

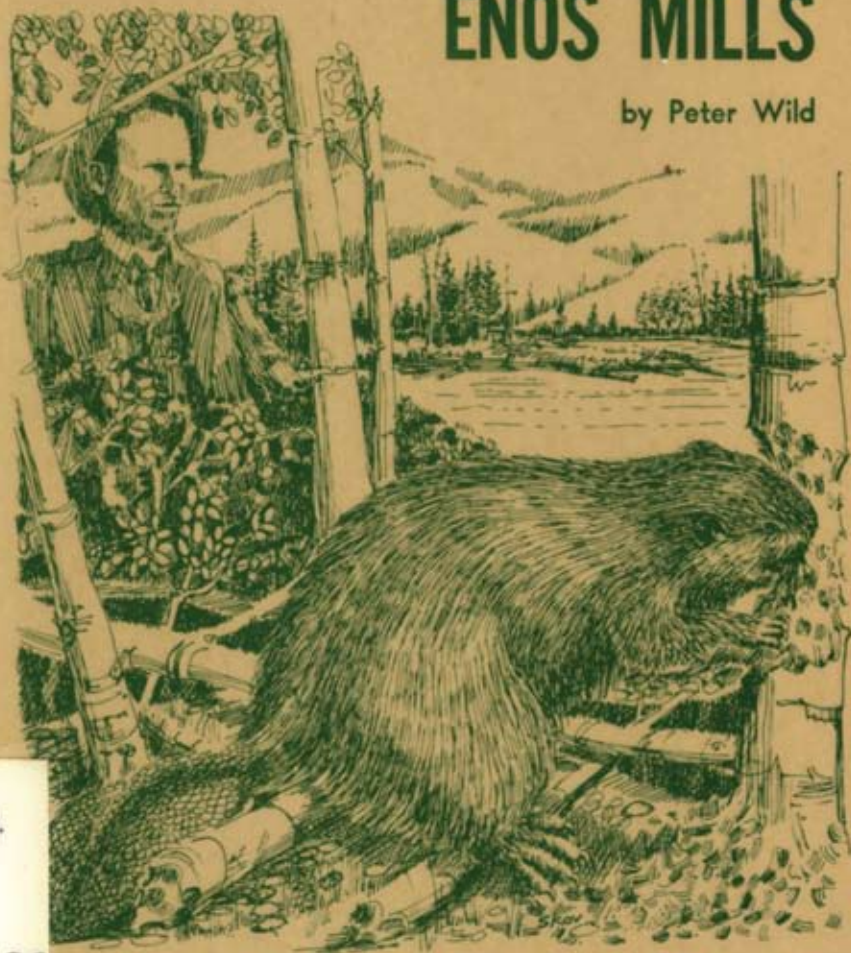
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WESTERN WRITERS SERIES

No. 36

ENOS MILLS

by Peter Wild



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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
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Boise State University Western Writers Series

Number 36

Enos Mills

By Peter Wild

University of Arizona

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Enos Mills

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I—INTRODUCTION

On August 4, 1913, a man took off his clothes, smoked a last cigarette, and then, casually waving to a group of reporters, slipped into the Maine woods. As Roderick Nash tells the event in *The American Environment* (Addison-Wesley, 1976, pp. 85-87), Joseph Knowles was out to prove he could live like "a primitive man for sixty days."

Two months later he returned to civilization, and Boston crowds cheered as he rode in a motorcade while wearing the skin of a bear that he claimed he had killed on his wilderness adventure. Nash goes on to point out that two or three generations earlier the public would have branded Knowles a madman. Then, struggle in the wilderness was too much of a daily reality for such a stunt to be unique. By Knowles's time, however, the frontier had long gone. His bizarre interlude struck a nostalgic chord with an increasingly industrialized nation longing to romanticize its past hardships with nature. Furthermore, it longed to believe, even as much of the once pristine continent lay in shambles around it, that the frontier life and its imagined virtues still existed.

Living two thousand miles away in the Rocky Mountains, Enos Mills never met Joseph Knowles. However, Mills's success as a writer and conservationist stemmed from his achievements "as a solitary and unarmed camper in the wilds of the continent" (*The Adventures of a Nature Guide*, p. ix), and they owed much to the psychology that rocketed Knowles to his

intense though short-lived fame. The youthful conservation movement took root in a culture ready for vicarious wilderness thrills. On a more thoughtful level, some people were awakening to the consequences of ravaged forests, disappearing wildlife, and polluted rivers—the legacy from three centuries of laissez-faire exploitation. Knowles was a showman, a passing phenomenon, not a reformer, but those wilderness travelers concerned about the country's long-term relationship with itself and the earth—Enos Mills, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and President Theodore Roosevelt—became the more substantial heroes that the progressive decades around the turn of the century demanded.

Students of American letters are quick to point to the unique literary contributions of a restless and muscular nation coming to grips with its own enthusiasm and a new continent. As to the large body of American writing that concerns the natural heritage, a popular magazine commenting on Mills's death offered an explanation for the difference between American and European approaches to nature:

In the wide range of its authors, Europe has produced nothing quite like Thoreau or Burroughs or Muir or Mills. The reason is apparent. These men had a kind of material which Europe has not known for many centuries—a country that was really new and wild, millions of acres of forests and fields in which the human footfall was all but a stranger, animals that had practically had no contact with the white man, flowers which no botanist had tricked out with Latin names. Here was something new to observe. . . . (“An Historian of Birds and Flowers and Animals,” *World's Work*, p. 252)

That fairly standard observation carries a great deal of truth, yet scholars have not emphasized another element in the turn

that Americans gave to the tradition of nature writing inherited from Europe. European appreciation of nature tended to be a gentlemanly pursuit, even as the Industrial Revolution ravaged the countryside and polluted the cities. There were, of course, voices of protest, but it was not until man's headlong exploitation of the natural world abruptly came up against the realities of denuded mountain ranges and eroded landscapes that writers melded a deep spiritual appreciation for nature with an equally passionate campaign to protect it. For a variety of social and historical reasons, that event occurred in the United States, particularly in the American West, and the result was a genre nearly religious in its intensity — if by the term “religious” one means those things of ultimate importance to a writer's life.

It is in such a context that we need to approach Enos Mills if we are to appreciate not only his literary contributions but the very limitations of personality and circumstances that molded them and made him unique as a Western writer and national reformer. Not one of his fifteen books belongs on the same shelf with such American classics as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, or Loren Eiseley's *The Immense Journey* — a fact no doubt responsible in part for the lack of critical attention given to Mills. In many ways he possessed a thoroughly popular mind. His writing suffers from the very features that appealed to the middle-class readers of his day: a tendency toward preachiness, the anthropomorphizing of wildlife into “Mr. Skunk” or “Mrs. Woodpecker,” repetition, and sentimentalization. Inspired by a chance encounter with the stentorian conservationist John Muir, youthful Mills wanted to become a writer and reformer, the John Muir of the Rockies — no mean feat for a self-taught wanderer. Unlike the intellectually powerful Muir, however, Mills was not often able to push his literary efforts for the cause of wild-

erness preservation beyond their immediate goals of entertainment and propaganda.

Still, to a remarkable degree he succeeded in his ambitions. "He, more than anyone else," says Robert Shankland in *Steve Mather of the National Parks* (p. 79), "was responsible for spreading national-park sentiment around the Rocky Mountains and for getting the rest of the country interested in seeing the region." Mills not only was able to touch what we may look upon as the somewhat naive literary sensibilities of our grandparents' generation, but also his pen was a major instrument in piquing the generation to action. Though his writing suffers a variety of shortcomings, his accomplishments in moving his readers to action outshine those of most writers.

