

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF BACKPACKING

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FOREWORD

To declare that in the very flowering of backpacking, a sport of mounting popularity for half a century and since the 1960s taking on trappings of an organized religion, can be seen the decay, invites incredulity, scorn, and hatred.

Yet one is reminded (and thus the title of this book) that a world without a Roman Empire once was so unimaginable that its disappearance was not so much as suspected for centuries after the fact -- and in a sense remains to this day to be accepted by the Pope.

Also, few guessed at midcentury, as the cities and transportation system of America were being rebuilt, indeed the entire fabric of the economy and society reweven around the automobile, that -- as we now recognize -- the family car would not outlast the century. Or for a parallel in recreation, rare was the voice in the 1950s predicting that the skiing "way of life," ~~representing~~ the Heroic Age of the "beautiful people," would prove to be a bubble bursting -- as it is in the process of doing -- in the 1970s.

The high priests of perfervid backpackers assuredly will attack my thesis as a damnable heresy and me personally as the desecrator of a temple. As consumed by the certainty of their revelation as any pentecostal, and as determined to save the heathen from hellfire, those they cannot convert they will crucify. The greater will be ^{their} the fury for ~~their~~ viewing me, the author of a backpacking manual, as an apostate.

The ~~risk~~^{punishment} must be ~~taken~~^{risked}. First, because simple humanity demands that the dangers of backpacking, hushed up by a Watergate-like conspiracy of vested interests, be warned against -- just as someone should have warned skiers in the 1950s that the price for exhilaration in youth would be, as they are now learning in middle age, the rainy-day aches of imperfectly-mended ~~bones~~^{bones} and the prematurely-wrinkled skin of too much bright sun. ^{and hobbling pace} ^{and dim eyesight} And just as someone should have warned America in the 1920s that in ~~an~~ exchange for the great automobile romp the nation ultimately would have to suffer plundering by the "energy companies," blackmail by Arabs, and economic and political collapse. And just as someone should have warned B.C. Italians ~~that~~ that if they didn't stamp out the aggressive village on the Tiber the A.D. taxes would go out of sight.

A second reason I must speak ~~out~~ is a not disloyal desire that through foreknowledge we backpackers better compose ourselves to embrace inevitable disaster with dignity and not be ~~led~~ dragged whimpering and whining to the gibbet.

Let it not be supposed I shortle over the fall of backpacking~~x~~ as Gibbon did over that of Rome, or ~~we~~ dry-wash hands in morbid anticipation as Spengler did over the Gotterdammerung of Faustian Man. I speak not in vindictive ~~in~~ loathing but disappointed love, not glee but gloom. Backpacking is not totally ~~vicious~~^{iniquitous -}, no more than Rome or skiing, and certainly less noxious than most of what's going on in America. That it must, at least in its present form, die, does not give me joy.

But die it must. And will.

The decline will have a number of causes, some springing from internal contradictions of the sport (for example, though the refinement of equipment led to a surge in popularity, ~~some~~ symptoms now are felt of a too-much-candy illness) and others from external socio-economic factors (for example, though profligate expenditure of energy, ~~was~~ represented by the automobile, brought ~~the sport~~ backpacking its palmyest era, the energy crisis, and the demise of the automobile, will be the mortal blow). In reality, all the causes are summarized in the immutable maxim of dialectic -- what goes up must come down, precisely because it went up. One ~~is~~ recalls the opinion of many medievalists that monasticism might have survived, ^{despite} the kings' envy of the monks' wealth, had not the monasteries been so much more attractive residences than the outside ^{world they became overcrowded and} that ^{the sewers got plugged.}

I await stoically the onset of the storm of contumely. The mountain shops which have prospered these past dozen years will ^{detest} ~~resent~~ me as deeply as saloon-keepers did Prohibition, and speakeasy-proprietors Repeal. The giant conglomerates which ~~is~~ have muscled in on the manufacturing of backpacking equipment (as Disney Enterprises did on skiing at Mineral King and Music Corporation of America on National-Park tourism at Yosemite) may very well ^{persecute} ~~go after~~ me as General Motors did Ralph Nader. And the ~~band~~ ^{now} writers ^{making a vultures' living from backpacking journalism and} terrified at the prospect of returning to the offal heaps whence they ^{originally} ~~came~~ surely will pick at whatever bones of my reputation are left after the ~~detectives~~ detectives finish.

History is written by the survivors and though certain of vindication in some distant future I know the retribution due me in the interim for being the first to bring skeletons from the backpacking closet and rattle them in public. I'm all too aware of the evil reputations saddled upon theologians who disagreed with the Fathers of the Church, and upon the Borgias by antagonists who were no less scoundrels but won the battle of political propaganda.

For my own sake and that of family and friends, I wish it were possible to be silent. Where I offend, may my even-handedness be granted; if I've failed to affront any group it's ~~not particularly~~ an oversight. I hope of a harsh posterity only that it may grudgingly concede amid its slanders, "He saw his duty and he done it."

