

LandScraped Photography

By Glenn Oakley

Brent Smith is driving his four-wheel drive Trooper through the Pahsimeroi Valley as the setting sun breaks golden across the sagebrush-studded valley floor and Bell Mountain rises against a perfect cumulus-studded sky. Anxiously, he pulls over, grabs his 4x5 view camera and tripod, and frames the scene between two beat-up road signs and a cattle guard. *Click.*

While a host of other landscape photographers, including Ansel Adams, have carefully maneuvered their cameras to avoid those ubiquitous unsightly power lines, signs and human debris, the Boise State art professor and 1975 graduate seeks out the clutter of human habitation. Since 1979, Smith has experimented with a landscape photography that confronts the abuse and usurpation of the American West.

His landscapes, says Smith, "are a response to how everything from my point of view seems to be becoming more fabricated, more artificial. When I think about the way I view the landscape,

it comes as a direct result of having grown up in Idaho and experiencing the wilderness — and imagining it not being there."

Smith's first photograph in his evolving series of disturbed environments was made at the old Capital Qwik Car Wash. Smith walked into the abandoned waiting room and saw a single green bench bolted to a white cinder block wall, grease stains on the floor — and a crumpled scenic calendar on the bench. The image clicked with Smith, who read into that scene, "If we weren't careful, this is all we'd end up with — images of the landscape instead of the real thing."

From there he began photographing these sorts of incongruities: rectangles of lawn in the middle of parking lots, trees lit by artificial light. Soon he was taking man-made objects into nature and creating his own discontinuities: plastic pink flamingos perched around a mountain lake, wooden ducks with metal wings (whose natural habitat is the walls of cheap motels) flying over Lake Lowell.

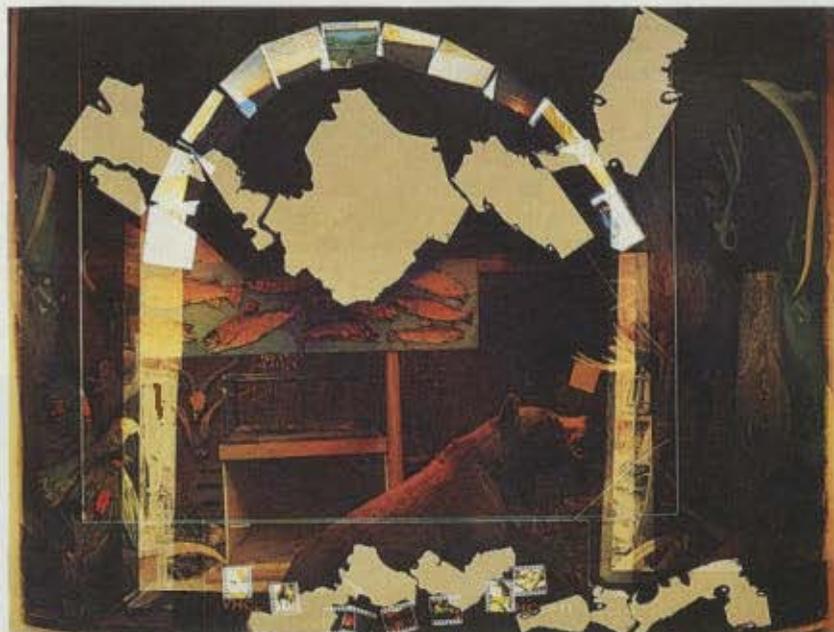
His latest work mixes several images together in a kind of large collage, which he further alters with photographic chemicals and by tearing and burning the images. One of those recent images is titled

"What you are watching." At the center of the piece is a trout, its blue-green image torn in half. Above the fish is the sign from the Morrison-Knudsen Nature Center where the trout was photographed. To Smith, the image of fish swimming behind plate glass for our entertainment and edification is "like it's the year 2050 and this is all we have left. That's not nature and it's no replacement for going out in the wilderness and having that experience."

Smith says he tears and burns the images to "make it clear these are just photographs, not the real thing, and to suggest that the subject matter is as fragile as the film image."