There are other reasons for rescuing Enos Mills from neglect. The Coloradan occasionally bursts into heady passages. Added to that, though an unabashed moralizer, Mills frequently is a good storyteller, evoking the charm of pristine forests and the awesome sweeps of the Rockies while spinning mountain yarns with the wry humor, suspense, and wealth of sharp detail that lead us into pleasurable belief. Further, Mills celebrated the last wild remnants of the Rockies even as he realized that industrial society was taming the wilderness he loved. His perceptions of one world passing while the other emerges offer an unusual account to students of the American West, particularly students of the Rocky Mountain region.

With its espoused faith in the wisdom of the common man and in progress and hence change, democracy is at heart a radical system, at least when an activist such as Enos Mills takes its tenets at face value and decides to carry the theories into practice. Self-taught, crusty, and willing to go to the cross if necessary to defend his beliefs, Mills seems more homey and human, more typically Western, than such sophisticated observers of the wilderness as Clarence King and John Wesley Powell. A sense of Victorian propriety, however, was the means

which allowed this basically eccentric person to gain acceptance with a mass audience while he proposed a set of progressive ideas in science, education, esthetics, and conservation. Those ideas helped change the attitudes of a developing nation groping for new values.

II — MILLS AND THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

After traveling by wagon from Indiana to Iowa, Mills's pioneer parents eventually settled on a farm in southeastern Kansas, about twenty miles from Fort Scott. Enos Abijah Mills was born on April 22, 1870, one of seven children. An illness — most writers say a digestive disorder, though at least one mentions tuberculosis — made the boy frail and unsuited for the rigors of farm life. It also irked his father, who diagnosed his son's lack of enthusiasm at family meals as stubbornness. Both father and mother had followed dreams of gold, going West during the rush of 1859; but after a brief stint in the Colorado mountains they gave up visions of quick riches and returned to farm the prairie soil. Enos was intrigued by their tales of the wild Rockies and the supposedly healthful mountain climate that might offer him a therapeutic alternative to a sickly future in Kansas. At the age of fourteen he set "his short stride against Fate" (*Enos Mills of the Rockies*, p. 9) and walked for several days across the plains to the nearest railhead.

At Kansas City he took a job as a baker's helper to earn the price of a train ticket to Denver, Colorado. The boy spent free time reading. Like John Muir, who twenty-five years earlier also suffered his stern father's parting anger by leaving home for wilderness adventures, Mills already showed the characteristics that would set him apart as an adult. He believed in self-improvement. Caring little for creature comforts, he had faith in his ability to get by with odd jobs. Most of all, as with Muir, the fanatical Calvinism of his father would stay with him, transformed into the more worldly cause of saving wilderness.

At its best, the obsession was marked by a near religious idealism, and in Mills's case at its worst by a streak of self-righteousness.

Grace D. Phillips describes the boy's arrival in the Rockies:

They became his Arabian Nights. He was enthralled by the bright blue skies, the high peaks, the little beavers felling trees and building their homes, the friendly bluebirds and the primeval forests. The boy from Kansas stood awed among the tall and lovely firs and the rainbow of flowers What kinds of trees grew on the mountains, what animals lived there, and would they be friendly? He was small and frail and alone, and a head of bright curls made him seem the more childlike. People wondered at his industry and his daring. With no companion at night in the dark woods, was he not afraid? He answered readily, in his childhood English. "What is there to be afraid of? There are no human beings around." ("Guardian of the Rockies," *National Parks Magazine*, p. 9)

The few who have written about Mills tend to place him in such an idealized light. Yet, allowing for the romantic curl-icues, and taking into account the youth's recent escape from an unhappy home to the snowcapped Rockies, the sketch probably is not far from the mark. Young Mills decided to build a cabin in the mountains, and it is worth considering the place that became his permanent home and the inspiration for most of his writing.

Rising from the Front Range, Long's Peak is the highest point in the northern part of the state. Forests of conifers sweep down to "parks," natural meadows in the valleys. One of the most famous of these, Estes Park, lies eight miles from where the original cabin of the youthful Mills still stands among as-

pens, a quaint relic at the foot of Long's Peak, one still watched over by his daughter Edna.

Though there were thrills and hardships enough for the sickly Kansan, he was not a trailblazer into the region. In 1820 the men of a military expedition dubbed the mountain in honor of their leader, Colonel Stephen H. Long. Mountain men trapped beaver in the area during the 1840's and the hunter Joel Estes built the first settler's cabin there in 1860. In 1868 John Wesley Powell led a scramble up Long's Peak, the first to reach its 14,255-foot summit. As towns and cities took root in the plains to the east, the scenic fame of the area spread. By the time Enos Mills trudged into it, Estes Park and environs had a handful of permanent residents and boasted two hotels that catered to the increasing summer tourist trade. The forests teemed with deer, bear, and elk; the higher elevations remained largely unexplored. Mills arrived at a propitious time. A hinterland began at his doorstep and stretched westward for miles over the jagged spine of the continent, while only a day's travel to the east by stagecoach lay the settlements on the plains and beyond them to the south the city of Denver with the amenities of civilization.

The alpine attractions of the area drew its share of celebrities and eccentrics. The English author Isabella L. Bird praised the region in *A Lady's Life in the Rockies* (London: John Murray, 1879), and Frederick H. Chapin described it in his classic climbing guide, *Mountaineering in Colorado: The Peaks about Estes Park* (Boston: The Appalachian Mountain Club, 1889). The famous artist Albert Bierstadt honored Long's Peak with a painting that for years graced the rotunda of the nation's Capitol. Arriving titled and monied from England, Lord Dunraven tried to secure his own private hunting preserve of 14,000 choice acres, thus perpetrating a land squabble that divided the locals and kept them at each other's throats throughout the 1870's.

The area even had its own resident desperado, Rocky Mountain Jim, who lived in a filthy hut in Muggins Gulch. Jim had fought Indians and killed a white man or two for unkindly remarks, so he said. From one side, his profile resembled that of Shakespeare, but a bear had clawed the other half of his face. Jim wore his long hair in sixteen golden curls, swaggered about with whiskey flask and pistols protruding from his pockets, and was not above turning his one glinting eye on lady tourists, to whom he was wont to write doggerel. A hunter and trapper, Jim opposed Lord Dunraven's land grab. When, a few years before Enos Mills set foot in the Rockies, a drunken settler hired for the job by Dunraven shot Jim from ambush, the region lost its brightest human attraction. Mills would become his more civilized and sophisticated replacement as the resident renegade and hero, but one of far more than local reputation.

In the meantime, the teen-aged Mills envisioned little more than a quiet life in the mountains. His goals were to stake a homestead claim, earn a modest living, and improve his health and education while exploring the wilderness. For the next few years he followed a pattern of enjoying his cabin during the short summers and then during the winters earning a little cash doing odd jobs for ranches and hotels. By the time he was seventeen, his health and confidence had greatly improved. Eager for wider experiences and better wages, he worked for several winters in the Anaconda mine at Butte, Montana. Manually quick, ready to learn, personable, and aggressive, he eventually worked his way up to the well-paying job of mine engineer. Butte offered other advantages:

Though the main thought of those in Butte was the mineral wealth of the region, there were plenty of social and intellectual activities. There were good schools, churches, several newspapers, and a fine library. The last was to be a gold-mine to Enos He

had never before had access to a library, and it is probable that he hardly knew where to begin to explore in this wealth of fact, fiction, travel, science, philosophy, and poetry. It is certain that he read much of Burns and Shakespeare. Always fond of poetry, he familiarized himself with the best, and collected scrap-books of favorite quotations and selections that appealed to him in his wide reading. In his constant use of the library he came in contact with some of the members of the University Club. He was invited to their gatherings and began to aspire to literary efforts of his own. (*Enos Mills*, pp. 42-43)

He read not only literature but also the science of Humboldt, Huxley, and Darwin that spurred him to closer looks at the nature he loved.

