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Greg Gordon. *Landscape of Desire: Identity and Nature in Utah's Canyon Country.* Logan: Utah State University Press, 2003. xi + 213 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87421-560-1; $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87421-566-3.

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Utah's Wild Canyons: Potential for Knowledge, Growth and Reconciliation

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Landscape of Desire is a thoughtful, well-written reflection on the value of wilderness and its juxtaposition with civilization in southeastern Utah. Gordon's vivid narrative brings the reader along on a two-month experiential course that he teaches for the Sierra Institute, an extension of the University of California at Santa Cruz. In the book, Gordon presents the natural history of the Colorado Plateau and, by way of example, we learn his lessons in the course's other two topics, the art of nature writing and wilderness education. As instructor and mentor, Gordon also teaches activism, since the course explicitly aims to document off-road vehicle use for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. Writing in the first person, Gordon shares his personal views and insights on the human/nature relationship in canyon country. As he describes the experiences and group dynamics of the seven students on the trip, his teaching assistant, and his golden retriever, Banjo, the reader vicariously travels with the group as they trace Muddy Creek from Interstate 70 south through the San Rafael Swell in east-central Utah and, with a layover and resupply in Hanksville and the campground of Capitol Reef National Park, continue along the Dirty Devil River until its flow ceases in the waters of Lake Powell.

Each of the book's twenty-two chapters is named for a geologic formation or process and opens with a description of that formation's physical properties and the historical conditions of its formation. Roughly ten pages each, these chapters are easily digestible, conveying a general lesson without overwhelming the reader with information or intricacies.

As testimony to his pedagogical skill, Gordon's prose is engaging, informative, and easy to read. He teaches of the region's ecology, geology, cultural history, political battles over wilderness, the pedagogy of experiential education, and ecopsychology in a seamless narrative that links these diverse topics via their common ties to the landscape. He simultaneously reveals his personal love of the landscape and frustrations with the industrial capitalist society that is directly or indirectly responsible for ecological degradation and spiritual desecration of the wilderness, grounding these ideals in the mud, quicksand, cow pies, slickrock, and tamarask (an exotic invasive riparian species) of Utah's canyon country. An activist and writer for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Gordon presents an unmistakable environmentalist ethos that makes no attempt to bridge the deeply polarized divide of wilderness politics in Utah and is unlikely to convert wilderness antagonists, yet his narrative will certainly embolden those who already appreciate the ecological, spiritual, and existence value of wilderness.

This book is much more than simply a travelogue interspersed with natural history lectures and essays about the value of wilderness. In his nature writing Gordon reads and interprets the landscape such that the plants, animals, geologic formations, canyon walls, river banks, and even the wind are all characters in a narrative that seems to originate in the land itself. Gordon explicitly ties his talented nature writing in with the human experience of and impact on the landscape. Prehistoric people, historic settlers, and each member of the group, including himself and Banjo, are also actors in this comprehensive and coherent interdisciplinary narrative. The redrock canyons of the Colorado Plateau are unique in their topography, ecology, and archeological record of past civilizations. For wilderness enthusiasts already acquainted with and endeared to this special place, Gordon's narrative will remind you of your own experiences in this grand landscape. For readers who don't already have a relationship with this unique place, tagging along on Gordon's course may be initially disorienting, yet will likely leave you feeling as though you are deeply acquainted with a landscape that is simultaneously exotic, mundane, pristine, and degraded. The wilderness that

Gordon leads us through is devoid of neither humans nor human influence. The students observe firsthand the effects of grazing, mining, and off-road vehicle use as they follow a river-drainage from one human construction (Interstate 70) to another (Lake Powell). By including a landscape that is clearly influenced by human action as a prominent character in his narrative, Gordon nurtures both a relationship and a blurring of the dichotomy between human and nature.

Nurturing a personal relationship with landscape is only one of the multifaceted aspects of Gordon's book. Theories and pedagogy of wilderness experiential education are also central. Interwoven with discussions of ecopsychology, the result is an illustration of how eight weeks in the wilderness can heal inner wounds and mature relationships with self and our human community. Gordon also provides detailed biological and ecological accounts of desert birds, amphibians, insects, mammals, and plants, both native and exotic, discussing these not only in scientific terms, but also in the context of the human forces that influence this ecosystem and the blurred boundaries between wilderness and civilization. For example, the group encounters wild horses in the canyon and enters into a thoughtful discussion of wild horse management. Are these feral animals wild, exotic, or domestic? Should they be left on their own, rounded up and culled to protect forage for cattle, or managed another way? Similarly, his discussion of the prickly pear cactus includes not only a physical and biological description, but also discussion of the evidence of prehistoric use, its edibility, and its usefulness as an indicator of overgrazing in the desert.

