The Trouble of a Place:
Chasing the freedom ideal through the American Southwest

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ABSTRACT

The Trouble of a Place:
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This ethnography of the outdoor education program Cottonwood Gulch looks closely at the way participants in the program pursued a particular ideal of freedom through their activities over a summer. Much of the Gulch's programming closely mirrors the mythology of the Wild West depicted across pop culture in movies, stories, music, etc. which all contain the freedom ideal at their cores. However, Cottonwood Gulch's version of the Wild West myth approaches freedom differently. Over the course of their time at the Gulch, participants come to understand the precarious nature of their place in that environment, and the ecological entanglement that they are a part of. They approach their relationship to the Southwest as a caring one. Having understood the part they play in the ecology of the area, they must care for it. Their care is expressed through labour, affect, and politics, though in some areas the program was more willing to lean into their responsibilities of care than in others. The freedom ideal is complex and often problematic, and looking at the way Cottonwood Gulch stayed (or did not) with the trouble of that complexity was key to understanding its relationship with the Southwest.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Images vi

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Reconciling the Cowboy Myth in the Pursuit of Freedom 8

Interlude: Rendezvous 32

Chapter Two: Precarious Beings 37

Interlude: The Nail and the Bell 54

Chapter Three: Caring with the Trouble 58

Conclusion 87

Works Cited: 90

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1: Landscape near Thoreau, NM 1
Figure 2: Hillis Howie 2
Figure 3: Cottonwood Gulch Basecamp 8
Figure 4: John Wayne in *Hondo* 13
Figure 5: The view from Muley Point 26
Figure 6: The Gulch Commissary Truck circa 1982 26
Figure 7: Com line-up circa 1978 26
Figure 8: Taylor and TT trekker in the Cloud kitchen 28
Figure 9: Turquoise Trail girls on the Cloud 29
Figure 10: Entrance to Basecamp 32
Figure 11: Prickly Pear 37
Figure 12: TT hiking along the Gila River 42
Figure 13: TT hiking with their full backpacks 50
Figure 14: Santa Fe Railway circa 1926 54
Figure 15: Keet Seel Puebloan ruins 58
Figure 16: Tom Henio working on the Outfit Hogon 64
Figure 17: Making pie in Pie Town: 73
Figure 18: Aspen Trees in the Manti la Sals 74
Figure 19: On the road in Utah 87

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Landscape near Thoreau, NM. Photo by author.

Route 66, the actual stretch of American highway, stretches 2,400 miles long from Chicago to Santa Monica (Independent Travel). But there's another Route 66, one simultaneously much vaguer and much more specific that winds its way endlessly through the public imagination thanks to countless movies, photographs, and books. The highway is a vital part of Americana and a poignant symbol of the American Southwest, because when one imagines Route 66 one also imagines the landscape around it. The highway wasn't paved until 1926, but when it was, a carpenter and teacher from Indianapolis named Hillis Howie began to fear for the fate of the region. He feared what the introduction of the modern world would do to the wild spirit of the place, like many who shared his romantic naturalist perspective (Cronon 1996). That very year, in order to share the Southwest with America's youth before it disappeared, he banded together a group of boys on the first ever Prairie Trek, an expedition which would eventually evolve into Cottonwood Gulch.

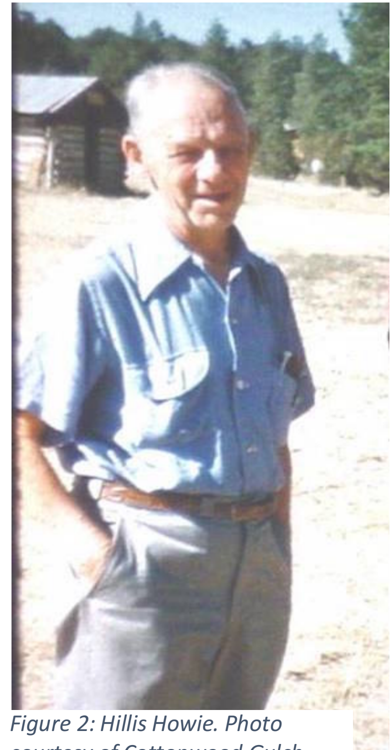

Figure 2: Hillis Howie. Photo courtesy of Cottonwood Gulch.

This story, Howie's story, was repeated to me countless times over the summer I spent at Cottonwood Gulch (aka the Gulch) in 2018. It was told in different ways by different people, shifting its shape like legends tend to do. The point was always the same, though—Howie started the Gulch in order to share the Southwest before it disappeared. One thing I find interesting about this legend is that while the paving of Route 66 surely did point to modernization, the Southwest had already been a tourist site for years by that point. As early as the 1890s, the Santa Fe Railway used the trope of the "Santa Fe Indian" as the "prototype of preindustrial society" (Stocking, 291) to advertise its services. By 1924 the railway was bringing fifty thousand tourists a year to the Grand Canyon and by 1926 had begun hosting "Indian Detours" which brought the wealthier and more adventurous tourists out to visit "spectacles" performed by native peoples (ibid). Even beyond tourism, communities of poets, playwrights, painters, and other artists began to establish permanent communities in places like Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico (ibid). Still, it was the paving of Route 66 in 1926 that captured Howie's anxieties about the changing Southwest and inspired him to show it to young Americans before it disappeared.

But it never did disappear, so what then? Why does Cottonwood Gulch continue to exist and educate children? One way to approach the question is to look at the purpose of outdoor education (aka outdoor ed) in general. Though summer camps and outdoor ed are not necessarily synonymous, there's a long history of valuing pedagogy in outdoor spaces in North America (Wall) and a range of "back to nature" solutions to the perceived problem of over-urbanization of youth emerged in the late 19th century (6). Over the years various programs gained popularity, the most well-known today perhaps being the Boy and Girl Scouts, Outward Bound, and Nols. While the births and histories of these programs are all different, today they all cite the wilderness as their home. The benefits of these programs, or of "being in nature" more generally have been well researched. Neurological studies have shown that just a few days in nature can lower theta signals in the prefrontal cortex, relaxing the brain like an overworked muscle (Williams). Interaction with nature has also been shown to improve executive attention skills, empathy, altruism, and has been used in therapies for post-traumatic stress, alcoholism, and depression (ibid). While I, like many anthropologists, am uncomfortable with the uncomplicated definition of nature that is the basis for these studies, for now it is enough for us to accept that interactions with nature have proven neurological and psychological benefits.

Still, these benefits, which with or without the science behind them have long been the basis of outdoor education, weren't actually what the Gulch based its program upon. During my fieldwork, my research participants often talked about Cottonwood Gulch's goals. They found it important to distinguish the organization from other outdoor education programs. Kris, the Gulch's director, told me that while many outdoor ed programs strive to "grow great kids", the goal of the Gulch is first and foremost about showing and teaching kids about the Southwest. It seems that while Howie's fear of the Southwest disappearing may no longer be relevant, the goal of the organization stays largely the same. Still, I found myself wondering why. Why was it important that these kids get to know the Southwest? I found that this goal was about learning to love a particular environment, a particular place. As participants at Cottonwood Gulch got to know the Southwest, the mythology, the materiality, and the relationships they experienced and encountered there allowed them to reimagine their position in the world. Learning to love the Southwest, learning to chase the freedom ideal it instilled in them, was about learning to know one's role in an ecosystem.

Cottonwood Gulch

The first Prairie Trek that Hillis Howie took out on expedition was an extension of the Boy Scout troop that he already led (Children's Museum) and continued on as an all-boys group for several years. But in 1934, likely at the suggestion of Hillis' wife, Elizabeth Howie, an all-female trek called Turquoise Trail was formed to explore the Southwest in parallel with the boys' Prairie Trek. That year also brought a home for the program when Howie purchased a 440-acre ranch to use as Basecamp. Basecamp was developed over the years with significant help by Tom Henio, a Dine friend of Howie's, and many of the trekkers built cabins and other buildings to add to Basecamp as part of their trek experience. The Gulch closed its doors during World War II but started up again after the war and has continued to evolve since. Today the program is comprised of ten different summer expeditions including the original Prairie Trek and Turquoise Trail, but also includes more specialized treks such as Art and Music Trek and Adventure Conservation Trek. It all still takes place in the Southwest, based out of the original Basecamp in Thoreau, New Mexico and explores the lands of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado.

The "on the road" mentality of the original Prairie Trek stuck and is still a vital part of the Gulch experience. The amount of time spent on the road is based on the type of trek and age group, but every group has some combination of time on the road and time at Basecamp. For example, Turquoise Trail, the group I spent my summer with, spent 11 days at Basecamp and the rest of the two months on the road. Because of this organization of time and activity, the terminology differs slightly from other summer programs. Cottonwood Gulch does not call itself a camp, so the term *trekkers* is used instead of *campers*, and in the place of *councillors* they simply use the term *staff*. Trek groups are organized mostly by age—Outfit is composed of the youngest kids and Mountain Desert Trek (MDT) the oldest. In between are Turquoise Trail (TT) and Prairie Trek (PT) which are still all-girls and all-boys, and Wild Country Trek (WCT), Art and Music Trek (AMT), Adventure Conservation Trek (ACT), Get Outdoors (GO), Paleontology Trek, and the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC). Cottonwood Gulch also holds fall and winter programing for schools and adult treks, but I was only there for the prime summer season.

I spent my summer with the Turquoise Trail as a staff member. Treks are generally composed of three staff members—a Group Leader, Program Staff, and Cook. I held the role of

Program Staff, meaning I was in charge of engaging with the trekkers and keeping things fun and interesting while the Group Leader dealt with logistical issues and the cook cooked. In practice, though, our roles overlapped significantly over the summer. Being employed as Program Staff provided many methodological benefits, such as not being seen as an outsider, but it also posed interesting challenges. Because I had some control over our group's programing, I played an active role in creating the culture I was researching. All anthropologists change and affect the peoples and communities they study with. However, I was expected to mould my group's activities and ways of thinking. For a while after returning to write, I found it difficult to separate myself from the rest of the Gulch community as a researcher. I went into the summer with many other new staff and went through the same training and socialization they did. While they all knew about my research, they didn't see me as different from them and eventually I didn't either. I formed the same relationships that everyone else did. I developed the same attachments to and intimacy with the Southwest and the Gulch as they did. The feeling of attachment I developed made it hard to step back and look at the organization in a critical way. Finally though, a year later, I am able to look past how I feel about the place to unpack what was happening there.

It is important to note also, though, that this feeling of attachment has also affected the way I approached my style of writing here. Although autoethnography is not exactly what I set out to write at the beginning of my research process, I have landed in that style, in a genre that places my own lived experience within the cultural context I was studying (Reed-Danahay, 30). Perhaps the main reason I have chosen to write this way is how important it is to me to situate myself, to make clear to the reader that the knowledge I gained during my fieldwork and have created based on it cannot be separated from the way I experienced it and who I am as an ethnographer and an individual. I have come to accept that "autoethnographic texts express more fully the interactional textures occurring between self, other, and contexts in ethnographic research" (Spry, 708)—interactions I feel are important to highlight. I have found speaking from my own experience the most effective way to avoid "othering" my participants and becoming "abusive in [] objectifying salacious condescension" (709). By putting myself at the centre of this ethnography, I put myself under as much scrutiny as the community I was studying, and make myself as vulnerable, if not more so, than they.

My instinct to write in this style was grown, I believe, out of my undergraduate and graduate programs which focused extensively on the postmodern "crisis of representation" in the anthropological literature and which trained me to constantly question ideas about truth and generalizability (710). I wrote this way fully aware that many autoethnographic texts lean towards self-indulgence, yet I was confident that I could write in this style while still successfully producing an academic text of value. As Spry states, "Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory" (713), a combination I believe I have successfully produced here. As I have been writing, I have felt that communicationg my findings in the way that I do, from my own point of view, still allows me to get my points across. I have still been able to say what I want to and successfully argue my positions using this style.

It was important to me that my enchantment with the Southwest peak through. Because to really understand the relationship created with the place you have to feel it, and explaining to the reader how I was feeling seemed the most efficient way to communicate it. I will never forget my first drive from Albuquerque to Thoreau. I was sitting shotgun next to my new friend, who I had just met along with all the other 2018 staff members. We were driving West along Highway 40 (which runs parallel to Route 66) and were engaged in some conversation or other. But somewhere in the middle of whatever I was saying I looked out my window and was struck by the canyons that seemed to have appeared suddenly all around me.

"I've never seen anything like this before" I remember telling my friend.

She just smiled at me—she had.

In that moment I confronted the fact that I was there. I was in the place that was so much more than a place. I am certainly not the first anthropologist to be seduced by the region. I follow Elsie Clews Parsons, Ruth Bunzel, and Ruth Benedict, among others south and West. These women were working at an interesting moment in American anthropology. The 1920s and 1930s was a time which defined the "fieldworker as a disciplinary archetype" (Stocking, 284), but also during which cultural anthropology and cultural criticism/popular culture overlapped far more than they do today (291). Ruth Benedict's famous Patterns of Culture (1934), which features the Pueblos of New Mexico, was written for popular audiences and even became a best-seller (Stocking, 299). It's not a stretch to say that these anthropologists played a part in inspiring crowds of tourists to take the Santa Fe Railway to the Grand Canyon and Southwestern "Indian Country".

But I was not there studying Pueblo people. If those anthropologists contributed to and were a part of the popular fascination with the Southwest, I studied the fascination itself. Almost a century later, there are still Americans coming from all parts of the country to "experience the Southwest". Why? What is it that they're getting from that experience?

Driving mile after mile through the desert, I had never felt freer. That feeling ended up being at the core of what made the Southwest so magical to me. I had not intended to make it the core of my project. Still, the concept of freedom became inescapable because at Cottonwood Gulch it was impossible for me not to be wrapped up in the American myth of the Wild West. The program recreated so many of the practices associated with cowboys and the rest of the mythology in order to instil the basic value at the centre of the myth, which is the freedom ideal. But what's interesting about the Gulch is that instead of highlighting individualism, as the concept of freedom often implies, it brought kids so close to the ecosystem that they couldn't help but recognize how tangled up in it they are. Participants of the program came to understand that this freedom they were pursuing was contingent on their environment, that they held a precarious place in the world. They learned to realize that in order to pursue the freedom ideal, they had to take care of those making it possible for them. Caring was important to the Gulch's practices and it approached it in several ways. However, as I'll argue, sometimes it's the things that are the most uncomfortable to get close to that require the most care. Because ultimately, freedom (especially in the context of the United States) is a highly problematic ideal. In order to justify continuing to teach it, it's important to stay with those problems and work on untangling them. I *do* feel that freedom is an ideal worth pursuing, especially in some of the ways the Gulch teaches it. The key is also learning that freedom is a responsibility, not just a right.