Harvey Manning

Cougar Mountain, 1975

PART ONE:

THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF BACKPACKING

Chapter 1

ORIGINS OF BACKPACKING

Most animals carry food and other materials primarily by mouth and only in small amounts for short distances. The ant aside, man is uniquely and characteristically the large-load, long-distance freighter. Omitting such motive powers as wind and engines, the principal methods may be broadly separated into (1) carrying on the human body, (2) pulling (or pushing) by the human body, (3) carrying or pulling by other animals, and (4) floating on water craft.

Floating, though yielding a sport contemporaneously with backpacking, will be touched upon in the next chapter and need not concern us here.

It is doubtful early man actually towed his mate around by the hair; still, the first form of pulling baggage surely was no more complicated than that. At some point in the remote past were refined the drag methods exemplified by the travois, which only peripherally, in mountain rescue, has played any part in sport, and the sled or sledge, employed in sport to some extent by snow travelers. Invention of the wheel led, of course, to transport devices ranging from the wheelbarrow to the wagon and, notable in sport, the bicycle.

The enslavement of other animals, significant in the history of man for the effect on his diet, also revolutionized his transportation. It may be wondered why, once having coerced companion creatures into carrying or pulling his goods, man has continued to submit his own body to such labor; this is the question, echoing the jubilation of ancient domesticators, implicit in the contemptuous jeers accorded backpackers by horseriders met on the trail.

The answer is, as backpackers reply to the horseriders, that exploitation of animals is not lacking in drawbacks, every species being more or less stupid or willful or both and generally aggravating.

The horse, least inefficient and undependable of the common beasts of burden, is expensive to purchase, dangerous to steal, and costly and time-consuming to operate.

As much as military skill and religious fanaticism the odor of the camel was responsible for the speedy conquests by the Arabs, who created panic wherever they went -- with or without their camels, the stench being so persistent. Arabs restored order and consolidated their rule only when they switched to the horse. ~~and~~ Upon later reverting to the camel ^{they} were universally abhorred and shunned until the discovery of oil; had any commodity then valued by Europeans been found on their lands in the 19th century, they certainly would have been exterminated more expeditiously and thoroughly than the Indians. It may be mentioned that the brief experiment with camel trains on the American frontier temporarily depopulated whole sections of the Southwest.

Few animals are as tractable -- that is, dumb -- as the horse and camel. The ox (and yak and water buffalo) are dumber, proverbially so, and slower as well and also eat more. None but princes can afford the elephant, nor would anyone else want it, what with the roguish habit of periodically trampling to death a villageful^s of men, women, and children. The ass (donkey, burro), the Volkswagen of its day, is notoriously cranky; the offspring of ass and horse, the mule, has most of the vices of both parents and few of the virtues. The goat is foul as a camel and mean as a burro. When out of temper the moody llama spits or even vomits on its owner. Just one society, in Siam, ever has been the least successful in putting the cat to work, and this by breeding a variety in which the selfish solipsism of the feline has been partly overridden by a canine-like insecurity and craving for love; the inner tension,

however, causes a congenital insanity that makes it untrustworthy. The dog, usually such a toady that kinship with the coyote and wolf seems incredible, has the major failing that in a group relying on dog transport, as did the Eskimos prior to the snowmobile, the effect of a bitch in heat is comparable to that in our nation of simultaneous strikes by railroad, maritime, and trucking unions, plus a wave of ~~student~~ anti-bussing riots.

But our subject being backpacking, the above is merely prologue. It is time now to turn to the oldest of freighting methods, and in sport the newest, carrying loads on the human body.

In the very earliest era, and concurrently with dragging, came the hand-carry, which lingers today in the picnic basket. Though the Gauls wore trousers, to the hilarity/disgust of the toga-clad Romans, the pocket does not appear to have been common in the West until the 14th century, when it was brought from China to the edge of Europe by the Mongol hordes of Tamerlane, who largely were successful because their foes carried purses. The latter long continued in favor among the backward Scotch and together with the kilt elicited the ribald ~~insults~~ ^{jokes} traditionally made by the English and such a mortification to Boswell.

Modern backpackers are amazed that the head-carry, in our view bizarre and unnatural, is so widespread. Many anthropologists believe the explanation of its tenacity lies in the phenomenon of the "dead-end ~~culture~~ culture," defined as one which due to some crucial mistake (flunking ~~to~~ Toynbee's "challenge-response" test) ceases to progress and becomes fossilized. By this theory, though random

chance a people advances from the hand-carry to the more efficient head-carry (rather than some other technique) and then suffers such diminished mental capacity it persists ~~remain~~ even when neighbors are employing donkey, wheelbarrow, or Land Rover. It is thought that, with the carrying almost exclusively done by women, here is either the explanation or the consequence of their inferior status. That is, either men perpetuate the head-carry to keep their women docile or simply ~~think~~ feel it's ^{beneath} ~~below~~ their ^{dignity to} ~~pointing~~ out to such dolts that other tribes have a better way.