Furthermore, Butte stirred Mills's political thoughts:

For Butte was an open forum for progressive thought and free speech. The red-hot political discussions turned Enos's attention to governmental history and political economy. He was already forming his opinions, as the following quotation in an old notebook would suggest: "If wealth was not so congested, if the masses received their due, they would be empowered and would purchase extensively. If all consumers purchased only enough to give themselves civilized comforts the quantity used for them would be enormous. Protectionists overlook this. Monopolies destroy the commerce, the comforts and virtues of the people." (*Enos Mills*, p. 51)

As the passage foreshadows, the negative effects of monopolies and big government on the country's individual freedoms and natural heritage would become main targets for Mills.

In 1889 a fire closed the copper mine. Temporarily out of work, the thrifty Mills dug into his savings and used his unexpected free time to travel. Strolling through San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, he struck up a conversation about the local flora with a stranger. The man happened to be John Muir, future founder of the Sierra Club. Fifty-one at the time, Muir was beginning to win national fame as a nature writer and the country's foremost wilderness defender.

But for the chance meeting, Mills might have spent the rest of his life in the pleasures of tramping from one 14,000-foot peak to the next. Not yet twenty, Mills held the charismatic Muir in awe. Through their subsequent talks on Mills's visits to Muir's orchards in nearby Martinez, the Sierra explorer worked something of a conversion on the Coloradan. As Kent Dannen puts it, "Muir gave direction to Mills's pleasant but rather aimless life and encouraged his desire to learn more about the way nature worked. And John Muir inspired Enos Mills to join in the crusade to save the wilderness in order that others could experience its joys and learn from it" ("Rocky Mountain Man," *Westways*, p. 29).

Yet restless Mills was not sure how to go about his new mission. Briefly he attended Heald's Business College in San Francisco, while continuing to nurture the friendship with Muir that lasted a lifetime. Over the next decade he traveled widely—to Alaska, to the Chicago's World Fair, to Europe—while returning periodically to his cabin under Long's Peak. The introduction to Muir represented an intellectual turning point in his life, but a less dramatic one in 1901 turned him in a more practical way to the cause that brought him fame and controversy. In that year, at the age of thirty-one and at last ready to settle down, he bought 160 acres adjoining his homestead property. After renovating the log buildings the former owner had hired out to guests, Mills opened Long's Peak Inn.

By the next decade nearly 50,000 visitors a year were ar-

iving in the Estes Park area to gawk at the peaks and trample mindlessly through the meadow flowers. Entrepreneurs were moving in to take advantage of the tourist trade and the high land values. Mills celebrated the economic future of the area. Speaking of yet another hotel going up in Estes Park, he said: "This large and adventurous investment showed great confidence in the future of Estes Park, required nerve, good business sense, and the capacity to see the recreation needs of the near future . . ." (*The Story of Estes Park and a Guide Book*, p. 93).

The boosterism does not represent a double standard on the part of the leading advocate of preserving the Rocky Mountains in their wild state. Mills wanted people, especially city people, to experience the outdoors. He reasoned that the Estes Park area should be developed wisely for the good of visitors, but he wanted surrounding forests and peaks left wild in order to insure their enjoyment. Yet as large-scale ranching, mining, and timber interests moved into the area, Mills began to witness the assault on his vision. Others shared his concern. In 1906 property owners banded together to resist the incursions by forming the Estes Park Protective and Improvement Association. Like most volunteer groups, its enthusiasm alternately raced and flagged; it would be Enos Mills who championed the vast Rocky Mountain National Park, created nine years later.

The business venture of Long's Peak Inn gave Mills the opportunity to put his ideas on conservation to work on a day-to-day basis. Visitors winding through the forest to his lodge wondered at signs posted along the way:

SPARE THE FLOWERS!

Those who pull flowers up by the roots will
be condemned by all worthy people

(*The Story of Estes Park*, p. 94)

The innkeeper had no piano and allowed no firearms or

pets—except his own dog, Scotch. A believer in a rigorous diet for both mind and body, he forbade his cook to use flour in pies and discouraged card playing and talk of movies. Instead, to divert them from their lowland ways, the evangelical host led guests night and day and rain or shine on tramps through the forests, stopping to point out the immeasurable benefits of beaver dams to mankind or the noble habits of big-horn sheep. He pulled, pushed, and cajoled flabby city folk to the top of Long's Peak, a mile above their rustic accommodations and a round trip of fourteen miles. When in 1906 the buildings burnt to the ground, Mills, ever the optimist, seized upon the disaster as a challenge to his ingenuity. Workmen hauled natural material down the slopes, and, doubting the sanity of their employer, constructed a new edifice built almost entirely of boulders and fire-killed trees. It featured a gigantic mass of roots in the middle of the living room, a spidery objet d'art for the guests' esthetic contemplation.

The regimen and bizarre surroundings startled some customers into early departures. On the other hand, though he gained something of a reputation as the eccentric of Estes Park, Mills reflected growing concerns on the national level. Even as it flexed its industrial and economic muscles, the country was evaluating its relationship to the environment it had abused. One premise of the thinking was closeness and harmony with nature, and the lodge manifested the new ethic. Mills boasted in a popular magazine that the hotel "did not frighten the peaks and scenery of the nearby mountains. . . . Both the lines and the color of this structure allowed it to stand in the little high mountain valley as though it were a cliff that had been shaped by the same slow acting elemental forces that had shaped the region" ("A Home of Forest Fire Logs," *Sunset Magazine*, p. 68). As a consequence, Mills was constantly pressed to expand his holdings in order to accommodate environmentally oriented tourists flocking to his unusual inn.

Conservation concerns were no mere passing fancy for the nation. President Theodore Roosevelt warned citizens that the country was doomed unless it mended its careless ways in using resources. In response, Congress created the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, and in 1916 it authorized a central administration for the national parks. Across the country, and especially in the West, millions of acres were being set aside as preserves to insure the prosperity of the nation and to protect its disappearing wild heritage. Nature study proliferated in the public schools. Citizens read books on conservation and crowded lecture halls to hear speakers on wildlife and forest preservation. Given his wilderness background and zeal, it was only logical for Enos Mills to attempt the step from local naturalist to nationwide publicist. In contrast to John Muir, who was so entranced with his Sierras that disciples often had to prod him into speaking and writing, Mills the middle-class achiever fairly glowed at the prospect of large audiences.

Taking Muir's advice, he had previously moved in this direction. In 1891 he gave a first talk on forestry in San Francisco, and during travels over the next few years he accepted invitations to speak at teachers' conventions and women's clubs about his experiences in the Rockies. Years of writing articles on local events for the *Denver Times and Republican* helped sharpen his journalistic skills. In 1902 a first magazine article appeared in *Outdoor Life*, soon to be followed by many others in *Harper's Weekly*, *Youth's Companion*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Catching the momentum, he next subsidized the publication of *The Story of Estes Park*. The brief history and guide for the area sold well, the first of many volumes published by commercial presses that supplemented his income. Soon his reputation as a wilderness advocate became such that President Theodore Roosevelt, casting about for publicists for his new conservation programs, hired Mills to travel around the country as Government Lecturer on Forestry. Mills held the job for two years.

By 1909 — writing, lecturing, and lobbying — Enos Mills approached middle age as a full-time conservationist enjoying the public limelight.

Overwork and an ironic accident would cut his life short, but for the next thirteen years he rushed around the lecture circuit and dashed to Washington now and then to shore up wilderness legislation. He stayed up late in his cabin, writing long after his guests had gone to bed, only to greet them in the morning with an energetic “Glad you’re living?” He gained such public notice that Horace Albright, Robert Marshall, and Stephen Mather welcomed him into the environmentalists’ inner circle, a group of idealistic but politically suave movers and shakers based in the nation’s capital. For all his contributions, Mills would give them reasons for regrets.