CHAPTER ONE:

Reconciling the Cowboy Myth in the Pursuit of Freedom

Figure 3: Cottonwood Gulch Basecamp. Photo by author.

Before I left for New Mexico, in the months leading up to my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time imagining what it would be like. I imagined wide open roads and big blue skies, cacti and rattlesnakes and juniper trees. In my head I could picture deep canyons and wide mesas without having the vocabulary to name them. I had never been to the Southwest before, so how is it that I could imagine it so clearly? While I had never been there, it had been implanted deep into my imagination the way it has for so many Americans. The story of the West and the cowboy who calls it home has been woven into the pop culture of many generations. The image is a clear one:

> "A lone cowboy emerges from a vast wilderness. He rides a horse and wears a gun, and he represents freedom and equality. The wilderness is dangerous but beautiful—forests, mountains, deserts, prairies. It offers the hope of a new social order built on an open frontier. This is the famous and familiar image of the American Wild West" (Wright, 1).

The West can mean many different things. Often the Southwest is depicted in the media because the landscapes are so dramatic and cinematic, but it can also mean the plains or the Northwest with its lush forests. The cowboy, too, can mean many things. The cowboy of the mythical West doesn't necessary herd cattle. He can be a rancher, a scout, an outlaw, or a sheriff. As Wright states, "The 'cowboy' of the myth is defined by his strength, honor, and independence, his wilderness identity, not by his job" (6). It's also important to note that while in pop culture he has traditionally been exclusively white and male, the true history of cowboys is far less white-washed. One in four cowboys were black (Nodjimbadem), and many others were Native American or Mexican. It's clear that the cowboy painted in fiction represents not so much an historical reality, but a statement of values.

What surprised me most about the reality that greeted me when I arrived at Cottonwood Gulch was how similar it turned out to be to what I had imagined. Of course, as an anthropologist I knew that it was dangerous to accept the expectation I had without any criticism and I wasn't so naïve as to expect that the West I encountered would be exactly like the West given to me by the media. I understood that the image itself was deeply problematic, rooted as it was in the romanticization of colonialism. Still, while I understood all of this, I can't pretend to have been unaffected by the depictions of the West by pop culture. While I could step back and analyze what was in my own imagination, I couldn't deny that it was there.

Still, those dreams I had had of driving through the desert and camping on top of mesas came true. It didn't have to be that way. There is plenty in the Southwest that doesn't match the mythical version. But I hadn't just gone to the Southwest. I had gone to Cottonwood Gulch. The Gulch's Southwest was a romantic one. The myth was alive there and daily life continued on within it. The value of myths is in the values they teach (Howells, 90) and the Gulch was dedicated to teaching the core value of the myth of the West. It taught this value by reproducing the myth over the course of the summer. But what was this value and how did the Gulch perpetuate it? This chapter is, ultimately, a mythology study and before I can answer these questions, I must discuss how the Wild West became a myth in the first place. Multiple books have been written on this topic and it is far too big for what I have space for here. Still, hopefully the fragment I provide gives sufficient understanding.

Buffalo Bill

The most logical place to start when discussing the cowboy myth is Buffalo Bill. He was, after all, the person who brought the West to the rest of America. He planted the idea of the Cowboy into America's imagination. Ultimately, he did this in the same way that most myths are implanted in the American imagination—through entertainment. He was an entertainer, and it's through his inventive storytelling that Americans came to know the Wild West. That being said, he wasn't always just a showman. His story was based in truth.

William Frederick Cody (Sell and Weybright, 5) was born in Iowa, but moved to Kansas as a child where he came into contact with the constant movement of people westward. During his childhood there, he was exposed to what are now considered tropes of the era including blockhouses, artillery, westerners in buckskins and coonskin caps, and various tribes of Native Americans (8)—all of this from the romantic point of view of a young boy. He met famous scouts of the era such as Kit Carson and Jim Bridger whom he came to greatly admire and eventually emulated (24). Eventually, Cody became a scout himself, meaning that he was employed by the military. As a member of the military in the era, he formed relationships with both Generals Sheridan and Custer (63). Military men like this were notoriously brutal. Custer, for example, earned the nickname "Custer the Indian Slayer" (4). It was a time, as the military gained more control and settlers flooded westward towards California, of great conflict between native peoples

and Euro-American settlers. And it is this tense time that has often been immortalized in the idea of the "Wild West". In this context of brutality, William Cody was seen as a benign and generally "good" frontiersman, not only in his skills but also in his ethics. His reputation rose rather quickly as a hero as he fought against "Indian raids", restored the food stores of military bases, and tracked down kidnapped settler women. He became a conservationist and advocate of game preservation (45) reflecting his love for the western lands. But of course, his identity as a hero was full of contradictions. He was simultaneously described as "the buffalo hunter and Indian fighter" and "above all men of his time, a friend of the Indian" (45). This tension and contradiction became a common trait of the Wild West myth.

Buffalo Bill's reputation as a western hero spread, at first without any conscious effort of his own. Soon, he was portrayed by writer Ned Buntline, who made Buffalo Bill the protagonist in his dime novels (78). It's at this time, now the 1870s, that Buffalo Bill's career turned towards showmanship. As a dime novel hero, Buffalo Bill was able to take his story on the road with Buntline, starting in New York. In 1878, Buffalo Bill appeared in a play written by Buntline based on his novels, and it sold out (100). This was an exciting time for Cody and he enjoyed sharing the West with these eastern city folks. The stories he told were dramatic, portraying the essence of the exciting life he had lived filled with sound, colour, and action (125). The shows followed a particular formula:

> "All these shows involved Indians, cowboys, scouts, frontiersmen, a lost maiden to be rescued, and some kind of comic relief. The more violent and absurd, the more shooting, the more coincidences and predicaments, the better the audiences liked them (126).

In Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, the pattern that later became so recognizable in the Western genre started to emerge.

The show only grew with time and eventually added more and more characters. Annie Oakley appeared in the Wild West Show leading her to her own fame (141). The show toured the entire country and even made it to Europe in 1887 (157). To thousands of people who had never seen the West and never would, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show *was* the West. It certainly created many lasting stereotypes about the West and laid the groundwork for over a century (and counting) of entertainment and media. More importantly though, it seems to me, it planted a fascination

with the West in American minds and created a space for the ideal, romantic westerner in the American imagination.

The Western as a Vision of Freedom

With Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show firmly established as an entertainment sensation, it's no wonder that the genre of the "Western" arrived almost as soon as the motion picture industry itself. By 1910, a fifth of all U.S. film releases were of the Western genre (Simmon, 3), though the early Westerns were usually filmed in the East. Eventually the films truly did use Western landscapes as their settings, and the wide-open spaces were used to "evoke visionary possibilities or a testing solitude" (94). These two ethics—visionary possibilities and testing solitude—are both key elements of a collective vision of what America is. They hinge on the belief in individualism and autonomy and also on the hopeful belief that the future is bright for anyone willing to work hard. They truly are the American dream. From the beginning, Westerns were conscious of their (perhaps self-imposed) responsibility to represent the essence of America. While they often falsified particular historical details, this was in order to tell what filmmakers saw as a larger national truth (114).

Ultimately, the theme that emerges in Westerns is that of freedom and the move West is often symbolic of Americans freeing themselves from the cultural bonds to England (95). Of course, this image of a new, American freedom depends on what the filmmakers themselves consider "free". Most Westerns are set in either the Jeffersonian or Jacksonian eras, as both their visions of democracy agreed fundamentally on the importance of expanding westward. To Jefferson, the West was the "empire of liberty" and to Jackson it was the "area of freedom" (140). While these two political rhetorics do point to slightly different ideals, the constant movement westward and the individualism of the cowboy are able to encapsulate both.

It's interesting to note that the cowboy character became more popular as America became more industrialized (Wright, 7). Early American colonizers assumed that every white male could own and work their own land and the idea of private property was essentially just private farms (4). But the market and the institutions that grew out of this early dream led to the rise of industrial production which threatened the agrarian ideal (5). As industry dominated, the Western film increased in popularity. The cultural myth of the cowboy reminded Americans of the original

vision of American individualism and freedom. And as Westerns came to represent the essence of an ideal of freedom in America, the cowboy protagonist came to represent the ideal free American.

"A man's gotta do what he's gotta do"

If you picture a cowboy in your head, there's a good chance you'll picture the Marlboro Man. Otherwise, chances are that with or without knowing it you'll picture John Wayne. Wayne stared in nearly 250 movies throughout his career (IMDB) and Westerns became one of his principle trademarks, along with his cat-like walk. He left a mark on the movies of the '50s and '60s in particular. As Joan Didion states in her essay "John Wayne: A love song", "when John Wayne rode through my childhood, and perhaps through yours, he determined forever the shape of certain of our dreams" (30). The cowboy characters he played represented the America that should have been. As Didion recalls:

Figure 4: John Wayne in the opening scene of Hondo (1953)

> "in a world we understood early to be characterized by venality and doubt and paralyzing ambiguities, he suggested another world, one which may or may not have existed ever but in any case existed no more: a place where a man could move free, could make his own code and live by it" (30-31).

In the first scene of *Hondo* (1953), Wayne emerges from the desert and approaches a ranch alone with his dog. The heroine (Geraldine Page) is wary of him at first, but as he helps her with tasks around the ranch in exchange for a horse, she comes to trust him. Eventually he leaves the range to assist the military in dealing with an Apache uprising since Wayne, like Buffalo Bill, is friend to both the "Indian and the White Man". At the end of the film he returns to the ranch where the heroine is trapped. He takes her and her son with him on to California—farther West—to freedom.

Hondo is just one example of countless Westerns that centre around the freedom ideal. In them, the cowboy often emphasizes his independence and his ability to make his own choices and be by himself. As John Wayne's famous line goes, "a man's got to do what he's got to do". But this

individualism is not an end in itself. It is a means to the ultimate goal of freedom that one can only pursue in the mythological West. Of course, these Westerns are also filled with many problematic themes common of their era. They begin from a starting point of racism, entrench narrow visions of masculinity, and romanticize violence. At the centre of these all too American problems is the American dream of freedom, however vague it might be. The Westerns tell their audiences that the best way to be free, is to be like the cowboy heroes.

Subversive Stories

Western films have a long history of going in and out of popularity and there have been multiple points in history at which the Western has been declared "dead" (Simmon). The early 2000s were a recent low point in Western popularity. As Simmon, writing in 2003, states: "No Westerns were released theatrically in 2002, and the distinction of the most recent theatrical Western at the time I write—Texas Rangers (2001)—is to have the lowest per-screen box-office take in industry memory" (xv). However, in more recent years there has been a proliferation of Western releases. Some of the most popular Westerns released since 2010 include *Django Unchained* (2012), *True Grit* (2010), *The Hateful Eight* (2015), and *The Revenant* (2015). There have also been a handful of popular television series of the Western genre released such as *Godless* (2017) and *Westworld* (2017). What's interesting about the more recent releases is that many of them work hard to subvert some of the negative aspects of classic Westerns such as blatant racism and sexism and the hyper-masculine male ideal.

Perhaps the first of the subversive Westerns that have become popular in the new millennium was Ang Lee's 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*, based on the short story by Annie Proulx. The story is of two cowboys in the 1960s who are hired to care for sheep in the mountains over the course of the summer. They fall in love and spend the rest of the film navigating social norms and sexuality. Vital to each of their characters is their strong masculinity. Like the traditional cowboy, they are good with horses, skilled at shooting, and comfortable in nature. The movie makes clear that their sexual identities do not interfere with their identities as cowboys.

The Netflix series *Godless,* like so many Westerns before it, opens with a lone man on horseback entering a ranch. In this series, though, the woman who runs the ranch shoots the lone man in the throat for entering her property. The town, it turns out, is made up almost entirely of

women since a mine collapse killed nearly all the men. While it still features a traditional cowboy character, the gender dynamics in the show are complicated and the message of the series is decidedly feminist. It also makes a point of subverting the traditional dichotomy of "cowboys and Indians". The heroine, Alice Fletcher (Michelle Dockery), lives with her Paiute son and mother-in-law (a strategy also seen in *The Revenant* with the inclusion of Hugh Glass' Blackfoot son, Hawk). While the inclusion of indigenous characters only in supporting roles is still conspicuous, contemporary Westerns often work to recognize their problematic "cowboys and Indians" history. *Godless* tells a rather classic Western story, while still dealing with issues of race and gender.

Finally, the point of the HBO series *Westworld* (2017) is to exaggerate the tropes of the classic Western. The show depicts a science fiction future in which humans can pay to experience a Western-themed park. The protagonists of the series are robots (or "hosts") who believe they are real humans living in the Jeffersonian American West. All the tropes are there—the goodhearted cowboy, the innocent rancher's daughter, the desperado—because the park is designed the same way the cast and plot of a classic Western would have been. But as the series unfolds the hosts begin to question the nature of their existence and the world in which they live. The rancher's daughter takes up the role of leader usually reserved for the strong male lead and becomes the cowboy hero herself.

The contemporary spin these examples and others have put on the Western allow the genre to continue on as social values and norms change. Interestingly, though, although they have added more progressive sensibilities into their plots and characters, the underlying theme of a search for freedom persists. In *Brokeback Mountain* the two cowboys are only able to freely express their love for one another away from society and in the wilderness, the place where the cowboy has always been most free. In *Godless*, hero Roy Goode runs from the gang of criminals who had determined his future since childhood in order to follow his own path. In *Westworld*, the hosts fight to break free of the confines of the park and to be free of their slavery to humanity. Regardless of their identities, the heroes in Westerns are still in the pursuit of freedom. America, particularly Hollywood's America, sees itself as changing and the Western is changing with it. But as much as they change, there are certain values and themes that are non-negotiable in an American hero. The Cowboy continues on. He may no longer kill Native Americans or advertise cigarettes or even be

a he. But the romantic West and the mythic Cowboy is still alive and well in the American imagination.

The Gulch in the Mythic West, the Mythic West in the Gulch

It's this core value—the pursuit of freedom and adventure—that Cottonwood Gulch worked to preserve. When people went to the Gulch, whether as kids or as staff, they had an opportunity to step inside the Wild West myth for themselves. There was no need to tell them the story because they spent the summer living it. However, newcomers to the Gulch didn't arrive already valuing this myth. They were no doubt familiar with the West in the same way the rest of America is, that's the nature of the myth, but they had not necessarily embraced the core value that the myth teaches.

Before the Gulch can teach its participants how to pursue these ideals of freedom and adventure, they first have to want to pursue them. I'm arguing here that part of what the Gulch does more generally is give participants a taste of this freedom—show them what pursing these ideals can bring them. Part of the way the Gulch does this is by enabling the participants to fall in love with the space—the West—and re-enacting the expression of freedom within it. The Gulch worked to give the trekkers a taste of these things, to show them what freedom feels like, so that they'd be willing to work to have it.

What does freedom feel like?

