RHETORICS OF THE WILD:
LAND RELATIONS IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the rhetorics of wilderness employees in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks in an effort to better understand the relations privileged, cultivated, and honored in wilderness areas by the National Park Service. Specifically, this thesis seeks to trace the legacies of colonialism as they manifest in the rhetorics of wilderness employees and to find sites of anticolonial possibility within those rhetorics. Drawing on the work of Indigenous philosophers, environmental historians, and rhetorical theory, this thesis makes three moves: First, it discusses the ways that wilderness employees simultaneously reify and resist colonial logics in their articulations of what wilderness *is* and *does*. Second, it examines wilderness employees compositional practices—they ways in which they literally build, maintain, and craft wilderness lands for particular ways of being and knowing. Third, it delves into wilderness employees' relationship with the lands they care for and suggests that these relationships push against colonial notions of inanimate land, ownership, and the prioritization of settler desires over the sovereignty of land. Ultimately, this thesis finds that the rhetorics of wilderness employees indicate that there is great anticolonial possibility in the National Park Service.

For the wilderness of the southern Sierra,
the ancestral homelands of the Yokut, Southern Paiute, Tule, Tubatulabal.

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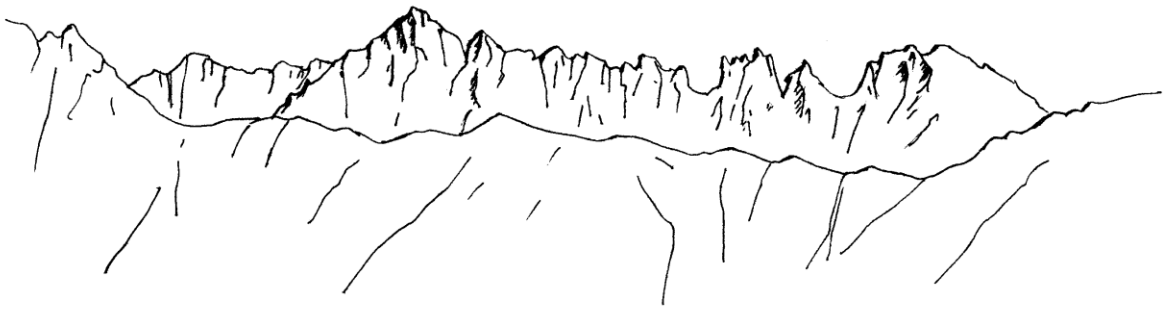
KEY TO SYMBOLS

Shift from academic text to creative non-fiction writing.

Shift from creative non-fiction writing to academic text.

Beginning of a new major section or chapter.



Learning My Relations:
Introduction

Figure 1. *Ranger Skeen*. Me, on patrol above White Chief Bowl in Mineral King. Photo by Kevin Skeen.

The deer return to the meadow in the evening. They come from the south, slipping through the trees in twos and threes, settling in the center. We watch them from the porch of the Hockett Meadow Ranger Station, twelve miles deep in the wilderness of Sequoia National Park. Cody sits next to me, steam rising from his tea. We are not in uniform; we've hung up the badge for the day.

There is a fawn in the herd and she is new. Small and wobbly, she bursts into motion, kicking and bucking and running in circles. The deer scatter, jostled. They chastise her with nips and nudges as she begins to learn her relations, her way of being in the world.

I grew up in these mountains and, like her, it is here that I learned my relations. My dad taught me how to read water—how to watch snow turn to stream, how to map the cross-section of a river on an x and y-axis. My mom named the plants, her watercolors blooming on white pages. *This one is Indian paintbrush*, she says, holding the flame-flower between stained fingers.

I learned to walk, to read, to *be* in these mountains. But after a year of graduate school at Michigan State University, I returned to the Sierras torn by the relations I *didn't* learn. In Michigan, I

encountered the stories of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Thomas King, and Robin Wall Kimmerer; I read and felt the work of Shawn Wilson, Kathleen Absolon, and Qwo Li Driskill. Encountering these narratives left me grappling with gross discrepancies in my understanding of home. I began to see the colonial history of wilderness, the ways in which wilderness has precipitated Native removal and the genocide both of literal bodies and of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing.

Now, I sit at an outpost of a colonial institution watching the deer graze in the meadow and I wonder about the relations that have been erased from this landscape; the people my ancestors removed to create this "uninhabited" wilderness. I wonder what it is, precisely, that the arrowhead of the National Park Service represents. *They came like a lion*, Winnemucca wrote, *like a roaring lion. And they have continued to do so ever since (3).*

I have worked for Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks for six summers. My first job with the Parks was right out of high school in the Wilderness Office. Now, I work as a trailhead ranger out of the Mineral King Ranger Station. I issue wilderness permits to visitors who are embarking on backpacking or stock trips[1] and I spend about half of my time in the wilderness—patrolling trails, picking up trash, enforcing rules and regulations, assisting visitors with trip planning, and responding to emergencies.

As my education at Michigan State pushed me to interrogate my complicity with colonial forces, it became important to me to better understand my National Park Service (NPS) community, to think about the ways that we reinforce colonial legacies, the effects of our presence in and management of the Sierra's wilderness. Increasingly, I was faced with scholarship that indicated that colonization was not over, that colonial forces continued to work in complex and sometimes covert

[1] Stock trips are wilderness trips supported by horses, mules, burros, or llamas. These trips can be stock-supported, where the animals carry the gear but visitors walk, or visitors will ride horses and have pack mules that carry their gear. Stock trips are referred to also as "pack trips" or "packing," in the verb form.

ways, and importantly, that our rhetorical practices have consequences on knowledge, on land, on bodies and beings. So it was, that I came to the central questions of this thesis:

- What kinds of relations are privileged, cultivated and taught in wilderness areas?
- What kinds of relations are left unseen, unknowable, by the colonial past and present of the wilderness idea and the Park Service itself?

Wilderness areas are managed according to federal, state, and local legislation; legislation that must be practiced into being by wilderness managers, employees, and visitors. This complex ecology of relations between lands, bodies, practices, and texts is intensely rhetorical. This thesis focuses on the ways that wilderness is constructed, storied, and practiced by wilderness employees in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park (SEKI, Sequoia-Kings).

Over the course of the summer of 2017, I conducted interviews with five of my colleagues, all of whom work in the wilderness of Sequoia-Kings. Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks lie in the southern Sierra Nevada mountains in California and contain over 800,000 acres of designated wilderness—which means over 97% of the lands the Parks preserve and protect are managed as wilderness. SEKI is very much a "wilderness" Park; in 2014 it passed its Wilderness Stewardship Plan, the first Park Service management plan to directly address the unique management needs of wilderness areas.

All of my participants hold a unique position in relation to wilderness lands in that they live and work in wilderness areas—a privilege extended *only* to wilderness employees. The "uninhabited" clause of the Wilderness Act excludes these individuals who are permitted to live in wilderness in order to enforce rules and regulations, care for NPS infrastructure, and ensure visitor safety. Wilderness employees interact with wilderness lands on a personal level and also serve as mediators between wilderness managers, legislation, visitors, and the land itself. We can learn a lot about the

complexity of the coloniality of wilderness and the National Park Service from the practices of wilderness employees.

Figure 2. *Hockett Meadow Ranger Station*. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

My sense that such an interrogation is necessary grows from the lack of scholarship in the field of Rhetoric and Composition on the National Park Service's rhetorical power; it's function as an institution with both local and national rhetorical missions. This was compounded by the academic and professional silence surrounding the Park Service's colonial past, not to mention the institution's colonial *presence.* I had to really dig to find stories of dispossession in the Park Service, and I continue to search for more concrete histories of Native removal in the Sierra. The prominent narrative seems to be that the Park Service came into being after a kind of "trickle-down" colonization. That is, someone else (miners, Spaniards, sheepherders), or something else (disease, time), removed Native peoples before the Park Service took possession of the land. This narrative may have some truth; however, it absolves the NPS of any complicity in the removal of Native peoples. Also, it is telling that it has been difficult for me to find a clear history of Native removal in

the Sierra—the fact that these histories are not cared for, are not recorded and sought, are not told, is itself an indication of the necessity of a project that seeks to articulate the ways that colonial forces manifest in our institution.

Theoretical and Historical Background

The National Park Service is a story-telling agency. From the shores of Ellis Island to the melting edges of the Arctic, the Park Service tells a diverse range of stories about our nation and the lands it governs. Often framed as an unbiased protector of sites important to our nation's history, culture, and identity, the Park Service acts as an extensive archive—not of documents and artifacts alone, but of lands, places, and the stories they carry. As Charles Morris writes, archives are not "passive receptacle[s] for historical documents and their 'truths,'" nor are they "benign research spaces, but rather…dynamic site[s] of rhetorical power." In 2016 alone, National Park Service (NPS) units welcomed over 345 million visitors—certainly, the Park Service's role as an agent of significant rhetorical power, is worth considering.

Further, the Park Service's history as a colonial institution is long and complex. The displacement of Indigenous peoples, along with marginalized communities of European settlers, is not uncommon in the Service's past and is often left unacknowledged in its present. Though some NPS units are working to make known the erasure of their pasts, (Shenandoah NP, for instance, incorporates the oral histories of white Appalachian community members who were forcibly removed from "park lands" in its main visitor center) the institution's colonial *presence* is largely left unexamined. The National Park Service is an occupying force—it continues to take up physical space on Indigenous lands. Though physical occupation of Indigenous lands is the Park Service's most pressing and basic violation of Indigenous sovereignty, the Service's coloniality is compounded by its rhetorical power. The Park Service's rhetorical practices—the stories it tells, and the *way* it tells

those stories—often serve to erase Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and ways of being from the landscape.

There is a lot of work to be done in the decolonization of the National Park Service, and I think this work should begin with "radical resistance against colonialism [including] struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" as Qwo-Li Driskill delineates (69). Park Service units should turn to the Native nations whose lands they occupy and begin conversations about what decolonization looks like—these conversations should be tribe-specific and should center Native voices, knowledges, and sovereignty. Some of this work has begun, with no small amount of resistance by the Park Service. Perhaps the most successful example is the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe of Death Valley who resisted removal from Park lands and eventually were granted a land trust by the United States Congress in January 2000 (Death Valley National Park). Relationships between the Blackfeet Nation and Glacier National Park have much improved over the last decade. Where once there were violent conflicts between armed rangers and Blackfeet hunters along Glacier's border, the Park's website now offers videos of Blackfeet elders reminding visitors that Glacier was and importantly, *is* the home of the Blackfeet Nation (Glacier National Park).

However, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us that "decolonization is not a metaphor…[it] brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (5). Decolonization of the National Park Service ultimately means that NPS units return the lands under their care to Indigenous peoples. As a settler descendent and a park ranger, I am un-settled by this definition of decolonization—and so, Tuck and Yang point out, should I be. I continue to grapple with land redress as a real possibility, not just for distant lands to which I have little connection, but for the mountains and rivers I call home. This is a grappling that I see as necessary and unfinished. In

Rachel Nickerson's words, I have yet to fully "accept the uncertainty of settler futurity" (3). It is for this reason that I turn to the language of *anti*colonial.

I seek moments of rhetorical intervention in the Park Service's colonial rhetoric; what I am calling anticolonial possibility. Such an intervention, a reorienting of rhetorical practice, may open space for decolonial action, but it is not, itself, a decolonial project. I do not wish to dilute Native struggles for decolonization, for land redress and sovereignty, by conflating that which works to alter colonial forces and that which is sovereign from them. Projects of anticoloniality and decolonization are not entirely separate. I think that anticolonial moves can work towards and with decolonial projects. But, their points of incommensurability are important to recognize and respect.

In order to interrogate the Park Service's colonial presence and thus, its anticolonial possibility, I turn to the wilderness of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, specifically to the rhetorics of SEKI's wilderness employees. Scott Richard Lyons writes that we must dismantle "the legacies of colonialism as they appear in our legal terminology, our academic discourse, our constitutions and other locales where language is used" (186). The National Park Service is rife with colonial language; the institution is ready for an examination of the effects of this language on the lands and peoples it serves.

Participants

In order to examine the rhetorics of wilderness employees in Sequoia-Kings, I interviewed five of my colleagues over the course of the summer of 2017. Kathleen Absolon writes, "in our search for berries, *we start with what we know*" (25). I began my search by leaning into relationships that I already had. My five participants—Jess, Michael, Matt, Adam, and Cody—are not only co-workers, but also mentors, teachers, friends, and family. Some I knew better than others, but all of them I felt comfortable approaching about being interviewed because they were woven into my already-existing relations. Our relationships are also geographically significant—I met all of my

participants in the Sierra, and we work and live in the same district in the Park. This is to say, that not only do we exist together in the context of the Sierra Nevada's significant girth as a mountain range, but also even more locally, within just a few watersheds. Michigan State's Institutional Review Board examined this project, the details of which I discuss in my methods section.

Jessica Barr – Mineral King Subdistrict Ranger

Jess is my supervisor and has been an influential mentor in my time with the Park Service. As a female law enforcement ranger who has spent her career working in male-dominated spaces she is, for lack of a better term, just super badass. Most of our interviews ended up talking about her early Park Service days as a trail crew member in SEKI and then a wilderness ranger in Yosemite and Yellowstone. Jess also received formal training in wilderness management from Humboldt State University, where she got her bachelor's degree in Wilderness Conservation. In addition, she worked for some time in Minnesota where the state and national parks systems have done a lot of work with local tribes to ensure that traditional practices continue on public lands. Jess and I's first interview took place at my childhood home in Three Rivers, which is on the southern border of SEKI. Her second interview took place in the open stretch on the south side of Timber Gap. She was starting a patrol, and I joined her for the first few miles. We "snuggled in with the sagebrush" for her final interview.

Michael Rodman – Little Five Lakes Wilderness Ranger

Michael has spent his life working and living in wilderness areas. He got his first position as a wilderness employee with the Forest Service in his early 20s and has spent the last 20 years doing this work. He got the Little Five Lakes position two years ago and plans to stay with SEKI until he's too old to do the job. Michael is sharp and quick-witted and a talented storyteller. He also fills a mentor role for me—training me not only how to deconstruct fire pits and naturalize campsites, but also how to interact with visitors, and encouraging me to find a place in wilderness work. Michael is

a devil's advocate, a trait I have tried to convey in my retelling of our conversations. He has, throughout my interviews and the writing of my thesis, questioned some of my most basic assumptions, pushed back against my claims, reminded me that theory can be isolating, that practice matters. Michael's first interview took place in Mineral King, at my parent's cabin where I live in the summers. (The cabin is in Silver City, a private inholding within the Park's boundaries.) For his second interview I hiked out to his station and we spent a few days together working, talking, and *walking*.

Figure 3. *Off-Duty Rangers*. From left to right: Me, Matt, and Michael. Little Five Lakes with the Kaweahs in the background. Photo by Cody Cavill.

Matt Zussman – Bearpaw Wilderness Ranger

Matt is a relatively young ranger (31), this was his third season at Bearpaw, and his fifth season as a wilderness employee. Matt has an interdisciplinary master's degree in Literature and

History, for which he wrote a thesis about how wilderness is represented in pop culture, specifically in the *Planet of the Apes* series. Because of this, Matt has had formal education in environmental history and came to the interviews with a deep and critical understanding of the wilderness idea's colonial past. Matt's station is just on the edge of my patrol area, so for both of our interviews we rendezvoused in the wilderness. His first interview took place at Little Five Lakes, Michael's station, when we were there to help Michael set up the yurt. Little Five's yurt has to be put up every spring and taken down each fall—Cody, Matt, and I all converged there in June to help Michael with that process. His second interview was conducted in Nine Lakes Basin. He met me there—I was five days into a patrol, and it took him a day to walk from his station to the Basin.

Adam Levy – Mineral King District Trail Crew Lead

Adam has worked in Sequoia trails since the early 2000s. As a trail crew lead, Adam is in charge of a crew of four people (in his case, all men) and about nine horses and mules. Adam leads one of two stock crews in the Park. They clear and build trails, bridges, water breaks, sometimes helping with larger maintenance projects like the wilderness ranger stations. In general, trail crews set up camp at one location for about four weeks, and then move to another location in the Park's wilderness for another four weeks. Adam and I met for his interview at the Atwell Barn, which is the trail crew's living quarters in Mineral King. We were unable to arrange a second interview. Adam is very charismatic; he is full of stories that have been passed down to him through his predecessors, and his love for the wilderness of SEKI, for the work he does, the stock he cares for, is very evident.

Cody Cavill – Hockett Meadow Wilderness Ranger

Cody is the youngest of the group (28), and the newest wilderness ranger. He's been the Hockett ranger for two summers now, though he worked as a wilderness employee in various capacities for the six seasons prior. Cody is also one of only two stock rangers in the park. He has two horses and a mule that he uses throughout the summer. Cody's sense of wilderness is largely

influenced by his childhood in Montana, where he "grew up pretty feral." He is also my partner, so I spent a lot of time with Cody both on and off the job, acting as partner, fellow employee, and researcher. Much of my thinking about wilderness has been talked-out and thought-through with him. Cody's first interview took place at his station in Hockett Meadow, a twelve-mile walk from Mineral King that I make pretty regularly on my weekends. His second interview was conducted at Quinn Meadow. We took the horses to Quinn; I rode Rocky, a black horse who liked to push me around, and was very excited about it.

Methodology & Methods

I grew up on the border of the Park, and in the summers, I work as a trailhead ranger out of the Mineral King Ranger Station. By re-searching the relations created, nurtured and cultivated in and with wilderness lands, I search for a better understanding of my own relations with the ideologies, peoples, and lands that raised me. I seek anticolonial possibility in the National Park Service in order to see that possibility in myself.