On the surface, at least, things went smoothly. Through keeping constant pressure on Congress, the enthusiastic group was able to transform the public’s new awareness into concrete results. Struggling against the monied exploiters, the band fostered a series of national parks and monuments, among them Glacier National Park, established in 1910. Uppermost in Mills’s mind, however, was the future of his own homeland. For six years he kept local residents mindful of the advantages of a government preserve in their area, while he campaigned for it through his books and helped urge the appropriate legislation through the Congressional machinery. In 1915 Mills glowed at the dedication of Rocky Mountain National Park, the august ceremony attended by the Governor of Colorado and a host of notables, but presided over by none other than Enos A. Mills himself.

After the victory, Mills did not abandon the conservation cause. Since President Grant had signed the bill setting aside Yellowstone National Park in 1872, the parks had grown on a piecemeal basis. In the face of increased visitation they sorely needed a central administration. Working with others, Mills

helped draft a parks bill, approved by Congress in 1916. The legislation created the nation's splendid parks system, but some results of the consolidation would cause a falling out between Mills and his old friends and help turn him into an embittered battler for dubious ends.

For all of that, the innkeeper kept turning out books about his often bizarre adventures in the wild Rockies, while he developed educational summer programs at his lodge. In 1918 he ended a bachelorhood of forty-eight years by marrying a homesteader who, like Mills himself, had found health and a new life in the mountains. Four years later, on one of his eastern lobbying forays, the man who called the wilderness "a wonderland" and "a safety zone" was injured in a New York subway collision. Soon after, he returned to his mountain home and tried to resume his old strenuous schedule. This time, however, the Rockies could not save him. Worn out from months of worry and overwork, and weakened by the accident, he contracted influenza and died on September 21, 1922, at the age of fifty-two.

III — MILLS'S WRITING

Mills's general approach was to publish articles in the popular magazines of the day and then later turn them into chapters of books. Sometimes he gathered pieces on particular subjects into volumes such as *In Beaver World*, *The Grizzly: Our Greatest Wild Animal*, and *The Story of Scotch*. At other times, the thematic arrangement of his material is less clear. Appropriate to a general and often youthful audience more interested in entertainment than artistic wholes, the method contributed to a pleasing informality. It also accounts for the repetition and lack of organization sometimes irritating to more demanding readers. Whatever the case, such a stream of articles poured from the cabin under Long's Peak that Mills's publishers were turning them into books years after his death.

His personal contact with John Muir was brief, but the effects were extensive and lasting. After meeting Muir in California, Mills patterned his life on Muir's. John Muir published articles and books, lobbied in Washington, gave speeches, ran a business, championed creation of a national park, especially loved trees, and danced the Highland fling in sub-zero weather to keep from freezing in the mountains. Following his lead, the younger Mills did likewise. The Coloradan's first commercial book, *Wild Life on the Rockies*, carried a dedication to his mentor. Muir wrote *Our National Parks* (Houghton Mifflin) in 1901; Mills *Your National Parks* in 1917. Mills mentioned Muir frequently in his books and quoted him freely. Mills openly, even eagerly, admitted the general debt.

Enos Mills especially followed the example of Muir by making outdoor experiences the main subject of his literary work. In keeping with the philosophy shared by both men, when out on his solitary wilderness tramps Mills traveled light. As will be seen, the method helped shape his experiences and hence his writing. A hatchet, compass, a supply of matches, and sometimes an elkskin sleeping bag made up his personal equipment. For food the mountaineer stuffed his pockets with raisins, which he shared with the wild animals. He filled much of the space in his small pack with gear for scientific observations: a thermometer, barometer, magnifying glass, and notebook. A pioneer photographer of the Rockies, he also carried a camera, a bulky item in those days, but one that produced dramatic illustrations for his books. In winter Mills might spend two weeks at a stretch in the outdoors, eating and sleeping little as he explored the frozen vastness of America's cordillera.

According to his own somewhat romanticized account:

I had many experiences, — amusing, dangerous and exciting. There was abundance of life and fun in the

work. On many an evening darkness captured me and compelled me to spend the night in the wilds without bedding, and often without food. During these nights I kept a camp-fire blazing until daylight released me. When the night was mild, I managed to sleep a little, — in installments, — rising from time to time to give wood to the eager fire. Sometimes a scarcity of wood kept me busy gathering it all night; and sometimes the night was so cold that I did not risk going to sleep. During these nights I watched my flaming fountain of fire brighten, fade, surge, and change, or shower its spray of sparks upon the surrounding snowflowers. Strange reveries I have had by these winter camp-fires. On a few occasions mountain lions interrupted my thoughts with their piercing, lonely cries; and more than once a reverie was pleasantly changed by the whisper of a chickadee in some near-by tree as a cold comrade snuggled up to it. Even during the worst of nights, when I thought of my lot at all, I considered it better than that of those who were sick in houses or asleep in the stuffy, deadly air of the slums. (*Wild Life*, pp. 5-6)

Such Spartan feats marked periods of exhilaration and discovery for once-sickly Mills. Yet, as the last sentence of the quotation indicates, the excursions had a purpose beyond producing personal insights and uncommon thrills to be recounted for readers. Since their arrival on the continent, Americans had feared wilderness. They considered technological society an antidote to the chaos of nature. In the events revealed through his writing, Mills was out to prove that wilderness, even in the harsh extremes of alpine winters, was a kindly place, physically and spiritually healthful, an inspiring antidote to the ills of an overcivilized nation. He saw his frugal method of traveling,

then, as an advantage, a means of living “intensely” with nature and of gaining rich contact with it. The purpose of Mills’s writing, therefore, was to entertain his mass audience by recounting his experiences and to re-educate it to the virtues of the wilds. As was the case with John Muir, the author hoped to move the public to support his own efforts at wilderness preservation.

Given Mills’s interests and limitations, in many ways the choice of Muir as a guide was a wise one. Yet the results of his studied emulation of the Sierra explorer were not always favorable. Notwithstanding his substantial contributions, the simple fact is that Mills did not possess the extraordinary intellectual powers and creative genius of a John Muir. Mills’s works, especially passages similar to those of Muir, suffer by comparison with those of the West’s foremost nature writer. At times the very scenes, and even the metaphors Mills uses to describe them, show the imitation.

Here is Muir in a treetop enjoying a wind storm:

Now my eye roved over the piny hills and dales as over fields of waving grain, and felt the light running in ripples and broad swelling undulations across the valleys from ridge to ridge, as the shining foliage was stirred by corresponding waves of air. Oftentimes these waves of reflected light would break up suddenly into a kind of beaten foam, and again, after chasing one another in regular order, they would seem to bend forward in concentric curves, and disappear on some hillside, like sea-waves on a shelving shore. The quantity of light reflected from the bent needles was so great as to make whole groves appear as if covered with snow, while the black shadows beneath the trees greatly enhanced the effect of the silvery splendor. (John Muir, *The Mountains of California*, Century Company, 1894, pp. 252-53)

In a similar event separated by forty years and nearly a thousand miles, Mills relates:

Around me the tall and crowded trees were swaying and bowing through a dignified dance. Invisible wind breakers produced sudden dips and vigorous sweeps that my old tree thought he enjoyed. Occasionally the tree-top swayed in one direction, then bowed in another. Once he nodded in succession toward all points of the compass, tracing a wavy circle perhaps twenty feet in diameter. Then he straightened up again to the perpendicular. The entire forest was suddenly tilted forward by a violent wind wave and without the least warning I was clinging to a leaning tower. Engelmann spruce wood is not celebrated for toughness so I quickly descended to earth. (*Adventures*, p. 79)

In each case, the writer has the advantage of an exciting and unusual situation, of interest in itself, regardless of literary niceties. Yet Mills carelessly mixes metaphors, introduces awkward personification, and prefers abstract words to concrete ones. He undercuts the potentially intense drama of the situation by the attempted humor of the last sentence. In contrast, Muir concentrates on developing the sea imagery, on turning the earth before his readers into a roiled mass. He directs the readers' eyes to the textural details that reflect the violence of the wind and the movement of the observer's tree. In short, one writer shows what is happening; the other merely tells about it.

