

“YOU CAN’T GO WRONG WITH A DOG.”

EXCEPT FOR THOSE DAMN POMERANIANS, BECAUSE WHEN THEY GET UPSET, THEIR EYES POP OUT.

JIM STILES

“The kids, like all kids, loved the dog and I just want to say this, right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we’re going to keep the dog.”

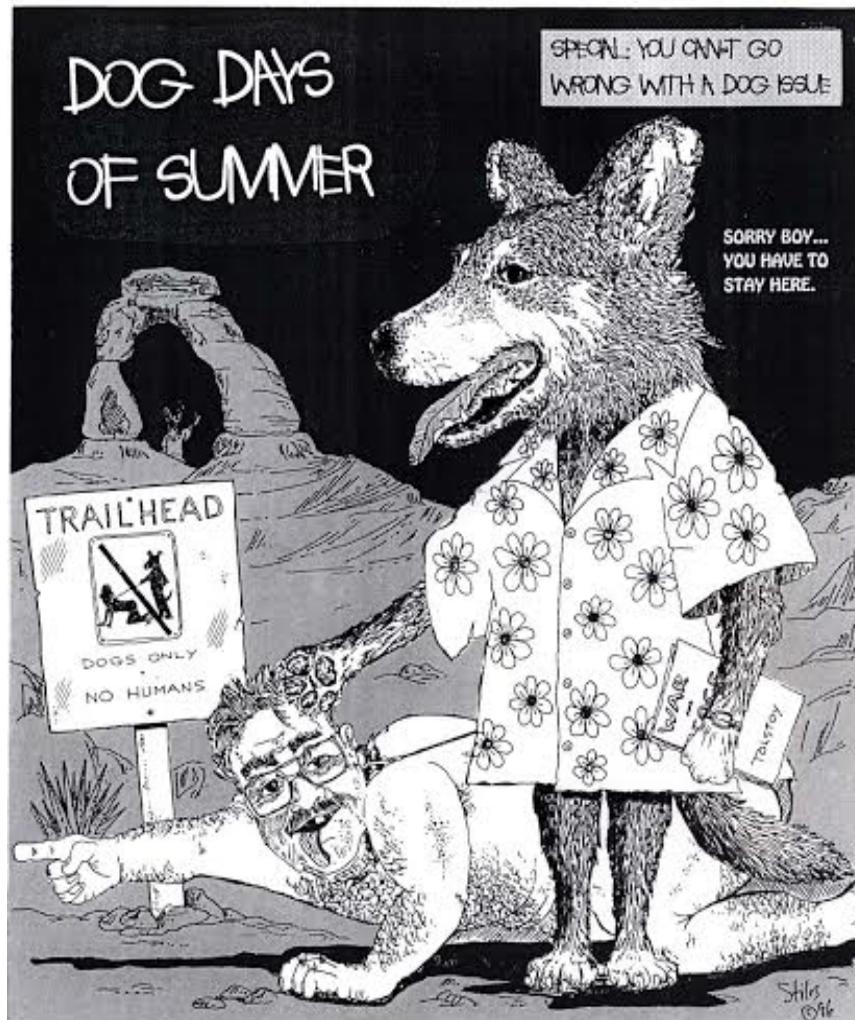
Richard M. Nixon

In the autumn of 1995, I made a gallant attempt to get arrested by the National Park Service during the show-down between President Clinton and the Congress which led to the big federal shutdown. I drove all over Arches National Park and could not find a ranger to place me in custody.

During the second shutdown in December, my good friend Dr. Geoffrey Woods arrived from Wales and knowing how much he loved Arches National Park, I decided to break the rules again. Jeff was accompanied by his 110 pound dog Bruce; the two of them are inseparable (although Jeff insists they’re “just good friends”), and I didn’t feel like arguing with him, so we loaded Bruce into the back of my Yuppie Scummobile and made our way illegally into the park via the Old Entrance Road.

But this time, I was luckier and I owe it all to Bruce. I am convinced that, had we not brought the dog along, we would have escaped unscathed yet again. But you see...rangers hate dogs. They can smell them. Even from a distance. It’s some kind of instinctive thing with those people. It’s weird.

We were exploring the area near the Delicate Arch Viewpoint. I wanted Dr. Woods to see all the good things the NPS had done for (and to) Arches since his last visit. After all, the new 1.5 mile road and associated viewpoints, bridges and parking lots only cost \$4 million. Meanwhile, Bruce was doing what dogs do best; he was frolicking and exhibiting the kind of unrestrained happiness that all of us long for...as happy as a pig in a wallow...that was Bruce. I believe he had just put his nose in an antelope ground squirrel hole and snorted a couple of times when a voice cracked the stillness of this lovely winter day.



article about my attempts to get arrested, the park people sort of expected me to try again.

But the dog. The DOG! That was going too damn far. Some of the other law enforcement rangers were furious that a real citation hadn’t been issued. With a FINE by golly! Even the normally mild-mannered, even-tempered Superintendent Noel Poe was steamed under the collar. “If it had been me that caught them,” he is alleged to have muttered to a friend of mine, “they wouldn’t have gotten off so easy.”