Shawn Wilson writes that "relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality" (7). As I seek to better understand the relationships that make up the reality of wilderness employees in the Sierra Nevada, I am oriented to this work, this meaning-making, by my education at Michigan State University and more specifically by the field of Cultural Rhetorics. As Powell et. al. describe in *Our Story Begins Here:* "cultures are made up of practices that accumulate over time and in relationship to specific places." Cultural Rhetorics understands these practices to be always-already rhetorical and centers relations as the content of cultures rather than objects. Thus, conducting research becomes less a study of things, and more a creation and exploration of relationships.

I have thought a lot about what it means to *start with what we know*, and I am sensitive to the importance of working from within communities of which we are a part. This sensitivity has grown from my readings of Absolon, Shawn Wilson, Malea Powell, and other Cultural Rhetorics and

Indigenous scholars. I have struggled with how I might study the coloniality of wilderness as a white woman of western European descent, especially considering I interact with a mostly white western-European community in the Park Service. What does it mean for me to interact with decolonial theories and practices? To relate with and use the scholarship and stories of Indigenous peoples? Further, what does it mean to approach my own community—the one that I *am* a part of—with the theories and ideologies of Native communities, of which I am not a part? How can I respect the practices of my 'colonial' community, while still critiquing and complicating those practices?

I think that a Cultural Rhetorics methodology lends itself well to the complexities of the relations between colonial and Indigenous communities. Cultural Rhetorics works to understand the world not as hierarchical, but as relational. The reconciliation Qwo-Li Driskill calls requires much kindness and care. Constellating my story and the stories of wilderness employees with the stories and knowledges of Indigenous peoples, reflects the complexity of relations between colonial and decolonial, privileged and oppressed. Cultural Rhetorics is a kind methodology—one that has the capacity to look upon both colonizers and colonized with understanding, respect, and humility.

I conducted two interviews with each participant, with the exception of Adam, who I was unable to meet up with a second time because of our different schedules. My guiding questions and consent form for these interviews are attached in Appendix A and B, respectively. I provided each interviewee with a copy of the guiding questions and the consent form, both of which were approved by Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board, several weeks prior to our interview. In some cases, I was able to get these documents to my participants before they entered into the wilderness by email or in person. In others, the guiding questions and consent form took a helicopter ride or traveled on the back of a mule to reach my participants. I note these unique forms of travel because I think it demonstrates the relations involved in this project even in the simple act of arranging the logistics for the interviews.

The interviewees were also involved, to varying degrees, in the composition of this document. As I drafted chapters and interpreted their interviews, I sent them drafts of my work to ensure that they did not feel misrepresented. This was and is a process, a negotiation. Participants commented not just on their own interviews, but also on the theoretical moves I was making—they asked questions, critiqued claims, addressed sentence structure, gave guidance. This is not to say that I took all of their recommendations. As we talked back and forth over this thesis, I had to make decisions about what was possible for me to complete before my deadline, what was reasonable for me to say to the field of rhetoric and composition, and what was ethical, responsible, respectful to my interviewees. These are messy negotiations, and in an effort to make visible the conversational nature of this thesis, I have included, wherever possible, our dialogue from the interviews. As I write this thesis, I join a host of voices already speaking about what wilderness *is* and *means*. I want to recognize that my interviews with Adam, Jess, Michael, Cody, and Matt, are snapshots of an ever-evolving process of making-meaning.

A Few Notes

I have included re-tellings of both the recorded interviews and unrecorded moments and memories. Each chapter begins with memory and moves into interview. I recognize that there is a difference in the ways that these two types of re-tellings should be read. To demarcate between moments when I am storying memories, and moments when I am relaying direct, transcribed interviews, I have used small drawings, as you saw at the beginning of this document and below. My mom, who also grew up in the Sierra, in Yosemite National Park, did these drawings for me. There is a branch and a leaf which will be used to mark when I switch from memory to interview. She is also responsible for the mountains which appear throughout the thesis.

Chapter Description

In my first chapter, *Articulating the Wilderness Idea,* I examine definitions of Wilderness historically, legislatively, and in academic scholarship. This chapter focuses on the rhetorical work that the wilderness idea has done to remove Native peoples from their homelands and to marginalize and erase their knowledges and lifeways. The second push of this chapter looks at how wilderness employees define wilderness and how they articulate the purpose of wilderness areas.

In the second chapter, *Composing Wilderness*, I examine the ways that wilderness employees compose the land beneath their feet, and the colonial legacies that determine how that composition takes place. In looking at wilderness employees' compositional practices, I review the history of Indigenous land-management in the Sierra, and the classed and raced notions of recreation that are now one of the driving forces for land-management decisions in the National Park Service.

My third chapter, *Belonging in Wilderness*, makes the claim that the land, itself, is rhetorical. By examining the ways that wilderness rangers have learned from and with the lands that they protect, and importantly, live in, I make an argument that they talk about land as though it possesses the capacity for a two-way relationship of meaning-making similar to Indigenous understandings of land/human relationships. This rhetorical positioning is generated in part from a sense that wilderness is home. I discuss the complexities of rangers being at home in Indigenous lands.

My conclusion returns to my central questions: What relations are privileged by the National Park Service in wilderness areas? What relations are left unseen, unknowable? I attempt to tussle with the answers to these questions, to recognize their implications, and to discuss a way forward.

Across the meadow, there is a low slab of granite that holds evidence of the first stewards of this land. Deep grinding holes, smooth and weathered, are pounded into the rock. Cody tells me, *it is*

impossible to know this land and not know that there were people here long before us; evidence of their presence is everywhere. And he is right.

I am taken back to a moment over a year ago when we walked off the trail and into the meadow, winding through the young trees at the edge. Cody saw it first, flashing in the sun. He knelt and carefully picked it up. The arrowhead's edges were sharp and unfinished, its shape a vague shadow of the patch on my shoulder.

Cody smiled up at me as I leaned in close. We were fascinated. Someone worked this rock, carried it across deserts, mountains, meadows; dropped it, unfinished, on this plateau. A thousand years ago? Two hundred? I didn't know. We placed the obsidian back in the earth and marked its location in his GPS. A marmot barked and the clouds drug their bellies across the sky.

Figure 4. *Evening Meadow*. The neighborhood herd in Hockett Meadow pasture. Photo by Cody Cavill.

I sit with Cody at the station and I re-member this moment. Gerald Vizenor writes that "The simulation of the *indian* is the absence of real natives…natives are the storiers of an imagic

presence, and indians are the actual absence—the simulations of the tragic primitive" (vii) As Cody and I marveled at the story of the arrowhead we conjured the indian—images of a pre-contact, primitive person, who tragically but inevitably was no longer *here*. Our simulation of the indian allowed us to feel connected to the past, as though we were reaching through the years to touch the forgotten story of this piece of obsidian, of the lives of those who carried it; it also allowed us to consider that story temporally bound. The arrowhead's story was over, it had ended many years ago, and neither of us had any agency in the disappearance of indians from this meadow. We generated an historic presence, which justified a modern absence. This absence applies not only to the indian simulation, but also to the structures, systems, knowledges, and narratives that led to the disappearance of the indian—that is, by simulating the indian as historically present but absent in modernity, we also make colonization a thing of the past.

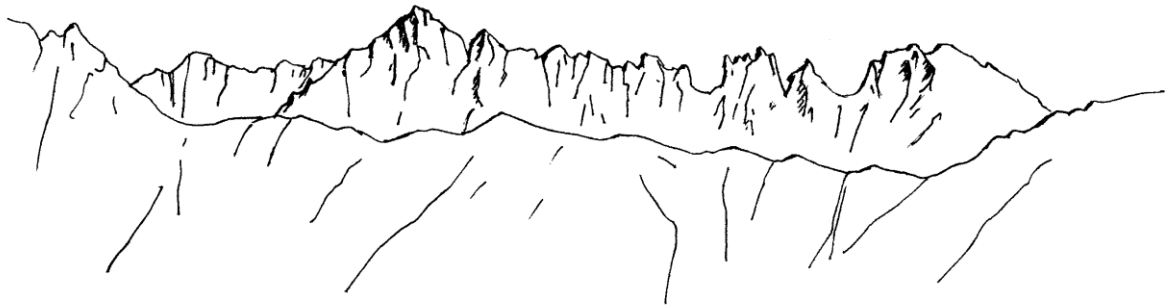
Vizenor's postindian warriors fight the simulation of the indian with active *presence,* they resist and survive and re-create stories of native modernity and futurity. In a similar way, settlers and settler-descendants can do anti- and de-colonial work by making-visible *colonial* presence—an act that requires a recognition of native presence in addition to settler complicity in the creation of native absence. For if we cannot see our coloniality, if we cannot recognize the continued marginalization of and violence against native peoples, if we continue to insist that colonization ended with the imagined disappearance of the indian, then we have nothing to fight against.

Quo-Li Driskill prods me, "Whose land are you on, dear reader? What are the specific names of the Native nation(s) who have historical claim to the territory on which you read this book? What are their histories before European invasion? What are their historical and present acts of resistance to colonial occupation" (23)? I look for the names of the tribes that lived in the southern Sierra Nevada.. Now, I answer Driskill's question with *Yokut, Eastern Paiute, Western Mono, Tubatulabal, Tule* (Jackson 12).

I am stung by Driskill's question: *Whose land are you on?* In answering with the names of Indigenous peoples, I am also answering *not mine.* My footprints, now, feel like a violation, my gaze feels harsh and grating. Winnemucca wrote, "They came like a lion, yes, like a roaring lion" (3). *That's me*, I say, shrinking, *I'm the lion*. But just as Driskill calls for land redress, they also call for reconciliation (69). "Decolonization is an act of imagining," Driskill writes (169). I am looking for anticolonial possibility—in myself, in the National Park Service, in the lands that raised me. I think this possibility lies in the land and in the relationships that sustain it. "Knowledge itself," Shawn Wilson says, "is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us" (87).

Cody and I watch the fawn disrupting her elders, kicking at the sky. Her mother noses her, licks the white spot on her forehead. The edges of the sky turn pink as evening spreads across the meadow and I wonder what I protect when I wear the uniform of the National Park Service. I wonder who I protect it for; who I protect it from.

The fawn tumbles in the grass. She and I, we are learning our relations.



“I can throw a rock at wilderness.”

Articulating the Wilderness Idea:

Chapter 1

Figure 5. *Walking with Michael***.** Michael hiking up the Big Arroyo towards Nine Lake Basin. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

We are walking from Little Five Lakes to the Big Arroyo. The trail twists through foxtail pines. These trees are hundreds of years old, some of them a thousand or more and they wear the years well. Wind-worn tongues of orange and yellow flicker up their bark.

The recorder is off and Michael lets loose. He wants to know what I am thinking about wilderness. "It's weird, being interviewed," he says, "I can't tell what you're thinking; it's not a conversation." In fact, Michael had thrown my questions back at me a few times during our interviews, but I had avoided them, pushed them again, in his direction. But now, we have miles to walk and there is no escape.

At first, I tiptoe around it, we talk about technology and I tell him I don't know if we have the right to restrict people's use of various technologies in wilderness. Michael brings up the Wilderness Act, leaning into its language to point out that wilderness areas should be free from human mechanization, which, certainly, technological devices are.

"Okay," I say, "but what if the Act itself is at fault? What if the language we're using to manage wilderness is problematic?"

"What do you mean?"

"I think that the Wilderness Act is worth thinking critically about. I think its language was written by a particular group of people, in a particular historical moment, and that it reflects those people and that moment."

Michael pushes me further and eventually, I spit it out: "What if the Wilderness Act and the wilderness idea are racist, classist, sexist, elitist?" I stumble here, the question feeling empty and over-simplified in its stack of '-ists', but it was, after all, at the core of my desire to interrogate wilderness.

"What if it is?" he asks. Michael has his own ideas about wilderness, developed over a lifetime in wild lands and considerable study, and he likes to play devil's advocate.

Our voices rise as we walk down the trail, pausing at the corners of switchbacks. My cheeks are flushed; our discussion, animated. We talk about language, resource protection, solitude, access, about class and race and the removal of indigenous peoples from wilderness areas, about the rising concern of environmental deregulation, the importance of preservation, of visitor interaction with wild places. Michael pushed me to articulate not only why I thought wilderness was imbued with racism and colonialism, but also why the colonial and racist history of the wilderness idea matters in the present, in the land itself.

At the time, I was unable to produce sound or salient answers to these questions, but I continue to return to this moment when Michael and I parried back and forth as we walked toward camp. At the heart of our discussion we were concerned not just with what wilderness is or should be, but also, with the rhetorical work that wilderness does in the world. We were invested in both the preservation and protection of wild lands and in the interactions made possible by preserving

those lands—for visitors and rangers alike. As we wandered from foxtails to lodgepoles to western whites, we negotiated histories, national and local legislation, bureaucratic institutions, academic scholarship, our own classed and raced identities as rangers, civilians, and settler decedents, and, quite literally, the land beneath our feet—all in an attempt to make meaning out of this thing we call wilderness.

I ask Michael, "What's your personal definition of wilderness?" We are sitting on the deck of my parent's cabin. Cody is in the kitchen and I can hear the clink of dishes and the run of the fossette. He is making us dinner.

Michael pushes at my question, looks back at me. "How would you define it?"

"I don't know," I hesitate, "I guess that's why I'm asking you."

He smiles; he knows I am dodging the question and I know it too. It is a bit unfair of me.

"When I saw that question on your list, I was…flummoxed. I imagined myself just, sitting in silence for a long time." Michael pauses, "It's not one word, is the problem. Just like with the first person you ever fall in love with, you define, you have this thesaurus that you build of what all the words you're using mean, and then you go to the next person in your life…and they begin to bandy about terms that you thought meant something. And they're using them in in what appears to be the incorrect context and I feel like wilderness is like that…It's a regulatory word. It is a literary word. It is a historical word. It is, a, word and, concept upon which almost any personal impression or, ideology can be foisted."

Michael has caught the trouble of a single definition of wilderness. He recognizes the slippery nature of wilderness as a term and points to the idea's pervasiveness across various discourses. As he continues, Michael talks about the need for a system "like the Oxford English

Dictionary, with a wilderness 1, 2, 3, etc." and he is absolutely right. Wilderness means many different things to many different people; it has official definitions established by the United States Government; it has practical definitions for application in the sciences and in land management; it has poetic and literary histories and connotations, all of which bleed into and shape one another.

As Michael explicates the complicated nature of the task I have set before him, it is almost as though he is asking me to narrow my question, to give him a rhetorical situation in which to deploy the term—an audience, a discourse, a discipline. But I am fascinated by the way that wilderness moves; the ways that the legal definition of wilderness is influenced by the literary, the scientific by the intensely personal—it is an important aspect of the rhetorical nature of wilderness. I hesitate to section it off, dice it up, because as wilderness moves across discourses, it carries its histories, values, and consequences with it.

Michael's analogy to falling in love is also extremely telling. For me, and I think for Michael, Jess, Cody, Matt, and Adam, defining wilderness is very much about love. When I asked my participants to define wilderness, I asked them to condense lifetimes of embodied experiences in wild lands, a deep and felt relationship, not to mention a host of often-conflicting scholarly, literary, and political definitions. It is precisely this task that I struggle to complete in this chapter.

A History of Wilderness

It is windy. Matt and I are looking out at the lake, the short trees at its edge, the high ridge behind them. He has just mentioned the Wilderness Act of 1964. He studied it in school, when he was getting his master's degree, through "the very, very critical lens of a few different environmental historians."

Even as wilderness crosses disciplinary and discursive boundaries, it does have a traceable, if complex, history. Environmental historians, as Matt notes, have outlined the history of the wilderness idea and its contributions to the development of our national American identity. Perhaps the most definitive of these is Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind.* However, as Kevin Deluca and Anne Demo point out, these histories often read as more "descriptive than critical" (543). While I recognize that providing a truly comprehensive and critical history of the wilderness idea would, itself, be a stand-alone thesis or dissertation project, getting a handle, however tenuous, on the story of wilderness in the United States is a crucial step in understanding the rhetorics of wilderness employees.

Figure 6. *In the Yurt***.** From left to right: Cody, Matt, and Michael, relaxing after setting up the yurt, Michael's summer home. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

"I'm, um, going to push a bit more," I say, "What, what parts of the Act do you think we should be critical of?" Matt looks the part of a critical ranger. He is tall and thin, with a robust beard and wild, curly hair. His glasses give him the look of a disheveled scholar, and I can easily imagine him at home in the halls of academia.

He looks away, strokes his beard, "The language that talks about preserving places that have been 'untouched by man'. 'Untouched by man' alone, just instantly brings up a whole bunch of problems of historical inaccuracy, racial problems, and also gender issues, but especially like it's just complete—I don't know if it's willful ignorance or naivete—to just say that these are places that have been untouched by man [when there were] and still are, in some areas, Indigenous people…That's the primary one that I think we should be critical of, is the way that [the Act] basically ignores our history of genocide that created the West as we know it today and made National Parks possible."

Here, Matt alludes to the long history of wilderness as a justifying myth for the colonization of Native peoples. Specifically, Matt references the language of the Wilderness Act, which established the Wilderness Preservation System in 1964. According to the Wilderness Act, a wilderness is "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain." Further, a wilderness area retains "its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation." Though the Wilderness Act was signed into law just over fifty years ago, the wilderness idea has been mapped upon the lands and bodies of colonized nations for hundreds of years.