In addition, Mills lacked the larger transcendental context that the other learned from steeping himself in the works of Emerson. Muir held the view that a higher moral and spiritual order can be perceived intuitively beyond the material world, and he used the vision to add power to his writing. Both men

loved trees and aimed their discourses on forests at winning public sympathy for larger conservation causes. But in the excerpts below, Muir clearly shows superior ability over Mills by persuading with a confident and impassioned prose that goes beyond moving the reader emotionally and demands a moral response:

Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; and if they could, they would still be destroyed—chased and hunted down as long as fun or a dollar could be got out of their bark hides. . . . It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees in these Western woods—trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty, waving and singing in the mighty forests of the Sierra. Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries since Christ's time—and long before that—God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools—only Uncle Sam can do that. (John Muir, *Our National Parks*, pp. 364-65)

A Mills passage using similar ideas pales by comparison:

Trees live from forty years to a few thousand years of age, and during their long life they stand in one place. They cannot travel, cannot run away from danger. In one place they face storm, wind, and drouth. Every tree has an adventurous life. It is a home for the birds, it shelters plants, and gives shade and beauty to the world. It may bear fruit, it may become a flag pole or a ship mast and sail around the world. (*Adventures*, p. 251)

Mills was at his best when he put aside memories of Muir's more stirring passages, accepted his own limitations, and con-

centrated on straightforward accounts of his observations and adventures. These often were rich and suspenseful enough in their own right to carry his prose. For instance, he tells of struggling down a snowy peak after going blind from snow glare (*Adventures*, pp. 3-19). From the increasing cold on his face, the mountaineer knows night is falling. "But darkness didn't matter," he reminds us matter-of-factly, "my light had failed at noon." The writer misses the opportunity at that advantageous point—as would not have been the case with Thoreau or Eiseley—for a metaphysical discourse on life and death. And fortunate it is for Mills, who might well have bungled the attempt. An avalanche sweeps the blind man away, but he saves his frozen hands by warming them on the carcass of a mountain sheep arriving at his feet with the onrush of snow and boulders. By this time we have little interest in metaphysics; we want to know what happens as we stumble down the cliffs in zero weather with the groping man, thrusting our hands into the snow to feel for trail blazes on the tree trunks—until at last we smell the distant smoke of a settler's cabin and follow it to safety.

If any one quality characterizes Mills's writings, it is enthusiasm. Due to their anecdotal nature, the first person is ever present, buoyantly leading the reader from one experience to the next. Yet throughout, whether catching a ride on an avalanche or tracking a grizzly bear while armed only with a camera, Mills focuses on the things around the author, not on the writer himself. Except for a personal reference now and then, the author remains a genial but somewhat detached observer, the eyes for his audience. It is as if Mills's world consisted almost entirely of pleasantness, as if all he needed to do was to reveal the wonders of the natural world around him and appeal to the latent wisdom and goodwill of his public—and victory for protecting wild lands would fall into place. The cheerful guise stemmed from Mills's basic optimism and his

overdeveloped sense of propriety. Mills did not want to discourage the public's growing enthusiasm for wilderness protection by revealing the frequently unpleasant and complex details of his personal situation and of the expanding conservation movement. But what Mills omitted from his books was a significant aspect of his life, one that helped shape his writing. This omission requires some explanation.

Though often personable and enthusiastic, Mills was, at heart, something of a curmudgeon. An openness to intellectual challenges contrasted with an inflexible emotional stance that made him quick to take offense and left him little room for compromise. Whatever he had shed of his father's Calvinism, he retained a system of absolute values. When transgressed by others, he felt a self-righteous anger rather than a politic appreciation for complexity. Added to this, he had spent most of his life traveling alone and educating himself in solitude — in short in doing what he pleased. He was a self-made man, but one from a rigid mold. Robert Shankland sums up his feisty qualities:

The two sorest ulcers on his psyche were the Forest Service and his brother Joe. Joe lived a few miles from Enos in Rocky Mountain; both ran inns, made pictures, delivered lectures, and wrote books, though without consultation. A wintry silence lay between them. Enos, the better-known of the two (in fact, a kind of celebrity), loathed the Forest Service possibly even more than he loathed Joe — he viewed it as a towering menace to conservation — and for about five years he presented himself to Mather as an ally, wishing, in the Park Service versus Forest Service differences, to reinforce the Park Service. When he tried to fan up the interbureau rivalry into something even hotter, however, Mather [head of the Park Service] balked, and all concord finally perished in a dispute

over the Rocky Mountain concessions. . . . The upshot was that Mather found himself down at the far end of the target range with Joe and the Forest Service. (*Steve Mather*, pp. 186-87)

In his colorful passage, Shankland is too harsh on Mills, for he ignores the lonely trials the mountaineer suffered in making Rocky Mountain National Park a reality. Not wishing to lose its holdings to the Park Service, the utilitarian Forest Service resisted efforts for preserving Mills's area. Its officers stirred up opposition to the park among local residents. Furthermore, the agency allowed overgrazing of the land, thus diminishing its future value as a park. Mills's enemies cut waterlines to his lodge and harrassed his guests by driving cattle through his premises at night. When Mills finally breathed a sigh of relief after the park's dedication, the Park Service itself seemed to betray him and other innkeepers. The agency appointed a concessionaire to run automobile tours through the new park. Armed rangers demanded a substantial entrance fee from drivers of all other vehicles, whether private or business, for the privilege of traveling where once all, including Mills's guests, had gone freely. Worse, the Park Service declared Mills's guiding service to be illegal.

The situation represented bureaucratic shortsightedness on the part of an inexperienced agency rather than purposeful antagonism, but, as with other injustices Mills encountered, he took it as a personal affront. More than this, as a staunch believer in free enterprise, he interpreted the unfair dealings as an insidious attack on the economic system underlying the nation's freedoms.

It was not, however, Mills's justifiable sense of wrong at such setbacks but his methods of combatting them that alienated fellow conservationists. Stephen Mather received a telegram from a friend concerned about Mills's behind-the-scenes anti-

government campaign: "Des Moines Capital has violent editorial inspired by Mills and full of half-truths in which monopoly octopus is attacked and you are dubbed king of an empire who is held in power by the barons of monopoly. I know you consider Mills's vaporings unworthy of notice but . . . suggest this inhospitable stab in the back should be answered" (*Steve Mather*, p. 186).

At the time, conservationists had problems of far greater importance to worry about than the tempest in the teapot of automobile concessions. Yet, wedded to one locale, Mills failed to see the issue in larger perspective. In the words of a sympathetic friend who wrote the introduction for a posthumous Mills book, for years the mountaineer of "princely ego," "little peculiarities," and "a high-strung nervous system" had thrown "all his intense energy, all his money, all his fierce craving for self-expression, all his genius and all his sense of the fitting and proper" into developing his homestead and inn (*Bird Memories of the Rockies*, p. xvii). Defending them according to his own lights, Mills spent much time, money, and energy during the last decade of his life jousting at minor windmills. The period corresponded to his most prolific years of writing. Mills fumed about the situation to newspapermen, but as far as his books were concerned, he tended to overcompensate. His studied efforts at avoiding unpleasantness in the volumes make them even more blithe than would have been the case if he had discussed such controversies reasonably in them.

