

THE 'NEW WEST/PROGRESSIVE' PARADOX

CONTINUED

that the Wilderness Society was putting out is what I think lies behind that. There's still a fair amount of merit to this concept." What would happen to the Escalante families who had lived in and near this town for the past century? He wasn't clear, but thought maybe they could be put to work cutting the exotic plant tamarisk, "if they were paid for it."

Diehl and Woodard's comments went unchallenged among progressive/greens, and though few of his peers were, or are, willing to be as candid, there is tacit support for the kind of future they proposed. Like Diehl and Woodard, it isn't just that many of them dislike ranching and mining and logging, they dislike the people who mined and ranched and logged.



In the last decade, efforts to transform Moab/Grand County into the kind of place Patrick Diehl could call home have met little or no resistance. And they have created some of the oddest alliances one can imagine to achieve their goals.

* When the proposed Cloudrock resort community first raised its ugly head, one could find little opposition from mainstream greens. The Sierra Club, while opposing the idea in general, made it clear that it had no intention of putting up a fight. They wrote to the developers, "We realize you are making efforts to ensure that Cloudrock meets standards above and beyond Grand County's...we hope you will be receptive to our concerns..."

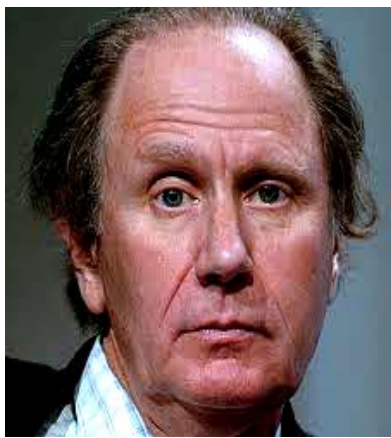
What kind of concerns did the Sierra Club have and what were their requests? Besides setting structures farther back from the rim of the canyon, spokesperson Jean Binyon made the following demands: "coloring roads and parking lots to match the surrounding soil...utilizing medium to darker earth-tones, and non-reflective materials

on all structures...outdoor lighting should be kept to a minimum..." All the requests were literally cosmetic in nature.

The Sierra Club also encouraged restrictions on Off Highway Vehicles..."Next to cows, (this is) the most damaging thing currently happening on the mesa. Please be explicit in not permitting their use on the mesa." Apparently, keeping out cows and OHVs was an acceptable trade-off for a massive multi-million dollar "wilderness" resort lodge and scores of condos and homes built on \$600,000 lots.

* In 2011, when the Occupy Wall Street movement dominated headlines, Moab green/progressives tried to connect wilderness designation with human rights and proudly marched in a well-attended Main Street parade. To cite Franklin Roosevelt again, "The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerated the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than the democratic state itself. That in its essence is fascism: ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or any controlling private power."

And yet the major Colorado Plateau green organizations who support the Red Rock Wilderness Bill—the Grand Canyon Trust (GCT) and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) are funded by some of the wealthiest capitalists and industrialists and financiers in the United States. This publication has documented the exploits of GCT's board member, venture capitalist David Bonderman, for more than a decade.



For more:
 'The Green Circle that Eats Its Own'
<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/2012/08/01/the-green-circle-that-eats-its-own-by-jim-stiles/>
 'Looking for Green heroes in a Coal-fired World'
<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/blog/2013/11/12/looking-for-green-heroes-in-a-coal-fired-world-jim-stiles/>
 'The Greening of Wilderness...pt 2'
<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/blog/2013/10/07/from-the-august-2008-zarchives-the-greening-of-wilderne-jim-stiles/>



Also consider GCT board member Louis Callister. Callister is a founder, former chair, and counsel to the law firm of Callister, Nebeker & McCullough in Salt Lake City. Their web site is open to the public and details their areas of expertise. Those 'details' should give any honest activist a sour stomach.

From its 'Energy, Natural Resources and Environmental' section: "The firm has represented developers of gas, biofuels, geothermal, waste coal, coal and wind projects. Our attorneys' expertise includes obtaining governmental approval and related permits for energy production projects as well as representation for continuing operations and compliance."