If the wide-open spaces of the West are the ultimate symbol of freedom, then the city is the opposite. Since the late 1800s, antimodernists have feared the pace of cultural change, the routine of daily modern living, and the impact "overcivilization" had on the public (Wall, 4). The effects of the city were particularly worrying when it came to children. Lower-class children faced the physical dangers of the city caused by unsanitary conditions and crowded housing (10), but in the case of middle- and upper-class children, it was "the city's harmful consumer culture and 'mechanized' way of life" (30) that was the cause of most concern. And so, they were sent to experience nature. Nature was imagined to have an inherently positive impact on youth and was said to wipe them clean of the negative influences of the city (34). Summer camps were created as a response to the city and the search for a nature to which to send children (5).

Nowadays, it may not be the city, specifically, that is seen as harmful. The distrust of modernity persists, however, and technology is the newest demon. The Gulch's director, Kris, was serious about making Cottonwood Gulch an "unplugged" program. Kids handed their phones and all other technology over to staff as soon as they arrived at the airport. Staff, for their part, were encouraged to keep all technology in the office, out of view of the children. If they chose to keep their phones with them, they had better keep them out of sight and completely silent.

Despite the general assumption that young people are completely reliant on their technology, I found that the trekkers I spoke to about it also appreciated the "unplugged" aspect of being at the Gulch. As one of the Turquoise Trail trekkers explained to me:

I don't really like my phone.
I feel like I have a really negative relationship with it just because of like
different things that have like happened and different things that I have just seen
that have just been like…
and like the way that people, when I hang out with people
I don't have my phone out but sometimes they do and it just makes me feel
like I'm not important
because they're just checking their Instagram feed.
So.
I really like it and the fact that no one else has their phone is really nice also.

Regardless of whether one is escaping the city or technology, camps are about being released from the confines of modernity. But while the Gulch did value the benefits of children "being in nature", it sought to expose them to elements of the West beyond that. As I've said, the Gulch worked to teach its participants to pursue an ideal particular to the mythic West. As a staff member, I certainly was not immune to these powerfully affective experiences.

*   *   *

The Turquoise Trail group arrived at Muley Point one evening not long before sunset. When we drove up to the lookout point where we would set up camp I helped the girls set up the tarps and Taylor the kitchen. But once camp was set up there was still some time before dinner and I was able to spend some time appreciating where we were. Muley Point is at the top of a steep cliff overlooking southern Utah, and I ventured towards the edge of the cliff to enjoy the view below. I looked out over the canyon towards Monument Valley in the distance and couldn't believe its beauty. It seemed impossible, like I was in a dream. The canyon rolled down below me into

incredible folds and the rock folded into itself in a way that made me unable to distinguish the colours. There was red rock and green brush and then a purple that I didn't know how to place. Later, on the drive back down, I would realize that it came from the wildflowers that covered the walls. It was so quiet up where I was sitting that I could hear the sound of a crow's wings cutting through the air as it flew above my head to land on a rock nearby. Sitting there, I began to understand how writers like Thoreau or Terry Tempest Williams could be so romantic in their writing.

Figure 5: The view from Muley Point. Photo by author.

This feeling followed me each place we went. I had it hiking Mount Tukuhnikivatz watching the Aspen forests get smaller bellow me as I hiked upwards into the rocks; I had it driving through Valley of the Gods; I had it every time we drove Highway 612 headed to Basecamp; I had it in the Gila where everywhere we went I felt like a mermaid should be signing a song in the river bend. And still I wanted more. Every place of beauty that I saw and experienced made me realize how much beauty was out there in the world and how much I wanted to see it all. After I left the Gulch, I just wanted to be outdoors more. I had felt that feeling Cottonwood Gulch wanted me to feel, and it stuck.

It's tricky to teach a feeling, though. That first night at Muley Point Tori, Taylor, and I got very frustrated with our trekkers. During dinner, despite having that incredible view available to them, the Turquoise Trail girls chose to eat their dinner staring at the commissary truck. The day we drove through Valley of the Gods none of them wanted to get out of the van. I realized then that part of our job was to make them appreciate this beauty, to show them how to slow down and feel the peace and sense that freedom. Were we successful? I'm not sure we were. I wish that they had expressed their appreciation for the beauty more. Perhaps that's why kids go to the Gulch from age 10 to age 18. It takes a long time to learn how to appreciate that sort of feeling. All the staff could do was let them feel it over and over again and the hope eventually it would click.

Part of teaching them to appreciate this freedom was reproducing the lifestyle of those people the Gulch was emulating, those people who, as I showed above, have come to symbolize the essence of American freedom—the cowboy. There were details about the way the Gulch experience was set up that resonated with the cowboy lifestyle. Some of the cowboy tropes that are known from history and the media were integral parts of the Gulch experience.

Campfire

The night Turquoise Trail got back from the 20-mile hike to the Keet Seel Puebloan ruins everyone was exhausted. Even so, I don't remember ever singing more than we did that night. Tori had been practicing her guitar all summer and was getting much better. We sang all the favourites—*Ghost Rider*, *Wagon Wheel*, *Wayside*. In between songs we talked about Puebloan history but also about the physical and mental experience that the girls had had. As staff, we always tried to guide the conversation in a certain way. Campfire was the only place that we ever had the trekkers in a more classic classroom setting. This was the place where we could try to teach them more explicitly. It was the space where we tried to let them open up and express any issues they might have or share things they wanted to talk about. The girls talked about how good it had felt when we finally arrived at the ruins. Margaret[1] said that she hadn't thought she could make it back up the canyon at the end but that having me behind her had helped. No one mentioned that when Ashley finally made it up the canyon she met the rest of the group's cheers with the finger, and then stormed off. We had moved on from that. Finally, when we were all talked-out we sang the song we sang at the end of every campfire.

Desert silvery blue beneath the pale moonlight
Coyotes yappin' lazy on the hill
Sleepy winks of light along the far skyline
Time for men and cattle to be still.
So now the lightnin's far away
The coyotes nothin' sceery
Just singin' to his deary.
Yo ho, tomon a holiday
So settle down your cattle til the mornin'.
Nothing out there on the plains that you folks need
Nothing there that seems to catch your eye

[1] The names of all the trekkers have been changed for their privacy.

Still you got to watch them or they'll all stampede
Plunging down some 'royo banks to die.

So now the lightnin's far way
The coyotes nothin' sceery
Just singin' to his deary.
Yo ho, tomon a holiday
So settle down your cattle til the mornin'

And when *Desert Silvery Blue* was over, campfire was over. When Campfire was over, the day was over.

But despite Campfire's importance, we rarely actually had a campfire. The summer was the driest it had been in years and everyone was on high alert. Open fires were banned for most of the summer. Instead, a staff member would attach a headlamp to their water bottle and stick it in the middle of the circle. The light shone through the water, giving the circle the glow of a fire. But of course, there was no warmth, no crackling of logs, no smell of smoke on our clothes. I asked Tori one day why we did it that way. Why fake it with a light in the middle of the circle? She said that she thought it made it easier for people to think when they had light to stare at. It was unifying, sitting around a light. This is true, there was something to be said for staring at a light while you're reflecting on your experiences. But why maintain the concept of campfire at all? The Southwest has been getting drier every year and fire restrictions are a constant now. If the Gulch knew that for a large part of the summer having a real campfire wasn't going to be an option, why not change it up and have these reflective moments at another part of the day?

Campfire was a part of the Gulch. No one who had ever gone there would be able to imagine the Gulch without campfire. Traditions were a big part of the program's identity and it simply wouldn't have been authentic Gulch without campfire. Learning these traditions as a newcomer, they often felt strange or didn't make much sense considering the circumstances (like campfire with fire restrictions), but people would be very upset if the Gulch got rid of them. Traditions were a way of expressing authenticity—they say "this is who we are and who we always have been". What were the people at the Gulch expressing as their authentic selves when they insist on maintaining the Campfire tradition? The romanticism of the campfire was important to them. Continuing on traditions like Campfire with all the songs and reflections reflected the cowboy lifestyle. It allowed trekkers and staff to see themselves literally in a romantic campfire

light. Part of teaching them to appreciate the freedom of being out on the land was reproducing the cowboy lifestyle. This was just how it was done. When one is out on the land one has a campfire. It's something that we all know from our understanding of cowboys, and something that trekkers and staff do every night at the Gulch. It is a nonnegotiable part of that life. Campfire happened every night, no matter what. If the value the Gulch was trying to instill in the trekkers was a search for freedom and that freedom was best represented in the American mythology by the cowboy, then by consistently maintaining a classic cowboy act like the campfire as a nonnegotiable tradition at the Gulch performed and practiced the pursuit of freedom.

The Solo

In the middle of training, when it was still just staff at Basecamp, the group decided to hold Campfire in the Ponderosa Pine forest, not far from the main cabin loop. The theme of the campfire that night was fire, and it made sense to hold it in the midst of the Ponderosas which had been the site of many prescribed burns over the years. We sat in a large circle under the trees and the sweet scent of vanilla that the Ponderosa bark gave off filled the air around us and the sun set fire to the sky in a brilliant orange as it went down. I felt magic in the air, and when we sang *Desert Silvery Blue* and Campfire ended, I wasn't yet ready to leave. So, as the others drifted off towards their respective cabins, tents, and hammocks, I stayed. I found a tree with a nice wide trunk to lean against and settled in with my notebook in my lap and my headlamp shining from my forehead.

I wrote for what seemed like a long time and then my headlamp began to dim. I was getting tired and felt ready to head back, anyway, so I got up to leave. When I did I realized that my light was so faint that I couldn't see more than a metre in front of me. I couldn't find the path. There was a bit of a moon that night, but the sky was dark. I kept searching for the path, trying not to panic and to maintain reason. I knew the cabin loop was east of the Ponderosa forest so I walked in the opposite direction of where I thought I remembered seeing the beautiful sunset. Suddenly I was surrounded by a smattering of wooden lean-tos that some school group had built in the spring. In the daylight they were cute and impressively well-built. But now, in the dark, they reminded me of witches and I couldn't help but imagine dark figures emerging from their open sides. I couldn't get myself to walk towards them anymore, and since I wasn't having any luck

finding the path anyway I turned around and sat at the base of another Ponderosa, a safe distance away from the structures.

I felt like I should get up and keep walking but all I could think about was getting myself helplessly lost and a search party being sent out when I didn't show up for breakfast. I couldn't bear the thought of the humiliation and decided to stay where I was. And I did. I sat in that spot in the dark because the light my headlamp cast just a metre in front of me was scarier than the pitch black. All I had worn to Campfire was a pair of shorts, a t-shirt, and my Patagonia fleece and after a while I got cold. I tucked my knees into the bottom of my fleece and my face into the neck. In that position I was able to drift off a few times—the first time not for more than a few minutes but eventually I slept up to a half hour.

I spent a fair amount of time listening to the coyotes barking close by. I got scared and told myself that I was no different than any other animal out there and that if I stayed still and quiet nothing was going to hurt me. That worked until it didn't and then I looked up at the stars for a distraction. I let the sky play games with my vision and the depth make me dizzy as I contemplated the distance between each star. But before long I began to think about aliens. If I were to get abducted by aliens it would be in New Mexico, after all. I stuck my head back inside my fleece shell.

Eventually, of course, the sun rose and I was able to find the path back to the cabins where I immediately took a hot shower. I didn't mean to tell anybody about it. I was embarrassed. But when I got back to the cabin after showering Sophie was waking up for her morning run, and I told her what had happened. By lunchtime most people knew. My friends teased me, of course, but I didn't feel ashamed or incompetent like I thought I would. Instead, I came to enjoy telling my story. I felt a sense of comradery as I told it that I hadn't felt before. People laughed when I mentioned the aliens and seemed impressed when I told them about the moments of peace I had found. Mostly they remarked on how cold I must have been.

I and everyone else moved on soon enough. As the summer went on, though, I noticed people mention it from time to time—not as a funny anecdote but as a valid, important experience I had gone through. For example, while in Valley of the Gods with TT, Tori decided to talk about solo experiences at Campfire. As she planned to explain to the trekkers, solos were a time when they would be alone in the wilderness for a night—an important experience she wanted them to

have this summer. That night at Valley of the Gods, she decided she would tell the story of her first solo during high school in Maine, Taylor would tell her story, and I would tell mine. I was surprised when Tori asked me. I hadn't considered what happened to me a real solo since it was completely by accident and usually people at least have a sleeping bag. But it had been an experience that gave me insight into what it was like to be alone in nature, insight that I could share with those who had never experienced it.

Whether or not one had had a solo experience distinguished some people from others. Not every staff member at the Gulch had gone through it, but most had. For the most part, staff there spent large portions of their lives outside of the Gulch backpacking through wildernesses and almost anyone I asked had a story to tell me. My friend Cob told me the story of the solo experience that was most memorable for him. The story is long and I'm not able to include it all here, but he ended it this way:

I was just going down these spirally thoughts of just how silly it is
or like looking at the map like ten times in five minutes and being like
'yeah this is definitely the place but what if it's not?'.
You just don't have that reassurance but then you come out of it
and I really came out of it that second night I was there
because I got to a place that I knew really well.
And so my hike up the last day was along a trail that I knew really well
but I had never connected these points.
And so it was sort of spanning that gap of the unknown area in between and
the sun was going down
and I got scared of timing
and having to do it in the dark
and I had heard other stories of people having to be rescued out of that basin.
And you know just all the stuff in your head
and then I got to this place called Five Lakes and ah.
I was so exhausted and I was so relieved to be there
and I went to bed at six and I woke up at ten the next day, which is like 16 hours of sleep
and I was just so…
getting through something like that and working through the personal discomforts …
Oh you just learn so much…
I learned, different people will get different things out of it,
but I feel like that trip in particular
I learned so much about how to cope with uncertainty in my own head
because there's always going to be uncertainty in our lives…
in our careers…
all sorts of things.
And learning to have that voice in your head that is second guessing
but also how to quiet it
and how to push through and the reward that comes from doing.

Considering it was such an important rite of passage (which I'll discuss presently), as trekkers got older over their years of going to the Gulch, they worked towards their own solo. Of course, the younger treks did not do them, but once kids reached TT or PT and especially MDT age, they were considered ready. The reason Tori had decided to talk about solo experiences that night at campfire was because she was thinking about having the girls do one during our backpack in the La Sal Mountains. Unfortunately, we were threatened by thunderstorms that night and unable to do them. So instead we had the girls spend a few hours alone in different parts of the Aspen forest the next day. This was not considered a real solo since it's vital to stay the night. Still, it was a step in that direction.