The stance forced him into clichés and optimistic generalizations. He lauds fellow settlers:

Those who live pioneer lives are generally the most fortunate of people. They suffer from no dull existence. They are aware at all times, living in every atom of their being. Each house is full of progressive thought. Their lives are full of new occasions that

call for actions that are accompanied with the explorer's charm — actions that make their lives strong, sincere and sweet. . . . To build a log cabin on the fresh wild mountain slope, and by its frontier fireplace explore the fairyland of enchanting thought, is indeed a blessing. (*The Story of Estes Park*, p. 68)

The panegyric may be ascribed to Mills's genuine optimism for the future and to his tendency to idealize life in the Rocky Mountains. However, Mills knew firsthand, though he usually chose not to admit it in his books, that life in the mountains could be hard and that his neighbors could be as narrow or as generous as humans anywhere. Some of the people full of "progressive thought" were the same ones who were cutting his waterlines, carelessly setting forest fires, overgrazing the slopes of Long's Peak, and generally ravaging the wilderness he was trying to save.

Of course, his writing concentrates on experiences in mountainous hinterlands, where he met few people, though on occasion he would come down from the peaks to spend a night with a settler. Despite his solitary habits, Mills generally liked people, at least in small doses. After spending days alone, he was ready for some human contact: "To get warm was a palpable excuse. I was not cold; I had no need to stop; I simply wanted to meet the people . . ." (*Wild Life*, p. 160). For their part, his isolated hosts also longed for conversation, and his stays were brief enough not to go beyond pleasantries and friendly exchanges of news. Mills, for example, comes across one wilderness family whose children keep pet snakes, rats, and turtles. He goes on for pages describing the antics of a wild quail they had nursed back to health from an injury. The portrait of the family among its animals is charming but is also stereotyped and full of platitudes.

Every now and then an acid comment breaks through. He

chastizes the boy who thoughtlessly shot two bluebirds nesting over his cabin door and condemns the prospector who dynamited a beaver house. Still, his judgments remain fairly mild, in keeping with what he imagines at least is the good taste and propriety of the day. Often, when he mentions them at all, he veils unpleasant encounters with humor. Poking about the Rockies with magnifying glass and camera, his face blackened against snow glare, and his clothes tattered with wear, Mills struck an unusual figure. He aroused the distrust of some ranchers and miners whose occupations were more ordinary than his own. Once he climbed into a tree to investigate a disease spreading through its branches. A passing stockman stopped to throw a stick at him and demanded to know, "Which one of the monkey families are you a member of, anyway?" (*Adventures*, pp. 105-06). On the rough-and-tumble frontier the suspicion could go beyond joshing. On another occasion he is down on hands and knees inspecting a plant in an area where gold has been recently discovered. Three unsavory prospectors apprehend him: "They desired to know where my roll of blankets was. I told them I did not carry one. Then they wanted to know what kind of a gun I used. To find that I was unarmed was too much for them. One asked me where I came from. He was promptly answered by one of the others who expressed the conviction that I was from an insane asylum" (*Adventures*, p. 109). In reality, they suspect that Mills has made a strike and is trying to mislead them. The three follow him through the woods for hours. At length they try to rough him up, but Mills keeps a cool head and escapes through quick talking, to continue home "unhampered by further misunderstanding of the scientific spirit. . . ." He has made light of what was a dangerous situation, but the incident serves to illustrate one of his main points, that humans, not animals, make the wilderness unsafe.

The humor is not always a disguise, an approach to a moral,

or an oblique way of handling disagreeable meetings. Foremost, the author wanted to entertain, and he showed a healthy capacity for poking fun at himself, for telling a joke for its own sake. The traveler goes into a miner's cabin to take shelter from a storm. As he stands in the doorway with the prospector idly watching the flashes, a lightning blast explodes in a nearby tree, pelting them with chunks and splinters: "To camouflage my feeling, I turned to Sullivan and in a matter-of-fact manner asked, 'Why is it that lightning never strikes twice in the same place?' Like lightning came the reply, 'It don't need to'" (*Adventures*, p. 122).

In the best tradition of Western writers, he inserts a tall tale once in a while. In doing this, he shows flexibility by breaking the pace of his lectures on the various trees of the Rockies and his exhortations to save them through support of national parks. Among the best of these is the chapter "Besieged by Bears" (*Wild Life*, pp. 217-29). Two prospectors have packed in a couple of sugar-cured hams from town to supplement their meager diet. Attracted by the aroma, three bears attack their cabin. They pound on the door, try to squeeze through a window, and thrust their paws through a hole they have dug in the earth roof. Inside, the terrified miners dash about, tripping over each other as they madly shore up their defenses. It is a hilarious and preposterous scene, reminiscent of a slapstick vignette from the silent movies.

Ordinarily, Mills goes to great lengths to convince his readers that animals need not be feared, but here it is obvious he is pulling his readers' legs and chuckling behind a ruse. He absolves himself of any charge of fabrication by stating that he is repeating the "exciting and amusing story" two prospectors told him while passing the time one night after supper.

Elsewhere, however, the distinction between fact and fiction is not as clear. Animals, both wild and domestic, felt at ease with Mills. While out on treks he frequently tempted squirrels

and birds to take raisins from his hand. Once he was able to stroke a shy bighorn sheep. This ability is verified by photographs and the accounts of others. On one occasion, though, Mills tells us that his rented horse seemed fascinated by his picture taking. To satisfy the mare's curiosity, he invites her to have a closer look while he explains the workings of his camera. The horse paws the ground with a forefoot in appreciation for the lesson.

We might let such an incident pass as the fancy of a lonely outdoorsman in need of conversation. Yet in other cases he not only gets "near the danger zone," as the reviewer George Gladden put it ("Some New Outdoor Books," *The Bookman*, p. 545), but he carries the anthropomorphism to extremes that insult his readers' intelligence. Lectures against cruelty to animals come couched in improbable stories about the heroic exploits of dogs and horses. For chapter after chapter Mills prattles on about "Mother Nature" and "Mrs. Squirrel." He delivers homilies on "Dr. Woodpecker, Tree-Surgeon" (*The Spell of the Rockies*, pp. 193-204), ascribing to the bird the conscious purpose of protecting forests from insects. Trees spread their seeds "by merrily strewing the air and the earth with their fruits" (*The Spell*, p. 303). Further, he slips into bizarre bathos by having a mud flat deliver an emotional sermonette on erosion. Mills was using a homey vehicle to combat misconceptions in his audience. Yet, as appealing as he imagined it to be, the method substituted one set of fallacies for another. It tended to subvert the scientific understanding of nature which he wished to urge upon his readers.

Decorative flourishes aside, Mills's science had considerable substance. Though self-educated, he read widely and assimilated deeply. He was a meticulous observer, patient enough to spend days dissecting a fallen tree, then making minute inspections of the pieces with a magnifying glass. Prone to drawing up lists and charts in his notebooks, he went to the trouble, for instance, of

counting 24,271 trees on an acre of lodgepole pines under study. Yet the compulsion was not busyness for its own sake. He could see, and explain clearly to his readers, how details fit into the complex workings of an ecosystem. A job he held for several seasons as a Snow Observer not only paid him for rambles into uninvestigated regions, but it no doubt helped sharpen his ability to recognize seemingly unrelated details as parts of a larger pattern. In an effort to predict summer water available for agriculture, for three winters the Colorado State Irrigation Department sent him across the length and breadth of the Rockies to measure the snowfall, make weather observations, and study the relationships of forest conditions to stream flow.