Mark Spence, in *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, details well stories of dispossession in the National Park Service; in particular he takes up the myth and damage of the idea of an uninhabited wilderness, where "man is a visitor who does not remain." By naming Indigenous lands "wilderness," white settlers also named them devoid of human habitation, which "enabled them to

see" the North American continent "as essentially empty of human beings, and thus available for immediate occupancy" (Callicot 357). Spence reminds us that wilderness areas were never uninhabited and institutions like the National Park Service had to undertake many different means in order to create a wilderness "without human habitation." In Matt's words:

> In Sequoia-Kings there were indigenous people living in the foothills on both sides [of the Sierras] and then trading across the mountains. And then in this park even after we, mostly, erase indigenous people we also had Basque sheepherders and a socialist utopian colony and they were all forced out too, because they didn't fit a certain idea of wilderness that the founders of the National Parks and subsequent Wilderness Act had.

The "certain idea of wilderness" that Matt refers to is that of wilderness lands as unpeopled, untouched, and unmanaged by humans. Interestingly, early ideas of wilderness were inseparable from a Native presence in wild lands. Spence writes, "forests were wild because Indians and beasts lived there, and Indians were wild because they lived in forests" (10). George Catlin, often credited with the first articulation of the National Park idea circa 1832, proposed not the preservation of an *uninhabited* land, but rather a protected area where "where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his horse…amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes" (Spence 10). Native peoples were composed as beasts of the wild, and as beasts, they were subject to the control of European settlers in the same way as the "fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes."

The wilderness idea is intimately linked to the narrative of "the Indian" in the settler imagination. In the early colonization of the United States, the North American wilderness was "the stronghold of Satan, and the indigenous population…was composed of the devil's minions" (Callicot 368). The synonymy of Native peoples with wilderness was an agent in the creation of the "savage Indian," for that which lives in the wild, must be wildlife. In 1933 Luther Standing Bear

wrote, "Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame" (201).

By the time George Catlin began to proclaim the necessity of a great reserve for Native peoples and their "natural habitat," (it is worth noting that many of the Native peoples Catlin was inspired by on the banks of the Mississippi had, in fact, already been removed from their native lands) the narrative of wilderness and of the Indian was beginning to change (Spence). As the East became more and more settled, and the spread of Western European civilization crept toward the west coast, both wilderness and native peoples were declared "vanishing." Sparked by writers and adventurers, early ecologists and photographers, wilderness and Native peoples became symbols of the vanishing frontier and the sublimity of nature (Spence).

Figure 7. *1967 Wilderness Conference Poster*. Sierra Club.

But the colonial nature of wilderness did not disappear. It was merely disguised by a new narrative of preservation and protection. Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, in their examination of the role of race and class in the construction of wilderness, quote early Yosemite activist Samuel Bowels, who typifies the justification for preservation at the price of displacement: "We know they are not our equals…we know that our right to the soil, as a race capable of its superior improvement, is above theirs…Let us say [to the Indian]…you are our ward, our child, the victim of our destiny, ours to displace, ours to protect" (194). Bowels, here, sees a direct correlation between wilderness lands and native peoples: they are both the property of white European settlers to "preserve and protect." In 1967, the Sierra Club hosted its 9th Wilderness Conference, which many of the Wilderness Act's authors and supporters attended. The Conference's poster (Figure 7), featured not a "pristine and primitive" landscape, but a "pristine and primitive" Indian. In other words, those who had written and lobbied for the Wilderness Act, used a depiction of the very peoples driven from their homes in order to establish wilderness lands, to represent the wilderness cause. In the poster used by the Sierra Club, "the Indian" is again relegated to a symbol of wilderness, and though their image has shifted from *violent* savage to *noble* savage, they remain under the colonizers' control.

Early preservationists like Bowels and John Muir, sought a natural landscape without the "mark of man," where (European) settlers could see clearer "the face of God" (Cronon 76). As Muir wrote of the "cathedrals" of Yosemite, he participated in a growing body of work that painted wilderness as an Edenic and pre-human space (Deluca 551). Far from early European constructions of the North American wilderness as satanic, Muir and his contemporaries, flipped the script: In early settlement, wilderness was the site of corruption, whereas in the current conception of wilderness, humans are the corrupting force. So it was, that even the (less-than-human) presence of Native peoples in wild lands became unnatural. The wilderness idea seeks a time before; lands that,

as the Act states, retain their "primeval character and influence," and are "protected and managed so as to preserve [their] natural conditions." The presentation of unpeopled wilderness as lands in their *most natural state* made the removal of Native peoples a well-justified restoration of the earth's original gardens of Eden.

Considering the colonial roots of the wilderness idea, it is no surprise that the Wilderness Act includes language about an absence of *human* habitation—Native peoples' presence in wilderness areas has always been marked primitive and animal. But the reduction of Native peoples to wild beasts is only part of the rhetorical work performed by the wilderness idea. Today, the same language that turned Native peoples into animals entirely erases the histories of Native presence in, and removal from, wilderness areas. As Chris Clarke writes, "there's a big problem with the wilderness concept as enshrined in law: it's rooted in a cultural outlook that defines Native people as either subhuman or nonexistent." The Wilderness Act forgets (and therefore forgives) its colonial legacy and this erasure obscures more than histories of dispossession and violence; it also marginalizes their knowledges and lifeways and renders Native peoples' political and ancestral claims to wilderness lands illegitimate.

The Consequences of a History of Colonization

"So your station is unique because of its location. Like, in general there's quite a few more people around," I say.

"It's actually technically not wilderness." Matt smiles, "There's a little bubble around the Bearpaw area that's not wilderness."

"That's what I thought," I say, squinting my eyes at the sun, "So you technically have to hike away from your station to get into the wilderness."

Matt laughs, "That's right," he grins, "I could throw a rock at wilderness. It's a very small bubble of non-wilderness."

Matt's station was built before 1964 (as many of the wilderness stations were) and sits next to the Bearpaw High Sierra Camp. The High Sierra Camp is a privately-run backcountry "motel" with tent cabins, showers, and hot meals for its guests. The Camp is too much "human development" and "habitation" for the area to qualify as wilderness under the Wilderness Act, and so the Sequoia-Kings Wilderness boundary is drawn to exclude the Camp and its surrounding 100 or so meters.

The Wilderness Act has been criticized in environmental studies for perpetuating a separation between humans and nature. William Cronon, in his oft-cited article "The Trouble with Wilderness" writes that wilderness "quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject" (10). Cronon speaks of the "central paradox" of wilderness—that in order to be wild and natural, wilderness must be free from human influence. By framing wilderness as land in its most natural state and defining that natural state as an absence of humanity, the wilderness idea separates humans from the natural world; creates an ideological rift between humanity and the environment. Cronon argues that if we "take to a logical extreme the paradox that was built into wilderness from the beginning" then we end up in an inescapable position: "If nature dies because we enter it, then the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves." This ambivalence, Nathaniel Rivers writes, has consequences in environmental rhetorics at large (423). Both Rivers and Cronon call for a "strange environmental rhetoric", in which humans are not separated from their environment, but are instead a part of the wild world (422, 18).

Scholars across disciplines have, in various ways, come to tussle with the human/nature dualism that manifests in the wilderness idea. However, often these inquiries do not address the dualism's roots in and contributions to colonization. The positioning of humans as separate from and superior to the earth is a distinctly colonial logic; one not at all reflected by Indigenous understandings of land/human relationships. Jeanna Moyer writes that dualism "frames either/or

distinctions in such a way that one member of the pair is subordinate to the other" (80). It is precisely the position of (European) human *over* (Indian) nature that has instigated, justified, and made innocent, violences of settler colonialism.

Though Cronon and Rivers both mention Native peoples in their exploration of the wilderness idea, neither scholar turns to Indigenous knowledge in their search for a new environmental rhetoric. If they had, they may have found that such rhetorics already exist, and they are by no means "strange.". Linda Moon Stumpff, a scientist, writer, and land-management specialist, writes "the worldview of Tribes offers a new perspective on the evolving discussion of the definition of wilderness and wildness" (114). Stumpff has directly engaged and challenged the wilderness idea, but we can turn also to Kimmerer, Cordova, Deloria, Wilson, Driskill, and many others—Native peoples have been composing themselves as part of the earth, part of the wild, for millennia, with the key distinction that this composition occurs *without* the colonial dualism of the Western European ideology. Not only has the wilderness idea physically eradicated native peoples from their homelands, it has also removed and marginalized Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing.

I agree with Cronon, Rivers, and Bennett: environmental rhetorics can benefit from a dissolution of the human/nature dualism, a re-composition of the settler-colonial relationship with the earth. The rhetoric of wilderness perpetuates an ideology that in many ways works against the stated, and more importantly, *felt* mission of the National Park Service. As rangers, much of what we hope for in wilderness areas is that visitors connect with the land, not that they are ostracized from it. It is important to recognize this "ambivalence" not only as the result of colonization, but also as a current colonial force. As wilderness continues to be mapped upon the lands of Indigenous nations, as its boundaries are bolstered by settler-colonial rhetorics, we reify the erasure and marginalization of Indigenous peoples—their lifeways, histories, and knowledges.

The fact that Matt's station, an eleven-mile trek from the nearest road with easily fifty miles of wilderness to the east, two hundred miles to the north, and a hundred to the south, can't *technically* be called "wilderness" is a poignant demonstration of the constructed-ness of the wilderness idea. Matt and I are amused; he doesn't technically live in wilderness—but he can throw a rock at it.

While we laugh at this slightly absurd example of the extent we will go to keep humans out of wilderness areas, I am reminded by Qwo-Li Driskill that these boundaries are not innocuous; they have material consequences. Driskill writes, "colonial invasions and explorations of Indigenous territories…work through the gendering and sexualization of Indigenous bodies and lands in order to place both Indigenous peoples and landbases into *colonial legibility*…to facilitate European expansion, settlement, and claim of resources (including human bodies)" (emphasis added, 49). Driskill's work is necessarily rooted in gender and sexuality, a context from which I do not wish to remove it, but the idea of colonial legibility resonates with me. I see the damage of colonial legibility in the history of wilderness—as we mapped *wildness* and *emptiness* upon the lands and bodies of Indigenous peoples, we justified the genocide that, as Matt puts it, "created the West as we know it today and made National Parks possible."

Driskill writes, "What the maps don't show—but are a constant presence in colonial accounts—are the routes through and over our bodies. Routes cleared by our bodies. Bodies left in the wake of invasions. Bodies stolen. Bodies that resisted and escaped. What the maps don't show is our bodies" (51). A map of the Sierra Nevada will show wilderness stacked on wilderness; it will show millions of acres of unpeopled, undeveloped land. I am thinking about the border, drawn carefully around the High Sierra Camp. For this private business, which services predominantly white, wealthy visitors, we have made and exception, moved the boundaries of wilderness to make space for the Camp—its visitors and managers. We defined the landscape by this commercial operation, marked the presence of these (Western European) entrepreneurs with a small dot on the

map that says *Bearpaw High Sierra Camp*. There is not, however, any mention of the sovereign nations whose ancestral lands the Sierra's are, nor are the numerous federally recognized tribes who pepper the borders of the Sierra's wilderness areas, represented.

The presence of the High Sierra Camp on the map, its exceptional status in an otherwise-wilderness-area, is a poignant example of the ways that wilderness continues to privilege white, Western European bodies over Indigenous peoples, indeed, sovereign nations.

Over the past year, I have reflected on that walk with Michael from Little Five to the Big Arroyo, and I have taken his questions very seriously. He asked me: What does the history of the wilderness idea have to do with the current management and practice of wilderness? As I trace the colonial history of the wilderness idea, I often find myself asking this question, wondering if the racist history of wilderness means that its present iterations are inherently racist and colonial. I am reminded by scholars such as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, that colonization "is not temporally

Figure 8. *Cloudy Skies*. Hiking down from Black Rock Pass to Little Five Lakes, looking east to the Kaweahs. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation…settler colonialism is a structure and not an event" (5). There is a gap, often left unbreeched, between understanding wilderness as complicit in the historic removal of Native peoples and understanding wilderness as a current colonial force.

Defining Wilderness as Employees

"I have a hard time packing [wilderness] into a neat little definition," Matt says, "but there's important bullet points that I could list that make wilderness for me, and one of them is being safe from roads and cars. And I think that's one of the, great things that the Wilderness Act has done regardless of, the, regardless of the aspects of it that I think we should be critical of."

As I listen back through our interview, I am reminded of a quote by Brittany Cooper: "Before I ever ask what a work fails to do, I ask what that work makes possible. I ask what it accomplishes or allows us to accomplish. That is how I critique" (Twitter). Listening to the voices of Matt, Michael, Jess, Adam, and Cody, as they recount stories and memories of wilderness areas, as they articulate what wilderness is and means, I am reminded to think also, of what wilderness makes possible.

Jess is telling me a story about her time in Yosemite as a wilderness ranger. She sits across the table, and her hands tell the story with her. "I went around this one corner and there was just this strange object and was I like, 'What is *that*?' And after I kind of looked at it and poked at it—it was, it was bear scat. But it was a full sized black garbage bag that had gone through a bear's system and it just, it still just wrenches my stomach. To think of what we do to bears…I cried."

My stomach turns, "That's terrible."

Jess's voice becomes more urgent, and her eyes, usually soft and clear, find a sharp edge. "I've seen this stuff," she says, "all the time you see things in bear scat, and that was the worst. What are we doing to these poor bears? You see the condition of their teeth or the condition of their

claws—just because they're breaking into human structures and it's just devastating. It's a horrible human problem. So I love talking about that when people have improper food storage. I'm passionate about it because it's, it's a human problem, not a bear problem."

I want to linger for a moment, on what Jess calls the "human problem." Here, she is speaking specifically about improper food storage. When bears get a human food reward, they seek out more human food. Eventually, they may become so comfortable in human spaces that they will break into homes, tents, and cars to get the high-calorie treats that sit on counters and in backseats. This behavior leads to the consequences that Jess details above—their claws become worn, their teeth deteriorate. Worse still, if a bear gets human food even just once, there is a very high chance that the Park will have to kill that bear.

It is a simple task to store your food properly in animal resistant food containers or bear boxes. Proper food storage ensures that bears never get human food, which means that the cycle of their habituation, deteriorating health, and eventually, death, doesn't even have to begin. If we store our food properly, our bears remain healthy and happy, doing bear things in bear ways. Jess's reaction to seeing an entire black garbage bag work its way through a bear's system (an image that fills me with a churning revulsion as I write it here) is an indication of the huge emotional investment that rangers have in both protecting the life and lands of wilderness areas, and, moreover, in *fixing* the human problem. Jess says that she loves talking about food storage with visitors and this, to me, speaks to the rhetorical work performed by wilderness employees on a daily basis—our job is to convince visitors to care about and for the bears, the deer, the paintbrush and lupine. In short, wilderness is about protecting wild lands from "the human problem."

The same boundaries of preservation that precipitated the removal of Indigenous peoples and continue to marginalize their lifeways and knowledges, to restrict their access to their ancestral homelands, have also protected their lands from destruction by settler corporations, from the

parceling-up of these lands into private property. I recognize that this begins to sound like an argument in favor of a lesser evil, as though I am seeking a pat on the back for a kinder, more paternalistic, colonization. And I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that institutions like the National Park Service get let off the hook because they are better than the Exxon Valdez. Rather, I want to recognize that the lands under the care of the National Park Service are well-poised to be sites of intervention in colonial practices because, in many ways, they are already positioned to critique the norms of settler society, to change settler practices.

Michael tells me, after explicating the complexities involved in defining wilderness, "I favor the concept of wilderness that showcases the natural processes. The concept that is most compelling for me is that of a place where the, influence and impact of mankind, which is so, otherwise *complete*—and arguably detrimental—it, is reduced…you can experience what this place looked like before we decided not to take care of it. And that to me, is, the most valuable part, of the idea of wilderness preservation."

Embedded in the wilderness idea is a desire for a change in behavior. The Wilderness Act reflects this impetus. It states its purpose is to protect wild lands from "an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization." As Michael puts it: "Without the lines of preservation the Exxon Valdez would pull up with Dick Cheney at the helm and the drill would come out." A land that is designated wilderness receives one of the highest levels of protection the federal government can provide, and without such protections I think Michael is right, our wild lands would look very different. Hotels, mines, hydroelectric plants, ski resorts, quarries—the opportunities for economic exploitation and resource extraction are endless. However, considering the wilderness idea's contributions to the genocide and marginalization of Indigenous peoples and rootedness of such exploitation in a Western European ontological dualism

between humans and the natural environment, I'd like to make an additional distinction: the human problem is really a settler problem.

Michael's comment, "you can experience what this place looked like before we decided not to take care of it" requires some unpacking. First, it indicates the impetus for wilderness preservation, that is, that "we" were not caring for the earth in the way that we should have been. The growing appeal of wilderness preservation in the early 1900s indicates that there was a sense among settlers that our treatment of the earth should be examined and reoriented. I also see an indication of the modern purpose of wilderness lands in Michael's statement. By emphasizing the importance of seeing what the earth looks like "before we decided not to take care of it," he indicates the power of experiencing what the earth is like when we *do* take care of it. Adam articulated a similar purpose. When I asked him why wilderness areas are important, he responded, "I think it's just seeing what could be." Matt also spoke of the importance of wilderness in providing contrast to our every day lives. "Sometimes people have really powerful, meaningful, experiences out here because you're doing things that are different from what they do every day, or making what they do every day feel unfamiliar and feel new and different and feel novel, and hopefully that makes them think a little bit critically about [their every-day lives]."

