Silent Valley hailed', while his accompanying letter conveying the good news of a favourable-to-conservationists decision by the Kerala State legislature wisely ends 'Now the emphasis has to be once again to achieve the status of the World Heritage Site to make it safer for future generations.'

EDITORIAL NOTES

More Beneficial Changes (continued)

Instructions for Authors

The last three paragraphs of these have been extensively revised especially to take care of the rescinding of photocopying permission with the resumed giving of 50 free offprints of signed contributions as explained in this place in our preceding issue. The Instructions will continue to be published on the inside of the back cover of each issue of the Journal but, as they are rather detailed and complicated, aspiring Authors are advised for convenience to follow the style of any issue of the Journal. Please remember that the set style must be followed if prompt treatment is to be expected.

Collaborating Organizations, Advisory Editors, and Refereeing

The new duality of international organizations, recently established effectively to adopt, actively foster, and henceforth bear primary responsibility for, the World Campaign for The Biosphere, have now taken the place of WERC among our leading 'institutional colleagues' who are indicated on the front cover of each issue of our Journal. These new twin INGOs are the World Council For The Biosphere (WCB) and the International Society For Environmental Education (ISEE), of which the first

descriptive account is published on pp. 353–4 of this issue. The account is contributed by the twin bodies' co-initiator Professor Craig B. Davis, who is Acting Secretary-General of both outfits until their first full-scale meeting is held in India through the last week of February 1984.

On our distinguished panel of Advisory Editors (covering between them we believe the main fields of environmental endeavour), Dr Genady N. Golubev, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Assistant Executive Director of UNEP, has replaced Dr Ruben Olembo as the one responsible for UNEP, and Dr Kenton R. Miller has replaced Dr Lee M. Talbot as the one responsible for IUCN—who are assuming again their active help with refereeing, such as all likely-to-be-accepted major papers and many shorter items are now subjected to, often plurally, before publication in our Journal.

In conclusion we wish again to express our appreciative admiration and gratitude to all those Referees and Advisers who work so assiduously and perforce anonymously to help us to maintain the standards of our Journal and allied services to which we believe the environmental movement is entitled.

N. P.