If only today the public is beginning to appreciate the interdependence of natural systems and the fragile web of life in which we all live, such a vision seventy years ago was all the more rare. Then, much of the public clung to the frontier myth of uncontrolled exploitation justified by inexhaustible resources. Each year, even as an expanding number of conservationists protested, the nation leveled millions of acres with the axe and then puzzled at devastating spring floods. Fearing grizzly bears, wolves, and coyotes, it waged a holy war to exterminate them. Along with other conservationists of the time, Enos Mills saw his job as one of replacing the ignorance with appreciation of nature as an organic and beneficial whole on which society depends for its very survival.

In doing this, for the most part he was a popularizer rather than an original thinker. He gave wide currency to important ideas of the naturalist John Muir, of the forester Gifford Pinchot, and of lesser-known scientists he read in journals hauled up over the stage road from Denver. No gullible disciple or dreamy theorizer, he tested the hypotheses in the surrounding wilderness. If one puts aside his anthropomorphizing, this aspect of his writing often has the ring of authenticity. Furthermore, as is true of other American nature writers, his

books delight and instruct not only because the author knew his material firsthand but also because he saw wild canyons, glaciers, and eagles with the scientist's insatiable eye for detail.

At times he oversimplified, as the popularizer must. At others, pursuing a whole spectrum of environmental questions, he spread himself too thin, always a danger for the generalist. Despite his efforts, he never grasped some of the workings of nature. Alternately preaching against forest fires and speculating on their benefits, for instance, he could not decide whether fires were a blessing or a scourge. He failed to conclude, as foresters only today are beginning to realize, that forest fires play a necessary role in pristine woodlands, that they are most destructive in areas where improper lumbering practices have left behind an abundance of fuel. And, a firm believer once he made up his mind, at times he was plainly wrong. Mills guffawed at reports that grizzly bears climbed trees. More significantly, he ignored the fact that deer and mountain lions had thrived together for thousands of generations. He concluded that lions are "often rapacious, cruel, sneaking, bloodthirsty, and cowardly, and it may be better for other wild folk if they are exterminated . . ." (*The Rocky Mountain Wonderland*, p. 208). The sentiment contrasted with his understanding of the beneficial relationships between predator and prey of other species. The prejudice against lions, however, was trumpeted by the influential conservationist President Theodore Roosevelt. And it was so ingrained in the culture that at the time Aldo Leopold, the foremost authority on game management, shared it.

Considered in the wide sweep of his writing, such errors mark only minor factual blemishes. Whether it was in asserting that lightning may indeed strike twice in one place or in demolishing the fanciful notion that bighorn sheep dive head-first over precipices, Mills delighted in countering superstitions with facts. This "debunking," as he called it, could take on

the somewhat jeering tone of the outdoors cognoscente, though for the most part the effect is more one of good-natured teaching than of ridicule. Whatever the case, the broad views he urged on his readers to replace their misconceptions about nature were partly borrowed but were also partly original. In several areas they form substantial contributions to the science of wildlife.

Twenty-seven years of observation by Mills lay behind *In Beaver World* (1913), the first important work on the animal since an 1865 study by Lewis H. Morgan. The sympathetic, thorough, and largely straightforward history of a beaver colony on the slopes of Long's Peak documents not only the day-to-day charm of beaver life but the creature's usefulness to man in protecting forest and water resources. Mills alerted readers to the wildlife crisis, using as an illustration the beaver slaughter by white men. He noted that human mindlessness might bring the extermination of an animal important to the stability of watersheds. The book concludes with a dictum of typical Millsian finality: "A live beaver is more valuable to mankind than a dead one." But just before quitting, the author follows it with a note of humor and hope: "The beaver is the Abou-ben-Adhem of the wild. May his tribe increase!" (*In Beaver World*, pp. 220-01).

Making a case for protecting America's largest rodent was only one problem, however. Beaver hats had long ago gone out of style, few people cared for the pungent meat of the harmless creature, and fewer wished to have stuffed beaver crouched on their mantels. The grizzly bear represented an entirely different matter. Most Westerners feared the solitary beast, which weighs up to a thousand pounds and which can kill a hunter with one swipe of his paw. Ranchers viewed the grizzly as an enemy that slaughtered their cattle and sheep for the malicious pleasures of bloodletting. At every opportunity they shot the bears, and the federal government joined

the frenetic cause by sending official hunters into the field wherever the marauder was reported. To suggest any other treatment for *Ursus horribilis* verged on the unpatriotic, if not on the deranged.

This was just the kind of bugaboo that Enos Mills relished in the attack. In *The Grizzly* (1919), he set out to correct the mistaken attitudes that were based on fear rather than on understanding. Probably no one knew more about the grizzly than did Mills. For years, unarmed and alone, he had followed the huge bears, observing their habits and adding to his collection of photographs. Not once had they attacked him. In fact, he assured his readers, they are among the most playful of creatures, enjoying nothing more than to sit on their haunches and like children blithely slide down snowy slopes. As to their alleged ferocity and depredations, grizzlies will defend themselves when wounded or cornered. And, though they might occasionally vary their diet with fresh beef or mutton, for the most part they are "walking mouse-traps" and "destroyers of pests" (*The Grizzly*, p. 275), worthy of people's thanks, not their bile.

To illustrate the moral, Mills recounted the experience of one wrathful settler: "A grizzly came down onto a rancher's meadow in southern Colorado and 'rooted it up like a hog.' The owner was up in arms and one morning killed the invader. Curious as to what the grizzly could have been eating he sent for a local butcher. His 'insides' showed, among other things, the remains of thirty-four mice, one rat, and one rabbit" (*The Grizzly*, p. 275). Yet, in addition to the unacknowledged agricultural benefits, Mills enthusiastically continued, the grizzly is the most intelligent, independent, generally superior and fascinating creature in North America: ". . . I consider him in most respects the greatest animal on the North American continent, if not in the world. He excels in mental development and physical prowess, and he possesses the rare quality of loyalty.

He is full of curiosity and is a born adventurer. The species impresses one with its superiority, and the individuality of each grizzly ever stands out" (*The Grizzly*, p. ix).

Mills further pressed the point for preservation. Anyone presuming to understand the outdoors should turn to this bear as a key to nature study. Therefore, the noble animal should be reintroduced to areas where it had been eliminated — a seemingly madcap suggestion for the times, but one, we should note, that is being considered today by naturalists. Assuming that he had swayed the reader by that point, Mills concludes the book with the proposal that the grizzly might replace the eagle as the nation's emblem. Ranchers in the Estes Park area undoubtedly eyed Mills with additional suspicion after publication of the book.

However, the mountaineer did not limit his campaign to winning public sympathy for the natural heritage on a species-by-species basis. Throughout his books he showed details as part of a complex fabric. By this means, he helped popularize concepts that were then fairly new to science but that now enjoy wide public understanding. Often he did this by telling how he put his theoretical knowledge to use. Temporarily blinded by snow glare, in the incident just related, he discovers how to regain his bearings and, by way of recounting a story full of suspense, he illustrates lessons in life zones and plant distribution:

For points of the compass I appealed to the trees, hoping through my knowledge of woodcraft to orient myself. In the study of tree distribution I had learned that the altitude might often be approximated and the points of the compass determined by noting the characteristic kinds of trees. Cañons of east and west trend in this locality carried mostly limber pines on the wall that faces south and mostly Engelmann spruces on the wall that faces north. . . . Turning about I de-

scended this slope and ascended the opposite one. The trees on this were mostly limber pines. Hurrah! Limber pines are abundant only on southern slopes. With limber pines on my left and Engelmann spruces on my right, I was now satisfied that I was travelling eastward and must be on the eastern side of the range. (*Adventures*, p. 8)

