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Description

Sierra Club Trail annual calendar [copy 2]

Physical Details

spiral bound calendar with annotations, 10 1/4 x 10 1/4" closed

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# 1975

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# The wilderness experience

Modern man lives in a world of his design, reacting only to other highly mechanized, in rural areas. Material possessions mean security. We drag this culture into the mountains with no more consciousness of our real motivations than Linus has when he reaches for his blanket. Business has capitalized on this human need. The recreational veh selling glorified, motorized blankets to adult Linuses who fail to realize the basic contradiction of bringing a portable manmade environment with them to experience the outdoors. Backpackers, too, frequently fail to realize that their attitudes are

Similar, although their gadgets are cheaper and lighter.

Only man tries to understand life at an ever more abstract level rather than being content to learn how nature operates. Animals, although they lack man's critical intelligence, are true guides to the wilds. Follow their trails through rugged country. You will find a comprehension of terrain far better than any Forest Service trail crew can provide. Man builds trails-roads and powerlines, for example - to go places. For other life, destiny is the architect. If a sufficient number of individual destinies follow the same route, a trail is made, its many purposes beyond our realm of calculation.

The difference between the trails of animal feet and man's manicured pathways is the difference between wilderness understanding and mere recreation. The key figures of wilderness philosophy—the Muirs, Thoreaus, Leopolds—were not building trails or just hiking to a certain place. They were experiencing a destiny at their feet. They walked, not to reach a place, but to understand, to feel, to know the world around them. That wilderness experience is, in a sense, religious. It may not confirm or deny belief in a special force that created life, but by actively involving us, as direct participants, it will go far towards explaining how life operates when uninterrupted by civilization. A counterfeit wilderness experience happens when a trail merely leads a backpacker to a lake where a portable home is unfolded, a miniature stove is primed and a sheet of plastic keeps out the rain. There must be a high degree of personal involvement with

the forces on either side of that camp and thin veneer of trail. humans and to human creations. There is little of the natural world left in the city, and mostly a purposeful cultivation, often itself. A wilderness experience is both mental and physical. It cannot happen in an armchair or a Winnebago. It may not happen on a trail or mountain.

I once read an article by a man who claimed to have spent years hiking through the wilderness as a purist, but now suggested building restaurants and using aerial transpage in Vocas ite and the High Sierra. He claimed that his thoughts were just as inspiring in a restaurant reached by an aerial tram in Switzerland as they would be on top of a Sierra peak reached by two days of toil. The response to such an assertion is obvious. The author is one of the hordes who are unaware that they have never had a wilderness experience. To him, a trail was only a pathway to a place. He had no realization that a pathway to understanding could not be shortcut with steel cables.

The opposite perspective-a true wilderness philosophyappeared in Science magazine when biologist Stephen Herrero concluded that man and grizzly bears should be allowed to coexist in national parks: "Man must temporarily relinquish his role as a tamer, a reducer of wilderness and enter into an ecosystem in which he may not be the dominant species. This can be the quintessence of man's experience in the national parks, because here man becomes a part of nature. This is the highest purpose

Trails and wilderness can be tools for understanding the world beyond the city and the town. But the best of tools are dependent on the skill of the user. A knife in the hands of a child is quite different from the same instrument in the hands of a surgeon. A violin has little music in the hands of someone who cannot play it. We tend to forget these things when we approach the wilder ness. We expect it to come to us. We expect to be taught instead of to learn. Boots, packs, freeze-dried food, maps and trail guides are often used to approach wilderness passively-to just pass through, a sightseer. Being there is more than the contact of boots

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