While Smith's work is far from the mainstream of landscape photography, this type of anti-nature photography recently has received national attention. Most prominent has been the work of Colorado photographer James Balog, whose work on endangered species became a cover story in *National Geographic* and a coffee-table book, *Survivors*.

Balog photographed the



BRENT SMITH: "I want some social or political content in the work ..."

animals in a variety of deliberately artificial environments, often employing the techniques of fashion photographers.

Balog's philosophy, set forth in the book's introduction, is similar to Smith's: "In the temperate and tropical zones of the Earth, humans have in fact destroyed much of the world's original habitat in a relentless search for farmland, living space, lumber and minerals. ... Recognizing this, I have no desire to perpetuate the romantic mirages of traditional wildlife photography. Instead I have created images of animals in exile from a lost Eden, adrift in the ether of a planet made alien to them."

"I think he's right on," says Smith, who doubts he will ever again shoot traditional landscapes. "I still think it's a viable means of expression for some people. I still like to look at it. But for me, it doesn't take me anywhere."

The immediate future is taking Smith to computers, where he is combining photography with computer-generated images. Says Smith, "It all deals with an alteration of nature and ultimately the fabrication of it." □

Plowing Through Red Tape

By Larry Burke

The summer holds great promise for Magic Valley farmer Greg Brown. Water supply looks fine. Crops are in and doing well. Once again it looks like his efforts will pay off in a bountiful harvest.

But things are a changin' on the Brown spread, and on hundreds like it where farmers, the archetypes of the Old West way of life, are confronting — and trying to adapt to — the ways of the New West.

"This isn't a family farm," says Brown as he looks in the distance toward a portion of the 3,000 acres he has planted in potatoes, sugar beets, dry beans and other crops.

"The era of the family farm — the guy raising a family on 80 or 160 acres — is over. Some are still doing it, but it isn't easy. You have to farm big now ... that's the only way to make money," says the 1974 BSU graduate.

"I was raised on a farm and I hated it," he jokes. "The last thing I was going to be was a farmer, but here I am."

Since he bought that first 300-acre farm nearly 20 years ago, he has seen half of his peers leave a profession that he says has become more and more complex every year.

"It's not farming anymore. You spend three-fourths of your time covering your rear instead of getting the farming done.

"It takes a lot of money and commitment to get started. Most young people don't want to beat their heads fighting government agencies."

Brown, like many other farmers, says the government sometimes goes overboard in its policies that impact day-to-day life on the farm.

"The environmental picture is out of whack. We've overcorrected for many of the problems ... the pendulum has swung too far the other way.

"In the past, there have been abuses, but those were greatly exaggerated. Ninety-five percent of the farmers didn't misuse chemicals. Now, we've lost a lot of chemicals used to produce a crop.

"We don't want chemicals and sediment going into the Snake River. No one is against stopping that. But the environmentalists want it ended now. They have blinders on ... they don't see the big picture. They don't care if they drive some of us out of business."

Brown's acreage is located on the Snake River plateau near Hagerman, just above the famous fossil beds. This year he is

installing a mechanized irrigation system that will be more energy efficient. Using computers, the pressure is read every three seconds, allowing the operator to quickly spot and correct problems.

Aside from its efficiency, Brown says the system will save labor, which has become more difficult to find. Brown usually hires 20 Mexican nationals to work on the farm. This year he needed the crew

members on April 1, but they arrived 10 days late because the Immigration Service held them at the border.

"The government has gotten in the middle. It has become too difficult to fight the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Department of Labor," he says. With the new irrigation system, he hopes to cut the crew down to four or five people.

Because Brown pumps his water directly from the Snake River, he is relatively immune from this year's drought. But the future of Idaho's water supply is a concern.