Around the turn of the century, the infant conservation movement tended to be a narrow cause, focussing on single issues. Not yet grasping the interdependence of life in ecosystems, proponents concentrated on campaigns for preserving forests or deer, for instance, but often they did not see the critical relationships between the two. Because of its immediate economic importance, forest preservation was among the most hotly pressed of the issues. To a certain extent Mills shared in the bias. On his own he investigated forest succession, the sequence in which various species of trees compete to dominate an area. Wryly depicting himself as a wilderness detective, he studied dendrochronology. Wandering the woods with a magnifying glass, he went beyond relating the year-to-year history of how a tree fared by examination of its growth rings — he sometimes launched into speculations designed to hold the attention of nonscientific readers. In New Mexico, Mills the popularizer stumbled upon a tree that not only was riddled with arrowheads dating back to 1486 and modern bullets found in the tree ring for 1881, but that also, coincidentally, showed evidence of visitation by the Conquistadors: “He was six hundred and thirty-six years old, and with the coming of the Spanish adventurers his lower trunk was given new events to record. The year 1540 was a particularly memorable one for him. . . . This year, for the first time, he felt the edge of steel and the tortures of fire. . . . I believe that during this year a Spanish exploring party may have camped beneath Old Pine

and built a fire against his instep . . ." (*Wild Life*, p. 43). To Mills, science should be exciting and should be made so if necessary by creation of a few dramatic details.

Be that as it may, Mills the generalist possessed the flexibility to range beyond trees. His interest in tree diseases led him into an appreciation of insect life: "I paused to watch some wasps that, like the birds, were feasting upon these grubs. A wasp on finding a grub simply thrust his snout into the grub and then braced himself firmly as he bored down and proceeded to suck his victim's fluids" (*The Spell*, p. 179). This, in turn, led him to propose that insect pests be controlled by their natural insect enemies. Again, the idea, one now being put into widespread use, was not original with Mills. Yet his comprehensive view of nature was quick to recognize the practicability of its application.

In his thorough fashion, Mills did not overlook tree roots. His observations prompted an interest in erosion, a condition that, he lectured audiences, was sweeping "the cream of the earth" from the nation. One antidote, of course, was protection of the beaver, whose dams on mountain streams slowed heavy runoff after rains. And the creation of new national parks, where hunting and other forms of exploitation would not be allowed, offered the best opportunity to accomplish this. Thus Mills brought a great many seemingly unrelated aspects of nature together, showing how they functioned, if man would only let them, as parts of a harmonious whole.

Almost from the beginnings of their movement, conservationists were divided, as they are today, into two basic philosophies. The utilitarians, represented by Chief of the Forest Service Gifford Pinchot, viewed nature in terms of how it could be turned to man's material benefit. To preservationists such as John Muir, the things of nature were sacred. The less man — with his greed and imperfect wisdom — tampered with them, the better off civilization would be. The different stances have

resulted in continuing and sometimes bitter conflicts. Mills did not support either side absolutely. Instead, he saw the necessity for controlled use in some areas, but for preservation in others. A businessman himself and a believer in material progress, he argued for forest protection on the basis of economic blessings. And perhaps realizing that the public responds more readily to hopes of profit than to fulfillment of ideals, he was not above using economic arguments to win converts for new national parks, whose pristine mountains would attract tourists: "The United States is behind most nations in making profitable use of scenery. Alpine scenery (in Switzerland) annually produces upward of ten thousand dollars to the square mile, while the Rocky Mountains are being despoiled by cattle and sawmills for a few dollars a square mile" (*The Rocky Mountain Wonderland*, p. 315).

Nevertheless, while granting the need for a measure of economic use, Mills's ultimate concern rested on the moral and spiritual benefits he saw in unsullied nature: "Although parks pay large dividends, they also have a higher, nobler use. They help make better men and women. Outdoor life is educational. It develops the seeing eye, supplies information, gives material for reflection, and compels thinking, which is one of the greatest accomplishments" (*The Rocky Mountain Wonderland*, p. 323). And he states the case even more emphatically in *The Spell of the Rockies* by referring to forests that "bestow blessings upon life that cannot be measured by gold" (p. 189). In *Your National Parks* he calls the reserves "the richest, noblest heritage of the nation" (p. xi).

A lover of all things wild, Mills was speaking from the heart, but he also was offering public support for John Muir, embroiled in the greatest conservation struggle of his life. At the time, a hydroelectric project supported by Gifford Pinchot threatened the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Muir's beloved Yosemite National Park. The head of the Forest Service looked

upon the undeveloped parks as a waste of the nation's resources, and those who shared his views eventually won in the classic confrontation between utilitarians versus preservationists. As to the position of Mills, the Forest Service already had sparked his ire by resisting creation of Rocky Mountain National Park. Once in a while he allowed himself a public swipe in his books at the government official who entered a forest under the guise of the conservationist, but who came armed with the means of destroying nature: "what a blunder to put a tree-cutting forester in charge of a park!" he chided in *The Rocky Mountain Wonderland* (p. 329). In the balance, Mills's loyalty was to the preservationists and his mentor John Muir.

The sickly teen-ager who walked into Estes Park and built a log cabin eventually earned a list of impressive credits. His accomplishments include creation of a national park, today one of Colorado's greatest assets, and support for similar preserves across the nation. He wrote a series of nationally popular books that helped educate the public to the values of its disappearing wilderness, and he made some original contributions to the study of wildlife. More generally, his life exemplified the possibility of a simple, harmonious, and fulfilling existence in nature. The last is especially important to ideas Mills promoted in his writing and put to work through informal educational programs he ran at Long's Peak Inn.

Motivated by curiosity, Mills early became an authority on the Estes Park area. Tourists often asked him to show them the sights, which at first he did willingly and without charge. After a while his tours took up so much time that he began charging for the service. In time, the "nature guiding," as he called it, developed into a regular feature of his hotel. As a method of educating the public, Mills envisioned a nationwide program of nature guides and urged, incidentally, that women were fully as capable as men for the job. These guides would introduce "others to the secrets of nature." However, the bene-

fits would go far beyond mere education. Mills maintained that people not only would improve their health and their intellects, but that they would develop morally under the beneficent influence of wilderness. In keeping with his other views on nature, this was a romantic concept, dating at least as far back as Rousseau. Its details can be seen in the "Trail School" he ran for children who came to his lodge.

For Mills, "Mother Nature conducts a delightful outdoor school and it is open every day in the year" (*Adventures*, pp. 41-42). Unfortunately, the traditional educational system, with its "puritanical" discipline and penchant for memorization, dulled its students. In contrast, Mills believed that children possessed an inherent yearning to learn about the outdoors. His procedure, then, was one of exposure. Often making light of parents' fears, he took groups of city children on romps over the meadows and up into the surrounding hills. There they would count flowers, gather material for "exhibitions" at the lodge, or simply sit for "hours upon a log by a beaver pond," absorbed in watching "the little brothers of the beaver."

Not every child was a willing convert to Mills's principles. Instead of concentrating on a forthcoming expedition, one new arrival insisted on discussing the latest movie he had seen. Some boys led him off behind a clump of trees and threatened "to beat him up." Soon, Mills chortles, "he joyfully and tellingly applied himself."

Despite the unpleasantness created by the occasional slacker, according to Mills the school's results verged on the miraculous. Once released, the students' natural enthusiasm for learning reached such a point that they cheerfully labored "under severe, self-imposed discipline" (*Adventures*, p. 174). Back at the inn they were so taken by their adventures that they wrote compositions on what they had seen and gave talks to the adults. They left his lodge "as avaricious for information as a miser is for gold." As a side benefit, the students glowed with health

and never were troubled by so much as a common cold. Mills's claims, of course, were overblown, but the principles behind his program foreshadow similar educational and rehabilitative wilderness schools, for both young people and adults, that are rising in popularity today.

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