<http://www.cnmlaw.com/practice-areas/energy-natural-resource-utilities-environmental-law>

From its Labor and Employment section: "Emphasis is placed on preventative measures...However, even the best of employers are sometimes surprised by litigation filed by their employees. In such situations, the litiga-

tors of the Labor and Employment Group stand ready to assist with a vigorous defense against all employee claims." (Emphasis added)

<http://www.cnmlaw.com/practice-areas/labor-employment>

And so when young activists carried a large banner through the streets of Moab that read:

**CORPORATIONS GET YOUR OWN LAND.
THIS IS OUR LAND...**

...did any of them realize that the very same green groups claiming to be their allies were funded by the very people they were protesting against?

For more: Read 'An Honest Response to Bill Hedden, the Grand Canyon Trust & 'A Just and Healthy Future for the 100%'...by Doug Meyer & GCT Board Member biographies...

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/2012/06/01/an-honest-response-to-bill-hedden-the-grand-canyon-trust-a-just-and-healthy-future-for-the-100-by-doug-meyer/>



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* Progressives/Greens have attempted to frame their support for the tourist/amenities economy as part of a war against climate change. In the recent Grand County election, when progressives solidified their control of government, they argued that a proposal to join a coalition of rural counties to promote energy development could have dire consequences. Candidate Chris Baird argued that, "This won't just be a local impact, it will be a global impact; millions, if not billions of people the world over, will suffer if this Coalition's goals are achieved."

And Castle Valley Mayor Dave Erley, whose 2008 victory letter defended the amenities economy, worried about proposed tar sands proposals and new roads. In a message to fellow members of a tightly controlled, members-only online group called "Moab Area Progressive Network (MAPN), Erley lamented, "I am sorry but if climate change is real, then everything else is window-dressing conservation. What happened last night is potentially the biggest threat to Quality of Life since the uranium boom." All the while, he and others continued to support unbridled recreation and tourism expansion.

Neither Erley nor any of the other progressives wanted to discuss the impacts that their own preferred economic alternative was creating. Their silence speaks volumes about the total disconnect between "production" and "consumption." Tourism and recreation and second homes are not forms of clean, non-motorized recreation. Grand County boasted building permits in the first quarter of 2013 totalling \$16 million, but no one from the Progressives seemed concerned. Yet these kinds of tourist amenities are inextricably linked to energy extraction. One leads to the other. But environmentalists refuse to consider the unholy bond between them.

A few years ago, a United Nations on the impact of tourism on climate change noted that "tourism's contribution to global warming was estimated to contribute between 5% and 14% to the overall warming caused by human emissions of greenhouse gases."

And it will get worse. "By 2035, tourism's contribution to climate change may have grown considerably. A recent scenario...considers different emission pathways, including a 'business as usual' projection based on anticipated growth rates in tourist arrivals, as well as distances travelled by various means of transport....The development of emissions from tourism and their contribution to global warming is thus in stark contrast to the international community's climate change mitigation goals for the coming decades."

To read more: Moab & Fracking & Climate Change & Elevated River Bikeways...by Jim Stiles
<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/2012/10/01/moab-fracking-climate-change-elevated-river-bikeways-by-jim-stiles/>

So, while most environmentalists oppose extraction and speak endlessly of resource degradation and the dangers of climate change and fears that the end of life on this planet as we know it is near, they seek some comfort in deluding themselves with the myth that if we just build enough wind and solar farms and utilize reusable grocery bags that we can restore the life and vitality—and longevity—of the planet. Yes, we can keep on consuming as we always have. And recreating. And promoting the endless growth of things like tourism.

As Wendell Berry wrote (and I've re-quoted time and again...

"...this is what is wrong with the conservation movement. It has a clear conscience....To the conservation movement, it is only production that causes environmental degradation; the consumption that supports the production is rarely acknowledged to be at fault. The ideal of the run-of-the-mill conservationist is to impose restraints upon production without limiting consumption or burdening the consciences of consumers. "

There is a certain irony that, despite such strong opposition to the energy industry, Moabites must admit that the remarkable success of fracking and subsequent increased oil and gas production, which has led to cheaper gas prices and cheaper transportation costs, will be a boon to their local tourist industry.

And finally, while progressives embrace social justice causes and rally around popular liberal themes, one can't help but ask, "Where's the beef?"