The head-carry is not utterly unredeemed; anthropologists have found users little afflicted by backache. But as one would expect, they are plagued by headache. Interestingly, this made them the most readily Christianized of the primitives, and in 19th-century records of the Anglican Board of Missions we see the supply of medications given equal emphasis with ^{translating} the Bible. He didn't mention it in his books but in private conversation [^] ~~Stanley~~ Stanley confided that the first words of the revered missionary long cut off from his base and thought lost, in response to the famous, "Dr. Livingston, I presume?" were, "For God's sake, man, do you have any aspirin?"

The shoulder-carry is nearly as old as the hand-carry and older than the head-carry, dating to the apeman slinging a large fish, bunch of bananas, or apewoman over his shoulder. This one-shoulder-carry evolved into ~~various~~ various forms through employment of a stick ~~or~~ or pole.

From ~~the~~ Trajan's Column in Rome we learn that a legionary on campaign had a short sword (gladius) hanging at his right side from a belt,

and in the right hand a javelin. On the march the battle helmet hung from his right shoulder. From the left shoulder hung a large, ~~rectangular~~ rectangular shield, leaving the left hand free to grasp the pole which rested on the left shoulder and supported at its end his foraging and cooking kit. This carrying method, familiar in modern times as that of the bindlestiff, was necessary in order to be ready for instant ~~an~~ action with the right hand if a band of Gauls or Brigantes burst out of the bushes. However, the technique was fraught with ^{dire} consequences for the future of the Empire, for Tacitus tells us it ~~was~~ caused the lopsided posture which made a veteran of the legions instantly recognizable; ~~and~~ the deformity and the constant ragging it occasioned by civilians ^{are} considered by Herodian ^{a contributing factor} ~~the main reason~~ ^{to} the troops frequently erupting in rages and killing ~~many~~ ^{emperors} in peaceful situations.

Much better in ~~the two-shoulder-carry~~

was the two-shoulder-carry, which evolved separately in North America, where Indian women thus transported infants, absence of the wheel in the New World ruling out any ^{kind} ~~form~~ of perambulator, and in mountainous regions of Europe and Asia.

The survival to the present of the two-shoulder-carry (via rucksack) in the Alps, amid examples all around of superior techniques, may seem a puzzle. However, here is another example of the "dead-end" phenomenon. The Romantics and their 18th-century myth of the "noble savage" to the contrary, Hobbes' ^{glum} description ^{of the condition of man} ~~of man in general~~ better fits mountain ^{peasants} ~~people~~, who are mountain ^{peasants} ~~people~~ specifically because they have been driven out of the lowlands by competition of smarter folk. As Harry Lime ^{observed} ~~said~~ in The Third Man, the Swiss, despite having for centuries a democratic government and enjoying freedom from destructive wars, have contributed naught to European

civilization but the cuckoo clock. ~~(To be fair, he evidently was~~ (To be fair, he evidently was unaware of the Swiss Army knife.) For closer-to-home examples of the sort of people who make a living in the mountains, we need look no farther than the prospector, the gypo logger, and the ski instructor.

Chapter 2

THE BIRTH OF SPORT BACKPACKING

Very late in history, indeed not to any significant extent until the past century, emerged the practice of transporting loads of food and equipment hither and yon in the name of sport. The English started it on their compulsory Grand Tours of the Continent when, as an expression of the Romantic revolt against the Enlightenment, they made excursions into the forbidding Alps, formerly avoided by all civilized folk who possibly could. The diversion of mountain-climbing they commenced was ardently taken up by Victorians who for this reason or that -- gross violations of the rigidifying moral code, as in the case of the sinister diabolist, Aleister Crowley, or boredom, as with the clergy who constituted so large a proportion of the early climbers, or things going badly at Oxford-Cambridge, as they so often did for everyone -- found it necessary or desirable to get out of the country. Wealthy and cultivated Eastern-Seaboard Americans, for whom the Grand Tour was a trip to England, began emulating their trans-Atlantic idols by including the Alps on their itineraries and subsequently, upon finding themselves excluded as colonials from The Alpine Club, forming their own American Alpine Club.

If intrepid enough to dare dangers of cliffs and glaciers and discomforts of the reeking hovels and vile foods of Alpine peasants, these 19th-century English, virtual masters of the world, and their American cousins who hoped to be so someday, were much too dutiful about the

responsibilities of their station to retrograde absolutely to barbarism, and to carry loads needed on ventures above the cow pastures hired peasants. Thus, though superficially seeming related, the Alpine travels have nothing to do with sport backpacking; the English-Americans (and the rich and titled Germans and Italians who, as usual monkeylike, hopped on the bandwagon) carried nothing ~~at all~~ heavier than a pocket handkerchief and ~~to~~ ~~the~~ peasants the hauling was a ^{simply} disagreeable if remunerative job.