MDT did have a solo night one night at Basecamp at the end of the summer, despite the thunderstorms. I spoke to Cob, who was their group leader, about what he hoped they would get out of the experience. He told me:

I've found in the past that when I have made time to take that space,
that what I get out of it was something that I never could have anticipated
or not that I never could have anticipated it
but I didn't go out there looking to check some boxes and come back with those things done.
I went out there and the things that happened to me
or the change in mindset was something that was just hard to anticipate,
hard to predict,
hard to know that that's what was going to happen.
So that's really what I want them to get out of it I guess.
Just learning more about themselves and how taking time away helps them as an individual.
And I don't know how that…
for each person it's probably going to be different.
At least at some level it will be different.
Maybe there will be commonalities
but I want them to have the experience of having taken that space
and learned something about themselves

Experiencing a solo was always an individual experience. The circumstances were always different and each person would bring their own understanding into and out of it. But regardless of how unique each person's experience was, there was a general understanding that one came out of it with a new perspective. Having experienced a solo indicated a rite of passage into a new area of knowledge. It was a rite of passage in a very classical sense and followed the trajectory of rite of separation, transition rite, and rite of incorporation (Van Gennep, 11). Let's take, for example, the

case of the MDT trekkers. Cob brought each of them to a part of Basecamp away from the rest of the trekkers and staff—a part far enough that they wouldn't be able to hear or see any of the normal activities the community was engaging in. There was, quite literally, a territorial passage (192) which separated them from the usual environment. Each MDT trekker then found a spot away from one another, so that they would be alone. Cob left each of them in the spot they had chosen and when everyone was ready returned to the populated portion of Basecamp. It's during this time that the trekkers experienced their transition. As Cob said, this meant something different for everyone. The personal revelations varied and each of their experiences were different (although they did all experience the same thunderstorm), but when Cob retrieved them from their spots in the morning and they were reincorporated into the Gulch community, they had a new understanding about their relationship with nature.

What was that understanding? What was important about spending a night alone in the wilderness? One of the most common traits I observed in the Western films was that of the lone cowboy. The ability to be alone in nature was one of the key elements of the character, even if those moments weren't always peaceful or positive. Having confidence in aloneness allows the cowboy to be out on the range, or in the forest, or on the mesa whenever they please. They can sleep wherever they find themselves, without relying on the presence of other humans.

When I found myself alone in the Ponderosa forest I didn't feel very free. Rather, I felt trapped by the dark. Still, after that night, the thought of being out by myself with the luxuries of a sleeping bag or a tent seems wonderful. I feel more confident that the aliens and the coyotes won't get me. I know that the dark passes and the sun comes up. I know how to be alone with my thoughts and the stars. Before that night I would have said that I knew all those things already, but I didn't really. By guiding trekkers through their childhood summers to that point, the Gulch enforced the importance of the solo. It taught them that part of being free is being alone.

On the Road with The Cloud

In the old, faded photographs in the Gulch archive of summers passed, one element remains constant. Regardless of whether the photos are from the '40s or '80s, the commissary trucks all look the same. They are big, hulking things painted green from back to front. While the cabs modernize over the years, the beds seem to stay the same. Above each of them is a rounded, metal

frame which supports a canvas cover, also army green. They look as if the concept of a covered wagon was simply superimposed onto the invention of the automobile. I suppose that's probably exactly what happened. The job of the commissary trucks (aka coms) was to carry a group's food, water, packs, and gear throughout their adventure on the road. I'm not sure when, exactly, the Gulch got rid of its last green truck, but while it served the same purpose, the truck I drove around the Southwest with the Turquoise Trail was quite different.

Our com's name was The Cloud. All Gulch vehicles have names, and ours was named for the Clouds, an important Gulch family related to Tom Henio. It was a white Dodge with the Cottonwood Gulch logo pasted onto the sides of its cab. It had a front and back seat and a collection of tapes to accompany the tape deck. While some coms were enclosed, ours was open to the elements. Instead of a canvas cover, the Cloud had a metal cage surrounding the bed and a gate at the back that was secured with a sliding bolt and a few bungie cords. Each morning after breakfast, I would swing myself up onto the back of The Cloud and the girls would line up behind it. In a rotating line they would pass me stoves, tables, backpacks, everything that made up our camp. I would pack these things one by one

Figure 6: Gulch Commissary Truck circa 1982. Photo courtesy of Cottonwood Gulch.

Figure 7: Com line-up circa 1978. Photo courtesy of Cottonwood Gulch.

onto the com, keeping the food towards the back in case somebody needed a snack on some highway stop. Once everything was packed, I would pull a tarp over top and secure everything with the ratchet straps that were connected to each corner of the cage (a task which took me the entire summer to perfect).

And then we would drive. I loved driving The Cloud. One sunny day in Utah, on our way to Muley Point, it was just Rebecca and me in the com and all the others were in front of us in the van. I had my left arm out the window and the Graceland tape playing. The road seemed to stretch on forever and the horizon was only interrupted by the dramatic peaks and mesas that pierced the blue sky. Rebecca sat, quietly staring out into the distance. We had been talking just before about her expectations for adulthood, but now we were both contentedly silent, quietly dreaming in our own worlds. We were headed West, as usual, and the sun was bright in the afternoon so I hid behind my sunglasses. I couldn't tell you what I was thinking about, it could have been anything. But then, all of a sudden, I wasn't thinking it any more. We had reached the top of the hill I hadn't even noticed we were climbing and suddenly the land below held spires of rock and mountains in the distance in a beauty that almost made me laugh, it seemed so unreal. The driving there did this. It would lull me into this sweet contentedness and peace, then it would snap me back into an awe of the place I was speeding through.

It was almost sad to get where we going each time because of how much I loved the drive. Still, there was something nice about the routine of arriving to our home for the night and setting up camp. Each trekker would carry out the task their detail required, and Tori and I would help Taylor set up. Taylor had a particular way that she liked the kitchen. She always had her prep table to her right, towards the back of the com, and the propane stove on her left, towards the cab of the com. In front of her would be another prep table and behind her the trunk with all the kitchen equipment. As Taylor set this up, one of the trekkers would help me untie a tarp from The Cloud's cage. Rolled up inside the tarp were two wooden polls, which I would pass to the trekker who would then try to secure them in the ground the same way as the free-standing tarp poles they used for sleeping. I often ended up retying their knots, because while a saggy tarp over them while they slept was their problem, making Taylor cook under a soggy tarp was a whole different story. Setting up the kitchen off the com like that gave TT a home on the road. Taylor picked flowers at each new campsite and would put them in a glass bottle on one of her prep tables, to give the space

a homey touch. One evening towards the very start of the first road loop, we had allowed the trekkers to explore the land where we were camped. There was a stream at the bottom of the hill, and the girls had set up their tarps away in a small grove of Cottonwood trees. Tori had told me to get them to do some soil and water samples with the Science Box, but when I found them they were all huddled in a pile under one tarp, fast asleep in the warm late afternoon. I couldn't bring myself to wake them, so instead I joined Tori and Taylor by the Com. Tori practiced her guitar and I worked on a poem while Taylor made that evening's dinner, all of us keeping a watchful eye on the thunder clouds in the distance.

Figure 8: Taylor and TT trekker in the Cloud kitchen. Photo by author.

When dinner was ready I did wake the girls, and they all came to the Com with their little stainless-steel cups. They stood in a line while Taylor served them each a serving of salad and then sat down. Once everyone was finished with their salad they lined up again for their hot course, and she served them the same way again. Once served, the girls sat on the ground by the com as they ate out of their cups, chatting casually. After Taylor had gotten a chance to eat she called them up for seconds and the whole process started over again. As everyone was finishing dinner, I poured water into a metal bucket and heated it over the propane stove. Once it was boiled, I distributed the water into three buckets, adding a few drops of bleach to one and soap to another. After they had all finished, they washed out their cups and spoons in the buckets and all took care of their respective details. Taylor made sure all the food was properly packed away in the coolers and the pots, pans, and SS cups were drying properly on the prep table. In the morning, all would be packed into the back of the Com and we would drive off to our next destination.

Life on the road was one of those things that gave the summer that quality of "Gulchiness", as my participants described it. After all, Cottonwood Gulch began that way. Hillis Howie didn't buy Basecamp until 1934, so the first years of the program were held exclusively on the road. The

Cloud, and all the other coms, made that possible. With all their food, clothes, and supplies in tow, Gulch groups were able to take to the road and explore the Southwest. The constant movement mirrored the mobility of cowboy life. The coms mirrored the previously common chuck wagons. Invented in 1867 by Charley Goodnight for a trail ride from Texas to New Mexico, chuck wagons served cowboys as a mobile kitchen. Before its use, cowboy cooks were limited to what they could carry on the back of a mule, and the new wagons offered far more opportunities for good eating (Hoy). I once commented on the similarities between com trucks and chuck wagons, and the staff member to whom I was talking just shrugged and said she was sure that's where the idea came from.

The Gulch's choice to use the term "com truck" instead of "chuck wagon" points to another strong influence of American summer camps in general—the military. Although there isn't enough space in this project to explore the influence of the military, it's important to note that it popped up periodically in vocabulary used and traditions honoured at the Gulch. Still, it's undeniable that the coms, especially the originals with their frames and canvas covers, were very similar to chuck wagons. Both allowed their users to roam, to carry with them all the supplies they would need for significant time out, wherever that might have been. In this way, the freedom of being on the road with The Cloud emulated the freedom of cowboys out on the range. Both allowed the ability to wander. It's through this wandering that the Gulch most successfully kept the cowboy ideal alive.

Figure 9: Turquoise Trail girls on The Cloud. Photo by author.

Conclusion

None of the Gulch practices that resonated with the traditional cowboy myth were framed that way explicitly. No one said that campfires were important because that's how the cowboys

spent their evenings. No one claimed that the value placed on spending time alone in the wilderness was connected to the cowboy's ability to do so. No one said that the road was an important aspect of the Gulch experience because it mirrored the cowboy's ceaseless wandering. In fact, I don't recall hearing the word "cowboy" once during my time there. This isn't surprising. As I've said, there are many negative qualities attached to cowboys—racism, toxic masculinity, and violence to just name a few examples. It was important that the Gulch distance itself from these qualities.

While politics were not often explicitly discussed, the general political atmosphere there was quite progressive. The Gulch prided itself on having had an all-female program so early (1934) and was staunchly feminist in its attitude towards young women's place in the outdoors. A majority of the staff working at the Gulch in the summer of 2018 were female. In fact, the program was actively trying to hire more male staff to give the boys more positive male role models. There was a strong LGBTQ+ presence among staff, and while staff members were not supposed to talk explicitly about their own sexuality with trekkers, it was supposed to be a safe space for trekkers to talk to adults about their own questions or feelings regarding the matter. All this combined with a strong conservation ethic and connection to local Dine families (which I discuss in much greater detail in Chapter 3) made it a program attractive to liberal American families.

This image was a difficult one to reconcile with those of the traditional cowboy and the ideal combined with the changing political reality caused a certain cognitive dissonance. However, as I showed in my discussion of subversive Westerns such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *Godless*, and *Westworld*, this dissonance is possible to reconcile. As much as politics or social values change over time, the freedom ideal remains central to the mythic Wild West. Despite all the problematic aspects of the cowboy narrative, the Gulch remained dedicated to this one—this ideal of freedom that is both very specific and impossibly evasive has remained. No matter how cowboys and the myth of the West have changed, they still represent this ideal. Freedom is always just beyond the horizon. It is found in wide open western roads and skies.

One of the things that my participants at the Gulch truly wanted me to understand was that the Gulch was about the Southwest. Unlike other outdoor education programs, they told me, the Gulch wasn't about "growing great kids". It was about showing them the Southwest. I believe them. Hillis Howie started the program out of fear that the Southwest was disappearing and the

belief that he had to bring the youth there before it did. But, the Southwest has not disappeared and is not going to disappear. Perhaps what Howie was afraid was going to disappear was not the physical Southwest, but the ideas wrapped up in what he imagined as the Southwest—this wild freedom and adventure, away from the confines of the city and the symbolic East. As I observed, instead of showing the kids a Southwestern freedom that is disappearing, the Gulch worked to preserve this freedom by emulating the old ways of expressing it and instilling it in the youth that still flew from all over to Thoreau, New Mexico.

INTERLUDE:

Rendezvous

Figure 10: Entrance to Basecamp. Photo courtesy of Cottonwood Gulch.

The trek groups that were on Basecamp already, Turquoise Trail and Wild Country Trek, had finally made it to the Basecamp entrance after a long morning of preparation. They lined both sides of the driveway, some of them sitting in the shade, some standing in groups of three or four. Staff mingled among them, also waiting. The feeling of anticipation in the air had been building for a week—the anticipation for Rendezvous. Rendezvous happened twice each summer and was a celebration at which everyone came back to Basecamp to get together, to enjoy being part of the larger community as opposed to their smaller trek groups. Staff seemed particularly excited as they waited for the first groups to arrive. After spending three intense weeks of staff training together they had branched off in different directions across the Southwest. Now everyone was coming back again.

Covering up the regular "Welcome to Basecamp" sign was a cardboard replacement which said "Welcome to Spacecamp" in painted letters. TT and WCT had voted, making Space the theme of that Rendezvous after much lobbying by staff (who were not allowed to vote). All the activities of the day would be loosely based on this theme. Basecamp staff had come up with space-focused games, crafts, and other activities ranging from rocket building to constellation painting. There were also costumes involved, and the long-awaited trip to Goodwill to buy these costumes had happened a few days prior. Tori, Taylor, and I had brought the Turquoise Trail girls out of Basecamp and to Goodwill, an event that had much more riding on it than I had originally thought. Most of the girls were very excited, and they bounced around the store in search of silver (for astronaut outfits), green (for aliens), and for anything sparkly (for stars, of course). As I perused the rows for my own costume they came up to me and held up options and I gave them my opinions, then they would run back to the dressing room to discuss with the others.

So, there we all stood on the morning of, lining the Basecamp driveway in our space costumes. I stood with Taylor in the heat, surrounded by aliens and planets of all kinds. Finally, a van turned into the driveway and all the space-people cheered. Some of the trekkers were piled into the back of their com, some waved out the van windows, and the staff beamed from the driver's seats looking exhausted and very happy. They pulled into the parking lot and released the children who were immediately absorbed into the Basecamp group. Staff then went on to unpack their com and find friends to squeeze. This homecoming repeated over and over again as each trek group returned, and each time a van arrived, the waiting group got bigger and louder. Eventually the last

group arrived and once they had descended from their vehicles the whole welcome party walked down the long driveway towards the mess hall. There, friends of the Gulch—many members of the Henio family, past trekkers, past staff, family members of trekkers, board members, etc.—were waiting and socializing among themselves. Trekkers who had been on the road were welcomed by the fry bread already frying by the back porch, and Basecamp decorated and ready for the festivities of the day.

