



THEME PARKS

John Colter, 1807-08

*They kept track of him that winter
west of the Absarokas, by day brilliant
ravens avid over snow, wolves and coyotes
hung around refining careful judgements,
the man recognized: one of them,
killers and scavengers all, under the Tetons'
high winter bite, taking pains with that
intricate deep silence
and maybe the snow stayed dry.
Wolves gone now, dead elk play host
in bloody snow, ravens and coyotes
make their moves in ages-old complicity.
Do-se-do and eye your partner Coyote turn,
Raven hop in Know when to call,
when to run Opportunity the wild card.
John was like that, each dawn a new surmise.
Later, he talked about the far places,
Missouri bottoms, rivers north and west,
headwaters of the Snake, shining creeks
trapped out and left behind,
mountain man's privilege.
Today at the elkhorn arch RVs lumber north
toward Teton and Yellowstone,
leave unheard those ancient
coyote-raven games of wide-awake
above Cache Creek, not for them
the awkward looking back,
that's for us, our privilege: to mourn wolves.*

I wrote that poem before wolves returned to Wyoming. Maybe no one mourns wolves any more, though I'm not certain of that. One sure fact is the transformation of wild animals into players, big draws, stars in National Theme Parks. You can be guided to

Lamar Valley in Yellowstone to watch wolves and if you're very lucky you witness a pack harassing an elk.

In Denali National Park you put down a fee to enter a lottery for the annual quota of cars allowed to drive to Wonder Lake; winners then pay another fee and take to the road, hoping to encounter grizzlies, mountain sheep, wolves. Almost any park offers an amazing array of extracurricular opportunities: video viewing of wild animals; chasing coyotes and buffalo by snowmobile; dioramas equipped with real live rangers to tell you what's what; guided river floats; horseback riding led by a wrangler; fishing guide service; scenic turn-outs for photo ops ... the original National Parks core curriculum, being on your own, is pretty much not there. The entertainment theme is appearing in other public domains too, the lands of Multiple Use and Fee-Demo. This is a huge topic, "well worth the watching," as the turn-out signs say, in Wyoming, about Wyoming wildlife.

This summer I stopped at Fossil Butte Monument to marvel again at the grand display of fossils. As you enter, your gaze goes immediately to an intact skeleton of a huge reptile on a pale slab of rock. Further in, you find a treasure of fossils displayed and annotated in straight-forward, non-condescending language. There is even a view of the workshop where recently dug-up fossils are processed and identified and readied for study. This is a federal government achievement we can all be proud of. (In Wyoming take U.S 189, from either the north or the south, to U.S. 30, turn west a few miles). I asked one of the rangers why they didn't charge an entrance fee. He said that, so far, that didn't seem to be in the offing. He also allowed as how he didn't really think they ought to be doing that. I went away feeling that all was not yet lost. Hey, it's nice to quit on the up beat.

* "Who Are We?" is an expanded version of a short chapter in my book, *Seriously Insistent*, Packrat Books, 2003.



MARTIN MURIE died on January 28, 2012 but his words will always live on, here in The Zephyr.



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3. The RIAA
2. Congress
1. Wayne LaPierre

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