To understand the course of events in America we must look elsewhere, namely to Turner's seminal essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," first read at a meeting of historians in 1893. In his electrifying opening paragraph, Turner drew attention to the statement made in 1890 by the Superintendent of the Census announcing that during the preceding decade the frontier as a continuous line had ceased to exist and therefore no longer would be traced in the decennial reports. Turner went on to propound his famous thesis that Americans had become what they were by being a nation at "the meeting point between savagery and civilization," and that the American character was shaped by "a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line."

Turner, of course, was poignantly cognizant of the nostalgia for the vanishing frontier welling up all over the nation. (Actually ~~not~~ ~~only~~ principally among wealthy urbanites; nostalgia was not felt by those who had lived on the frontier.) He perhaps was unaware that his thesis was gaining a sort of confirmation through the new

phenomenon of expeditions being ^{undertaken} ~~taken~~ -- for other than economic reasons, and by people who had never ^{before been outside a city} ~~been there~~ -- into the remaining pockets of wilderness.

In the East the "return to primitive conditions" followed rivers and lakes, where a canoe-centered sport was born, the wealthy recreationists hiring for their equivalent of Swiss peasants the trappers and Indians who ~~managed~~ ^{managed} ~~known~~ to survive in the ~~North Woods~~ "North Woods" -- not because they were fond of the place but ^{or courage} because (see previous chapter) they lacked the initiative [^] to move to the cities.

In the West the explorations took a rather different form, that section of the continent having been demonstrated by Lewis and Clark to be unsuited to canoeing. There the adventurous doctors and lawyers, professors and teachers and preachers, hired for their load-hauling the horsepackers serving the decaying mining settlements and the newly-expanding herds of cattle and sheep. However, so wary of these rude horsemen (not without reason) were the ~~the~~ city gentlefolk they felt it prudent ~~not~~ to probe the "meeting point of savagery and civilization" only in large groups. Thus, in 1892, was founded in California the Sierra Club, soon followed by other clubs in other cities of the West.

East and West these wilderness travelers shared something with the Semitic prophets who in a past age came out of the ~~North East~~ desert in an endless stream proclaiming new faiths. Smug in their Romantic certainty that they had been ennobled ^{by a confrontation with Deity} and in their Puritan conviction they had been ^{spiritually cleansed} ~~purified~~ by getting soaked in storms and broiled in sun, eaten alive

by bugs while themselves subsisting on a diet that would have been disdained in the ~~darkest~~ ^{grimmiest} slum, they scorned as effete ^{and decadent} their friends who ~~remained in~~ ^{partook of no} ~~the city playing~~ ^{sport more flesh-punishing than} lawn tennis and croquet^x and proclaimed themselves the only true Americans left. This attitude is familiar to us in the writings of Teddy Roosevelt.

In the East the cultist "return to primitive conditions" developed ^{into} the sport of woodcraft, settling down in a canoe-supplied camp and spending the summer building log cabins, whittling pothooks, and learning from guides not only how to catch fish and shoot bear but such arcane ~~tricks~~ ^{tricks} as snaring birds and rodents and stewing or barbecuing them as appropriate.

In the West, however, the outing clubs had as a second purpose the preservation of natural beauty ^(the temples) and the stricter members quickly saw this required eliminating horses from the scene. ^{The substitution of} ~~A substitute~~ burros proving an unsatisfactory ~~measure~~ half-measure, they took inspiration from John Muir, who when driven ~~not~~ loony by tending ~~hundreds of~~ bands of sheep often went roaming the High Sierra with no gear but a blanket, if that, and no food but a chunk of stale bread in his pocket. Such a spartan existence being too rigorous for any but ^{an Old Testament} Muir, his disciples modified the pure doctrine with lessons from the prospectors ~~still~~ lingering in Western mountains. These poor ^{souls} ~~folk~~, too dull-witted to join the rush to the Yukon, in the main ^{even} lacked such amenities as burros; instead they dumped supplies in ~~the~~ ^{them,} gunnysacks, tied ropes to ~~the~~ ^{them,} and slung ~~it~~ over shoulders.

Thus was born sport backpacking, uniquely American -- or more specifically, Western American. Not instantly, ~~rapidly~~ nor even rapidly,

did the innovation become popular. Rather, the packtrain recreationalists looked upon erstwhile friends with horror, feeling they had stepped over the line from civilization into savagery. For their part, the ~~early~~ backpackers, with their monastic dedication to "going light," formed a cult within a cult and treated the horsebound with the same contempt ~~as~~ both groups accorded the citybound.

