

WILDLIFE EARTH

Summer 1998

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Wildlands Philanthropy

Conservation Heroes

Barry Lopez: The Language of Animals



The Language of Animals

by Barry Lopez

The steep riverine valley I live within, on the west slope of the Cascades in Oregon, has a particular human and natural history. Though I've been here for thirty years, I am able to convey almost none of it. It is not out of inattentiveness. I've wandered widely within the drainages of its eponymous river, the McKenzie; and I could offer you a reasonably complete sketch of its immigrant history, going back to the 1840s. Before then, Tsanchifin Kalapuya, a Penutian-speaking people, camped in these mountains, but they came up the sixty-mile-long valley apparently only in summer to pick berries and to trade with a people living on the far side of the Cascades, the Molala. In the fall, the Tsanchifin returned down valley to winter near present-day Eugene, Oregon, where the McKenzie joins the Willamette River. The Willamette flows a hundred miles north to the Columbia, the Columbia another hundred miles to the Pacific.

The history that preoccupies me, however, in this temperate rain forest is not human history, not even that of the highly integrated Tsanchifin. Native peoples seem to have left scant trace of their comings and goings in the McKenzie valley. Only rarely, as I hear it, does someone stumble upon an old, or very old, campsite, where glistening black flakes of a volcanic glass called obsidian, the debitage from tool-making work, turn up in soil scuffed by a boot heel.

I've lingered in such camps, in a respectful and deferential mood, as though the sites were shrines; but I'm drawn more to the woods in which they're found. These landscapes are occupied, still, by the wild animals who were these people's companions. These are the descendants of animals who coursed these woods during the era of the Tsanchifin.

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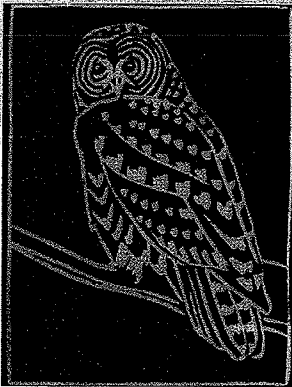
About Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project

Wild Earth (POB 455, Richmond, VT 05477; 802-434-4077; fax 802-434-5980) is a quarterly journal melding conservation biology and wildlands activism. Our efforts to strengthen the conservation movement involve the following:

- We serve as the publishing wing of The Wildlands Project.
- We provide a forum for the many effective but little-known regional wilderness groups and coalitions in North America, and serve as a networking tool for wilderness activists.
- We make the teachings of conservation biology accessible to non-scientists, that activists may employ them in defense of biodiversity.
- We expose threats to habitat and wildlife.
- We facilitate discussion on ways to end and reverse the human population explosion.
- We defend wilderness both as concept and as place.

Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project are closely allied but independent non-profit organizations dedicated to the restoration and protection of wilderness and biodiversity. We share a vision of an ecologically healthy North America—with adequate habitat for all native species, containing vibrant human and natural communities.

The Wildlands Project (1955 W. Grant Rd., Suite 148A, Tucson, AZ 85745; 520-884-0875) is the organization guiding the design of a continental wilderness recovery strategy. Through advocacy, education, scientific consultation, and cooperation with many regional groups, The Wildlands Project is drafting a blueprint for an interconnected, continental-scale system of protected wildlands linked by habitat corridors.



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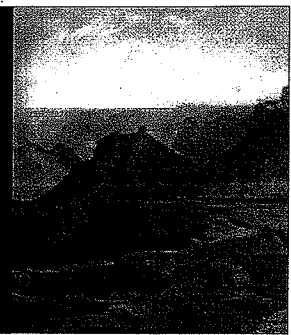
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