When asked for their personal definitions of wilderness, all of the interviewees reproduced the language and values of the Wilderness Act. This is not surprising. As wilderness employees, we are hyper-aware of the language of the Act. It dictates our every-day professional practices, our very existence in wilderness lands. However, when asked what the "point" of wilderness was, (a question that asks about wilderness's rhetorical intent, rather than its essence) each interviewee articulated ideas that pushed at the human/nature dualism of the wilderness idea. In fact, the "point" of wilderness was almost always about re-composing the relationship between humans and nature. Wilderness, according to rangers, is about connecting to the land around us.

I ask Jess, "Why do you think wilderness is important?"

She looks out the window, back at me, "It's kind of getting back to where everything's more in sync or sustainable like there's more of a balance where everything is equal, in a wild or natural sense." She pauses, "You know there's always this conversation [about] where humans fit into wilderness. But we do. If we're not—if there's a harmony and a balance of giving and taking. Using things efficiently and sustainability but not completely, like, treading and causing [damage] just for our own advantage. It's this wild, natural sense of a place. Where we're not just totally destructive and developing for our own gain."

Figure 9. *Jess in Sage*. Just south of Timber Gap. Day one of a five-day patrol. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

What becomes evident in speaking with wilderness employees, is that the wilderness idea does not only separate humans from the earth—its rhetorical work is more complicated than that. Rather, wilderness areas are as much about protecting the landscape as they are about reorienting settlers to the land and thinking critically about how we treat the earth. Wilderness is a salient

concept and has been a powerful force in the protection of wild lands precisely because it resonates with many people, because many people have "powerful, meaningful experiences," as Matt sates, in wild lands. And so, while the wilderness idea bolsters the human/nature dualism it also provides a way for people to connect with the earth in meaningful ways—it does rhetorical work to convince settlers to better take care of their environment.

However, I think this connection is made *in spite of* the rhetoric of wilderness. As we combat the "human problem," we reify the notion that humans, broadly, are inherently bad for the natural world. Such positioning precludes the possibility that there is a way to live *with* the land that is reciprocal, that there is a relationship with the earth that makes our presence not only positive, but necessary for ecological and spiritual health. Not only does such rhetorical positioning place settlers into Cronon's paradox (that if we want to save the earth, we must kill ourselves), it also *makes illegible* Indigenous peoples' already-existing relationship with their homelands.

As I think about Michael's question, about this issue of whether or not the colonial legacies of wilderness *matter,* I am reminded of a moment in one of Cody's interviews. We were sitting in the station, drinking decaf coffee and the sun was starting to drop behind the trees. It was towards the end of the interview and I was struggling with how to bring up the topic of Indigenous peoples:

"I haven't had to ask anyone these questions yet so bear with me as I figure it out." I said, "But, um, sort of what do you know about the history of wilderness? I guess maybe let's keep it local. How often do you interact with the history of the Hockett area? Does that question make sense?"

"I—Definition please." Cody said, "Yeah, please reword. Because your answer would be like every…breath you know? It's—everything here is historic."

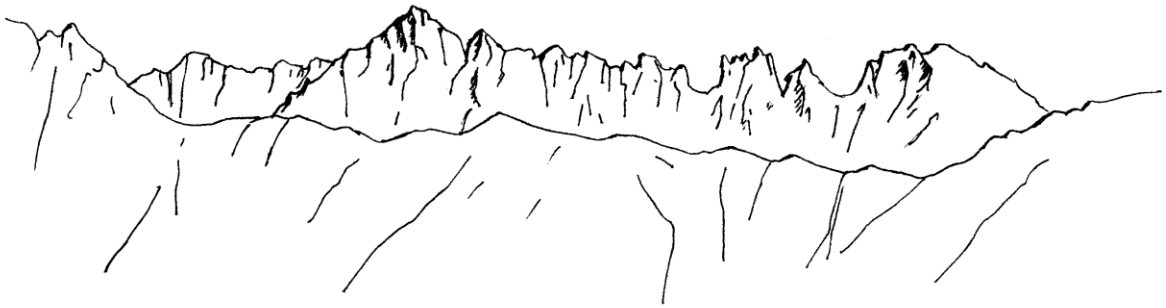
"The history of this area, like there were very clearly people living here. Western European and Indigenous peoples. So how much do you know about that history? About the people who were here before it was wilderness?"

"Yeah. Not enough. Shamefully little given that I get to live here. But I'll tell you what I know...I know there were Indigenous tribes all over this area…And even without ever cracking a book or having a conversation you would know that if you spent enough time here because the evidence is everywhere in the Hockett Plateau. Even without *trying*, you find arrowheads, you find grinding holes, you find all of these indicators that people have been here a long time, a really long time."

Cody notes that the local tribe was the Yokut, and that the Hockett Plateau was a "mecca," even more heavily used than the rest of the Park. And though Cody and I can name the "prehistoric" Indigenous peoples of the Hockett, neither of us can name their decedents. We do not know their "current and past struggles for sovereignty"; nor do we know the story of the Hockett's unpeopling (Driskill 69). Our glaringly incomplete history of the transition from "mecca" to "uninhabited" is itself a testament to the continued suppression of Native histories and modern stories of resistance to colonization on and off Park Service lands. It was not until my graduate studies that, upon seeing the grinding holes and arrowheads of the Hockett, I thought to ask: What happened here? Where are they *now*? In the Parks, Native peoples' historic presence in wilderness lands is recognized, even romanticized, but their absence from these lands in modernity is left largely unexamined.

There is beauty and simplicity in Cody's remark: How often does he interact with the history of the Hockett area? "Every breath." Though I think Cody was referring to the fact that he lives in an historic cabin, interacts with the historic cultural sites of Native peoples and early European shepherds and herders, and practices what is quickly becoming the archaic art of packing mules and

riding horses into the mountains, his answer to this question speaks to the ways that the history of wilderness is passed down; is so laced into every aspect of our being—as wilderness employees and enthusiasts—that we take it in and send it out, with "every breath."



“Let the beavers have their river.”

Composing Wilderness:

Chapter 2

Figure 10. *Packing in Hockett*. Cody, riding Rocky, leading Slim and Trigger. Leaving Hockett Meadow for patrol. Photo by Dale Gates.

Cody and I walk into the campsite and set our packs by a tree. There is a small flat area, perfect for a small tent. It is nestled in the trees, about a five-minute walk from his station. He is showing me around the campsites closest to his station. There are three different kinds: stock, reclusive backpacker, boy scout group. He has built and maintains these campsites with specific users in mind—he composes them thinking of a very particular audience.

"This is the honeymooner's suite," Cody says. "Tucked back here, away from the bear box and the boy scouts." There is no fire pit, no makeshift camp furniture. In fact, if you weren't looking for it, you probably wouldn't find it. "This one's for the couple that wants some privacy, or the backpackers who want the low-impact wilderness experience. You know, no campfire, no noise, no humans."

We comb through the site looking for trash or forgotten gear. We find very little—some micro-trash and a wrapper from a protein bar. "Gluten-free and vegan," I say, reading from the list of ingredients. It is perfect. This site is made for the vegan backpacker.

We wander back towards the station picking our way around puddles and marsh-zones. The heavy winter has left the Hockett Plateau soaked through and muddy. There is a narrow trail that branches off to the west and Cody points through the trees, "The stock camp is over there." I can see a hitching rail and the deep imprint of horseshoes in the mud.

The boy scout site is closest to the station, almost visible from the front porch. It has two fire pits dug into the earth and a large metal bear box in the center. The tent spots are heavily impacted and large. There is very little vegetation in the area, the ground is covered in dead pine needles and dusty footprints. Large rocks and logs are poised by the fire rings for sitting and lounging.

I check the bear box, pulling out a bag of soggy trash and three Mountain House freeze-dried dinners. Cody is cleaning out the fire pits. They are in good shape, with just a few extra rocks stacked around the edges and a pile of ashes in the center. We sift through the ashes and pull out some tinfoil and other unburnt trash.

Cody lays a fire in each pit, carefully stacking twigs in a crisscross pattern. This is an unusual practice—most rangers wouldn't go so far as to lay a fire for visitors, but Cody explains that he thinks it sets a standard of care for the campsites. His theory is that if people arrive and the site looks clean and put-together, and there's a fresh fire laid and the bear box is empty, that visitors will be more likely to care for the site during their stay—to pick up after themselves, to refrain from leaving behind sopping bags of trash and Mountain House dinners.

"Has it worked?" I ask.

"I don't know," he says, "maybe it's all in my head. But a few times I've come back here to clean up after a group and there's a fresh fire laid."

Indigenous Composition of Wilderness

Indigenous peoples have been composing the earth for millennia. In Kat Anderson's comprehensive examination of the traditional land management practices of California Indians, *Tending the Wild,* she explains that the fertile landscapes encountered by early explorers were not the result of a lack of human presence, but rather were evidence of the "profound influence" that Native peoples had on their environment (4). Far from the misnomers of "hunter-gatherer" and "forager", which indicate a "hand-to-mouth existence" and "imply that California Indians dug tubers, plucked berries, and foraged for greens in a random fashion, never staying in any one place long enough to leave lasting human imprints," Anderson explains that Indigenous peoples did more than move lightly across the earth, they altered the composition of the flora and fauna of California, carefully and deliberately "managing" wildlife and plant populations (2).

When early explorers discovered the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada, they did not see the "imprint of man" as they had come to know it—that is, their understanding of human/nature relationships, rooted in agrarian farming and dominion over the natural world, made Indigenous peoples' management of the land unintelligible. Rather than consider that Native peoples were sustainably managing their environment so that the plants, animals, and lands in their care flourished, early explorers assumed that Native peoples didn't have the capacity to exert influence on their environment. The evident lack of colonial exploitation of the land could mean only one thing in our colonial legibility: California was uninhabited, and where there were people, they didn't really

count as human, and if they *did* count as human, then the lack of a significant impact on their environment marked them as less civilized, less evolved.

Anderson writes that the "primary way…we have responded to the loss of biodiversity, the degradation of ecosystems, and the endangerment of particular species is by setting aside land and protecting it from virtually all human influence" (Anderson 8). This dedication to protecting wild places by removing human influence, is rooted in a story that begins with a healthy, well-balanced environment that slowly degrades as the human ability to affect our environment increases—an inverse relationship that inevitably leads to destruction. What happens when this story is re-composed? What happens when it becomes evident that humans have always had significant agency in the natural world? When the story of Native peoples' relationship with the earth changes from one of deficiency—a lack of agency, capacity, and presence—into a story of active and influential participation in their environment, it becomes clear: Native peoples have exerted no less influence over their environments; they have, however, exerted a different kind of influence.

As Indigenous peoples were removed from wild lands in order to "preserve their natural conditions," the composition of the land was altered, and the effects of their removal, the abrupt end to their management of the land, continue to reverberate in the changing dynamics of the ecosystems from which they were taken. "Interestingly," Anderson writes, "contemporary Indians often use the word *wilderness* as a negative label for land that has not been taken care of by humans for a long time, for example, where dense understory shrubbery or thickets of young trees block visibility and movement" (3). A classic example of the damage of "hands-off" management is the federal government's history of fire suppression. Long before settler arrival, California Indians lit fires to clear the understory, herd game, and cleanse the tangled oak woodlands where they did much of their harvesting and gathering for prominent food sources like acorns. These fires were an important part of the ecological health of their environments and contributed to what scientists

today call the *fire regime*, or the general pattern in which fires naturally occur for optimum forest health (Anderson 4). For some biomes, fires once every fifty years are best, in others, like the Giant Sequoia forests of Sequoia-Kings, once every five to seven years is ideal (NPS).

However, settlers understood fire to be a purely destructive force, and in the early years of the National Forest Service and National Park Service, *any* fire was considered a threat to the natural resource. Thus, fire suppression became a prominent management position and, in addition to "naturally caused" fires, Indigenous peoples' purposeful fires were removed from the fire regime. Interestingly, as managers attempted to protect their forests from fires, from the corrupting human influence, they had to take quite the "hands on" approach, creating a vast infrastructure for wildland firefighting operations. As land managers successfully suppressed fires across the United States, marked changes in forest health occurred and the fires that *did* catch on increased in intensity and severity. It wasn't until the 1980s that Park managers in Sequoia-Kings, in conjunction with scientists and foresters, began to implement what they called "control burns"—that is, they purposefully lit fires to clear the undergrowth, reducing fuel loads and restoring "natural" fire regimes. Presently, these prescribed fires are a huge part of wildland firefighting operations in the Park Service and in Sequoia-Kings in particular. In fact, in July of 2017, SEKI firefighters conducted a prescribed burn alongside members of the Tule River Tribe—a move I recognize as an important step towards the reintroduction of Indigenous land-management practices and a recognition of the Park Service's long history of marginalizing Indigenous knowledges and lifeways.

But fire suppression is not just the result of the settler ignorance of the natural world. In Jake Kosek's *Understories,* which examines the complex social and political conflicts of forests in Northern New Mexico, he writes of the rhetorical development of fire suppression as a management position. This development began with the understanding of fire as a purely destructive force, one that threatened not only human life, but also (and arguably more importantly) the vast economic

resource of forests for the logging industry. Kosek's telling of this history becomes even more

Figure 11. *World War II Forest Fire Prevention Poster*. US Forest Service.

poignant as he illustrates the ways that nationalism, racial purity, and xenophobia were intricately tied to fire suppression campaigns during World War II. Forest preservation became not only a protection of an economic resource, but also "directly linked to the patriotic sentiment of a nation at war" (193). Kosek elucidates the National Forest Service and the War Advertising Council's rhetorical strategies during WWII, whereby they "metonymically associated 'fire' with 'enemy,' allowing them to link the forest to nation and then depict the forest as threatened and in need of protection from these enemies" (194). The enemies depicted by the War Advertising Council were distinctly racialized subjects, as in the poster above, and this was no coincidence. The metonym of "fire" with "enemy" and "forest" with "nation" also represented, in a fairly heavy-handed

association, "forest" with "whiteness" and "fire" with "racial contamination." It is important to note that the War Advertising Council did not create the notion of racialized land, but rather capitalized and made visible sentiments already held by the American public (Kosek 193). All of this is to say, that while early management positions of fire suppression did depend on the tenant that fire was destructive for the environment, these positions were not based solely on a misguided desire to protect the ecological health of forests, but were also closely tied to ideas of race and nation.

I relay the history of fire suppression because it demonstrates a few things: 1) that the removal of Indigenous peoples from their homelands and the marginalization of their lifeways and knowledges has had and continues to have material effects on the land itself, 2) that wild lands have always been actively managed by Indigenous peoples which means that the 'hands off' management paradigm of wilderness protection is based on a fundamentally false perception of an original pristine nature without human influence, and 3) that our management practices, no matter how neutral we believe them to be, no matter how rooted in scientific knowledge and observation, are always-already political, are implicated in larger social constructions like systemic racism, nationalism, and colonialism. When Indigenous peoples and their practices were removed from wild lands, human influence did not disappear, it merely shifted, took on different cultural values and practices. In an effort to examine the values and practices that currently shape wilderness lands, I turn to the compositional practices of the National Park Service, more specifically of wilderness employees, which can tell us not only about how wilderness is composed, but also for whom it is composed.

Maintenance, Construction, and Contradiction

Wilderness employees have a unique relationship to the rhetorical ecology of wilderness because they are active agents in its physical and ideological composition. They are builders, janitors, medical providers, interpreters, enforcers, educators, technical experts, and guides. In their daily

activities they mediate wilderness legislation, management directives, and their own personal philosophies of preservation and stewardship, for and with visitors, fellow employees, and the land that surrounds them.

As Cody constructs the various campsites in the vignette above, he has audiences in mind that have different ideas of what wilderness is, and therefore, different ways of interacting with wilderness. During his interview, Cody talked about "a classic stereotype" of a young backpacker, which he recognized was "dangerous" to perpetuate, but thought had some truth to it. He described the backpacker as:

> A young, mid-20s, well-read, well-intentioned, ultralight backpacker…[who] kind of thinks they know best like they kind of think they understand this whole wilderness thing pretty darn well. And they are meticulous, and they are stewards of this land, and they clean up behind them and they pick up extra trash on the trail and they can quote the 1964 Wilderness Act.

This is the visitor that Cody has designed his "honeymooner's site" for. They value wilderness as areas where "the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man," and when they seek out a campsite at night, they are looking for a spot that has little to no evidence of human manipulation. They are chasing the Act's promised "opportunities for solitude" and they take to heart the principles of "Leave No Trace". And so, Cody constructs this site for them. He picks up trash, removes any makeshift camp furniture that previous visitors may have built, ensures that the site remains campfire-free, and only directs visitors who he thinks will appreciate the site's solitude to stay there. Cody's construction of the site, and the visitor's perception of it, is dependent upon the idea that wilderness is free from the influence of mankind.

But, of course, not every visitor to the Parks is hopping down the trail reciting the Wilderness Act, and Cody's delineation between sites for stock users, boy scouts, and the

backpacker couple, is an excellent example of this. When Cody was discussing his stereotypical backpacker in his interview, he was using that stereotype to elucidate a common conflict in the Hockett area, and in wilderness in general: that between the leave-no-trace fanatics, and the stock-

Figure 12. *Riding Through Trees*. Slim, the mule in the foreground. I am in the background riding Rocky. On our way to Quinn Meadow and Patrol Cabin. Photo by Cody Cavill.

users. This is a conflict that I will return to in later in this chapter because the divide is so wrapped up in notions of class and leisure, and in the way that wilderness is for a particular type of person and a particular type of use.