Maybe they should have just burned us at the stake and been done with it.

But seriously, how is it possible that an animal like this can cause such outrage? It’s time we took another look at dogs, the way they deserve to be looked at. In fact, the question is, who really deserves the free reign of our national parks? Dogs or humans? Going further, who deserves a free reign of Mother Earth herself? Who ultimately will treat the planet and us, for that matter, with more respect, compassion, and kindness than a dog?

“Let dogs delight to bark and bite, for God hath made them so.”

Isaac Watts, 1715

To be specific so as to make my point, let’s look at the Park Service’s irrational hatred of dogs. Their complaint is that dogs are not a part of the natural park environment. They disrupt wildlife and trample the vegetation. They sometimes bark at night. And they crap on the trail when their owners thoughtlessly (and illegally) allow their

dogs on the trail. That is the sum total of their grievance.

To each one of these complaints, I plead on behalf of my canine brothers and sisters: Guilty as charged...what’s your point?

I mean...seriously...is that the best you can do? It reminds me of the song ‘Alice’s Restaurant,’ when the sergeant asks Arlo if he’s “moral enough to join the

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It was Ranger Karen McKinley Jones in full combat gear and she’d caught us dead-to-rights. She was still more than a hundred yards away when she ordered us to return to the parking lot and we considered making a run for it, but then thought better of it. We met Karen face-to-face a few minutes later. Bruce came bounding out of a ravine ready to slobber all over Ranger Jones’ laden green pants, not to mention her standard issue, Browning 9 mm leather gun belt (complete with gun).

To her credit Ranger Jones was as tolerant and patient as we had the right to hope for. She was, in fact, downright pleasant (and besides I may, in the future, very well break park rules again, so there was nothing inappropriate about doing a little “sucking up” at this point). Karen issued me a “courtesy tag” for entering a “closed area,” in this case the entire park. And she gave reggie a verbal warning about the dog. We left humbly, promising that if we ever did return to the park while it was closed and let a dog run freely, we’d be more discreet about it.

In the days that followed, my Deep Throat inside sources told me there was quite an uproar over the incident (God, those rangers need some new hobbies). No one was particularly upset about the illegal entry; since the November

Army” after being convicted of throwing garbage in an undesignated area. Arlo replies, “You wanna know if I’m moral enough to join the Army, burn women and kids’ houses and villages after bein’ a litterbug...you gotta lotta damn gall.”

So here are the dogs, doing what comes naturally. After all, they’re a hell of a lot closer to the natural world than we are. But dogs don’t throw their beer cans out the window or carve their names on rocks. They don’t plow 4-wheel drive vehicles across cryptobiotic soils, they don’t whine about the cost of camping, and they don’t plug up the toilets in the campground at 1 AM and then complain to the ranger to fix it.

They didn’t ask anyone to pave the park with miles and miles of asphalt so they could see it quicker, nor did they demand a visitor center or comfort stations. And they sure as hell didn’t want to spend \$4 million dollars on a new 1.5 mile road to the Delicate Arch Viewpoint.

I sometimes overstate my case...Am I making my point here?

If not, then let me be more succinct...who’s more deserving of having their butts kicked out of Arches National Park: The Dogs? Or we sorry-ass humans? I think the choice is quite clear.

"Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in."

Mark Twain



The simple fact is, dogs are better than we could ever hope to be. And smarter too. I can personally attest to that fact. When I moved away to college, my parents replaced me with a twelve pound West-highland Terrier named...may the Great Hairy Thunderer forgive them...Duniwassel. I was unprepared for the shock when I went home unexpectedly one weekend and was viciously attacked by my furry successor. He went right for my ankles and I screamed, "For the love of God, take out its batteries!" as my mother rushed in from the den.

Ma scooped up the little rat dog and held him proudly for me to inspect. The

dog relaxed smugly in my mother's arms, secure in the notion that, in a few short weeks, he was held in higher esteem than their first born son, despite the fact that he never showed a consistent interest in house training himself and he had bad breath.

Duniwassel's superiority complex annoyed me and left me feeling inadequate at times. But it wasn't until I came to know my own dog, some years later, that I truly appreciated the genius of dogs.

Muckluk was a husky-shepherd mix and could have done anything in the world if she'd just had opposing thumbs. In her early days, I worried that she would eat herself to death before she ever reached her full potential---not just massive quantities of food, but hats, the front seat to my car (she ate the arm rests for hors d'oeuvres)...whatever was handy.

But with age came maturity and a wisdom that I had never observed in a dog before. It became apparent after a while that my dog was a freakin' genius.

One day we were exploring canyons in Arches near the Fiery Furnace. We came to a narrow, twisting slot canyon; Muck peered in to its dark and gloomy depths, sauntered over to an old juniper tree, stretched out in its shade and went to sleep. I commanded her to follow (she always thought that was pretty funny...me commanding her.), but she merely raised an eyebrow, shrugged apathetically, and rolled over on her side. I started up the canyon alone, only to discover it boxed out less than a hundred yards up the dry wash. When I returned, Muck rose wearily and moved on.