Before trekkers could get themselves into too much trouble they were rounded up and split up into activity groups. The groups were mixed, putting kids from different treks together in order to give them the chance to hang out with new people. My group consisted of two boys from Adventure Conservation Trek, two Prairie Trek boys, and a little Outfit girl. The boys let her take the lead, and the first activity she wanted to do was rocket building. I lead the group to the NAW (Native Arts Workshop) which was currently decorated as a black hole, with blacked out windows and streamers hanging in the doorway. When we entered, though, it was abuzz. I sat on a table with Tori and Matt while we watched our groups build rockets out of construction paper, wood, and anything else Mackenzie, the resident artist, had provided for them in the workshop. When the time-slot was almost over, they launched them and competed for prizes in distance, durability, and style. Throughout the day the space-themed activities continued, interrupted only by lunch and dinner.

At dinner, we ate Navajo tacos (taco fillings inside fry bread) off of plates held on our laps in the Chatt'Oh and were encouraged to mingle with friends of the Gulch and other trek groups. Since Turquoise Trail and Wild Country Trek were hosting this Rendezvous, it was their responsibility to serve the elders of the Henio family their food, and make sure they were well attended to. After dinner details were done as usual, just on a bigger scale, and then it was time for campfire.

This was the main event—a combination of tournament and show. It consisted of four types of activities—Mudgie, Slaps, songs, and road reports. The preparation for each of these events had taken place while groups were out on the road, and Rendezvous campfire was the chance to take the spotlight. The songs and road reports were rather straightforward. Trek groups would prepare a song to sing—sometimes made up and sometimes just a song they liked—and during the road report they would tell the rest of the Gulch what they had done while on the road,

whether in the form of a skit, a story, or whatever. Mudgie and Slaps were the most fun for most people, though, since this was where things got competitive. During Slaps, two people stood a couple of feet away from each other (measured with human feet, not the imperial system) and both raised their hands up to their chests, palms flat and facing one another. They then proceeded to slap one another's hands until one of them lost. Losing was the result of either taking a step backwards, forwards, or falling down. Mudgie was a bit more complicated. In Mudgie, two teams of three sat cross-legged on the ground facing each other with a boot in front of them. A referee held the Mudgie (usually a lighter but anything of a similar size worked) behind their back and a player guessed which hand it was in. If they guessed right they got to choose whether to guess or pass first. If they'd chosen to pass first, the team captain then started with the Mudgie in their hands and the team members passed it to and from one another while the other team watched, trying to follow the location of the Mudgie. The spectators all sang the special Mudgie song, and when the song was ending each member of the passing team lowered their hands into the boots in front of them, and the other team had to guess which boot the Mudgie is in.

TT lost pretty quickly in Mudgie that night, but made it far in Slaps, losing only to a big MDT boy. No matter what the game or who they were playing against, though, everyone was always rooting for Outfit. They were adorable up there playing Slaps against almost certainly bigger opponents and they took it very seriously. The whole audience would chant Outfit! Outfit! Outfit! when they played and erupt with applause and cheers when they won. Ultimately, for staff it didn't matter who won or lost, but for trekkers it really did. I asked one staff member who had been a trekker as a kid about Mudgie specifically, and she explained it to me this way:

It's important to me
because it was one way that I got to become like a larger presence as a trekker
was becoming a part of a Mudgie team.
It meant that other treks saw me more
and then staff were seeing me more
and I wasn't in a leadership role,
but I was in a representative,
being the face of my trek kind of identified me as a Gulch kid.
I lived and breathed for this game
and it helped me identify as someone who really belonged here.
And even more so than belonging
I represented this place.
Which I think helped me gain a lot of ownership over the experience.

After campfire, the celebrations continued. First was Back Porch Swing. Many of the staff members who played instruments (so most of them) set up on the back porch, and a friend of the Gulch named David taught the rest of us how to square dance. The swing was hectic and noisy and by the time it was over everyone was a mess. Like many Gulch traditions, the Back Porch Swing was a relic of the early days of the Gulch. Back then, most people already knew how to square dance and the event was more a normal dance than a teaching moment. But in 2018 many staff didn't know how to square dance, let alone the trekkers. It was one of those moments when the traditions of the Gulch were pulled ungracefully into the future from the past. It was a hard tradition to carry on, but it was important to the Gulch

The Back Porch Sing was much nicer. Once trekkers had settled down from the dancing and staff had recovered, everyone found their trek groups and sat on the ground. Kerosene lamps were placed in the middle of the circle, giving a romantic glow to the night. Each group picked their favourite song from the songbook, and the whole camp sang them one by one. It was beautiful to hear all those voices singing together. After all the chaos that was Rendezvous—the running around, the competition, the costumes, the joyful reunions—it was beautiful to just settle in together and sing the best songs the book had to offer. And then, of course, we sang *Desert Silvery Blue*, our collective lullaby. Everyone had been singing it all summer and now for the first time we heard it in all of our voices. Rendezvous was about coming together as a community and this lullaby did the absolute best job of that.

CHAPTER TWO:

Precarious Beings

Figure 11: Prickly Pear. Photo by author.

It was the end of the summer and soon all the trekkers would be gone. Tearful goodbyes awaited us in our near futures and the evenings were cooler now, as if to warn us. Staff and trekkers alike clung to the comfort of Basecamp. Still, late one evening I stood on the back of a com as Tori passed items up to me like we had done countless times over the last few months, preparing for a departure. We packed multiple stoves and groovers; boxes full of kitchen supplies; jugs of water; and all those other items that had become a part of daily life for me. Standing up there on the com the sky stretched out before me, a deep orange darkened by grey clouds. Tori and I didn't chat as we loaded everything up. There was no lightness in our movements or excitement in our voices. The mood was tense because the departure we were preparing for wasn't an adventure, it was an escape.

Fire loomed over the hills. Full-time staff were tracking its movements, receiving updates on where the wind was taking it and considering the likelihood it pass through Basecamp. Kris was away, and while they were in communication with her, it was up to them to make the decisions they had been trained to make. How close would they let the fire get before evacuating? There wasn't much I could do—this type of decision was way beyond my experience level. But I could help Tori pack up a com so we would be ready, just in case. When we were done packing up at the barn we drove the com across the street to the mess hall so others could load up some food. By this time it was dark and there was nothing left for me to do but go to sleep, listening for the sound of emergency bells.

The bells never rang and the next day the com was unpacked, evacuation avoided. But as I lay in my sleeping bag trying to get some rest that night, I was acutely aware of my powerlessness. Part of it was that there was nothing more I, personally, could do to help out. There I was trying to sleep while other staff members would spend much of the night tracking the fire. But even they were rather powerless. There would be no stopping the fire if it came through, only escaping it. The Southwest had a way of reminding you of your powerlessness. Whereas the night before I had felt secure and safe in my sleeping bag, that night I felt small, vulnerable to everything around me. But that was part of being at the Gulch, and I came to understand it as a vital part of the Gulch's teachings. It might offer an empowering sense of freedom, but the price of that freedom was the harsh realization of one's own precariousness.

A Precarious State of Being

Within the anthropological literature, precarity is most often used in terms of a person or population's economic instability (Kasmir, 2018). While some argue that it has always existed and is not new (5) theorists often talk about precarity in the post-Forist capitalist context and use it to describe "unpredictable cultural and economic terrain and conditions of life" (1). It has come to define a class in itself. Different from the proletariat, seen as a more singular working class (7), the precariat is defined by its multiplicity with "structural relationships to capital and self-interests that are distinct from and opposed to older workers in stable, long-term, unionized jobs" (8). Whether or not precarity can be a good thing is up for debate (7-8) but either way it is characterized by instability.

Economic instability is not the only type of precarity, however. Anne Allison (2012) argues that precarity is connected to but not always interchangeable with precarious labour (349). Based in the context of suicide in Japan, Allison looks at social precarity, defining it as "a condition of being and feeling insecure in life that extends to one's (dis)connectedness from a sense of social community" (348-349). Feeling disconnected from a sense of community makes one feel vulnerable to life's difficulties, exposed. But there is another type of precarity that while connected to labour and social life I have yet to see much written about. This is environmental precarity—vulnerability to ecological forces that moments like awaiting a Southwestern bush fire makes very clear.

For my purposes, talking about environmental precarity, I find Judith Butler's 2012 discussion particularly useful. Her conception of precarity stems from the idea that people are all intimately connected to one another, so much so that the boundaries of the self are more porous than we usually imagine them. She states:

> "In my view (which is surely not mine alone) the life of the other, the life that is not our own, is also our life, since whatever sense 'our' life has is derived precisely from this sociality, this being already, and from the start, dependent on a world of others, constituted in and by a social world" (141).

Here Butler talks about sociality in terms of human relationships—humans are dependent on one another for food, shelter, safety, etc. (147). Still, if our lives are not entirely our own and are derived from other humans, they are just as much derived from nonhumans. Human bodies and lives rely on other species and objects for food, shelter, and safety, too. This dependence makes us

vulnerable, just as our dependence on other humans does (141). The precarious position of humans is not only due to economic or social instability, but to this vulnerability as well.

Butler makes an important distinction between precariousness and precarity. While precariousness applies to all humans because we are all interdependent on each other and therefore vulnerable, precarity is unequally distributed and makes some more vulnerable than others (Kasmir, 2). This distinction also applies when thinking about the environment. As the environmental justice movement has pointed out, while ecological disasters and changes affect everybody, they affect those already in vulnerable positions more than those with more privilege.

Most of the kids attending Cottonwood Gulch came from places of privilege and would not have been described as existing in a state of precarity whether economic, social, or environmental, though there were exceptions. While, using Butler's distinction, they existed in a state of environmental precariousness, like we all do, they generally would not have experienced the precarity that is immediate vulnerability to the ecosystem. That is, except at Cottonwood Gulch. Over the course of the summer at the Gulch, trekkers found themselves in situations where they were very vulnerable. These situations showed them how much they relied not only on each other and the staff, but also on their relationships with the nonhumans they encountered and interacted with. Throughout this chapter I will show how trekkers relearned their position in the world—how they came to understand their precariousness through understanding their reliance on other beings. As I discussed in Chapter One, the goal of Cottonwood Gulch was to instil the value of a pursuit of freedom in its trekkers. However, while old-time Western films emphasized independence as the way to achieve freedom, the Gulch taught that freedom is about understanding one's complete dependence, the precariousness of being human on Earth.

Shelter

The most obvious type of shelter that hikers or campers use is a tent. Sometimes trekkers at the Gulch learned how to build lean-tos but it would have been impossible to build shelter from found materials every night while on the road or backpacking. Trek groups needed shelter they could bring with them to set up and take down every day while they were on the move. The youngest group, Outfit, used tents because they were easiest to set up, but these were not actually

practical in the desert because the wind blew sand into the zippers and they constantly got stuck. Instead, older groups camped under tarps.

The first thing Turquoise Trail staff taught the group to do on the first night was to set up their tarps. Camping tarps are rectangular pieces of water resistant fabric that vary in size. Usually, they have four ropes attached to each of the four corners and two ropes attached to the middle of the tarp that come off of the ends. If setting up the tarp in an area with trees, the first step is to find two trees the tarp fits between and to tie the end ropes to the two trees. If there are no trees available, one has to use the tarp poles which work through a combination of balance and magic. Once you have tied off the end ropes, you have to tie of the corner ones. Getting the angle right is important, because you need to pull the tarp in the right directions so that the fabric between the corners won't sag. You tie the corner ropes either to stakes which have been hammered into the ground, or to brush or rocks. Setting up a tarp is satisfying once you've gotten the hang of it (at least I found it so) but difficult to get right. You have to know your basic knots, have the patience to tie and retie them in order to get the angles right, and, if you're using the tarp poles, gain a basic understanding of physics, or at least balance.

It took Turquoise Trail a long time to get their tarps right despite having learned on the first night and repeating the process almost every night for the rest of the summer. The rule was that they always had to set up a tarp even if they planned to sleep out under the stars. No one wanted to be caught in a storm with no tarp up. But for the first half of the summer hardly a drop fell. Because of this, Turquoise Trail failed to understand the issue with their saggy tarps for a long time. Every evening Tori, Taylor, and I would tell them to redo their angles and every evening they would grudgingly redo them, only slightly improving the sag. Eventually, though, monsoon season hit and the damp Turquoise Trail girls finally understood the importance of getting the angles right on their tarps. The tarps, or more the girls' relationships to the tarps, were one node of the network of things and beings keeping them safe and comfortable.

Water

While on the road, Turquoise Trail carried six water coolers that provided water for drinking, cooking, doing dishes, and brushing teeth and washing hands. The routes the group took through the desert often depended on where it would be possible to fill up the coolers, and the

search for water sometimes landed the group in some unexpected spots. Water was constantly in the back of staff members' minds. It was easy to get dehydrated in the desert, and the goal was to drink five litres a day, which was convenient since most water bottles held one litre. Any time a trekker complained of not feeling well, any time they were being whiny, any time they were getting tired too fast, staff members' instinct was to ask "How many water bottles have you drunk today?". While it wasn't as much of an issue with older groups, staff had games and other tactics to make sure younger kids were staying hydrated.

Finding water while on the road was mostly something that staff worried about. While backpacking, though, the trekkers were involved in this worry because they had to ration their own supplies to be able to make it to the next source. Worrying about water could really change a backpacking experience, which Tori kept in mind when picking routes. Turquoise Trail took two backpacking trips over the summer. The first was along a branch of the Gila River in the Gila Wilderness, and the second was up Mount Tukuhnikivatz in the Manti La Sals. As Tori put it to me, the Gila hike was the "backpacking is fun" backpack, while Mount Tukuhnikivatz would provide a bigger challenge. Part of the reason the Gila was the "backpacking is fun" trip is that water was never an issue. The trail followed the river and any time we were getting low on water it was right there to fill up with. It wasn't just the quantity of the water that made it easy, but the quality. Staff taught the trekkers how to look for the best places to collect water. The faster it was running the better, and it was important to avoid gathering it from places where livestock might be nearby. Since the Gila was a wilderness area, there was no livestock and the water ran fast and clean. Even so, to be safe, we put a drop of bleach into each litre to kill bacteria.

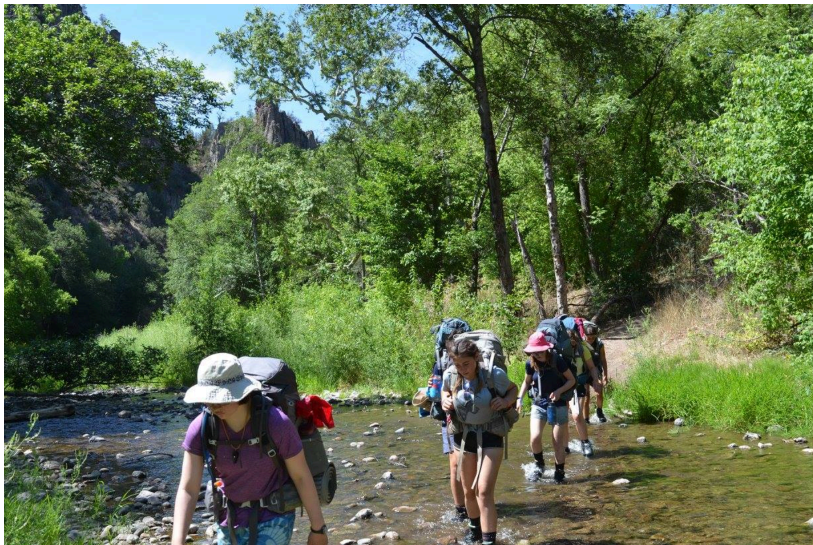

Figure 12: TT hiking along the Gila River. Photo by author.