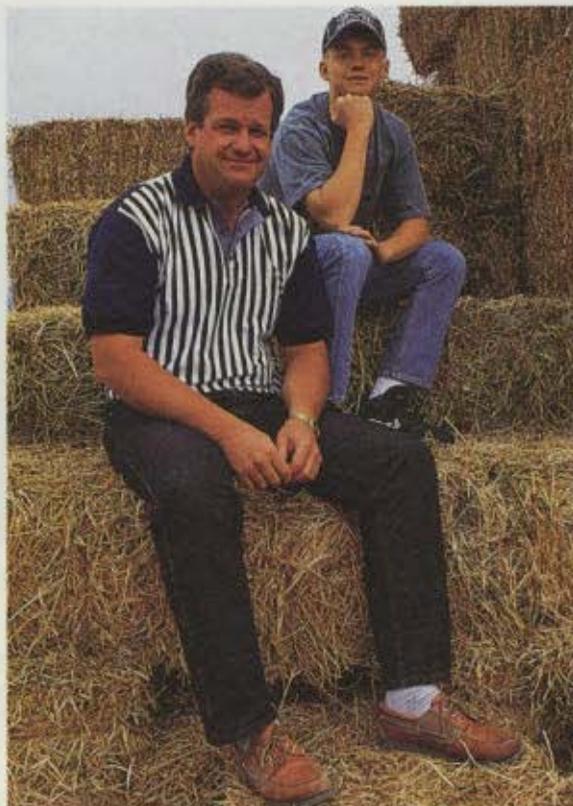
"The state is out of water. Wells in the aquifer have depleted the supply. When we get into a drought, more water is pumped out than is going in. Someday, those farmers may have to shut off their pumps. If we stay dry for a few more years, it's going to get ugly," he says.

Brown says agriculture could do a better job at polishing its public image. "We aren't good at getting the true story told ... we don't toot our own horn." If our critics could spend a day with a farmer and see what he does and how he does it, they would come away with more understanding."

Twenty years from now another 50 percent of the current farmers could leave the business, he predicts. In their place will be "megacorporate" farms that will have their own personnel departments and legal staffs. "It's the only way agriculture will survive," he says.

"Why am I in it? I'm making a living. But I've worked hard and taken a lot of risk. Every spring you don't know what's going to happen." Brown and his wife Helen (Fleenor), also a 1974 BSU graduate, have a 15-year-old son, Sean, who helps with the operation by driving heavy equipment in the summers. Will Sean be the third generation of Browns to till the rich Magic Valley soil?

"The way things are changing, I don't know if I would encourage him to farm or not," replies Brown. □



GREG BROWN: "I've worked hard and taken a lot of risk."

LARRY BURKE/PHOTO

Out of the Woods

By Edie Jeffers

Boise State alum and 11-year logging veteran Ivan Rounds has a personal view of the clash between "traditional" Idaho industries and environmental concerns.

A member of the 1977 Big Sky champion football team, Rounds graduated with a degree in criminal justice the following spring. He decided not to pursue law enforcement, and instead looked for work in his hometown of Pottlach, Idaho, an area heavily dependent on the timber industry.

Even though the timber industry already had an uncertain future in the late 1970s, he went to work as a logger for Keck Logging, a contractor for Potlach Corporation. An avid outdoorsman, the job "in the woods" suited Rounds. "I loved what I did," he says. "I liked being outdoors."

But soon after he went to work, Rounds could see the effects of a declining industry. "I'm a member of the school board, and you can always tell when logging is down," he says. "The fathers are more involved at school, and the mothers get madder at their kids" because of the stress of their husbands not having an income.

During his tenure as a logger, it was not uncommon for Rounds to go for long periods without work and without pay. "Loggers can make a good income," he says, "but you can also go six to 12 weeks without work because of weather." Loggers are paid for actual production, not for the number of hours worked. And Rounds adds that comprehensive medical coverage is unheard of in the industry.

In the early 1980s, Rounds watched Potlach Corporation, a major area employer, close its aging mill, lay off its own loggers, and switch to contract logging. Other mills in the area followed suit. The town of Potlach became a bedroom community.