Stock users, as Cody points out, have a different relationship with wilderness lands. "They've been here for a lifetime, maybe," Cody says, "maybe this is someone who helped pack in the stuff that made this trail 30 years ago." Cody remarks that to the ultralight backpacker, a stock user might seem like a "John Wayne figure… Cowboying his way into the wilderness with a griddle and bacon,"

not to mention the "thousand-pound animals who are pooping in the trail and making a bunch of noise." When Cody maintains the stock camp at Hockett, he makes sure there's a good fire ring, a hitching rail, bear box, and some rocks and logs to sit on. He anticipates what stock users will need and want and recognizes that their interactions with the land are not couched in the language of the Wilderness Act.

Though he may not go to such great lengths to make the site seem as though it hasn't been touched by humans, Cody attempts to approximate a "wildness" for all of the sites that he composes.

> I'll come in behind a group that just left, like do our ranger magic. Everything looks nice, it looks wild again, it doesn't look like a group of 16 Boy Scouts was just there, right? So that's the paradox, coming into play…The majority of users they're unaware, hopefully. That's the goal for me at least, is to make it as wild as possible for other users who come here.

Both Matt and Cody talked at some length about the paradox of such a construction—for they are manipulating the land in order to make it seem like it is unmanipulated. "How can you have something that fulfills that definition [of wilderness] and all of those characteristics, and then *make* it?" Cody asked, "It's a paradox. You can't do that. By simply attempting to create or manage something like that you are in fact trammeling the very thing that you're trying to untrammel." Matt, after talking about the steps he takes to naturalize heavily impacted campsites said:

> There's a, well, depending on how you want to look at it, either a paradox or a hypocrisy that's not necessarily a bad thing but that, maybe involves the suspension of disbelief to really go with it and feel like this work is important. Just the idea that the wilderness is supposed to be untouched by man. When the creation of this National Park and all these rules that [we] impose are very much managed…by human beings. Our presence is very very strong…. It's supposed to look like people weren't there, it's supposed to look untouched by

> people but…sometimes it feels a little silly to get rid of little rocks or stumps that are nice to sit on. So sometimes I just leave them there. You know the trails are hard work and require a whole bunch of technology to build and they're there so that people can be here in the parks…it is kind of a strange thing to make a place look like it was not intervened by human beings when that's what I'm doing.

Imbedded in this hypocrisy, or conflict, is the ambivalence described by Nathaniel Rivers and William Cronon. Here we see a physical manifestation of the wilderness idea's positioning of humans as separate from nature. In particular, wilderness is positioned as something in which we inherently do not belong, as an Edenic garden from which we have been rightfully cast out. As rangers, we approximate wildness by attempting to remove evidence of our work, our presence, our influence—without, of course, actually removing ourselves, all in an effort to preserve the land's natural condition. And our idea of what that natural condition is, is steeped in the colonial legacies of wilderness.

However, there is value in altering our practices as humans to better take care of the earth. Many of our efforts as rangers are rooted in this idea of care. Cody lays fires in his fire pits in an attempt to set a standard of care for his visitors. He knows that it is, in fact, the boy scouts who tend to have a heavier impact on the land—who leave trash behind, and chop down green wood instead of gathering "dead and downed" branches from the forest floor. Often, this is just because of a lack of experience. By leaving a fire, Cody wants to speak to these users in particular, to say "I understand you want to have campfire. Awesome. No judgement. Please do so sustainably, carefully."

It is common ranger logic: If an area is clean and unimpacted when visitors arrive, they are more likely to leave it clean and unimpacted. If, however, there is trash and toilet paper and illegal fire rings strewn about a camp, visitors are less likely to care about, or pay attention to their own

practices. Our maintenance and janitorial work, is not just to remove all evidence of mankind, but is also an effort to care for our ecological surroundings, and to teach that care to our visitors.

As can be seen from my discussions with Matt and Cody about their composition of campsites, and the long history of 'hands off' land management generated by the idea of wilderness as free from human influence, we not only expect that Park visitors will pass through wilderness areas, that they will not stay, but also that they will do so with as little impact to their environment as possible. Wilderness employees compose the earth with both this transitory audience, and the rhetorical goal of directing and ensuring that audience's minimum impact on the land, in mind.

As Michael points out, "if we did not have a trail system, people would create [their own] trails…but they would not do that reliably and they would not do that in perhaps the spots that are more resilient to the impact of their travel…and that would propagate erosion, that would detrimentally affect the hydrology of the waterway." Ultimately, the Parks' trails are in place to prevent a "cascading effect of negativity." We have to build trails to protect the landscape from the visitors and to help visitors navigate wilderness lands in the most ecologically responsible way possible. What this means is that trail crews also have to build trails in such a way that visitors will be inclined to use them—the very composition of the trail has to be convincing and user-friendly. Michael gives an example of this dynamic:

> If you don't put a trail in a good place and engineer it and maintain it, it becomes something that people don't want to walk on either because it goes to an area that's too muddy or it becomes, in size, too deep to be comfortable and they just start walking next to it and then next to that, next to that…An area that used to be a nice meadow with one lane through it, is now five trails that are thrashed and all those fine materials [are] being washed down into the waterway and it's affecting, you know, sedimentation in the water.

I think Michael, Cody, and Matt's discussion of their compositional practices indicates a few things. The first is that wilderness employees are actively participating in the composition of wilderness lands. They are authors, creators, composers, and their compositional practices are deliberate and intentional. Further, wilderness employees' composition of wilderness is *rhetorical*. They build trails and construct campsites with the very specific aim of creating an apparatus, that by design, convinces visitors to pass through wilderness without, as Michael says "undue residual impact" to the land. And finally, the purpose of their composition, though wrapped up in colonial narratives of human absence, is to protect and create ecological balance. As Michael says, the trail can't be built willy-nilly across the land, but must be put in a *good place*—for the land and for the visitor.

Composing for Beavers

In the section above, it is clear that one of the primary "audiences" for wilderness employees' composition of the land is Park visitors. However, the other primary stakeholder in this composition is the land itself.

"We had a problem with a beaver." Jess says. There is laughter in her voice. "A beaver family came in and they just obliterated a trail and…the trail crew said 'This has been happening for decades and we have to keep fixing the trail and the beaver keeps just wiping it out' and I'm like 'Why don't we just move the trail away from this area where the beaver *obviously* wants to be?'"

I love this moment—Jess smiles big, and I can tell she is proud of this story. Her simple answer to this problem, that we alter our practices to accommodate the beaver family, tells me so much about who and what she values in wilderness. To Jess, it is obvious that the beaver comes first.

She continues, "Everybody was like 'We can't do that, it's the second most popular fishery in the whole park.' And I [said] 'Well fishermen can still [get there even if] the trail closes…it's going to

impact the stock users more than anybody else.' I pushed it and we actually did it. We closed the trail for a whole season so that they could move the trail and get away from this beaver habitat and let the beavers have their river and we can have the trail in a better position. So that was just, that felt like a big achievement."

Though it seems an amiable tension, I see a level of confrontation in Jess's story. And while I do not know the full extent of the situation, from Jess's telling of these events, it seems that her solution to the "beaver problem" upset the status quo. For Jess, it is clear that the beaver's needs come first, and rerouting the trail is a good solution, even if it is inconvenient for trail crews, managers, and visitors. However, the "status quo" is to put the needs of humans above those of the land and its beings—a status quo made evident by decades of rebuilding the trail in the same place, only to have the beaver family, once again, obliterate it. In the persistence of the Park Service, in its refusal to reroute the trail, I see the ideological positioning of humans *over* the natural world manifest: each time the trail is rebuilt in the same place, we reassert that our right to that section of river is greater than that of the beaver, that the beavers should change *their* ways to accommodate us. Jess pushes back against this dualism by suggesting exactly the opposite: we should change our practices to accommodate the beaver family, we should "let the beavers have their river."

In Jess's declaration that we should "let the beavers have their river" I see a fundamental shift in ideology that resists the colonial human/nature dualism. Jess doesn't think that our "right" to the land—as rangers, settlers, humans—is any different from the beaver's right to the river. In fact, Jess makes it clear that she is of the opinion that the river belongs to the beavers and that we should behave accordingly.

Jess says, "We went out with the trail crew and archaeologist and compliance and walked it and the plant people and like you know make sure that the route that we had chosen was. You

know. Was right and we weren't going to impact anything else and we pulled it off. That was a good year."

When Jess tells me this story, I smile too. We both get so much pleasure out of the idea of the trail being closed for the whole season, of trail crews and managers and plant people and archeologists and environmental compliance people working for months to create a better environment for the beaver family, to rethink the composition of the landscape so that a more harmonious relationship between the beavers and the humans might exist. This feels right to us; it feels like good ranger work.

As Jess talks about this process that she went through to make compositional decisions about the reroute, I am reminded of Shawn Wilson's discussion of respect. He writes "Respect means you listen intently to others' ideas, that you do not insist that your idea prevails. By listening intently you show honor, consider the well being of others, and treat others with kindness and courtesy" (Wilson quoting Steinhauer 58).

Consulting the archeologist, "plant people," compliance, walking the land with the trail crew, Jess is talking about a process where the builders and planners of the trail respect their relations—albeit in the unromantic language of a bureaucracy. Rather than just think about what might be most convenient for visitors and employees, they considered the *best* place to put the trail—for the beavers, the plants, and the landscape. Jess and her colleagues did their best to compose themselves into an already-existing ecology of relations rather than dominate that ecology with their own ideas and desires.

Wilson's tenants of respect and relationality are present here. Jess honors the beavers' relationship to the river by rerouting the trail, and she thinks about how to best reroute the trail in order to respect the other beings and relations in the area. As Wilson writes, for many Indigenous peoples there is no difference between the kinds of relationships they hold between the other

humans and their relationships with non-human beings. Quoting one of his participants, Jane, Wilson notes, "'When you talk about the land and people and community and everything is related…The only difference between human beings and four-leggeds and plants is the shadow they cast'" (87). Jess, too, is honoring the beaver the way she would a human. She does not assume that the beaver is inferior to her because of its beaver-shaped shadow. Instead, she fosters a relationship

Figure 13. *Trailside Wildflowers.* Trial on the north side of Timber Gap. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

with the beaver and the surrounding landscape by respecting both, listening to beaver and to the land for how she should behave, act, compose.

Composing for Recreation

Adam is sitting by the fire. His hat is tilted to one side and he holds a beer in his hand, a cigarette between his fingers. He has thick blonde-red hair, a smile that comes easy, and is full of stories. Reaching down, he grabs a log, pokes at the fire before laying it in place.

"Maintain the trails, open up the trails is the main thing." He says, "At the beginning of the season there's trees down everywhere. We have to get the place open for the people."

In a very literal sense, the trail crews of Sequoia and Kings Canyon have shaped the Parks' wilderness. Trail crews in the Park ensure that visitors have access to wilderness areas. As Adam mentions, there are over 800 miles of trails crisscrossed over 800,000 acres of wilderness in Sequoia-Kings and the Park's trail crews are responsible for opening them up—clearing them of downed trees, rolled boulders, or other minor damage—and dealing with any larger construction projects—bridges, washouts, rock-work, major rebuilding or rerouting.

"That's our main goal," Adam says, "And then when you're doing your maintenance runs all over the—there's 800 miles of trail in this park—trying to get it all open, you're going to come across something that you did not expect. It happens every year. There's going to be some catastrophic thing that happened to some of the trails and…there's some places, some things that happen that make it impassable, so we'll post up and we'll do this big project…A lot of chainsaws. A lot of chainsaw work. A lot of cutting trees. It's the main deal. Get the trees out of the way because there's a lot of people running through here."

Adam's description of trail crew work strikes me as practical and full of purpose. He has a very clear idea of not only what he does, but also who he does it for. Getting the wilderness open "for the people*"* is Adam's primary goal. Later in his interview, I came to understand this goal as not only practical, but also shot through with a sense of idealism, of public duty and service.

"I do this for, for the people, for the civil duty, I feel like it is, to keep these trails open for everybody to see what they want. And if people really want to brawl off and do their own thing that's cool too, it just makes your experience. I'm happy getting these trails open for everybody."

I want to talk about who Adam clears and builds trails for, who "the people" are. The Wilderness Act, as I mentioned in my first chapter, does include an element of human interaction

despite its evident distaste for human influence. It states that wilderness areas should provide "opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." Adam, and the crews under his supervision, build trails for visitors and more specifically, for recreators seeking solitude.

DeLuca and Demo question the Wilderness Act's seemingly universal language. They ask: Who counts as people, and what counts as recreation (552)? Quoting John Muir, who writes that "…the heart of the Sierra Nevada, is a noble mark for the traveler: whether tourist, botanist, geologist, or lover of wilderness pure and simple" the authors note the distinctly upper-class activities that Muir deems "noble" for the Sierras (DeLuca 552). The wilderness of Sequoia and Kings Canyon is built for a *recreating* audience and this tells us a lot about the orientation of wilderness lands to upper-class notions of leisure. The original incarnations of National Parks were very-much intended to attract wealthy East-coast settlers to vacation in the west (Spence 87). Glacier National Park, for example, was originally marketed by the Great Northern Railway in order to sell train tickets; the company also heavily lobbied Congress to establish the Park (Spence 79). This classed notion of who wilderness and National Parks are for, persists in modern wilderness areas.

DeLuca and Demo continue their analysis of John Muir's writings by examining his apparent disdain for those who work in wilderness lands. Specifically, they look at his representations of Billy, a sheepherder with whom Muir spends much of his first summer in the Sierra. Muir mocks Billy, claiming that he can't "see the sublime beauty of the wilderness" (552). He writes:

> I pressed Yosemite upon him like a missionary offering the gospel, but he would have none of it. "Tourists that spend their money to see rocks and falls are fools, that's all. You can't humbug me. I've been in this country too long for that." Such souls, I suppose, are asleep, or smothered and befogged beneath mean pleasures and cares (553).

Muir here, is privileging a certain kind of orientation to wild places over another. That is, he believes his own experience and appreciation for Yosemite—one rooted in leisure and upper-class activities

such as tourism, botany, geology, and walking for walking's sake—is superior to Billy's. But, as DeLuca and Demo explain, "Muir and Billy's encounter is not a meeting of wisdom and ignorance, but a clash of different knowledges and worldviews" (553). This clash is very-much wrapped up in class differences, in notions of blue-collar work, like sheepherding, working the land, and the more erudite labor of scientific study or the appreciation of beauty.

Muir's derision of Billy's orientation to Yosemite, this idea that wilderness areas are for leisure, for "pure" recreation, is something that still manifests in wilderness. Though Adam skimmed over it pretty quickly, he mentioned that not all of his interactions with visitors are good:

"Some people do not appreciate it, which is really weird to me." Adam is referring to coming across visitors when he and his crew are doing trail work. "But they just don't know. They just think we're out there, like you know, they always ask us if we're, I've been asked if I was a con."

"A con?" I ask. I am surprised.

"Yeah. 'Are you guys a convict crew?' No," Adam shakes his head with a scoff "We're not convicts."

Adam's crew, when they are several weeks into the summer, carrying picks and shovels, chainsaws and gasoline, they look pretty rugged. And certainly, they provide a stark contrast to the backpackers walking by on their five-day trip. But the fact that, to some visitors, the trail crew's work in wilderness marks them criminal, indicates the extent to which blue-collar work is out of place in wilderness areas. In the criminalization of trail workers, of trail work, I see the vestiges of colonial assumptions and hierarchies that place those who are close to the land, who *work* the land, in inferior positions. As native peoples were made *beasts* because of their synonymy with wilderness, so Muir paints Billy as *base* and *mean,* because he works the land rather than appreciates its beauty. So too, are Adam and his crew made convicts as they lift shovel and axe.

What I think this demonstrates is the distinctly *different* relationship that wilderness employees have with wilderness lands in comparison to the visitors' experience of those lands. In some ways, wilderness employees occupy similar spaces to indigenous peoples. That is, they actively compose the landscape around them, they live semi-permanently in wilderness lands, they work the land, they do more than pass through and appreciate the sublime (though they do those things too). What became clear to me during my interview with Adam, was that wilderness employees are invested in the land in ways that visitors are not, and these investments allow them to understand land and nature and their relationships to it as beyond of different from the human/nature dualism set up by the wilderness idea. Wilderness employees certainly tussle with Cronon's paradox, with constantly trying to compose themselves out of wilderness, but they also experience a felt, and sometimes articulated, connection with the land that makes them neither superior to it, nor separate from it.

Figure 14. *Mules*. "The kids" grazing in Hockett Meadow. Photo by Cody Cavill.

"Stock tends to be a pretty contentious issue [in wilderness]," I say.

"I have a lot more to say about that than anything else really. Stock in the wilderness is my big thing." Adam is ready for this question. He shifts in his chair and I can see him gathering his thoughts. "Those trails wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for the stock. People don't understand that. There [was] a big thing and a bunch of years ago with the whole High Sierra Hikers Association, whatever those people were called, trying to get stock out of the wilderness…There's a few people in the Park Service, we won't name names, who don't want stock in the Park Service either, or in the backcountry. They're making it really hard for us to do our job."

Adam makes a very good case for why stock are an integral part of trail work. He mentions, among other things, the physical toll that hard labor takes on the members of a crew, and the ways that horses and mules mitigate that. But I think his passion for stock in wilderness, the reason that it's his "big thing," is about more than getting the job done. The removal of stock wouldn't mean just that it would be harder for trail crews to maintain and care for the Parks' infrastructure but would also be the end of a way of life—a way of being and knowing wilderness lands.