Enormous impetus was given the a-borning sport when Dan Beard imported the Boy Scout idea from England. Actually, what Lord Baden Powell had in mind was the quite utilitarian notion of training young auxiliary soldiers ("scouts") to augment the regular military in ~~campaign~~ campaigns against the Boers and Fuzzy-Wuzzies and, eventually, the Hun. Beard's ~~own~~ genius lay in adapting the idea to the ever-growing American nostalgia for the now long-dead frontier. (And a high compliment was paid by the Communists when, in the 1930s, they organized as competition the Young Pioneers, with ~~a~~ ~~or perhaps one more similar to that of Baden Powell's~~ ~~gangs~~ ~~of~~ identical program except for the inclusion of Marxism.) Very soon ~~gangs~~ ("troops") of children were canoeing or marching into the woods and blowing bugles. Because they did good deeds and were always prepared, and were trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent, and swore an oath to keep themselves physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight, they earned widespread admiration.

In the East the Scouts were ~~almost purely~~ woodcrafters, canoeing if possible or ~~if not~~ ^{otherwise} hiking ^{short a distance} as ~~little~~ as necessary to get out of sight of ~~the~~ suburbs, ~~camping, and~~ occupying themselves from dawn to dusk

chopping down trees ~~and making bough beds~~ and making bough beds and kabobs and KYBOs, then sitting around the campfire singing *until Taps.*

In the West, however, though Scouts dutifully carried hatchets and hacked ~~away at the greenery~~ *enthusiastically* at the greenery, an increasing number of troops did so not in static camps but on the trail, emulating the ^{heroic} backpacking mavericks of the outing clubs. The sport being superbly suited to the very young, particularly those who are strong and have vowed to be obedient and cheerful, soon the Western wilderness rang with childish laughter and it grew ~~more~~ steadily less common to be endangered by wild animals, ~~which~~ which rarely were seen anymore.

Because of Scouting, until ~~very~~ recently the preponderance of backpackers were under ~~the age of 15; and, except for those who never did,~~ *stayed with the sport past the normal age of* few males ~~went backpacking, and they discovered~~ girls. (One might suppose the founding of the Campfire Girls and the Girl Scouts would encourage boys to continue hiking, but the former spent most of their time selling mints ^{door to door} and leaders of the latter, in an era when even the suspicion of impurity could ^{doom} ~~drive~~ a female ~~into~~ the streets, were very cautious never to take their charges into a forest known to contain Boy Scouts.)

That a great many mature, ~~or~~ or at least ~~fully-grown~~ ^{partly} fully-grown people go backpacking nowadays may be explained by a nostalgia not only for the frontier but for the lost innocence of blissfully-ignorant childhood.

Chapter 3

THE RISE TO A MASS SPORT

Environment-conscious backpackers of today customarily denounce the automobile as the devil incarnate. ~~and~~ ^{in doing so} They are justified by not only the air and noise pollution of cities and the psyche-scarring trauma of freeways but the ~~agonizing~~ ^{infuriating} jams of traffic on recreation roads leading to the fringes of wilderness. Yet perhaps up to 99 percent of ^{present} backpackers wouldn't be backpackers were it not for the automobile, which has been the greatest single stimulus to the sport.

America lacked a genuine transportation system until the automobile. Railroads served excellently well in Europe, and still do, because there ^{and are} they were intended for transportation. In America, however, they were built in the East so Commodore Vanderbilt and compatriots could water the stock and in the West to swindle Congress out of land grants. That they were not abandoned immediately after construction ~~is~~ is owing to the fact that when the first band of scoundrels made a pile and ~~retreated~~ fled ~~elsewhere~~ to escape ~~prosecution~~ ^{gang} prosecution a second ~~group~~ ^{commenced getting} of crooks took over the lines and ~~got~~ rich plundering the peasantry, as described by Norris in The Octopus. Farmers of the Northwest said of the ^{president} ~~owner~~ of the Great Northern Railway, "First we had the drought, then we had the flood, then we had the locusts, ~~and~~ then we had James J. Hill." While conducting their pirate raids across the face of the nation, the tycoons spent the absolute minimum on maintenance; in the end, the system, ^{becoming so ramshackle as to imperil human lives} ~~disintegrating~~ they dumped the

passenger end of the business on AMTRAK, whose customers well know roadbeds generally are rougher than the fields beside them and coach walls carry such graffiti as "Grover Cleveland is a dirty old man."

The automobile dazzled Americans as the rising sun ^{of freedom} and gleefully they threw themselves into such novelties as suburban living, Sunday driving, and auto touring. As for backpacking, ~~was~~ with cars bringing trailheads steadily closer to cities, it became in the 1920s a sport not just for occasional extended vacations but every weekend. Even many horse recreationists were converted, ~~the use of animals~~ ^{their beasts} being so cumbersome ^{to use} they previously ~~simply~~ hadn't taken short trips. Throughout the 1930s, despite the dampening effect of the Depression, growing numbers of outing-club members and Boy Scout (and a scattering of Girl Scout) troops hoisted packs and took to the trails.

Meanwhile the automobile was generating a brandnew sport, car-camping. Formerly National Parks were seen more often at lantern-slide lectures than in person, but from World War I on the ambition of millions of Americans newly on wheels was to collect a complete set of ~~National Park~~ decals and souvenir pillows and to fill photo albums with pictures of bears being fed, voluntarily or otherwise, by fellow tourists.