Potlach Corporation placed some of its laid-off workers at mills in neighboring towns such as Coeur d'Alene and Lewiston, but loggers who wanted to stay in the woods opted instead to go to work for gypo contractors, driving as much as three hours to a work site. Loggers who make long commutes aren't compensated for travel time and may have to turn around and go home because of bad weather. Others formerly employed by area mills began to

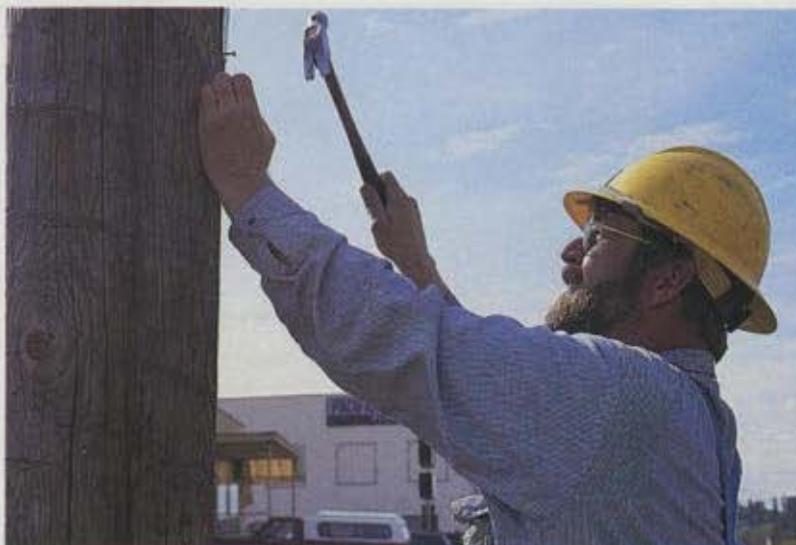
commute to Pullman, Wash., Moscow and Lewiston to work as truck drivers, janitors, maintenance and highway department workers.

Towns farther away from Pullman — such as Clarkia, Elk River and Deary — remain completely dependent on logging. The ebbs and flows of the industry have had an even more profound impact on those communities, according to Rounds.

With a wife and a young family, the instability and limited benefits of the industry led Rounds to leave the woods in 1989, and take a job with Washington Water Power as a utility pole inspector. His home office is in Tekoa, Wash., a 35-mile commute from Potlach.

Although he misses elements of logging work, he and his family enjoy the security — and the steady paycheck — of his job with the power company.

Rounds says that even though the economy of Potlach and nearby areas has been adversely affected



IVAN ROUNDS: "I don't know a logger who also is not an environmentalist. They are environmentally minded."

by the instability of the logging industry, the community spirit continues to thrive. Last year a Potlach family lost their young daughter to leukemia. During her long illness, Potlach (population 850) and the surrounding school district raised \$35,000 to help the family pay medical bills. Loggers raised \$25,000 of the money by logging and selling donated timber.

Although Rounds knows public perception doesn't concur, he believes loggers show compassion concerning the environment. "The way to make a good living in logging is to do a good job and respect the environment. Sure, there have been abuses by certain loggers over the years, but we all want to preserve the forest for our kids. Loggers will be blamed for logging the trees, but I don't know a logger who is also not an environmentalist.

"They are environmentally minded. A large percentage of loggers are also hunters and fisherman. They want the resources to be there."

In defense of the logging industry, Rounds says, "If loggers aren't working, there are a lot of people who feel the pinch." He says this is especially true of the small towns in northern Idaho that are so dependent on logging. "When people aren't working, they are not able to support the other businesses in the community." □

Howling 'til the Wolves Come Home

By Edie Jeffers

Five short, quavering howls, followed by five longer cries and five more longer howls. That's how 1994 BSU graduate Suzanne Laverty learned to talk to her friends four years ago.

Howling is a means of identifying and locating wolves, the first stage of biological research to confirm the actual presence of the rare animals.

Laverty was taught by Dr. Steven Fritts, Northern Rocky Mountain wolf recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The first time she "went solo," her call was answered by gun fire. "Bullets came flying over my head," says Laverty, "so we ran back to the car, and Steve told me, 'Well I guess I taught you too well.'"

Her first solo howling expedition was a dramatic introduction to the fiery opposition she would face as the director of the Boise-based Wolf Recovery Foundation (WRF). Since she began in 1988, Laverty has learned to listen to those from the "shoot, shovel and shut up" school, and has herself become a symbol of the compromise that is taking place between the New West and the Old West points of view.