Adam references a protracted legal battle that Sequoia-Kings fought with the High Sierra Hikers Association (HSHA), first in 1991 and again in 2004. HSHA is a nonprofit group who fights for the interests of hikers in the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada. On their website HSHA states "the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada continues to suffer at the hands of commercial interests and under the hooves of too many horses, mules, cattle and sheep." They note that the organization does not "aim to ban these activities," but rather "seek[s] only reasonable limits and controls to protect meadows, wildlife, water quality, and the experience of wilderness visitors." I think it is telling that HSHA's primary objective is to regulate stock use in defense of both the natural environment and the "experience of wilderness visitors." While I recognize that managing stock in wilderness areas is certainly necessary—horses and mules have a heavier impact on the land than a lone backpacker—I

also see HSHA fighting for the privileging of a particular kind of interaction with wilderness lands. That is, HSHA makes assumptions about what the wilderness experience *is* and *should be* (free from human influence and development), who that experience is *for* (hikers, those walking through) and what is *best* for the natural environment (as little impact as possible). While I appreciate HSHA's activism as it challenges the Park Service's tendency to make exceptions for commercial, money-making operations (like the High Sierra Camp that Matt and I discussed), I also see classed and colonial ideas of wilderness in their arguments. The organization fights not just for land-management practices that protect the natural environment, but also, intentionally or not, to exclude a particular kind of visitor and a particular way of being from wilderness lands.[2]

This conflict is not new. As Cody mentions, these two "camps," backpackers and stock users, "traditionally don't like each other very much. They see each other as competition. And, from my observations, oftentimes they don't try very hard to like each other very much." Both Cody and Adam mention that stock users often have a history in the Sierra that is different from your average backpacker, that it was, in fact, stock and stock users that "[made] these parks something accessible for people to come in with a backpack and enjoy." As Cody notes, stock users have often spent lifetimes packing in the Sierra:

> [They] have invested so much of their lifestyle and lives in these places and they feel…to some degree, a sense of ownership over these places…and if you're riding along, appreciating the wilderness in your own way…and you get glared at and maybe said some inappropriate things as you pass by, or maybe even occasionally there's actual malicious intent where people try to scare your stock. And obviously this is not everyone. This is the

[2] This section does not discuss the nuances of HSHA's claims against the Park, and I am very influenced by my own investment in the stock community. I have included the information on HSHA not to critique the organization's action against the Park—I do not know enough to make such a critique—but rather to show the pervasiveness of notions of what and who wilderness is for, both within and outside of the Park Service and to demonstrate that people are invested in arguments about questions like "who is wilderness for?".

exception to the rule. But these things happen. And, you get essentially spit on by this community that no longer needs you.

Cody's descriptions of stock users marks them as not only visitors to wilderness areas, but also as people who have long histories of working in wilderness, of constructing wilderness lands. This isn't the case with every stock user, but it is worth noting the close associations that we have with stock users and wilderness work. I mention this because it points to the ways that stock users are classed by the wilderness idea. Although stock trips are certainly trips of leisure and it is not an inexpensive venture to take stock into wilderness, stock users are often read as "John Wayne figures, cowboying into the wilderness," and this reading marks them as lower-class, as pursuing and working the land in cowboy-ways—ranching, herding, farming. It is important to note that stock users are largely white, European settlers, and I highlight the anti-stock sentiment not to paint them as an infallible community who is being pushed out of wilderness, but rather to demonstrate the ways that the wilderness idea's colonial roots also restrict settler relationships with land.[3] The fact that the wilderness idea doesn't have room for stock users is an indication of the ways that narratives of leisure and class continue to operate in wilderness areas, and of the rhetorical work that the wilderness idea does to marginalize not just Indigenous ways of knowing and being, but also *any other* way of knowing and being that does not fit the predominant narrative of "hands off."

The push against having stock in wilderness areas makes it hard for Adam to work in wilderness, and this is a really good example of the ways that the wilderness idea doesn't leave room for ways of being outside of Muir's "traveler, tourist, scientist." Adam, without the stock, literally

[3] In Michael's review of this chapter, he commented: "I wonder if you have thought much about the arch-colonial concept of a white man mounted in the saddle?" Stock users, as "cowboys," bring forth a whole bunch of images of the often-romanticized Cowboys vs. Indians narrative, of Cowboys conquering the West. I do not mean to gloss over that history though I recognize that, to some extent, I have here. Using the stock community to demonstrate the exclusive nature of rhetorics of wilderness without interrogating the complexities of the colonial legacies that are specific to the stock community is problematic. For now, because of time constraints and the scope of this project, I will note that this is a significant gap that requires a deeper interrogation than I have provided.

can't do the work he needs and wants to do. Stock are an important tool for Adam and his crews, and regulation against stock-use in wilderness makes impossible, or at the very least, difficult, Cody and Adam's interactions with wilderness lands that have occurred through and with stock. We also make those interactions inferior, base, mean. Value judgements are made based upon a visitors' relative impact on the earth—walk lightly, good; impact the land, bad.

These narratives parallel myths about Indigenous peoples "moving lightly across the land." In our attempts to achieve a pristine natural environment in wilderness areas, we make assumptions about what the human role in wilderness is. We assume that *any* human influence is detrimental to the environment, is un-natural. But this assumption is based on the premise that Indigenous peoples lived primitively enough that they did not alter the ecosystems of which they were a part. Not only does such a premise reduce Native peoples to some "less evolved" version of Western European society, stripping them of any agency in their environment and erasing their very-different ways of being with land, it also gives rise to exclusive notions of wilderness that privilege white, upper-class, relationships with land. SEKI's wilderness is composed to cultivate settler relationships with land, and more specifically, to privilege passing through, visiting, not belonging.

Adam tells me, "I've seen mules four legs straight in the air with a grin on their face. You see a mule smile before? It's *absolutely* possible. The coolest thing in the world is unclipping all of them putting the bell on the main horse and watching all of them run full speed into a meadow and kicking their legs out like—You know. You've seen it at the Hockett. Man, it's the funniest thing you've ever seen in your life. They are so happy out there…Stock is, it's unfortunately a dying breed, the stock the stations or things like that, which is unfortunate, there's only a few remaining. They're making it harder."

Low light slips through the window. We are several cups of tea into our interview. I'm trying to ask Cody about how he reconciles the violent past of wilderness with our active maintenance of this land, this idea, as 'free from human influence.' It is only now, as I listen back through our interview in a coffee shop in Michigan, that I know that's what I was trying to ask him. At the time, though, I stumble out something about re-wilding practices.

"What do you think about re-wilding efforts?" I ask. He looks a bit confused, as though he hasn't heard the term before. "Like, removing permanent bear boxes and…any sign of human development to make an area 'more wild?'"

Figure 15. *Interview with Tea*. Cody, during his first interview at the Hockett Ranger Station. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

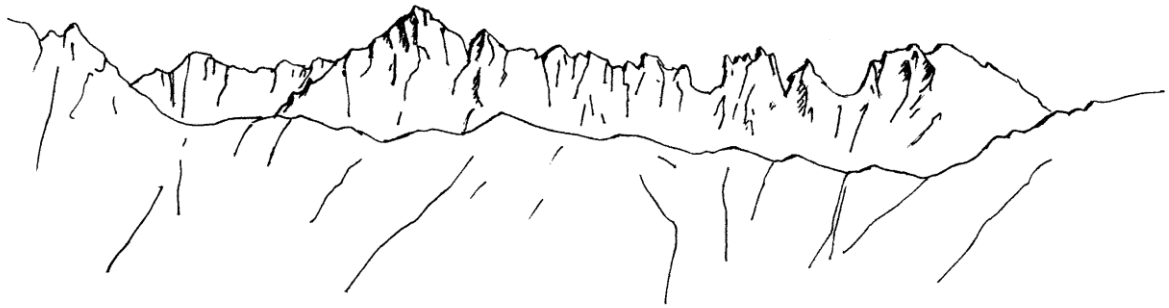
Cody looks down at his tea. "I know that [Indigenous peoples] worked really closely with this area and to some extent they manipulated it, and that's worth mentioning because when we

think of these wild places and re-wilding them—" Cody stops, starts again, "A prime example, if you look out at my meadow right now, and it's reflective of many of these meadows in the Hockett area, there's tree encroachment. There are all of these young trees that are growing out into the meadow and shrinking the meadow. And the reason for that, it's largely held…is because Indigenous populations burned all these meadows in the summer, or fall I guess. They burned them all to keep them open for--I don't fully know, but I would assume grazing of some form? And we don't do that anymore."

I am thinking about the stories my parents told me when I was younger. I have images of renegade rangers—grizzled, tired of bureaucracy—sneaking into the night to pluck baby pines from the edges of high alpine meadows; cold stars keeping watch overhead. This, of course, was strictly against Park Service policy, but the rangers saw the meadows disappearing and wanted to protect them. Their instinct was to intervene on behalf of the meadow. I can't say where that instinct came from—whether they wanted to preserve the scenic benefits of the meadows or if they had some other impetus in mind. What has become apparent, however, is that Indigenous peoples didn't only burn to clear underbrush, they also pruned and tended to the meadows by plucking young pines and firs from their edges. I find it comforting to know that a few old rangers picked up that practice as well.

"There's an eerie physical representation of the timeline growing longer since we have removed Indigenous practices from this land," Cody says, "and you can see it in the annual growth of these young trees in these meadows."

That summer, Billy, a long-time trail crew member and one of Adam's predecessors, came out to the Hockett. He arrived on horseback, reigns held loosely in his hands, jeans dusty and creased. "Used to be," he said, "that whole pasture was wide open. Meadow's sure getting smaller."



“This is my home.”
Belonging in Wilderness:
Chapter 3

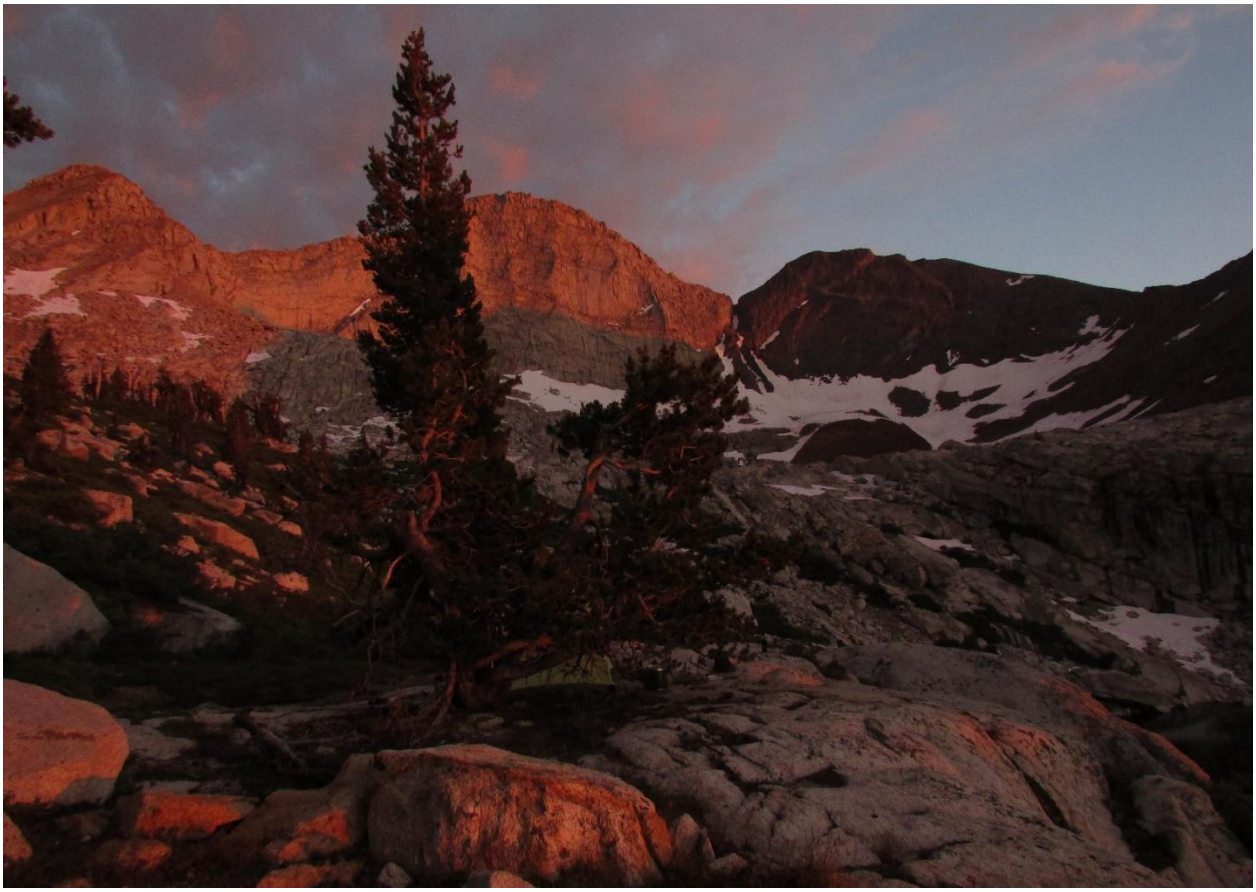


Figure 16. *Alpenglow on Florence Peak*. From Franklin Lakes. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

"Michael, I learned a new word!" I tell him. I have been holding on to this word all summer, waiting to share it with him because he is a writer and a bibliophile and has a great capacity and love for language.

"Yeah?" He hikes ahead of me, takes a sharp right off the trail to step on rocks and logs. We are crossing the outlet of one of the small lakes near his station. I watch him maneuver over the terrain, put my feet where he put his, copy his movements, try to copy his ease. It is a tactic I have used for years—with my dad, mom, brother, and uncle. I copy their movement to learn how to walk over the land, to learn what a good step looks like, what a sturdy boulder is, how to shift my weight and use my body to move across these mountains.

"Hydrographic." I say. I'm maybe a little bit too proud of myself. Michael walks easily across the stream on a narrow log. I teeter, take a few steps, pause, and then, am across.

"Hydrographic?," Michael repeats.

"Yeah it means the geography, or topography of water—like a lot of the Parks' boundaries are hydrographic. Which I love. Our imagined boundaries of ownership and management sometimes are drawn where there is already this other boundary—a natural one, where two watersheds are meeting."

"Huh." Michael says. Wildflowers brush against our knees as we move through the streambed. I slap at mosquitoes. When we dropped to the water they swarmed around my ears, landed softly on my arms, sucking eagerly.

Earlier that morning, Michael and I watched the eclipse. A visitor gave me an extra pair of eclipse glasses. He and his three daughters had come out all the way from Ohio to spend the week of the eclipse in the Sierra. We weren't in the zone of totality, but we watched as the moon moved across the sun and then boomeranged back through the clouds.

I was perplexed, "How come the moon doesn't just move in a line across the sun? Why does it snap back like that?" I asked.

Michael looks up through the glasses, peering at the shadow on the sun through the thin layer of clouds. "You know," he says, "one of the coolest things that happened in my early wilderness days was when I had been sleeping out under the stars long enough to know what phase the moon should be in, and where in the sky it should be. I just learned it from being *out,* and then later, I looked it up, you know, I read in a book about how the moon moves and how its phases work, and it made sense because I had already learned it just from observing the night sky enough."

A few mornings later, Michael and I sat on the lip of a granite cliff, watching the sun bounce off of the lake. He told me he woke up in the middle of the night and got really disoriented because the stars weren't in the right place. "But it's just not a summer sky anymore. The end of the season's coming."

When I relayed this story, about Michael and the moon, to my American Indian Rhetorics course, one of the Indigenous women in the class said, "We would just say that he has learned to listen to the land's language."

I've been trying to figure out why I am so fascinated by the Parks' hydrographic boundaries and I think it is because I love the idea that we are listening to the land. Instead of drawing a thick black line arbitrarily across the earth because of commercial interests or the sharp lines of private property, we seek the line in the earth from which water is always falling away, we listen to the land's language.

Articulating Land as Rhetorical

"I'm thinking about this year—I think it's really cool with the late start and everything. I know it's hard. It's another sword-edge thing." Jess is talking about the massive amounts of snow that we got in 2017, and the resulting slow start to the summer season. "I'm just happy that the wilderness kind of had itself to itself for a while. Even though there's still plenty of people out there but not in the sheer numbers. So it kind of gave it a break."

The winter of 2017 was a record-breaking year for the Sierra. The mountains were stacked with twice their average snowfall, which meant that the summer season for the Park started late. Streams ran high, and snow obscured routes well into June. The high passes were still blocked with cornices and steep shoots of snow in July. Because of the difficult conditions, visitation was down for the first half of the summer. Only the really hearty visitors, or the ones who didn't quite know what they were getting into, were embarking on wilderness trips. The sword-edge that Jess mentions refers to a couple of different things—one, these conditions are dangerous for both visitors and employees and the whole Park was on high alert, in many ways we were just *waiting* for something

bad to happen. Also, the conditions meant that her wilderness employees were front-country bound for longer than we'd like to be, and it made us restless.

Figure 17. *Ranger Rodman*. Michael on patrol in the Big Arroyo. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

"I don't know who said it," I say, "I think it was either Michael or Cody...One of them told a visitor early on, 'Nature's not ready for you yet. She's just not ready.' And the visitor came back and told me that, and I was like, 'That's a good…yeah.'"

"Exactly," Jess says.