Gordon teaches how historical land use policies such as the Homestead Act, the Taylor Grazing Act, and the formation and charge of federal land management agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management have influenced land use and the human/nature relationship in the American West. In one chapter he discusses the Mining Act of 1872 and provides a captivating and detailed description of the boom and bust of uranium mining in the Moab area. Gordon is critical of uranium mining for its detrimental health effects and the harm and destruction that has resulted from nuclear bombs, bomb testing, and nuclear power accidents. But overall, his is not necessarily a narrative of decline, but one of hope, growth, and renewal, written with a vitality that comes from spending time in the wilderness in spite of, or perhaps because of, the interconnected human and natural history of the area.

Also included are discussions of Mormon history and how this strong cultural presence in Utah influences contemporary debates over land and resource management. In addition, as the group camps in Robbers Roost, an entire chapter is devoted to the history of Butch Cassidy and other outlaws who used this remote canyon to shepherd stolen cattle and hide from law enforcement. Similarly, as they near the end of their trip at Lake Powell and the former confluence of the Dirty Devil and Colorado Rivers, the reader learns about the intricate political game of Colorado River water apportionment, the history of damming the river, and the environmentalists' struggle to decommission or deconstruct Glen Canyon dam.

While brimming with a wealth of information, *Landscape of Desire* is intended for a general or pleasure reader rather than a scholarly audience. Gordon's account is one of a knowledgeable and well-read environmentalist. However, with its vast breadth of content, theoretical depth is sacrificed. Bibliographic notes, including references used and suggested readings, are provided for each chapter, yet there are neither footnotes nor endnotes and page numbers are not given for direct citations. Single major works from each field are cited, but Gordon rarely triangulates with additional references or probes the wealth of more detailed and nuanced literature that is available in, for example, Utah and Mormon history, wilderness philosophy, or land use conflict in the American West.[1]

While Gordon's narrative challenges the human/nature dichotomy by thoughtfully examining the juxtaposition of wilderness and civilization, he confronts the polarized contemporary political debates over wilderness in Utah only indirectly and from the position of a steadfast wilderness advocate. In Utah and throughout the American West resolution of conflict over natural resource protection and use is often stymied by power struggles and lack of communication between a federal bureaucracy with mandates from Washington, D.C., and local governments and residents whose identity and livelihood are inextricably bound to the resource and the landscape. Identity with the landscape, plants, and animals is a central theme of Gordon's book. His account of unexpectedly meeting a ranch hand looking for stray cattle in a remote canyon notes how the two men live in very different worlds, yet emphasizes that they share a common appreciation for and connection to the landscape. Gordon could take this theme even farther and probe what, if anything, he might share in common with the BLM managers or the off-road Jeep drivers whose actions destroy the landscape that he holds so dear.

In the context of Gordon's inspiring narrative, and especially because Gordon has an explicit wilderness activist thread, he could have further enhanced his narrative by examining the intense contemporary political battles over wilderness designation and land status in the area. Examples include the attempt at collaborative decision-making in the San Rafael Futures Project and the project's proposal to designate the area with a new land classification as a National Heritage/Conservation Area, repeated attempts to pass the Red Rocks Wilderness Act in Congress, and a proposal to grant the area National Monument Status.[2]

All in all, however, I recommend *Landscape of Desire*. This informative, thoughtful, and well-written narrative takes the reader on a memorable journey through the natural and cultural history of Utah's canyon country, revealing the rich potential for personal growth and a heightened appreciation of both wilderness and civilization that can be found there.

Notes

[1]. See for example, L. J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); J. B. Callicott and M. P. Nelson, eds., *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); and J. L. Sax, *Mountains without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980).

[2]. For information on the San Rafael Futures Project and attempts at collaborative land use decision-making in Emory County, see: Utah State University Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning, *San Rafael Region Futures Project* (Utah State University, 1997); Emery County Public Lands Council, in "A Comprehensive Management Proposal for the San Rafael Swell"; and B. Israelsen, "Counties May Shrink Utah Wilderness," *The High Country News*, March 20, 1995. The web site of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (www.suwa.org) has further information on the Red Rocks Wilderness Act, including its history and current political status. The current version of the Red Rocks Wilderness Act can also be found at www.theorator.com/bills108/s639.html. For information on the San Rafael Swell National Monument proposal, see www.ut.blm.gov/sanrafaelswell/index.htm and its related links. There is a vast literature in environmental conflict resolution. Two good references for the basic theory and application of collaborative conflict resolution are R. Fisher and W. Ury, *Getting to Yes* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) and L. Susskind, S. McKearnan, and J. Thomas-Larmer, eds., *The Consensus Building Handbook* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999). Finally, D. Kemmis's *This Sovereign Land: A New Vision for Governing the West* (Washington: Island Press, 2001) offers a thought-provoking proposal for including local residents in all federal land management in the American West via collaborative decision-making.

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