As time passed I learned to watch Muckluk's assessment of a canyon before I attempted it on my own, because somehow she knew...the damn dog knew it boxed out. How did she do that? She never told me



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And Muckluk was not impressed by celebrity. She managed to maintain her dignity even when I flushed mine down the toilet. Once, I met Robert Redford in a cafe' in Hanksville. All I could manage to say to the man was, "Next to the Wizard of Oz, Jeremiah Johnson was my favorite movie." Redford looked at me with utter disdain. He was about to walk away when he saw Muckluk.

"That's a beautiful dog you have," said Bob.

He leaned over to pat her on the head. Muckluk glanced over her shoulder at the great Redford, devastated him with her scornful look (much more devastating than the look he gave me) and walked casually into the shade of my car. I'm surprised she didn't pee on him, just for added effect.

While I admit, not all dogs are as intelligent as Muck was, they are still, from everything I've been able to observe over the years, a far superior species to the bi-pedal creatures that claim to be dogs' masters. Therefore I can only conclude that human attempts to restrict dogs and deny them freedoms taken for granted by us are nothing but sad examples of petty jealousy and a manifestation of our own insecurity.

And yet it continues. I don't mean to keep picking on my former employers the National Park Service, but they continue to provide such good examples of the kind of discrimination I'm talking about. Recently the NPS established a new rule that says park visitors cannot take pets in a car on any gravel, dirt, or 4-wheel drive road. Even if the dog stays in the car. Even if the owner only lets the dog out to take a leak. Even if it's on a leash. Even if the road is miles and miles away from the nearest hint of civilization.

It's okay for the vehicle to be there, burning gas, belching fumes, and making noise. It's okay for the driver and a load of human passengers to come along for the ride. They can jump out of the vehicle and howl like coyotes, but they can't bring their pup along who can howl a lot more effectively. You see what I mean?

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this dilemma. I've been trying to think of a way the Park Service could admit their mistakes and do it without losing face...they hate to do that. I think I have the answer.

Dogs are needed in national parks to maintain the balance of nature and allow the continued evolution of the many species that reside there.

Consider Arches National Park in its most pristine state, free from human intrusions. Deer and antelope and desert bighorn roam the canyons and valleys. Rodents of all kinds scurry in and out of shadows in the sandstone cracks and crevices. But predators wander the park as well---mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, foxes---all maintaining the natural balance of things.

But what happened? Predator populations have been decimated over the years. Trappers, subsidized by another agency of the federal government, Animal Damage Control, are known to trap right to the boundary of the park. A few years ago, a local trapper claimed to have trapped and killed four bobcats, fourteen kit foxes, and too many coyotes to count, along the northeast edge of Arches in just a few weeks. Some of them were trapped literally within sight of boundary signs.

Now consider the animals that these victims prey upon. Let's consider the cottontail rabbit, for example. The rabbit's natural defense against predators is speed. It can outrun its pursuer most of the time. That's why the species has survived. What if you removed the rabbit hunter from the environment? What would happen to the evolutionary process that gave the rabbit this defense mechanism?

Without coyotes and lions to chase rabbits, they'd have no need to be fast. They'd lose that edge. They'd start watching tv and eating snack foods. They'd become big, fat slob. Tourists would start mistaking rabbits for Rush Limbaugh. And there would be so damn many of them.

What's the solution? That's easy. Until we can restore predator populations to their natural levels, we must find a way to keep their prey in shape. And what better way to do that than to turn the dogs loose in national parks to harass the wildlife to their hearts' content? In fact, we can't even call it "harassment." We can feel good when we let dogs chase rabbits because we're helping nature by allowing dogs to serve as surrogate predators. It's a good thing.

Are there historical examples that could confirm this theory? Look at the Hereford cow. Isn't it possible that at one time the Hereford was a sleek, graceful, agile creature that could prance rings around a gazelle? Until, for unknown reasons, the predator that pursued them was eliminated?

And yet discrimination against dogs is rampant in contemporary society. Dogs are required to go to a separate doctor (although if the truth were known, I'd prefer to be examined by a vet), they're not allowed on airplanes...they have to fly freight, for cryin' out loud. FREIGHT! Even environmentalists hate dogs. I remember the Earth First! Rendezvous a few years ago. They banned dogs from the festivities. Here was a mob of remnant hippies...beer-swilling, bearded, hairy-legged eco-freaks, chanting obscene slogans and urinating on Ponderosa Pine trees, but dogs were not allowed because they weren't a part of "the natural scene." Indeed.

Something should be done on behalf of the dogs...something must be done.

And that's it. End of pro-dog diatribe. If none of this has moved you, if you still consider dogs to be nothing more than slobbering inconveniences, if you still regard yourselves the intellectual and moral superior to the lowly canine, then at least remember these words by the immortal Mark Twain when he observed:

"If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principle difference between a dog and a man."