"I'm kinda glad she's keeping us out a little bit." Jess and I are sitting on an open hillside. We've "snuggled in with the sagebrush," as she put it when I asked where she wanted to sit for the interview. The earth drops steeply beneath us and it is covered in color—red, purple, yellow. The wildflowers are out; they bend into the hillside with the breeze.

Jess is quiet, she looks down canyon. "Yeah, that goes right with my mosquito theory. I think [the wilderness] is just shining, like I mean even now it's still, it's like August, August fifth, and look at all these flowers!"

Jess's "mosquito theory" is that mosquitoes are the land's way of telling us that we shouldn't be in a particular area at a particular time. Mosquitoes come out in force in really wet areas, like meadows and lake shores, and they have life cycles that parallel the ground's fragility. Mosquito populations peak when meadows are really wet, when their new buds are just starting to come out of the mud. In other words, mosquitos peak when the land is most vulnerable to damage by big mammals such as humans or deer. But neither humans nor deer like getting eaten up by mosquitoes and so we stay away from those areas until the mosquitoes die off, by which time the earth has dried up, the buds have turned to long grasses and flowers, and our feet don't do the damage that they would if we tramped through the same area when everything was wet.

"It's just shining, this year," she says.

"It is." We are quiet for a moment. Black ants crawl across my pant leg.

"She's not ready for us," Jess smiles.

I want to note a few things in this moment—one, is the personification of wilderness as a *she*, who has agency and "keeps us out" or "isn't ready for us." Another is Jess's "mosquito theory" which I think illustrates an orientation to land that is similar to Indigenous understandings of relationality and of who and what land is.

Indigenous philosopher Viola Cordova writes that "the universes that Indian and Euro-Christian inhabit are two different 'worlds'—parallel universes, so to speak. We occupy the same space and the same time but we live in different 'worlds'" (120). Cordova goes on to explain that one of the primary differences between Indigenous and Eurruo-Christian worlds is our understanding of the earth and our relationship to it. Indigenous peoples understand the earth as a

living being whereas Euro-Christians imagine the earth to be an inanimate *thing*. Cordova writes that a human being in the Euro-Christian worldview is always at odds with his environment, that "a human being in the European sense is not a part of the world." Rather they are either "a creation of an extraterrestrial god who has set man up in an alien environment," in the religious framework, or "a being that has evolved beyond his former relationship with the Earth," in the scientific or secular view (Cordova 52). "In both cases," Cordova notes, "man is seen as alien, a stranger, to his environment" (52). Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, know the earth as mother. It is important to note that as Indigenous peoples consider the earth to be mother, they do not necessarily condense the earth into a singular human-esque deity, but rather honor all of the earth's relations as both their origins and the sustaining force of their existence (Cordova 53). In an Indigenous paradigm "survival depends not on competition, but on cooperation. Man is not a being in opposition to nature but a part of it" (Cordova 122).

I want to make the claim that land, itself, is rhetorical, and I want to note that very different arguments are necessary for someone reading this text from an Indigenous worldview, versus a Euro-Christian worldview. In a worldview that knows the earth as mother, as a literal relation and living being, an argument is hardly necessary—*of course* land is rhetorical. *Of course* land has agency, of course it teaches us and speaks to us with intent. However, arguing that land is rhetorical in a Western European paradigm requires an entirely different set of arguments—for how can an inanimate object be rhetorical? How can something that lacks cognitive ability or the capacity for human language possess the intent and thought necessary for persuasion, for making arguments, for teaching, for speaking at all? The field of object-oriented ontology (OOO) is an attempt to do just that, to make an argument that inanimate objects have rhetorical capacity. And though these arguments are certainly complex and helpful in dismantling dualisms like the human/nature binary of the wilderness idea, there seems to be something *missing*. Part of what's missing might be that

these arguments are still made with only one worldview in mind—the Euro-Christian—and while they are critical of this worldview, OOO scholars have not looked beyond it for other ways of imagining the earth and our role in it. Instead, they attempt to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools, and are, to their credit, largely successful in doing so.

Figure 18. *Evening Canyon*. Looking down the Big Arroyo, back towards Little Five Lakes. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

I think that wilderness employees articulate the land as rhetorical. In Jess's mosquito theory I see her imagining the land as something with intent—that is, the mosquitoes hang out in wet meadows *for a reason*. I hear Jess articulating a land that *knows better* than we do, one that teaches us where to walk, one that guides us—one that has intent, agency, rhetorical capacity. In our personification of wilderness as a "she" who "isn't ready for us", I see us understanding the land we protect as a being who has a power that is greater than our human desires. I recognize that

personification is a figure of speech, it is, itself, a rhetorical tool used to generate vivid imagery, emotional appeal, a sense of same-ness, of 'identification *with*,' to use Burke's language. And it is quite possible that Jess, Michael, and Cody were merely using their own rhetorical adeptness to generate a particular kind of connection with wilderness, for themselves and for the visitors with whom they were speaking. However, in this personification of wilderness, of the land we protect and *serve*, I see a desire for language that speaks to our emotional and spiritual connections with wilderness lands, one that offers us belonging instead of exile, cooperation instead of competition.

I walk to school in Michigan. It is fall, and the leaves have turned. The wind tosses them into the air and settles. I am listening to Robin Wall Kimmerer's audiobook, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. She asks, "Do you think that the earth loves you back?" (124). I recoil, much like her students do. The earth cannot love. The earth hasn't that capacity—it can be mapped and charted and measured. It is string after string of data, and data does not love. But my chest cracks at her question—perhaps, because I am walking in a strange and unfamiliar place and her words feel like home.

"Knowing that you love the earth changes you," she tells me, as I try to keep my spine straight, "activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond." One of her students says, "You [don't] harm what gives you love" (125). The crack grows.

What if, as Cordova writes "the land were a living being?" Or in the words of Kimmerer, "What if the earth loves you back?" (124). What if land is rhetorical? The wilderness idea, with its roots in Western European colonial thought and its modern privileging of scientific knowledge, makes no room for these questions. They are made absurd and impossible by our conviction that

the earth is made up of inanimate objects, our reliance on scientific knowledge to read the earth. Despite the absurdity of these questions, wilderness employees are already articulating land, and more specifically wilderness lands, as rhetorical.

"There's always this question, of like, where humans belong in wilderness," Jess says, "But we do. Of course we do."

"What do you think that role is?" I ask, "of humans in wilderness."

"Going out there and just. Finding the solitude and a more like, either a spiritual or psychological healing. I think there's a huge value in that…. I think we've evolved so fast recently, with our industrial revolution and everything that's happened since, that we've lost touch… we've gone away from being rooted and connected to the land [and] a lot of people don't understand what's happening in their minds. Because there's that complete disconnect with the Earth…I think a lot of human beings can't...understand...why they feel a sense of loss because they're not connected to the environment."

There is no doubt that wilderness employees are passionate about the protection of wild lands, and one of the most prevalent reasons for that passion is their belief that wilderness areas have the power to change people, to heal them, to reconnect them to the earth. I hear this when Cody tells me that "wilderness is an emotion," when Matt says that "people have powerful, meaningful experiences out here," when Adam talks about the importance of people being able "to just brawl off," when Michael tells me that wilderness is important "because we are animals." Jess, Matt, Michael, Cody and Adam, all talked about the importance of solitude in generating this experience. The inarticulable "spiritual" connection that wilderness employees have with the land, that they want visitors to also have, indicates to me that they *already believe* that land does rhetorical work, for they place a great value in people just being in wild lands—without being "festooned with various technological devices," without roads or cars or layers of pavement. Wilderness heals on its

own—the land itself does the healing, we have only to spend time in wild places, to listen to the land, let the land teach us, heal us, connect us.

"I really think people can't describe or even understand the value of [wilderness]," Jess says, "but, just experiencing being part of the earth, I think people are losing that. That was always my biggest thing, it's why I chose wilderness conservation, was our connection to the earth. Wilderness gives us that opportunity. The Wilderness Act and the whole history of setting aside wilderness areas, I still believe in that strongly because otherwise we could lose these precious places where people could still experience, humanity within nature."

Jess articulates that wilderness preservation is doing more than protecting an ecological resource, doing more than quartering off an area for the preservation of biodiversity or for scientific study. Wilderness lands are also doing work to connect people to the environment and these connections aren't just made by wilderness employees and the National Park Service, but by the land itself. Protecting wilderness, then, is about protecting *relationships*, between bears and deer and lupine, and between humans and the rocks and dirt they walk upon, the rivers they cross, the ravens that glide, open-winged, across the horizon. Wilderness is about protecting the rhetorical work of land—the land's ability to heal, teach, and connect.

Seeking Belonging in Wilderness

Cody told me this summer that wilderness is an emotion—one that depends upon a feeling of slight discomfort, of willing vulnerability. I let that sit in silence. And he added, "I know—It means wilderness can't be home." But I know Cody well, and I can tell by the way he stares back at me, as though he is waiting for me to break, that he doesn't like these words even as they come out of his mouth.

When I asked Adam to define wilderness he said, "My wilderness?"

"Yeah," I smile. I like that Adam's first instinct is to distinguish between his personal wilderness and some other wilderness—one that, presumably, belongs to someone else. When Adam says "my wilderness" he is not referring to a section of wilderness that he owns, to a literal ownership of land, but rather to what makes wilderness *for him*. Not an institutionally or legislatively defined wilderness, but the wilderness that he gets to define.

"Roadless for sure," he said, "Trail-less is good too...A lot of people are kind of intense about their wilderness experience and really don't want to see anybody, but...roadless, trail-less, I don't really know."

I had a sense that I was asking the wrong question. "Do you have any stock stories?" I ask and Adam's eyes light up. He leans forward, launches into an account of his worst day packing. He tells me about wrecks, about getting stuck in a lightning storm and letting the horses loose, letting them run full-tilt across the Guyot Plateau, holding on for dear life. "Those horses saved my life that day," he says. Throughout Adam's interview he was less interested in telling me what he thought wilderness *was*, and more interested in telling me stories about the people, animals, and places that made up his life in wilderness.

"[SEKI trail crew] is a community that's what it is…. One big happy family. We're just happy to see each other and do hard work and live out there...It's just a big family. And our family stretches way back—Eric, Billy D, Steve Moffet, rest in peace—all those guys. I'm still telling Steve Moffet stories and then maybe 15 years from now people will be telling my stories. So like all the crazy shit that's happened to us. So I think it's just one big happy family around here." Eric, Billy D, and Steve Moffet are trail crew legends—men who worked and lived in wilderness for forty-plus years—and their stories have been passed down to Adam through many voices and hands. As Adam mentions, he worked for Eric in his early years with the Park Service and "everything I do I do the way Eric

did it, and he did it the way it was done before him." Adam is not passing through the wilderness of Sequoia & Kings Canyon. These lands are his home.

When I asked Matt if he could speak to the differences in his experience of the land and a visitor's experience he said simply, "Visitors are passing through and I feel like it's my home." He continued:

> I've always passed through large areas of the park and tons of people pass through my little zone. But it's nice to have an area, about which I've become really, really familiar. And [I] can see all these little changes that happen throughout the year. Whether it's additional campsites that are built or fire rings or the snow melting or the flowers and other vegetation blooming and dying. And the water level rising and falling throughout one summer and then from one summer to the next. It's cool to hear all of these things. I think a sense of ownership and belonging kind of feed into that.

Figure 19. *Home at Quinn*. Cody, making tea at the Quinn patrol cabin. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

When I hear Matt say that he feels a sense of ownership over his patrol area, I hear a few things. First, I hear that he feels a special responsibility for the lands that he calls home. "Bearpaw," he says "is sort of my area to watch over. And I feel responsible for trying to keep it and make it a certain way." My sense is that Matt feels close to the area around Bearpaw because he is doing more than just passing through, because it is his home. Viola Cordova writes that in the Native American worldviews, "man, a part of the universe, must adapt himself to and be responsible for the continuing harmony he sees about him." Cordova continues that such an orientation fosters a sense of "indebtedness" to the earth, which develops a relationship of reciprocity. Wilderness employees, in being at home in wilderness, have cultivated similar relationships with the land they care for, relationships that come from doing more than passing through. But even as they articulate wilderness as their home, they push against the idea of ownership in the colonial sense of private property.

"Do you feel a sense of ownership over your station and your patrol area?" I ask Matt.

"Sometimes I find myself thinking that, and then I kind of check my thinking," he says "I feel like it's, both philosophically and legally, it's public land. It's everybody's land. It's no one's land. No one really owns it."

The fact that Matt can feel *at home* in lands that he doesn't believe belong to him is really important. Matt feels belonging without ownership. In fact, the sense of belonging generates a sense of ownership, a word I think Matt and I are using to describe not owning something as in having dominion over it because of an economic transaction, but rather a sense of responsibility. We have a responsibility *for* the land—we are responsible for the health of the relations in the areas we care for—and a responsibility *to* the land—the land itself holds us accountable for our actions.

I cannot write about being at home in wilderness, about belonging in and to these lands, without also feeling the words of Qwo-Li Driskill, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, reverberate

through me. Tuck and Yang write that "settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain" (5). What does it mean that part of the rhetorical work of wilderness, of the National Park Service, is to connect settlers to the stolen lands of Indigenous peoples? What does it mean that wilderness employees are *at home* in wilderness areas? That we are defined by this land? That we feel like we belong *to* and *with* it?

These questions are far beyond the scope of this thesis, far beyond the scope of any one individual's answering. They require the thought and work of many different communities and cannot be answered by settlers or Indigenous folk alone, for both of our futures are implicated in them. However, I think the rhetorics of wilderness employees can provide some insight to our preparedness to tackle these questions. Particularly surrounding notions of homemaking as a settler desire.

Tuck and Yang describe settler colonialism as the process during which "land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property" (5). Wilderness areas are, in many ways, the product of this process. Empty, wild lands have been made into settler property and even though, as Matt points out, public lands resist notions of *private* property, they are still the property of a settler colonial government. However, in wilderness areas, as can be seen through my participants relationships with the lands they care for, that "homemaking" is less dependent upon "settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain" (Tuck 5). In fact, wilderness employees value the non-human world more than the conventions of settler society.

Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, "The ecosystem is not a machine, but a community of sovereign beings, subjects rather than objects" (331). When Michael says that he prefers the version of wilderness that "favors the natural processes;" when Jess honors the beaver's right to the river

and cries at seeing a trash bag work through a bear's digestive system; I hear that these employees are respecting the land's sovereignty. But this respect is complicated, because although wilderness employees' orientations to SEKI's wilderness might honor the sovereignty of the land over that of settlers—an important step towards anti-colonial work—the National Park Service continues to honor settler sovereignty over Indigenous sovereignty, and this is a complex point of incommensurability, one that requires some interrogation.

I want to linger, for a moment, on the idea that wilderness employees have developed a sense of home in wilderness *without* turning that land into property, without requiring that they have dominion over all things in wilderness. Rather, their sense of home is generated from an embodied connection with land, a connection that depends upon a deep belief and understanding of wilderness as *not theirs* to manipulate and do with what they will. Wilderness employees have a distinctly different relationship with wilderness lands because they do not "own" them, because they believe that wilderness should "have itself to itself." It is precisely because rangers have had the privilege of living in wilderness lands without this colonial sense of owenership, that they have developed relationships with these lands that exist differntly than Tuck & Yang's description of settler colonial processes of homemaking. Wilderness employees have learned from the land how to walk and read the earth, how to live with the land rather than against it. The land is teaching them a new way of being.

In the rhetorics of wilderness employees I see great anticolonial potential because of their felt connection with land. This is complicated because, as Tuck and Yang point out, it is precisely land that is the most contested resource in the process of settler colonialism, and the settler desire to make Indigenous lands their home is incommensurable with Indigenous projects for sovereignty and decolonization that want, ultimately, to get their lands back. It would seem then, that an anticolonial relationship with land might be impossible for a settler. I want to recognize that by suggesting that

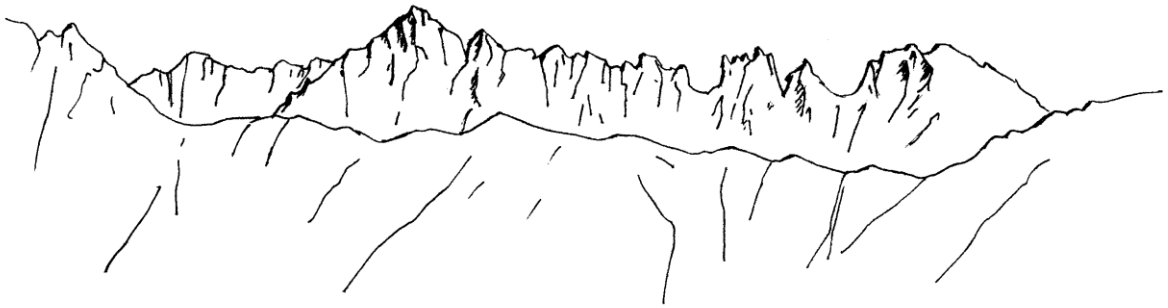
settlers might just make their homes *differently,* I may be skirting the more basic issue, what is for some Indigenous peoples the better solution to the problem of colonization: if settlers leave, then the settler colonial state will also disappear. I am not ignoring or dismissing this option, but I am recognizing that as a settler descendent who feels that the wilderness of the Sierra is my home, is the "context for my existence," as my mom described it on the phone the other day, I am invested in finding a way to be at home in Indigenous lands that isn't colonial, that resists colonial relationships with Indigenous peoples. I seek reconciliation, but I am also aware of the tendancy for settlers to use reconciliation to, once again, disappear "the Indian problem," and this is a tendancy I would like to avoid (Tuck 9). Tuck & Yang write that it is important to attend to "what is irreconcilable" as we attempt solidarity. As I write of feeling at home in wilderness, I am simultaneously pulled by the conviction that my feeling at home is inherently colonial and by the conviction that it is because I feel at home in wilderness that I am dedicated to anti- and de-colonial efforts.