A year before his death, Edward Abbey expressed his own dismay. He was often quoted for saying, "The only thing worse than a kneejerk liberal is a kneepad conservative." But in 1988 he devoted a page in his journal to "Yuppie Liberalism." In part he noted:

"They love Negroes, Mexicans and Indians (our official minorities), but prefer not to live near them or send their children to their schools...They support civil rights but seem unaware of or indifferent to the concentration of wealth and power in America (i.e. one percent of the popula-

tion controls thirty-four percent of the country's wealth, while ten percent controls sixty-eight percent) as a threat to democracy. (NOTE: Abbey wrote that 27 years ago)...They promote economic Growth while ignoring the effects of Growth upon our air, water, soil, wildlife, open space, wilderness, etc...Neo-racism, yupster liberalism, New Age liberalism."

Last year, the letters to the editor column in the local Times-Independent was overflowing with demands that a local popular canyon, called 'Negro Bill' Canyon be changed to something less offensive. And it's true that for years, the reprehensible N-word was used in place of "Negro." But that obscenity was corrected more than 50 years ago. Changing the name again became, briefly, Moab's latest cause celebre for its liberal constituents. But one would be hard pressed to find those same activists doing anything to resolve the outrageous wealth disparity that their amenities economy has brought to town.

In November, Moab/Grand County Progressives crushed the old guard, winning all of the seats in the county council it sought. Its first order of business was to rescind the previous councils's vote to join a coalition of southern Utah counties. Their goal, to coordinate and consolidate efforts to further develop the extraction industry, will continue without Grand County. It was one of the most toxic, ugly elections in anyone's recent memory and, when the dust cleared, Moab established itself, more firmly and finally than ever, as the latest permanent colony of the New West.

As one Moab veteran put it, rather depressingly, "We are past the point of no return in becoming the final version of a wealthy, crowded 'in-place' to be in the New West. The amenities economy at its best. Retire to Moab, live your lifelong old hippie dream of citizen activism. You don't need to work anymore, you made your nest egg elsewhere. Save the planet while conveniently ignoring your contribution to the problem."

SUNSET FOR 'OLD MOAB' & THE 'OLD WEST'?

"Did it ever occur to you that everything we done was a mistake? You and me did our jobs too well, Woodrow...hell, we killed off most of the people that made this country interestin' to begin with."

-----Augustus McCrae, 'Lonesome Dove'

This part is personal.

I came West from Kentucky to make a home in Utah when I was just out of school and still wet behind the ears. I dreamed of the day when I'd need to shave more than once a week. I was raised a Republican but had recently discovered 'Desert Solitaire' and had morphed into a fire-breathing Ed Abbey Groupie. I was pretty sure I knew everything that needed to be known about 'saving the West.' It had not yet occurred to this young activist that someday I'd feel obliged to try and save it from the likes of myself.

Moab was a quiet place in those days. It survived on mining, some ranching, the Atlas mill and tourism. Like other young environmentalists of the day, I went to the wilderness hearings and attended the public lands debates. Smug and all-knowing—not to mention young and stupid—I laughed at the oldtimers, the Moabites who had lived there for years and decades and beyond, who respected our ilk and warily viewed us as arrogant interlopers.

I remembered one town meeting about wilderness designation, when Moab's Joe Stocks rose to address the crowd. Joe came from one of Moab's oldest families, going back almost a century, and he was not happy to see the changes coming. And he could not understand backpackers.

Joe said, "I spent two years in Vietnam, carrying an 85 pound pack on my back. It was miserable. So now that I'm home, why on earth would I want to do that for fun? I love this country but I'm not walking my ass off to see it." We all chuckled, but even then, as otherwise condescending as I could be, I saw some logic in Joe's argument. Or maybe it was his honesty that I admired. The longer I lived in Utah, the more I came to respect the Moabites who had come before me, even if I didn't agree with them. I admired their candor. Their integrity. Even if I thought they were wrongheaded.

One day, maybe 25 years ago, I sat down at the counter at the Westerner Grill for lunch. I noticed that the man next to me was glaring at the side of my head—I could almost feel it. He squinted for a moment and growled, "Aren't you one of those damn hippies at that wilderness meeting last night who wants to lock everything up?"

I gulped. But recovered. "Well...yes I am. Aren't you one of those anti-wilderness guys who wants to bulldoze everything?"