It would be all too easy to patronize these city-bred car-campers, commenting wryly that going out to get cold and wet and be frightened by noises in the night was their reenactment of the Daniel Boone experience. ~~virtually everyone~~ ~~still~~ ~~country~~ But to render them justice, ~~in the 1920s and throughout in the 1930s~~ ^{was required} ~~submit~~ a fair amount of courage ~~did one set forth~~ to navigate rough, ^{wagon} ^a ill-marked roads in vehicles that might or might not get to and from a destination without a breakdown that could leave travelers stranded for days.

Time passed. There came paved roads, dependable cars, the Sears Roebuck wall tent, and the Coleman stove. The quality of camping was transformed, and not in every opinion for the better. If those who had been young and daring adults in the 1920s were, in their creaky middle age of the 1940s, content with placid comfort, their children, now young adults, were bored. They also were overwhelmed. In their childhood the campgrounds had been nearly vacant but now a new crowd, postwar rich and mobile, discovered car-camping; amid Coleman lanterns hung above every picnic table and portable radios blaring, stars could not be seen at night nor rivers and birds heard anytime.

Here we must express a debt to ~~studies~~ the Northwest Wildland Recreation Research Unit of the U.S. Forest Service. In landmark ~~research~~ ^{studies} these scientists statistically established a causal correlation between car-camping as a child and backpacking as an adult. The process is inevitable in its self-evident simplicity: to recapture the excitement available to them in the 1920s and 1930s as children in car-campgrounds, as adults in the 1940s and 1950s they had to move on -- away from the roads and onto the trails. Their mass migration was encouraged by the fact the backcountry seemed not so spooky as it had to their parents; everywhere they saw troops of boys, even girls, setting out packs ^{on} ~~in~~ backs unafraid.

The ever-growing first wave of backpackers -- outing-club members and Scouts -- was augmented by this second wave of former car-campers to create in the 1940s and 1950s the First Great Backpacking Explosion. Traumatic as was the sudden invasion for oldtime backpackers nurtured by empty-trail days of the 1930s, it was the popping of a paper bag compared to the Hiroshima-loud noise that was to follow.

When the GI Joes came marching home from World War II, they plunged into two recreations. For one, virtually in a single night they impregnated every female of child-bearing age in America -- and on issuance of the first offspring ~~was~~ went at it again, and again. Thus the Baby Boom of the 1940s-50s. For the other, in the postwar prosperity with its high incomes and long weekends and vacations and fast cars and smooth roads and instalment-plan foolproof camping kits complete with umbrella tents and beer coolers, they -- and their swarms of infants -- avidly took up car-camping. Nothing better ever having been known to them, the crowding didn't bother these new campers as it did the old, who were driven onto the trails.

Now let us count off the years, bring those children of the Baby Boom to adulthood, and see what happens. Yes. As with their predecessors, they became disenchanted by car-camping, now further degraded by arrival of the Airstream and Winnebago and minibike, turning the typical campground into a cross between a ticky-tack suburban housing tract and a shopping-center parking lot; this third breed of car-camper apparently thronged the woods not for ~~any~~ communion with nature but to escape the noise-control ordinances beginning to be enforced in cities.

Thus, in the mid-1960s, another flight to the trails, not by a handful but a horde. The first wave had been a ripple, the second a breaker; this third wave was a tsunami.

Traditionally the career of Park Ranger has attracted folk with interests in flowers and wildlife and rocks and a liking for a peaceful, nature-centered life. Since the Baby Boom of the 1940s resulted in the Backpacking Boom of the 1960s, a better qualification for the job has been a taste for law enforcement and, in Yosemite Valley, riot control.

Chapter 4

CLOTHING AND THE COMING OF THE FAD

So far we have been examining what may be called the spring and early summer of backpacking. Moving now into high summer, more and more often we must, while basking in the sun, glance uneasily forward to inevitable autumn.

Gather ye rose buds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that blooms today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The automobile lifted backpacking to a mass sport in the 1960s; other factors impelled the fourth or fad wave that struck in the 1970s, and none more powerfully than changes in clothing.

The early sport expeditionists, being city folk, had no notion how to dress for the wilds. Men adopted from prominent exemplars garments more or less suitable, such as the riding breeches of the U.S. Cavalry, wool mackinaws of lumberjacks, and ten-gallon hats of cowboys. The clothing of women, who suffered the extra impediment of modesty, was even more unwieldy. Indeed, only the sturdiest could venture in wilderness at all, encumbered as they were by veils to protect delicate feminine complexions, heavy ankle-length skirts, billowing wrist-length neck-high shirtwaists, and God knows what beneath; literature of the period is discreetly silent on the subject, though one can speculate (and be appalled) by scanning old Sears Roebuck catalogs.