Kimmerer writes, "Like my elders before me, I want to envision a way that an immigrant society could become indigenous to place, but I'm stumbling on the words. Immigrants cannot by definition be indigenous. Indigenous is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring changes history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with land" (213). I want to be clear: Indigenous relationships with land *will never me the same* as settler relationships. I am not suggesting that we mine Indigenous rhetorics for convient "turns of phrase" in order to better connect settlers to stolen lands. An appropriation of Indigenous rhetorical practices by wilderness employees or the National Park Service would be yet another colonial violence. I do not think that we should simply supplant settler ways of being with Indigenous practices. The Indigenous relationship with these lands is different from the settler relationship and the solution is not to make them the same, but rather to honor their differences. Settlers, certainly, can and should learn a lot from Indigenous peoples, scholars, and stewards about how to re-compose their relationship with land so as to resist

continued colonial violence on the land and on Indigenous peoples. However, we (settlers) cannot simply appropriate Indigenous ways of being and knowing, we can't just "play Indian." Kimmerer also asks, "if people do not feel "indigenous," can they nevertheless enter into the deep reciprocity that renews the world? Is this something that can be learned? Where are the teachers?" (213).

Wilderness employees' relationship with land is laced with colonial legacies, as can be seen from their articulations of the wilderness idea and their composition of wilderness lands, they continue to reinforce colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing and being. But the rhetorics of wilderness employees also have the potential to help us articulate new ways of being because they have been listening to the land—that most contested resource—because the land is teaching them how to walk, and read, and make-meaning of the world around them. The land, *this* land—the rivers and cliffs of the Sierra Nevada—is becoming the context of their existence.

"After all these generations since Columbus, some of the wisest of Native elders still puzzle over the people who came to our shores. They look at the toll on the land and say, 'The problem with these new people is that they don't have both feet on the shore. One is still on the boat'" (Kimmerer 207). Wilderness employees have the potential to be strong allies in anti- and de- colonial projects in the National Park Service, in protecting the land from the colonial human/nature dualism, in learning new ways to enact that protection, and in restoring Indigenous relationships to wilderness lands *because of* their relationship with land rather than in spite of it. Instead of severing settler relationships to land as an effort toward decolonization, I think we have to work towards learning a new way of for settlers to be with land. In order to disrupt colonial relationships between settlers, the land, and Indigenous peoples, we, settlers and settler decendants, have to build new relationships. Kimmerer writes, "The land knows what to do when we do not" (333). We can build these relationships through and with land—the land will teach us how.



The Stories Rangers Carry:
Conclusion

Figure 20. *Mineral King.* Looking south from Timber Gap towards White Chief, Eagle, and Mosquito Lakes. Photo by Analisa Skeen.

The air is high and thin and I pull at it with delicate fingers, weave it through my lungs the way my grandfather used to weave lichen-dyed wool through the tight strings of a loom. I have picked my way across patches of snow and rock to this spot on the ridge. The wind bends grass and new buds into the hillside; everything is wet and young. Across the valley, familiar ridges are stacked—grey and sheer—above the dark pines of tree line. Mosquito Lakes, Miner's Nose, Eagle Lake, White Chief Bowl.

White Chief. I do not know the story of this name. The local newspaper guy, whose eyes are eager and limbs, wiry, once told me something about an Indian Princess and a Viking and I cringe at the vague memory of his stories.

As I move down the hillside, looking for the cut of the trail, I am slow. It is steep, but my footing is careful for other reasons too. Mostly, I am looking for rocks and hard dirt for my steps

because the earth is seeping. I can hear water tripping down the slope all around me, and where I cannot hear it, I see it—all of the mountains are mud this year; their skin shines with layers of water.

As I walk across these mountains, I carry stories. Some are mine—memories of growing up here, of falling in love here, of finding a family here. Some are my parents', my brother's; some are my grandparents. I hear stories around the trail crew camp about raging parties and daring rescue attempts, about mules pulling out hitching rails and early season blizzards. Now, I carry Jess, Adam, Cody, Michael, and Matt's interviews as I step between Queen Anne's Lace, columbine, and yaro.

There are also stories woven into my uniform—stories of dispossession and violence, stories of reclamation and survival, stories written and unwritten into the arrowhead on my shoulder, the gleaming yellow badge at my chest. I carry these too.

As I think back through this thesis, there are a lot of moments that I question, moments that feel mired in theory that may or may not actually work. Though I experience anxiety around these moments, it reminds me that this thesis is the beginning of a process of re-thinking and re-learning my relations, of creating new relations with the lands that raised me. It is a moment in a larger conversation. But there are a few things that I am certain of, however tenuous that certainty is.

Rangers are storytellers. We carry stories across the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada and the stories we carry matter. I know this because the stories of Indigenous scholars and writers have changed me—they have changed how I walk and read the land, how I understand what it means to be a ranger, how I speak with visitors, how I envision the National Park Service, the land itself. I hold close Kimmerer's question—*do you think the earth loves you back?*—which still makes my chest shudder, not because I know the answer, but because I do not.

An examination of the rhetorics of wilderness shows us the colonial history of the wilderness idea and the ways that it continues to marginalize Indigenous peoples, their lifeways, knowledges, and ways of being. It also illustrates the human/nature dualism that persists in modern wilderness rhetorics and creates a tension wherein humans can love an appreciate the land, but they must do so without influencing it. Such a tension creates a one-way relationship with wild lands and that relationship is made in spite of the rhetorics of wilderness. It also makes illegible Indigenous peoples' relationships with their ancestral homelands.

Figure 21. *My Parents*. Sigrid and Kevin, standing in front of the Mineral King Ranger Station after a June snowstorm. Photo by

The rhetorics of wilderness employees reproduce the colonial legacies of the wilderness idea. However, in their articulations of the purpose of wilderness areas, employees push against the colonial human/nature dualism. They insist that wilderness is about building connections with our

environment, not separating ourselves from it. This ambivalence is present in rangers' ideological and physical composition of the wilderness idea and the lands they care for. So too, do rhetorics of care, moments of disruption of the human/nature dualism manifest. Rangers put the land (and its beavers) first, rather than privileging settler desires. The rhetorics of wilderness employees prove that wilderness does complex rhetorical work, for they simultaneously reify and disrupt colonial relationships with land and with Indigenous peoples. While their talk and practice lean heavily on "removing human influence," they also believe that one of the most important rhetorical goals of wilderness is to alter settler (visitor) practices, to teach a way of being that helps settler society take better care of the earth.

Further, wilderness employees are learning from the land. They articulate wilderness lands as having rhetorical capacity. This rhetorical positioning looks similar to Indigenous understandings of land/human relationships, wherein humans participate in a two-way reciprocal relationship with the earth. Thus, wilderness employees' orientation to land is different from settler-colonial desires to turn land into property and a source of capital. Though settler rangers feel at home in wilderness, this feeling at home rises from a sense of belonging to and with the land, rather than a sense of owning and having dominion over land.

So, what relations are privileged, cultivated, and honored in wilderness areas by the National Park Service? What relations are left unseen, unknowable by the colonial past and present of the wilderness idea and the NPS? Through my interviews with wilderness employees, I think it is clear that the National Park Service and the wilderness idea privilege Western European ideologies and ways of knowing and being in wilderness areas. Further, settlers, in particular white, wealthy visitors, are given precedent over Indigenous peoples. Wilderness areas and the National Park Service are participating in the continued erasure of Indigenous histories; their ways of knowing and being are made illegible by the wilderness idea and the Park Service is doing little to intervene in the rhetorics

that perpetuate that illegibility. However, in the rhetorics of wilderness employees, there is also great possibility for anti-colonial intervention and this intervention is made possible by rangers' deep investment in the lands they care for.

There is a lot of work to be done in examining the ways that the colonial rhetorics of wilderness and the National Park Service work. Colonialism's effects on both settler and Indigenous bodies, knowledges, and practices are very complex and require much unpacking and interrogation. I think that the National Park Service should engage in this work at the institutional level, and that NPS employees should interrogate their own complicity with colonial structures. This interrogation will lead not only to more ethical, reciprocal relations with Indigenous peoples—making the task well worth our efforts for that reason alone—but might also help foster different relationships with wilderness lands, relationships that do not rely upon composing ourselves out of wilderness, that do not perpetuate colonial violence.

The rhetorics of wilderness employees in the National Park Service also offer up scholarship to the field of rhetoric and composition. Though I recognize that this thesis has largely been invested in changing ranger practices and the National Park Service, I think there is much to be gleaned from wilderness employees about the complex ways that colonialism manifests in our rhetorical practices, the ways in which land is composed with rhetorical purpose and intent, and the ways that land itself, is rhetorical. These claims have consequences not only in the Park Service, but in other locales within the field—environmental and institutional rhetorics are two areas that come to mind.

It is important to note that this thesis is limited in both scope and depth. Glaringly absent from this piece are the voices of local Indigenous peoples, and as I pursue my career as a park ranger and consider returning to academia, I want to work on building relationships with the local tribes of Sequoia-Kings. Such relationship-building is a long process and was not one that I could accomplish

over the course of a single summer. Similarly, I was unable to really uncover and explore SEKI's already-existing relationships with local Native peoples. The Park does have a tribal liaison and is working to strengthen relationships with local tribes. Moving forward, I want to better understand the institutional structures that the Park has in place to support Native peoples.

I have thought a lot about how to end this thesis. In a moment of excitement a few days ago, I told Cody, "Guess what?! I'm almost done with a *two-year* project." He responded: "We both know you've been working on this for longer than two years."

I will end with a story about horses and mules. I don't quite know why this one feels like the one to end on—perhaps because I am excited to return to the Park and working with stock is yet another new relation that I am navigating as a ranger and human. I think, mostly, it is because this story feels like home.

Slim is head-shy. He pushes his ears back and widens his eyes if I come at him head-on, so I walk up to his shoulder and let my hand fall on his neck. *Well hey there Slim,* I say running my hands down his back. *You're so handsome—the best mule of the whole lot*. I move my hands closer to his jaw, try rubbing his ears. He stiffens. *You don't like that do you? Okay bud.* His ears are large and fuzzy and they are hard to resist, but I move away from his head, pat his rump and watch the dust rise. He noses the grain sack at my side. *Grain for a kiss?* I ask. He doesn't want the kiss.

My Dad told me once, when I was little, that horses have hearts in their hooves. *They pump the blood up and down their legs with these extra little hearts*, he said, *They're called frogs and you can feel them beating in the center of the hoof.* I used to watch the horses in the pasture by our house, their long necks bent to the earth, their soft lips working over the grass. I imagined small frogs sitting in their hooves, pulsing.

Dad tells me stories about horses in the Sierra. I have images of him walking into the morning fog, bridle in hand, letting out a long whistle. His horse, Paiute, would come to him, he told me, eager to do work, eager to ride and to run. One time, they raced a bear up the long line of a canyon. *Bears are fast,* he tells me.

Mom tells me that she used to feel them coming into camp—Dad and all the horses. They worked at Muir Trail Ranch, a camp high in the Sierra. She was a cook and he took care of the stock and as he walked into the fog to round them up, she started the ovens and cracked eggs over metal bowls, whisking them to froth. *The ground would shake,* she said. *The tent would shake as they rode in in the morning.*

I know I am six-year-old-girl horse-crazy. I am embarrassed by my naive enthusiasm, but I can't help myself. I love the stock. Love their dirt-filled hide, their rough, short-cut manes, big fly-filled eyes and the smell of their manure. Mostly, I love releasing them in the evening.

Cody and I walk towards the trail crew camp around seven or so. We get there and the guys are ready to go. We slip the bell onto Rocky's neck and I take Slim's lead, untie him from the hitching rail. Alex has hopped onto one of the horses, and Cody follows suit, ridding bareback into the meadow. We move through the trees and I lengthen my stride, feeling the pressure of the stock behind me. They are excited and I have trouble keeping Slim at my side; he wants to *go*.

"Let 'em loose!" Adam shouts.

I unclip the lead and Slim pushes forward. There's sixteen head in the Hockett and they all thunder into the meadow, pounding their hearts into the earth.

I write in my journal: *The season is beginning. There are ponies in the meadow. I get to be a ranger again.*

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Land Relations in the Wilderness of the National Park Service
Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and American Cultures
Michigan State University

Purpose of Research: This project examines the ways that wilderness—as a legal designation and an idea—is constructed, storied, and practiced by wilderness employees in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park (SEKI).

Specific Procedures: You are being asked to participate in an interview, with the possibility of follow-up interview(s), about your practices as a wilderness employee in the National Park Service. At any time, you may choose to not answer questions which are not applicable or you do not want to answer. If clarification or further information about one or more of your answers is necessary, follow-up questions will be asked. You are welcome to refuse to provide clarification or extra information. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. Your answers may be quoted directly or paraphrased in Analisa Skeen's master's thesis and any publications resulting from her thesis. You may decide to stop participating in the project at any time, and to have any records of your interview(s) returned to you or deleted.

Duration of Participation: The initial interview may take up to an hour and thirty minutes. This depends on how long it takes you to answer the interview questions. In addition, a follow up interview may be requested, which again, could take up to an hour and thirty minutes. You may also receive emails asking for clarification or extra information, which will take more time should you choose to answer them.

Confidentiality: The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Michigan State University responsible for regulatory and research oversight. Collected data will be stored on Analisa Skeen's computer that requires a coded username and password and is located in her office in Bessey Hall at Michigan State University. The data may be accessed by Analisa Skeen and Alexandra Hidalgo. Data will be kept indefinitely and may be used in Analisa Skeen's master's thesis and publications resulting from it.

_____ I would like this interview to be confidential. The researchers will assign me a pseudonym that will be used throughoutAnalisa Skeen's thesis and publications resulting from it when quoting or paraphrasing my answers. My position in the Park Service will be revealed, but my place of work will only be identified by geographical area. It will be known that I work for Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park, but my precise location within the Park will not be revealed.

_____ I would like for my name to be used throughout the dissertation and publications resulting from it whenever quoting or paraphrasing my answers. My place of work and position in the Park Service may also be used.

Recording: Your interview will be audio-recorded for the purposes of this project. Photographing your image as part of the research would also be helpful, however, you may opt out of being photographed.

_____ I give permission to record my voice and photograph my image for this project.

_____ I give permission to record my voice for this project.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits. Participants may get some personal gratification out of discussing their work and purpose with the National Park Service. Interviewing wilderness employees may provide the National Park Service with a deeper understanding of how wilderness is constructed and managed in the field, in addition to the complexity of its own position as a colonial institution. Rhetoric and composition as a field may gain a deeper understanding of the ways that employees practice rules and regulations into being, and the decolonial potential of colonial institutions.

Risks: Risks are no greater than the risks of everyday life. Furthermore, in the acts of reflecting and responding during interviews participants may discover and/or discuss events that could be emotionally difficult. For those who wish to remain anonymous, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality—safeguards to minimize this risk are discussed in the confidentiality section of this form. For those who wish to use their real name for this project, there is no confidentiality. Should you choose to have your answers be connected to your name in Analisa Skeen's master's thesis and publications resulting from it.

Compensation: None.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about this project, you can contact Analisa Skeen at analisa.sk@gmail.com or Alexandra Hidalgo at hidalgo5@msu.edu. If you have concerns about the treatment of research participants, you can contact Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board at (517) 355-2180.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study, and that you understand what is expected of you should you accept. Your signature also indicates that you are aware of the risks and benefits of participating in this project. In addition, your signature allows Analisa Skeen to use your answers throughout the interview process for her master's thesis and any resulting publications.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

APPENDIX B:

GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Land Relations in the Wilderness of the National Park Service
Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and American Cultures
Michigan State University

Purpose: To discuss your history with wilderness, your practices as a wilderness employee, your understandings of the relationship between wilderness and Indigenous peoples, and your personal relationship with wilderness lands.

Personal History:

a. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
b. Do you have early memories of wilderness? Of the National Park Service?
c. Can you tell me a story about an early wilderness experience?
d. How did you begin working with the National Park Service? What led you to your current position?
e. Why were/are you drawn to Park Service and/or wilderness work?

Defining Wilderness:

a. How would you define wilderness? I'm interested in what you think the general definition of wilderness is as well as your personal definition of wilderness.
b. Can you tell me about a moment or place that you feel represents wilderness?
c. Do you operate differently when you're working in wilderness versus backcountry? And if so, how?

Working in Wilderness:

a. Can you describe your position in the Parks?
b. What do you think the primary purpose(s) of a wilderness ranger are?
c. How do you interact with visitors?
d. Hypothetically, if you were in charge of the Park, and you made the rules, how would this land be treated? What does "preservation and protection" look like to you?
e. What do you think about re-wilding? About removing firepits and bear lockers, etc.?

Wilderness & Native Peoples:

a. What do you know about the history of wilderness?
b. What do you know about the Native American communities that lived in the Sierra Nevada?
c. Have you interacted with local Native American tribes and/or people?
d. Do you know anything about Native American land-management practices? Do you know any of the Native peoples' stories about these lands?

Relationship with Land:

a. Do you see wilderness areas and the National Park Service playing a role in climate change? If so, what role?
b. Why are wilderness areas important to you?
c. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

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