In the La Sals we had to be more careful. There, we were hiking on range land for a majority of the time and while the water we found did look very clean, we were wary of the cattle we had seen while hiking. We were better about straining our water through bandanas as we filled our water bottles and added more drops of bleach. We also made sure to sanitize the rims of our bottles by turning them upside down and letting some of the safe water run out over all the edges. Finding water was also harder in the La Sals. Tori had planned our route out ahead of time, but when we arrived at many of the places there was supposed to be water, it was nowhere to be found. Along with learning how to make sure water they were drinking was clean, the trekkers learned the importance of hydrating when they were able to. During backpacks when the water situation was insecure, it was important to drink as much wa ter as possible when they did find it.

Drinking water was so important that people at the Gulch always kept their water bottles with them. With the younger kids it was staff's responsibility to make sure they had their bottle before going anywhere, but eventually it became second nature. One's water bottle became such an extension of the self that they came to be symbols of a person's identity. It was common for both staff and trekkers to cover their water bottles with stickers from places they had visited over the summer or on past trips. This was partly an indicator of achievement, an indicator of the mountains a person had climbed or national parks they had visited. The fact that stickers went on the water bottle, specifically, is significant. People at the Gulch were socialized to make their water bottle a part of them, to always have water available. Without it, they could do nothing—they were completely reliant upon it.

Food

Most mornings, Taylor and I woke up before the sun. It certainly didn't happen naturally. Both of our alarms would go off and we would pull ourselves out of our warm sleeping bags into the cool desert morning air. We might smile at each other or whisper a good morning, but mostly we were silent. There wasn't much either of us wanted to say as we dragged ourselves into our morning routines. Usually, I would perch myself on top of the Cloud, facing East to watch the sun rise as I tried desperately to catch up on field notes. As I scribbled, I would hear Taylor puttering around below me, preparing breakfast.

The first thing she would do was take out the coffee pot and boil water for coffee. Then she would get out all the ingredients she needed for that morning for the hot course and make sure the coolers were drained of any ice that had melted overnight. Next she would take out the pans and set up all her tools around her, including gloves, aluminum foil, and gallon zip-lock bags which were always needed. If it was an easy morning meal, like pancakes, she would combine the mix and water and heat the pan and try to time them so that the pancakes were halfway done by the time the cereal course had started. But if she was serving a more complex breakfast, like everyone's favourite breakfast burritos, it required frying up the potatoes she had cut and soaked the night before and scrambling eggs with sausage, pepper and onion while also heating up the tortillas.

Somewhere in the middle of Taylor's routine I would climb down from the Cloud and help Tori wake up the trekkers. We would do our best to get them to take down their tarps and get themselves ready before breakfast was read. When everything was in a line behind the com, ready to be packed, we would let them line up for the first course and they would take their pick of cereals. They would eat their cereal and Tori and I would sip our coffee while Taylor finished the hot course, and when she was done they would line up and she would serve them.

When it came to eating on the road, the trekkers were well taken care of. Each day, one of the Turquoise Trail girls would be assigned as cook's assistant and help Taylor with lunch and dinner, but mostly it wasn't their responsibly to prepare food. It did, however, change the way they consumed food. On the road, trekkers and staff ate out of what they had named *SS cups*. These were small stainless steel bowls that the whole meal would be piled into, whether it was chili and salad, tacos, or anything else. The SS cup was paired with a spoon—the only utensil available since anything could, technically, be eaten with a spoon. This may not seem like a big change, but considering how socialized eating norms are, learning to eat this way took some getting used to. Eating on the road took flexibility. One couldn't expect a plate, bowl, fork, spoon, and knife if the dishes were being washed in a metal basin with sacrificed drinking water.

While backpacking though, especially towards the end of the summer, Taylor did give the trekkers more responsibility when it came to preparing food. It was particularly important to her that they learn how to use the Whisperlight stoves. These backpacking stoves were fueled by white gas, which is relatively cheap, and were light and easy to carry while backpacking. They were however, difficult to get used to. It was important to know how to properly clean, fix, and use them

if there was going to be any hot food out in the backcountry. The flame that came out of these stoves could be rather unpredictable. Although there was an aluminum sheet to protect from the wind, it could be scary when the flame seemed to get out of control. Part of cooking in the backcountry was understanding the risks of fire. Turquoise Trail was lucky in that we didn't hike anywhere with fire restrictions that forbade camping stoves, but many groups had to eat their backpacking food cold. Fire—its usefulness combined with its danger—reminded folks that they were connected not only to the immediate ecosystem, but to the climate as well. The condition of the climate, in this case draught, affected everything down to whether or not they'd be able to warm the beans they put in their stomachs out there.

Before each loop, Taylor thought hard about the meals she wanted to make on the road. She told me that it was important to her that the trekkers recognize much of the food so that they would feel comfortable, but that there be enough variety that they didn't get sick of it. Food was very important at Basecamp, too. Both trek group cooks and Basecamp cooks understood how much the food could change a trekker's experience over the summer. As Walter, the Basecamp head chef, explained to me:

I feel like if you can keep the trekkers happy
keep them eating healthy, fun foods
it really improves their experience
and it helps them to not have to worry if they're going to have enough food
good food.
You know?
Otherwise they'll be constantly worried on the next meal
and they won't be focusing on how much fun they're having.
So I think it has a really big impact on trekkers and their experience here.

The importance of food in regards to the trekkers' emotional well-being may not seem particularly relevant when it comes to them learning to take care of themselves. After all, mostly staff members fed them—they weren't required to learn how to feed themselves entirely. But even if they didn't have to prepare it themselves, trekkers were very close to the food that they ate. When they were backpacking, they had to carry all the food they would eat on their backs and help Taylor get a steady flame going if they wanted it warm. Being on trek made clear that food didn't just appear out of nowhere. It was crucial to both their emotional and physical well-being and making it depended on many different kinds of energy.

Animals

Hiking among the Aspen trees was a magical experience for Turquoise Trail. It was beautiful wandering down a path with great white trunks shooting up into the sky all around. Aspens became many TT trekkers' favourite tree by the end of the backpack in the Manti La Sals. But when it came to hanging a bear bag, they were less than ideal. On Turquoise Trail's first night that backpack, the group was forced to sleep in a dense Aspen grove. Tori had been looking for a place to set up camp for some time, but it was getting dark and we needed to get settled. When it came time for me to collect the food and hang the bear bags I looked up and realized that the lowest branches of the Aspens were way up in the sky. There was no way I would be able to get the rope over them. I was forced to hike out quite a bit, bushwhacking my way through until I found a young Aspen with lower branches. It was there that I hung them.

The next morning, I went out to collect the bags before the trekkers woke up so that Taylor could begin preparing breakfast. I balanced on a fallen log on my way out to avoid having to cut through the underbrush again, but when I headed back with the heavy bear bag in my arms it was more difficult to balance. At one point I slipped and my foot went down through the brush and into a rotting log. Then, suddenly, I was in sharp pain on multiple points of my body. The pain registered first and then I realized that I was being attacked by hornets. I dropped the bag and ran as fast as I could, sitting down on another log when they had stopped chasing me. I called for Tori and Taylor and they came to my rescue, which in this case meant squeezing my hand as I caught my breath and cried a little bit.

When we thought the hornets had probably settled down, Taylor went to collect the bag because Tori was very allergic to bees. As she sat there with me, Tori and I realized how despite it being unfortunate that I was in pain, we were rather lucky that it had been me. It could have just as easily been her who had gone to retrieve the bear bag. If she had stepped on the hornet's nest the group would have had to evacuate immediately. Tired, I had moved brashly through the brush. It was an important reminder to Turquoise Trail staff that we were not alone in the forest, and that our experience relied heavily on our respect and understanding of the creatures around us.

There was a fine line between respect and fear. Tori, Taylor, and I decided not to tell the trekkers about my hornet experience. We knew we would be doing quite a bit of bushwhacking that day and we didn't want them paralyzed with fear. Instead, we made sure to overstate the

importance of avoiding rotten logs. But in the moments when the trekkers were aware of certain dangers, fear was an interesting emotion to manage. Teaching them how to responsibly straddle this line between fear and respect, fear and fascination, was an important part of teaching them about their position in the world out there.

The day Tori, Taylor, and I picked the trekkers up from the airport we camped not far from Arroyo del Tajo. There was a lot going on for the girls that night. They were just starting to get to know each other and their staff members and for some of them it was their very first time sleeping out under the stars. Their nerves about the summer ahead had compounded into their nerves about that night, and when night came they all traveled together to the camping toilet we had set up. On their way back towards the tarps where Tori, Taylor and I were sitting preparing for Campfire, they all suddenly yelled. For some of them it was more of a squeal, for some it was a scream.

"Rattlesnake!" one of them called out to us.

Tori and I glanced at each other. Obviously, Rattlesnakes were dangerous. We didn't want them to panic, though. This would probably not be the last time they encountered a Rattlesnake or other dangerous animal and it was important that they deal with the situation properly.

"Okay," Tori said to them, her voice calm. "It's no big deal, just walk away slowly and come back over here."

None of them answered her and they all continued to stare at the snake, huddled together. The way they were clinging together made them look afraid, but their faces told a different story. Emma's face, in particular, held a strange smile. It was goofy and nervous. All of them were both scared and fascinated. We had to tell them to get away from the snake again, more urgently this time.

This combination of emotions was a common reaction to animals for Turquoise Trail. I witnessed it again during the backpack in the Manti La Sals. The area through which the group was backpacking was not designated Wilderness, this time, but range land. There were cows everywhere. While hiking, Tori and I played a fun game with each other called Bear or Cow. Each time we heard a large animal in the trees we would have to guess whether it was a bear or a cow. Luckily, it was a cow every time. It was nice having the cows around. Tori told me that it felt like they were keeping her company. But despite their kind eyes and long lashes, cows are large animals

and in herds rather intimidating. At one point, TT reached a point in the path that was entirely blocked by a small herd lead by a bull. I watched Tori navigate the situation in a similar way the trekkers had dealt with the rattlesnake. It was unlikely that they would charge and it was cool to be so close to them. Still, she was responsible for the group's safety and had to make sure not to make any rash decisions. In the end, we approached them slowly and eventually they simply moved away onto the grassy hill side.

Renegotiating relationships with animals was an important part of the trekker's learning at the Gulch. Animals were a reality, which was a good thing. They were a part of the wildlife that Gulch participants cherished. But their existence in these spaces and their relationships with the trekkers was different than domestic animal relationships. They could do harm—hornets would bite, bulls could charge, bears could eat all of the food or worse. Wanting to be in the spaces in which these animals lived meant learning how to understand their presence. Too much fear would mean never stepping foot in these spaces. Not enough fear meant harm. If the Gulch wanted their trekkers to be out there, they had to learn how to straddle that line.

Objects

It would be dishonest to portray the Gulch as a program that removed its participants from "society" entirely. As I've described previously, it didn't see itself that way either. The Gulch wasn't only about immersing its participants in Wilderness, despite the value it placed on it. It was about introducing them to the Southwest and teaching them to chase the Western dream. Because of this, the Gulch recognized its reliance on human-made objects. Learning the importance of these objects was just as vital for pursuing the West as learning about their reliance on water or their relationships to animals.

There was one day of staff training in particular that focused on vehicles. This was an extremely important training day because most staff would be spending a significant amount of the summer on the road and if anything happened to the coms or vans, it was their job to fix the problem. The day began with a lecture from the man who took care of all the Gulch vehicles, a local mechanic who was difficult to understand but undoubtedly knew what he was talking about. After listening to him for a while, the group of staff then went on to the parking lot where all the Gulch vehicles were waiting. There, an experienced staff member went over how to change a tire.

I had technically learned how to change a tire when I first got my licence at 16, but I had never had to use that skill and was grateful to have the refresher course.

The highlight of the day, though, was the driving. Each new staff member got into the driver's seat of a com with an experienced staff member on the passenger's side. The experienced staff members directed the drivers out along the highway, which was easy, then onto a dirt road headed up a steep hill. The road hugged the side of the hill and made sharp turns on difficult terrain. The drive required more attention and effort than any I had driven before, and the size of the vehicles we were driving was intimidating. Still, we all made it up, although one group got stuck for a while, and the ride back down was exhilarating. All the nerves that had gone along with learning to drive these vehicles translated into a sense of empowerment when I realized I could.

But the learning attached to Gulch vehicles didn't stop with learning how to drive them and it didn't stop with staff. When on the road, one of the details trekkers were expected to do every morning was the vehicle check. This included checking the oil, coolant, tire pressure, etc. on both the com and the van. For many of the trekkers, being on trek was the first time they had ever opened the hood of a vehicle, and the repetition throughout the summer increased the possibility that the skills would stick. As I discussed in Chapter One, pursuing the West and the ideal of freedom it held would not have been possible without the coms. The coms allowed trek groups to take to the open road, to chase the horizon, to explore places in all corners of the Southwest. But that freedom would stop abruptly with a flat tire or an overheated engine. It was important that the trekkers understand that these vehicles were vital to their experience, and that they needed to know how to take care of them.

In many ways, the Turquoise Trail vehicles became part of the group. TT grew an intense emotional attachment to the Cloud and it was difficult to say goodbye to it at the end of the summer. After so much time spent inside of them, caring for them, and relying on them, the vehicles seemed like members of TT. This feeling extended to other objects, too. The time individuals spent with their personal objects made them indispensable. Each trekker's relationship with their gear was an important part of their experience, especially while backpacking, and it was important to teach them how reliant their own bodies were on their gear.

It was interesting to see how much value people experienced in outdoor activities put into the gear that they chose to buy. Buying gear was an important decision because it was expensive

and supposed to last for a long time. Tori told me that she had picked out her first backpack when she was in high school and had stuck with the same brand ever since. For other gear, she told me that the suggestions of other women, specifically, were important to her. She valued experiences—both her own and people she was close to. She was adamant that every body is different and that understanding your own body's needs was the most important thing.