At first, those on opposite sides of the issue had a "polarized view, a hard-core, desensitized look at each other," according to Laverty. "Now that we're getting to know each other ... we're finding people in the middle who want to get things accomplished."

Through internships and countless "extracurricular" hours, Laverty, who majored in communication, uniquely combined her academic pursuits and her life passion — wolf recovery — to work with groups both for and against wolf recovery and search for compromises. "We've been trying to find win/win situations that benefit both the wolves and the people who live in the area," says the 1991 winner of BSU's Ted Trueblood Scholarship for Environmental Journalism.

The primary focus of WRF is education. Since 1988, 15,000 children have learned about wolves through classroom presentations and learning materials. Laverty won the 1991 national "Take Pride in America" award for her environmental education efforts. Adults learn about recovery efforts through special events and educational material distributed at community events.

Fund raising is another critical aspect of the work at WRF. To help

defray the \$6 million cost attached to implementing wolf recovery in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming over a 10 to 15 year period, the Foundation is trying to get the public to help — in addition to contributing its tax dollars. "The beauty of it is that it not only allows the public to help fund these critical programs, but they get an education at the same time," says Laverty. "That's the beauty of the

New West. We can't be polarized anymore. I think people are seeking the common ground so we can get on."

And "get on" we will. According to Ted Koch, Idaho wolf recovery biologist for FWS, the reintroduction of wolves could begin in Idaho as early as October 1994, either by continued natural migration from Montana and Canada or by capture and relocation.

Natural recovery is taking place. Two or more wolves presently exist in Idaho, and detection by trained biologists has doubled since the 1980s. The most recent instance where a biologist found evidence of the presence of a wolf was on April 6 in the Warm Lake area.

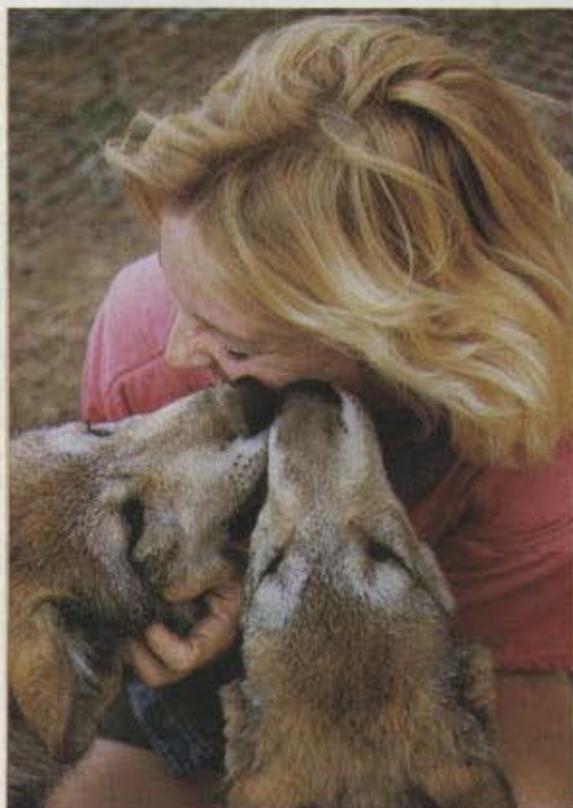
After three years of public hearings, debate and work with concerned groups, Laverty and others in the wolf-recovery camp can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

"We don't care how recovery happens, we just want to get wolves in Idaho," she says. "As long as we can get them on the ground, it will be up to the wolves to recover, and the people in the backcountry to let them live. We've just got to give wolves a chance."

Laverty has spent more than six years as a public champion for the rights of this endangered species. But to her, wolf recovery is more than a job:

"Wolves are the missing component of what makes our ecosystem complete, and their spirit is a part of wilderness. The Northern Rockies is one of the only ecosystems left that is intact enough so that wolves can be recovered here. In most of the other areas of the country, they have been wiped out. I don't want my kids to have to go to Alaska in order to see a grizzly bear, a bald eagle or a wolf. I think the American public wants to have sanctuaries in the lower 48 that are still truly wild.

"We've got to put back what we've done wrong." □



SUZANNE LAVERTY: "I don't want my kids to have to go to Alaska in order to see ... a wolf."