The two questions hung uncomfortably in the air. Finally he said, "Ah...what the hell. What's Mae got on the special today? I'm Neldon Lemon," and we shook hands. We'd stay friends for decades until his death just last year. The last time I saw Neldon, a few years ago, we'd talked about doing an interview; he was a good friend of Charlie Steen and memories of those days are fast fading. I still regret that I didn't make a stronger effort to meet again.

And I regret that, in those early days, I didn't try harder to at least see both sides of the public lands debate that was playing out in Moab, and which continues even today. By the time I started The Zephyr, I had come to appreciate my 'Old Moab' friends, even when we disagreed. I wished that I could have seen this country as they did when they were boys and young men. I often tried to imagine the red rock through their eyes and their accounts. Maybe that was the problem—I wanted to have been there as a boy too. I wanted things to stay as they had been. Like them, the future scared me. And yet, I'd guess that most of the older Moabites then saw me as an interloper too. And, of course, they were right.

As the years passed and New Moabites became a more prominent force in southeast Utah, I realized that, though we shared similar concerns about the land, many of my new friends had little or no regard for the place's history or the people who came before them. Stories of Moab's past drew little attention. When I ran a three part series by Mark Steen about his father, Charlie Steen, called "My Old Man, the Uranium King," some of my new progressive friends questioned my sanity. "Why would you waste time and pages," one asked, "on a guy who mined uranium and tore up the land? And," he added, "they made bombs out of it."

Even trying to explain seemed pointless. But I persevered and found it more comforting to remember where Moab had been than where it was going. Nowadays, many of Moab's new residents think that Southeast Utah itself began on the day of their arrival.

Consequently, I've encountered some hostility from Moab's progressive leaders who believe I'm consorting with the enemy. It's been a strange experience to be the pariah among my old environmentalist pals; they seem unable to grasp that I can retain my own principles and still appreciate someone with a different perspective.

Recently County Councilman Chris Baird argued, in an email to me, that because, "probably you aren't from the west," I was trying to earn my "red-neck merit badge." He tried to make the argument that I was somehow usurping his authority as an expert on rural life in Utah and complained bitterly on a facebook page, "Try going to church for a few decades, learn to shoot a gun, and drive a motorcycle, go hunting," he wrote. "Or spend your entire life surrounded by your tea party family members. I'm sorry, but Jim Stiles doesn't have the right to dictate anything rural Utah to me." He concluded, "I just get upset that he tries to lecture me on my own turf, as if he knows this community better than I do, knows rural Utah better than I do. I know rural Utah in a way that he will never know it."

I've lived in Utah's Rural West for 30 plus years and Mr. Baird has been alive for 30 plus years, so when it comes to which of us has had more experience, it seems we should be able to call it a

draw.

The difference between Chris (and so many others like him) and me is that while I still find value in aspects of the rural life in Utah, he and his New West allies seem hell-bent on dismantling it. Baird may have endured a right-wing family and "going to church for a few decades," but I get the feeling it's not a lifestyle or culture he has much use for.

Fair enough, but he and his ilk don't seem to think the Rural Westerners have the right to exist anywhere. So, I don't understand why he would want to claim the role of spokesman for rural Utah when it's clear he despises every component of it

I'm far from being a 'tea party guy' myself and I don't know how many of my Old Moab friends embrace its core beliefs. What I do know is that, despite our political differences, I still like and respect many of the 'Old Moabites,' whose families have been in southeast Utah for decades and who eked out a hard living in an unforgiving landscape for a century, when nobody else wanted to live there at all. To recall Hedden, it was "a hard place to get rich, but it was a real good place to be poor."

They may not claim to have a zen experience when they see a canyon country sunset or wax poetic about the red rocks, but it doesn't mean they're indifferent to the beauty of the land they've been a part of for so long.

Besides, diversity--- having a different opinion and being able to express it—is a hallmark of progressive thought. Remember FDR? He once visited the Grand Canyon with his wife Eleanor. She thought it was "the most beautiful and majestic sight" she had ever seen, but he disagreed. "No, it looks dead," he said. "I like my green trees at Hyde Park better. They are alive and growing."

It just goes to show, everyone's entitled to their own opinion...even the most revered Liberal of the 20th Century.

WHAT'S NEXT...