One of the first things Tori taught the Turquoise Trail trekkers when backpacking was how to properly pack their backpacks. She showed them how to distribute weight evenly inside the packs while still keeping in mind easy access to important materials. Things like a rain jacket should be at the top of the pack, just in case, and heavy foods should be at the bottom of the bag, equally distributed on the left and right sides. Learning how to properly pack a bag was much more important than the trekkers initially thought. They would be carrying these backpacks for hours a day, and the state of their muscles depended on it. One of the Turquoise Trail trekkers had trouble with her backpack the entire summer. She would often wake up late in the morning and have to rush to pack it. The uneven distribution of weight in her pack and her insistence on wearing the pack too low, despite staff having shown her where it should sit, made hiking a much more difficult experience for her. By the end of the summer though, most trekkers learned. Eventually, they understood how personal one's gear was to one's own body and when they did their gear became a part of them. Perhaps more than any of the other examples I have given in this chapter, the trekkers' relationship to their gear illustrates the porous boundaries of the self that I have borrowed from Butler (141).

Figure 13: TT hiking with their full backpacks. Photo by author.

Precarious Entanglements

To truly unpack the boundaries of the self is far beyond the scope of this paper. Still, for our purposes I believe it's necessary to look at a particular separation, that of the self from the

environment. While these dichotomies—self and environment, nature and culture—have been widely discussed in anthropology (I will come back to them in the next chapter), in this chapter I believe it is most useful to look at ecologies of life as an alternative to the nature/culture or self/environment dichotomies. In his chapter "Culture, Nature, Environment: Steps to an ecology of Life" (2000), Tim Ingold discusses how focusing on the synergy between organism and environment can bring us back to "a genuine ecology of life" (16). For Ingold, the dichotomy between the two is not useful because an individual and its environment are constantly reacting to one another, creating one another. While "textbook ecology" makes the classic equation of organism plus environment, Ingold states that "A proper ecological approach…is one that would take, as its point of departure, the whole-organism-in-its-environment. In other words, 'organism plus environment' should denote not a compound of two things, but one indivisible totality" (19).

I have hesitated, so far, to use the term entanglement. On one hand, when analyzing the ways in which the trekkers at the Gulch were completely dependent upon the beings and objects that were a part of their experience, it seems appropriate. However, my understanding of the term comes largely from Donna Haraway's book *When Species Meet* (2008) from which I came to understand that in order for things to be entangle, they have to be able to "look back" at one another. Haraway says, "we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories" (42). I hesitate to talk about the relationships formed at the Gulch in terms of entanglement because not all of the "others" I am discussing were alive. The trucks, for example, weren't "looking back" at the Gulch trekkers. Still, if we return to Ingold's argument for ecologies of life, we can see how the trucks, the streams, the water bottles, the cows, the tarps, all of these things were part of the trekkers' environment while at the Gulch. So, according to Ingold, they were inseparable from the trekkers themselves. In other words, the trekkers were entangled with these things in the way that all more-than-human ecologies are entangled. To be disentangled from these various objects and beings would be fatal and part of what the Gulch was teach was how vital these relationships were to survival.

Survival is a major part of the Cowboy narrative. When discussing the idea of 'survival', Anna Tsing (2015) states that "In popular American fantasies, survival is all about saving oneself

by fighting off others. The 'survival' featured in U.S. television shows or alien-planet stories is a synonym for conquest and expansion" (27). It's odd that she didn't choose to use Cowboys as an example here as they fit perfectly into her definition, particularly in regards to conquest and expansion. I argued in Chapter One that the Gulch was actively pursuing the Cowboy dream of freedom. In the classic Western Cowboy Myth, this freedom is about moving forward, fighting of "Indians" in order to be able to stay on the land. The Cowboys are depicted as fiercely independent and if they cannot fight to stay where they are, they simply move farther West as John Wayne did in *Hondo* (1953). Freedom means moving forward. This moving forward is consistent with the modern notion of progress, and the belief of a straight line out of the past and into the future (Tsing, 5).

As I showed above, however, this was not the kind of survival that trekkers learned at the Gulch. Their understanding was of precarity, of dependence. I maintain, though, that this survival did not contradict their pursuit of freedom in the West. Perhaps instead, the Gulch was redefining the definition of freedom inside the Western myth. Freedom in the way classic Westerns depicted it was all about independence. Their ability to take to the land whenever they wanted was framed as their own achievement and strength. But the Gulch taught trekkers that in order to be free, in order to take to the land whenever they wanted, they had to understand that they were not independent. They had to understand that their survival was dependent on a vast network. As Tsing puts it, "staying alive—for every species—requires livable collaborations…Without collaboration, we all die" (28).

Conclusion

Ethnographers who look generally at the way humans and nonhumans come together and interact with each other often end up illustrating this environmental precarity. There are many examples I could give, but while writing this chapter I have thought most often of Jason de León's *The Land of Open Graves* (2015), perhaps because it takes place within the environmental context of the desert. In this ethnography, de León shares the stories of migrants crossing over the Mexico/US border and the extreme difficulty of facing the harsh Sonoran Desert. What happens to these migrants as they're crossing the desert depends so much on the environmental conditions—the heat, the animals, the water (or lack thereof). De León's point is that the US

border enforcement strategy "Prevention Through Deterrence" weaponizes this environment in order "impede the flow of people from the south" (5), which goes beyond what I'm arguing in this chapter. Still, their situation is a good example of what real environmental precarity can look like. It has real life or death consequences.

What the trekkers at Cottonwood Gulch experienced clearly is not the same. Not only did the organization do everything it could to make sure the kids didn't actually come into harm's way, but they also didn't have the US government after them while they navigated the environment. Still, Cottonwood Gulch helped them become aware of the effect environmental factors have. It taught them the importance of understanding their position within this network of relationships differently. As climate change and shifting environmental conditions put more and more people into states of environmental precarity, understanding humanity's general precariousness will play an important part in trying to find balance and learning to care for a changing world and the people in it.

INTERLUDE:

The Nail and the Bell

Figure 14: Santa Fe Railway circa 1926. Photo The Taos News.

If there was one thing that I and other newcomers to the Gulch learned very quickly, it was that being late to meals was completely unacceptable. Meals were approached with a discipline that echoed the military history of so many summer camps. In "the old days" if a person were late for a meal, they were given an orange and banished to the back porch to eat their fruit alone. Nowadays, though, tardiness doesn't result in an orange and isolation but with a stern talking-to from the Gulch's director, Kris, which is best avoided whenever possible. Meals were the time of day when everybody came together from whatever they had been doing around Basecamp that day, and it was important to be prompt.

Breakfast was, of course, the hardest meal to arrive to on time because first one had to wake up. Like every other call to action at the Gulch, wake-up and then breakfast was announced with the bell. The bell hung on the outside wall of the front porch side of the Mess Hall. It was classic looking and seemed as if it had been hanging there forever, though its predecessor laying in retirement on the ground nearby revealed that it hadn't. One morning, having woken up early in order to get some field notes written, I was asked to ring the wake-up bell. Feeling honoured, I closed my notebook and went out on the front porch, then climbed up onto the bench that sat in front of the bell. I grabbed the protective ear muffs that hung beside it and placed them over my ears. Beside the ear muffs hung an old railway nail, rusted and full of history, which I was to use to ring. In the weight of the nail I felt the land into which it had been dug and then unearthed from years later by some Gulch trekker. I hit the bell hard with the nail, taking time between strikes at first but then ringing ever faster to rouse the sleepy trekkers and staff from their sleeping bags. I thought of all the people who had hit this bell before me and all those who would do it after. It was one of those many Gulch moments that seemed to stretch on infinitely backwards and forwards in time, trapping me somewhere in the middle. Eventually I let the last ring die out, and by the time it had faded I couldn't imagine that anyone on Basecamp was still awake.

Soon, those trekkers assigned to the kitchen detail that morning began to arrive at the Mess Hall. I helped them lay out the plates and cups and utensils necessary for breakfast on the tables until I felt they had it under control and then I went outside. Other staff had begun to arrive and after pouring themselves coffee they too wandered out to wait. Soon some other staff member was instructed to ring the bell, this time only three times for breakfast. More trekkers began arriving but they weren't yet allowed inside the Mess Hall. Instead, they stood in what only the generous

would describe as a line starting at the front door. There was some chatter, but the breakfast line tended to be a quiet one. The staff clutched their mugs of coffee and the trekkers wiped sleepy seeds from their eyes in the chilly desert morning until a few staff members got up in front of the group and started to sing a wake-up song.

All I want is a proper cup of coffee
Made from a proper copper coffee pot.
I may be off my dot
But I want a cup of coffee from a proper coffee pot.
Iron coffee pots and tin coffee pots
They are no use to me!
If I can't have a proper cup of coffee from a proper copper coffee pot
I'll have a cup of tea.

The song was repeated louder and faster until everyone was more awake. Some people groaned, some people feigned irritation, and some people were genuinely irritated. But there was deep affection for these songs, and those trekkers would be able to sing them from memory for years to come. The day hadn't really started without a morning-song.

The staff sang songs until the kitchen was ready and Walter signaled a staff member to ring the bell once more, this time just one soft ring. At the sound of the bell everyone fell silent, took off their hats, and snaked inside (a few stragglers sprinting towards the Mess Hall to arrive before the door closed). Inside, those who had been assigned to Kitchen Detail that morning stood at each table, their hands in the air and fingers indicating how many seats were available. One by one, staff and trekkers found a spot then stood at it silently until everyone had found a place. The room waited, hungry, until Kris announced "Seats!" then a flurry of activity erupted as everyone pulled out the benches and began talking all at once before serving the food.

This was not a special morning. It was one of the few mornings that I got the honour, but whoever rang the bell the routine was the same every day. During the first days of staff training, new staff were confused by this strange tradition. There were seemingly endless traditions and routines to learn and new staff often described the rules as "culty". But by the end of the three-week staff training most people had not only learned the rules but found meaning in the performance of them. During the first few days when the kids had finally arrived new trekkers often expressed confusion and disdain for the behavioural rules in a similar way to how new staff had just a few weeks before. But new staff enforced these rules as strongly as returning staff,

sometimes even more strictly. Eventually, for staff and trekkers alike, it wasn't just the rules and traditions that were learned, but their value.

What was this value? Routines and traditions like the breakfast line I just described were said to have a particular "Gulchiness". In other words, they were what made the Gulch the Gulch. Traditions so strange and particular were difficult to get used to, but once we did get used to them it was difficult to imagine life without them. Like I said, the day hadn't really started without a morning-song. I could stop there, but "Gulchiness" is not a satisfying descriptor. It may have been enough for the staff and trekkers, but it's necessary to unpack what they mean by it. Let's take the nail—the rusty one I used that morning to ring the bell. Its home is just there beside the bell, and it would be unthinkable to ring the bell with anything else. But that nail came from somewhere. It was a railway nail, meaning that it had possibly been dug into the ground as the railway expanded westward. There were remnants of trains past everywhere around Basecamp. At some point, the track that that nail was keeping in its place would have been torn away, that nail discarded and left in the dirt. Then at some other point, a trekker would have found it while exploring Basecamp and shown it to a staff member and somehow it ended up married to the bell.

Nowadays, that would not happen. As the Gulch matured and a Leave No Trace philosophy was instilled, it became forbidden for trekkers to keep souvenirs from their adventures. Staff would say to them, "That's so cool! What a great find. Now leave it there for the next person to discover". Still, that particular nail remains hanging on the side of the Mess Hall, an artifact of an educational philosophy the Gulch has since outgrown. But it's not just an artifact of an educational philosophy, is it? The tracks the nail held fast to the ground allowed for trains expanding westward, bringing settlers who would displaced thousands of people from their land. That nail which was such a central part of my experience ringing the bell that morning is itself a symbol of the colonialism that the Gulch is wrapped up in. If these traditions which are made up of symbols of a complicated, contentious history and present are what give the Gulch its "Gulchiness", then one cannot deny the complicated and contentious reality of the Gulch's very existence. Traditions like the ringing of the bell pack the complex history of the Gulch into just a few moments.

CHAPTER THREE:

Caring with the Trouble

Figure 15.: Keet Seel Puebloan ruins. Photo by author.

There was a day during staff training when everyone got very excited for an outing. It seemed like we had been on Basecamp for months, though it had only been a couple of weeks. Everyone was in a great mood piling into the vans and off we went to Crown Point on Navajo Nation. We were headed to a rug auction held at a local school. Set up along the walls of the gymnasium were venders selling their crafts—jewelry, baskets, etc.—but the main event was the auction itself. The auctioneer and his assistant stood on the stage holding up various rugs, and the bidders sat on chairs on the floor with their classic bidding numbers.

Some staff bid on rugs, but mostly we watched. Listening to the auctioneer speed through his sales was an experience in itself and it was fun to see friends boldly raise their numbers into the air and then laugh gleefully when they won the bid on a small rug. The rugs themselves were beautiful. Each weaver clearly had their own style, but it was particularly interesting to see the distinct styles that came from different towns or areas. The place the rug was from often determined the colours and the motifs used.

I also noted that most, though certainly not all, of the bidders were Dine themselves, and I wondered whether they came to bid on the rugs of people they knew or if they were there to bid on rugs from other places on the Navajo Nation. Of those bidders who were not Dine, the most conspicuous was a white man standing off to the side, away from where the rest of the bidders were sitting. I began to really take notice of him after the third rug he bought, but the final number of rugs he left with was far higher than that. I asked the person I was standing with about it, and they told me that he was most likely planning on selling the rugs for a much higher price back east. This left me with an uneasy feeling, and I hadn't been the only one to notice. A few other staff members were talking about him on the van ride back, and the conversation was cagey. On the one hand, those selling the rugs were probably glad to have sold them. On the other, he had outbid many local people and it didn't seem fair that he would be reselling the rugs for so much more than he had paid. Plus, he had just bought so many. I thought it was a good conversation to be having, but I found it odd that those staff members having it spoke almost in whispers. It was as if they felt they were supposed to have had only a positive experience at the auction, and they felt strange communicating their uneasiness.

As the summer went on I would witness this reaction to problematic happenings quite a bit. There was a tendency to avoid addressing things like this directly. Perhaps the organization

simply felt that, as adults, staff were old enough to think critically about these situations themselves. Still, it didn't change much once the trekkers were around. I found that people in leadership positions at the Gulch often distanced themselves from the problematic aspects of the organization or activities trek groups were participating in. The focus was mainly on emphasizing the positive parts of being there.

Staying with the Trouble

In her book *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Donna Haraway writes mostly about ecological crises and the problem of dealing with changing environments. However, I think it's a useful concept for my purposes, as well. She talks about nurturing "well-being on a damaged planet" (76) and how it's no use dreaming about the past, whether you imagine it horrible or heavenly, nor a dystopian or utopian future (1). What's important in staying with the trouble of the current environmental moment is the present, of figuring out how to live together in "unexpected collaborations and combinations" (4).