The handful of females who refused to submit to iron propriety and thus be effectively excluded from the new adventure, backpacking, ~~initially~~ changed from skirts to bloomers, thus becoming, in the eyes of the multitude, fallen women, fair game for insulting propositions. Doughty and persevering rebels (in city lives, often suffragettes) they were, fit heroines for their militant ~~contemporary~~ ^{modern} sisters, and in the 1920s joined with men in the shift to more practical garb -- men's/ ^{work} trousers and shirts, plus ordinary, undistinguished sweaters and jackets and hats.

In the Depression-straitened 1930s cheapness became a prime consideration and J.C. Penney and Goodwill Industries major suppliers, so that backpacking, if unconventional once the recreation of refined ~~gentlefolk~~ ^{gentlefolk}, gained a reputation as the sport of roughnecks little if any ~~more~~ ^{more} ~~civilized~~ ^{civilized} than gypo loggers. The ~~scene~~ ^{bonanza} of dirt-cheap surplus after World War II maintained the mood, a party of hikers then resembling a fleeing rabble of routed infantry.

Though increasingly free in city lives, the bulk of unmarried (and wishing to be) women rejected backpacking in this period, realizing it would drastically hamper enticement of males; the females on the trail were pre-adolescent, already had captured a mate, looked better in backpacking ^{ponchos} ~~than city outfit~~ ^{dresses}, or didn't give a damn.

In the 1950s ^{and 1960s} enterprising manufacturers succeeded in transforming another hangout of slobs, the ski slopes, into scenes fit for Vogue with the stretch pants, the bunny hat, and finally the whole added new wardrobe of apres-ski. Discerning a ~~similar~~ similar profit opportunity on the trails, in the late 1960s and early 1970s they evolved and promoted Backpacking Chic.

female ^(like male) observed, as did those of males, the
 The hues of oldtime hikers ~~observed~~ natural ~~decency~~
~~of~~ background-blending forest-green and dead-leaf khaki. Now the
~~wilderness~~ ^{suddenly} shrieked with Day-Glo ^{reds and oranges} ~~in colors~~ of parkas and sweaters, packs
 and tents; from miles away hikers intruded their presence on observers --
 and closer up ^{unavoidably} ~~deliberately~~ caught the eye. And figure-flattering knickers
^{gaudy} and knicker socks, Malibu shorts and lederhosen, halters and T-shirts,
 were complemented by such smart accessories as the cuty-pie hat and ~~the~~
 sweetheart sunglasses. Previous qualms eliminated, women took to the trails
 in large numbers. But the peacock, after all, is the male of that species;
^{pretty, unattached} with women in the wilderness to dress up for, men became no less garish.

If one imagines manufacturers were chagrined by the competing "rebel"
 style of the go-to-hell Blue Jean Look of ragged cutoffs and bib overalls
 affected by boys with long hair and girls with no bras, one imagines wrong;
 these jeans were not old and cheap but factory-processed at great expense
 to ~~intentionally~~ appear old.

Here we must step aside to call attention to another consequence of
 the Baby Boom of the 1940s. Whereas in prior eras outnumbered, disciplined
 youth dutifully aped their elders, ^{when} the children of GI Joe flooded into
 schools the ~~center~~ center of cultural gravity dropped ~~downward~~ downward in age
 to the campus. Moreover, this Dr. Spock generation was not one to ^{seek} ~~look~~
 elsewhere than inward ^{for} ~~to find~~ the Gleam.

And what was happening on campus? So alluring had backpackers (male
 as well as female) become in the wilderness, they began wearing trail clothing
 on campus too, to the envy of other students, a great many of whom adopted

the costume and then, finding true authenticity subtly evasive, went actually backpacking to attain it.

Already the now-outnumbered and cowed over-30-and-40 generation had for security sought protective coloration of the Youth Culture, men growing beards and donning beads, women doffing bras (or if that was impractical, adopting the Poncho Look) and both trying to listen to rock and experimenting with pot bought from student dealers (perhaps their own children, in ~~the~~ high school or junior high), ^{the "dope" as} ~~and~~ often as not actually being mountain-shop dehydrated spinach, ^{which nevertheless gave them a good giggling high.} Now, as ever keeping a sharp eye on campus, they eagerly embraced the costume of the trail -- and to "keep up with the kids," occasionally wore it onto the trail.

So it was that the sport spread from wilderness to campus to the entire nation; status as a fad was honored in 1974 by a cartoon in The New Yorker and in 1975 by a lampoon in Mad.

The promise having been made in the opening of this chapter not to ignore flowers of evil blossoming in the backpacking garden, it must be warned that females dressed a la mode may receive unwanted attention. It is dangerous to enter, in costume, a mountain village, where gypo loggers in caulked boots and tin pants will be at best sullen and suspicious, more likely boisterously insulting, and at worst are liable, as their grandfathers did the suffragette-hikers in bloomers, to accost female backpackers. Grimmer to report, the gypos have taken to skulking along trails during periods of unemployment, which for them fill most of the year, and thus the 1970s epidemic of backcountry rape.