I don't know what the future holds for the New West—for towns like Moab. For many of us, it feels like its fate is sealed. How long has it been since our most ardent environmentalists dared to speak out against this transmogrification of the Rural West—its 'Disneyfication'?

Recently, the town has finally been engaged in a debate about affordable housing in Moab/Grand County and the gross inequity of its wealth. There are some good hearts and souls still residing in my old home town and their passion and concerns are genuine. But the governing bodies have been slow to respond and, at this late date, I'm not sure what can be done to really change a process that was proposed and embraced and promoted for the past two decades. Perhaps tax breaks could be offered to low income families and a lower percentage rate on loans. Maybe the town can further reduce impact fees for them as well. Maybe they can require the larger businesses to provide employee housing.

But the cost of a starter home in Moab is around \$200,000 and, barring some unforeseen cataclysmic economic downturn, that won't change. And now, the same citizens who have supported the tourism economy enthusiastically embrace plans to establish Moab as a college town. And that will transform the community yet again.

'Transformation' is the word to remember. The "amenities economy" was not a device to help a community that was struggling to survive. It was a device to replace the community that was there—to transform it into something else entirely. To replace it. Like I've said before, "Moab is assimilated." Or pretty damn close.

A few years ago, as social media like facebook began to change the world in ways I could not have even imagined, I thought of one of my favorite poet/songwriters, Utah Phillips. His ballad, 'The Tellin' Takes Me Home' still haunts me. He wrote:

*"I'll sing about an emptiness the East has never known,
Where coyotes don't pay taxes and a man can live alone.
And you've got to walk forever just to find a telephone.
It's sad, but the tellin' takes me home."*

For me, the West was always about silence and space. Lots of it. About endless landscapes that stretch to infinity, and skies so vast and unbroken that they defy description, and moments of such incredible beauty and clarity that you thought you'd burst if you didn't share this extraordinary moment with someone right now.

And what made the West so special was that you couldn't.

The West was about remoteness and unimagined quiet and sometimes it made us crazy trying to decide if we loved it for its solitude or loathed it for its isolation. We really did have to walk forever to find a telephone. No one can truly know the West and love the West without also hating it. But it was the West's unforgiving nature that also made us feel stronger. We chose to live here with all its emptiness and hardship and unforgiving space. Somehow being able to survive the West, on its terms, gave us a leg up on the world.

Still the West overwhelmed us and filled us with unbridled joy and crushing loneliness, all at once. Like a bear hug from the Universe, we'd stand on the summit of a favorite peak or stretch out on our backs in the middle of a desert valley and for a moment we'd almost be giddy.

And then the silence would sweep over us and we'd search for some sign that we aren't as insignificant as we feel, and we couldn't. We'd look around and think—it's so...big. And suddenly our laughter would sound like the hollow giggles of a mad man let loose in a coliseum and we'd start to cry. Because this was as good and as bad as it gets.

And we'd feel so alone and we'd want to tell someone. We'd want to hear a voice. But we couldn't. Because this was The West—the big, hard, breathtaking, heartbreaking, unrelenting, unforgiving American West.

The West was more than the sum of its parts; now, for so many, its only value is its parts. Should we exploit its physical resources? Should we mine it and drill it and chop it? Or should we build strip malls and condos and curio shops? Should we run seismic trucks across the desert or ATVs and mountain bikes? And how many more amenities can make the West more attractive? Or profitable?

I always knew we couldn't save the west via elections or ordinances or pieces of legislation. But I thought there'd be more defenders who understood what it was they trying to save. One day, I came across this quotation, by the late Charles Bowden...

"Imagine the problem is not physical. Imagine the problem has never been physical, that it is not biodiversity, it is not the ozone layer, it is not the greenhouse effect, the whales, the old-growth forests, the loss of jobs, the crack in the ghetto, the abortions, the tongue in the mouth, the diseases talking everywhere as love goes on unconcerned. Imagine the problem is not some syndrome of our society that can be solved by commissions or laws or redistribution of what we call wealth. Imagine that it goes deeper, right to the core of what we call our civilization and that no one outside of ourselves can effect real change, that our civilization, our government are sick and that we are mentally ill and spiritually dead - that all our issues and crises are symptoms of this deeper sickness."

Bowden's right... It goes deeper.