The foundation of the backpacking costume, the boot, is also the central symbol of the fad.

Having in the 1920s abandoned the knee-high "rattlesnake" boot in favor of the logger's boot coming only a short way up the calf, in the 1930s backpackers, following the lead of mountain-climbers, largely moved from use

and "slivers"
 of hobnails on soles to ~~Swiss edge-nails~~ Swiss edge-nails or tricouni nails.
 After
~~During the war~~ World War II the Mountain Troops brought from
 Italy the Bramani rubber-lug sole. Purely ~~to shock~~ ~~the conservative~~
~~conservative~~ comrades with what seemed an ~~outrageous~~ ^{heresy} ~~novelty~~, a
 these
 few climbers replaced their nails with/lugs. Not realizing it was a joke,
^{neophyte} ~~climbers~~ ~~converted en masse~~ and, after them, the backpackers,
 who in this period ~~exhibited~~ began exhibiting the slavish adulation of
 climbers ~~that has~~ ^{tic} characterized ~~them~~ ever since. That the shift was ^{due to}
^{a caprice of} ~~due to~~ fashion ~~rather than~~ rather than reason is abundantly clear to
 (now mainly the Vibram design)
 anyone who has worn both; though lugs ^{give} better traction on rock and
 cushioning on trails, they are much inferior to nails on such slippery terrain
 as footlogs and steep heather, grass, dirt, and snow and doubtless have
 caused many hikers' deaths that could have been avoided with nails.

Similarly, not one hiker in a hundred has any real use for the ^{complexly}
^{which were} padded and reinforced boots/introduced from Europe ~~in a large number~~ in the
^{which in the 1960s} 1950s and ~~which quickly~~ displaced the simple old "shell" boot. Again,
 climbers favored the import and that was good enough for ~~the~~ sheep-like
~~the~~ hikers. Manufacturers and retailers were pleased by the new boot
 because it was far more expensive and yielded a higher profit; ^{they} ~~and therefore~~
^{traditional American} virtually ~~giving~~ gave up making and stocking the ~~old~~ shell.

From Alps to American climbers to backpackers, from peaks to trails to
 campus^s to Manhattan Island cocktail parties, spread the "European climbing
 boot" look," with all its connotations of "strength through joy," the north
 walls of Eiger and Grandes Jorasses and Matterhorn, lebensraum, blitzkrieg,
 and Buchenwald.

Considered "sexy," this brutal boot exuding cruelty from every seam is the concentrated essence of the costume and the fad. In contrast to the homely old shell and in parallel to the caulked boot of the logger, it serves as a power symbol, which is why hikers invariably buy boots far heavier than they need. Visit a mountain shop. Watch the transformation of novices. Men enter the boot department head-ducking meek and women feminine-sweet; they exit as macho-swaggering storm troopers and scowling libbers. In the perverse extreme, see them purchase black leather jackets, like so many Hell's Angels of the 1950s, and black leather rucksacks, and black leather anything -- including, at the shameless shops that cater to ~~the~~ ^{these} disciples of the Marquis, even whips. One sinister shop in a New Jersey city which was a 1930s stronghold of the German-American Bund offers custom-made rubber lugs in a swastika pattern.

Yet the pendulum swings. In the early 1970s ecologists wept that heavy boots were tearing up meadows as viciously as bulldozers. In response, barefoot hiking became common among aging "flower children," as did helicopter rescue of barefoot hikers. Less radical preservationists renounced boots for sneakers, a trend that dismayed manufacturers until their designers perfected "training shoes" (the new name for tennis shoes) which were as expensive as boots and just as sexy in their suaver way.

Chapter 5

EQUIPMENT AND THE EASING OF PAIN

No matter how darling the costume, backpacking scarcely could have achieved popularity employing equipment of the 1930s and 1940s, endurable solely by those innured to pain by fanaticism or too young to know any better. As it happened, better gear was awaiting the 1960s Third Wave of pampered car-campers-turned-hikers, who doubtless would have lacked the mettle for wilderness had they been compelled to carry 1940s gear, and the 1970 Fad Wave of ignorant urbanites, who even with the ~~the~~ marvelous modern outfits lead a precarious backcountry existence.

Through that internal contradiction ever perplexing and amusing to philosophers, always the "returners to a primitive condition" no sooner get there than they go to work building a civilization; actually, perhaps they are drawn to a simpler world precisely because it provides ^{free} scope, ~~absent~~ ^{limited} in ^{labyrinthianly-complex} cities, to devise fresh complications. The woodcrafters' childlike delight in exercise of ingenuity also was typical of early backpackers, perpetually tinkering with this item or that. However, not until the First Great Backpacking Explosion of the 1940s-50s was there a market sizable enough to permit basement Rube Goldbergs to set themselves up in viable businesses. From this period date the most famous of the backpacking manufacturers, ^{usually} ~~typically~~ men then getting along in years and sensitive to the need for less-punishing gear. Responding to their requirement