Ongoing colonialism is not separate from the trouble of ecological crisis, and it can be argued that histories of land dispossession, destruction, and violence as well as homemaking and love of place by the descendants of those who committed the violence are entangled within human relationships to Earth. Cottonwood Gulch is an excellent example of the complicated mess of this trouble. There are many positive aspects about the organization's mission— teaching kids to love the land and to take care of themselves and others—but it is also a product of European expansion westward and it currently exists on traditional Navajo land. Moments like the one I described at the rug auction were common and the auction is a good example of Gulch staff witnessing the racial friction that exists in the area. But the Gulch itself held a problematic position in the Southwest; it didn't just witness them.

Throughout the summer I observed how the Gulch navigated the violent history that allowed it to exist and cultivate a "response-ability" through its actions of attachment and detachment (34) to the humans and nonhumans that shared the Southwest. In this chapter, I will show how the Gulch dealt with the trouble of its presence there. In order to validate its position in the place it called home, it approached its relationships to humans, nonhumans, and landscapes

through practices of care. Expressions of care highlighted the areas in which the Gulch was more willing to stay with the trouble, and those where it preferred to disengage.

A brief history of Navajo land dispossession

Cottonwood Gulch was located in the Four-Corners region of the American Southwest. This is the place that the four states of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado meet. Traditionally, this land was home to Ute, Hopi, Zuni, Pueblo, and Dine people (native-land.ca) and throughout the summer, treks drove through and visited many modern-day reservations. The most prominent for Gulch participants however, were the Dine[2]. The Cottonwood Gulch Basecamp was located on traditional Dine lands, and Gulch trekkers and staff had the close relationships and interactions with individual Dine people. Because of this, it makes the most sense for me to focus on some of the history of Dine land dispossession, though I'll barely be able to scratch the surface.

Traditionally, the Dine determined their homeland based on the four sacred mountains that defined its corners: Mount Taylor in New Mexico, Blanca Peak and Hesperus Peak in Colorado, and the San Francisco Peaks in Arizona (Roberts and Shilstone, 47). By the 1850s, Anglo settlers planned to ranch the grasslands and mine the hills that lay in this region and since the Dine resisted, by 1851 the governor of New Mexico Territory had adopted a policy of surrender or kill (47). Relations were consistently strained and by 1862 Gen. James Henry Carleton began drafting plans for the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo (47).

The walk, carried out by Kit Carson, was launched in 1863 and relocated thousands of Dine people to Bosque Redondo, the designated reservation (Lacerenza). The people were forced to walk 400 miles to the relocation site and those too weak to complete the walk, including pregnant women, children, and the elderly were shot and left on the trail (Roberts and Shilstone, 48). Once at Bosque Redondo, the relocated Dine people quickly ran out of firewood, Army Worm destroyed the corn crop, and the alkaline heavy Pecos River water caused severe intestinal problems (Legends of America). Finally, on June 1, 1858 the US government recognized the failure of the

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[2] *Dine* is the name the people traditionally called themselves while *Navajo* was imposed by settlers. While I was there, I observed Dine/Navajo people choosing which name to call themselves based on personal preference. Here, I use the two names interchangeably.

reservation, and a treaty was signed allowing those who remained to return home to the land enclosed by the sacred mountains (Roberts and Shilstone, 51). Of course, this didn't end the US's interest in the resources on Dine land, and it has continued to displace and exploit Dine people and land for coal, uranium, and oil (Lacerenza).

Cottonwood Gulch, for its part, is located in Thoreau, NM. While the Basecamp and main part of the town are not located on what the US government has labeled legal Dine land[3], there is still a strong sense of it being Dine historically and spiritually. While there is a large, central Navajo Reservation, quite a bit of land designated to the Dine is scattered throughout the area. This is commonly referred to as a checkerboard system leftover from the expansion of the railroad. When rail companies moved westward, the law gave the companies ownership of every other section (640 acres) and the government claimed every section in between. These days, the land is a mixture of four types of ownership: tribal, BLM (Bureau of Land Management), private, and state. Tribes have been making an effort to buy more land, but the designations remain complexly interwoven.

The Gulch's Basecamp is designated private land among this checkerboarding. For years it was used for logging before Hillis Howie bought it in 1932, but it is not clear when, exactly, it was taken from the Dine people. Currently, it sits very close to tribal land. The town of Thoreau is mostly private, but when driving through one hits Dine land very quickly. Often, much of the land that is "legally tribal" does not show up that way on maps, and the boundaries can be unclear. What is clear, however, is that despite being legally private, Cottonwood Gulch's Basecamp home is on historically and spiritually Dine land.

The Henio Family

There were various ways that the Gulch made Basecamp's connection to the Dine clear to trekkers. Basecamp itself had incorporated various traditional structures, including a Hogon (a traditional Dine dwelling) and a Chatt'oh which was often used for larger gatherings and ceremonies. Further, much of the arts at the Gulch were focused in the Dine tradition, and the NAW (Native Arts Workshop) often had local artists come in to teach traditional crafts like

[3] The whole idea of "legal Dine land" is problematic since the land was stolen in the first place, making the idea of legality seem rather arbitrary. Here, I use the words "legal Dine land" not to assert who has the right to what land, but simply to explain how the US federal and state governments recognize ownership.

beading or blanket weaving. More than anything else, though, the Gulch's connection to local people was through the Henio Family.

It is difficult to overstate how much Cottonwood Gulch owed to the Henio family. Without the Gulch's relationship with them it would have been an entirely different place. Most, though not all, of the Navajo people the Gulch had relationships with were a part of this family in one way or another, though marriages had introduced a handful of surnames to the mix. The man who stood at the head of these generations of friendships was named Tom Henio. I heard the story of how Hillis Howie met Tom many times over the summer in various pieces, but the most complete story came from Tom's great grandson, Walter.

According to him, Tom Henio and Hillis Howie met at Tom's wedding to Walter's great grandmother, Ada. Howie had been at a trading post with Prairie Trek and the owner of the trading post told him that there was a wedding going on and that they should go. So, they bought some gifts there at the trading post and went to the wedding. After the wedding Tom and Hillis became good friends. It was Tom who told Hillis when the old logging land went up for sale, and Hillis bought it and turned it into Basecamp. Hillis hired Tom to help build many of the buildings and to do the masonry and flagstone work on the floors and chimneys in the cabins. The unique designs that he carved into each of the cabin chimneys were still visible when I was there in 2018. Tom and Hillis stayed lifelong friends and the Gulch became a fixture in the Henio family over the generations. Walter recalled attending the Gulch as a trekker, and he and his sister, Elojia, both ran the kitchen during the summer I was there. Many Henio relatives were considered "friends of the Gulch" and visited Basecamp throughout the summer or at the annual Rendezvous celebration. The Henio family was woven deep into the fabric of the Gulch and its through them that trekkers there learned about Navajo culture.

The importance of the Henios' contributions to the Gulch was not lost on the organization and its relationship to the family was one of, if not the, most important relationship that the Gulch cared for. However, this culture of care that people at the Gulch claimed for themselves extended far beyond their relationships with the humans in their community, and it's important to understand how.

Caring in a more-than-human world

The way that theorists think about the human relationship to nature is constantly evolving. The separation of culture and nature was a long-standing dichotomy in classic anthropology, and it was commonly believed that culture was a human adaptation to nature (Ingold, 39). This assumption allowed many interesting ideas about human societies to emerge, many of which are still relevant today. For example, in 1972 Sherry Ortner compared the nature/culture dichotomy to the female/male. While I disagree with her starting point that the nature/culture dichotomy is an indisputable reality, it makes sense to make the comparison in a culture such as ours that perceives it as such (10). Regardless of my disagreement with its starting point, the article showed that the nature/culture dichotomy affects many aspects of our lives. However, I'm more inclined to agree with Marilyn Strathern who, when approaching the topic of the dichotomy stated outright that "there is no such thing as nature or culture. Each is a highly relativized concept whose ultimate signification must be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics" (177). She also pointed out:

Figure 16: Tom Henio working on the Outfit Hogon. Photo courtesy of Cottonwood Gulch.

> "The combined capacity to participate in 'otherness' and treat that otherness as an object (of study) has made anthropology" (ibid). This process depends upon a central conviction that man 'makes' culture, and insofar as this is true can also stand outside his own 'nature'" (177).

Therefor it makes sense that anthropology would have been so caught up in the dichotomy for so long—our entire discipline was based on the idea that humans create something that is more than nature.

Since Strathern, many theorists have questioned this dichotomy, not only in anthropology but more broadly (See Murdoch, 1997; Ingold, 2000 for some examples). Not only have theorists begun to see this dichotomy as misleading, but the rigid scientific categories that created it can also be seen as harmful. Within prevailing scientific frameworks, fields of knowledge are restrained, and "all claims to truth must appeal to a mechanistic world view, one in which forms of life and death are made alienable, extractable, commodifiable and reducible to their parts" (Myers, 3). This constrained vision forces other forms of knowing, such as Indigenous knowledges, to conform to this scientific rationalism. Through "forms of knowing otherwise" (ibid) researchers are able to ask how violence to peoples affects the well-being of local ecologies—to think not just about people being dispossessed of their land, but land dispossessed of its people (6).

Outside of academia, many environmental activists also see a problem with a rigid separation between nature and culture. Radical ecologists shifted environmental thinking away from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric ethic, recognizing all parts of the ecosystem as having equal value, as well as the importance of social justice as the key part of achieving this equality (Merchant, 11). Activists such as Val Plumwood argued that as humans separate ourselves from nature in order to dominate it (insisting on the nature/culture divide), not only do we lose the ability to empathise and treat non-humans on ethical terms, but the more we falsely believe in our own autonomy (9). This is, ultimately, the ethic I argued Cottonwood Gulch participants developed in Chapter Two. I discussed how the relationships the trekkers and staff had with the beings and objects in their environment gave them an understanding of ecological entanglement—it taught them that they were a part of a larger network which they relied on. Ideally, internalizing this ethic and recognizing their entanglement with the rest of their ecosystem would cause Gulch participants to understand their responsibility to care for it, whatever caring may mean in a particular situation or relationship.

Hardly a new philosophical concept, *responsibility* is central to many Indigenous understandings of relationships with others. In contrast to the liberal understanding of rights and entitlements given to an individual by the government and couched in the language of freedom and equality (MacDonald, 75), individual and shared responsibility to family, clan, community, and homelands often form the basis for Indigenous governance (Corntassel, 5). Human beings have the responsibility to care, whether that be for fellow humans or for other beings connected in

the ecosystem. But care is a complicated matter and can be practiced in a variety of ways depending on the situation and what one is caring for.

In step with the philosophies I have discussed above, in her book *Matters of Care* Maria Puig de la Bellacasa states that "it has become indisputable, if it ever wasn't, that in times binding technosciences with naturecultures, the livelihoods and fates of so many kinds and entities on this planet are unavoidably entangled" (1). She argues that everything we do to sustain this web of interconnections is caring for it (3) and that care does not always mean a warm, feel-good attitude (2). As Puig de la Bellacasa argues, there are three dimensions to care: labour/work, affect/affections, and ethics/politics (5). As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, Cottonwood Gulch worked to legitimize its continued existence in the Southwest through the care it gave to the humans, nonhumans, and place it was entangled in. It's through each of Puig de la Bellacasa's three dimensions of care that people at the Gulch stayed with the trouble.

A fair trade

When it came to the people the Gulch maintained close relationships with, the way it practiced care through labour was very straightforward. The Gulch approached these relationships with reciprocity. When on the road, trek groups often camped on land owned by friends of the Gulch in order to save money on campsites, but also to spend time with them and learn from them. The trekkers learned that each new place they slept, they would be expected to do some work. On the occasions when the group slept somewhere not associated with a friend of the Gulch, the expectation was that they would put some time into improving the space.

Access to land wasn't the only thing that the Gulch felt it needed to reciprocate labour for. Much of what friends of the Gulch provided was time and energy. For example, the Gulch has a long-standing relationship with a Dine woman named Irene, a descendent of Tom Henio's. At the very end of Turquoise Trail's second road loop, her house was the last stop before heading back to Basecamp for Rendezvous. That night was an extremely memorable one. Some of Irene's children and grandchildren had come to eat dinner with the group, and everyone had a great time being in such a warm family setting. I spent a long time playing with the littlest grandchildren, and one of Irene's sons taught Margaret how to shoot arrows. There were many dogs and kittens, and a lot of fun. We ate Navajo Tacos for dinner that night. It was Taylor's responsibility to prepare

most of the taco fillings, which she found rather stressful since cooking for Irene was like cooking for one's own grandmother. Irene prepared an enormous quantity of beans and made the Fry Bread with the trekkers. They were invited into her kitchen to learn how to make this typical Navajo dish, a treat in itself. After dinner she showed them how she wove traditional Navajo rugs, which they enjoyed. What Irene shared with the group that night reached far beyond providing Turquoise Trail with a place to sleep. She gave her land, her time, and personal knowledge that was an irreplaceable experience for the girls. In return, the group cleaned up fallen branches and sticks from around a portion of her land and worked on putting up a shade tarp.

The night at Irene's is just one of many examples. In Pie Town with Nita, Turquoise Trail harvested rocks for a fire pit (which Prairie Trek built later in the summer). The night the group stayed on Carrie House's land, although she wasn't there, we meandered a stream close to where we were camped in order to improve the ecosystem around the water. Considering the range of gifts the friends of the Gulch gave the groups, sometimes the labour the Gulch gave in return felt small. But the friends weren't sharing their time and space with trek groups for the labour. They were doing it because the relationships were important to them, and they enjoyed giving the trekkers these experiences and knowledge. Still, the labour trek groups reciprocated was important. It showed the friends that the organization and its participants recognized and appreciated all they were giving.

Yes, you have to hang the bear bag.

Gulch participants learned to express care through labour with nonhuman beings as well. During staff training all new staff had learned how to hang a bear bag. However, there were too many people on the backpack for everyone to get the chance to physically practice and I never hung one myself during training. This meant that on the first Turquoise Trail backpack in the Gila Wilderness, the day I taught the girls how to hang a bear bag was my first time ever really doing it. I knew the theory and that's how I explained it to them. This is how you hang a bear bag: You put anything smelly into a bag (toiletries, food, etc.) and you tie a rope to the bag with a slip knot. Then you tie the other end of the rope to a stick or a rock and throw it over a high branch, not too close to the trunk because then a bear could easily just climb up the trunk and reach the bag. Then,

you pull the rope from the stick side like a pulley, and the whole bag is supposed to lift up into the air. That's the theory.

I went through these steps with the girls and all was going well until it came time to lift the bag. It wouldn't budge. It was too heavy. I tried for a while with the girls and it was getting awkward so I told them to go do something else and I would have to figure it out myself. I tried by myself for a long time. I tried hard to remember the alternative strategy Cob and Koby had taught us at staff training, something to do with a carabiner that was supposed to reduce the friction between the branch and the rope which would have made it easier. I couldn't think of it for the life of me and eventually I asked Tori for help, since she was experienced. She couldn't get it either. The problem was the weight of our bear bags. They were too heavy and there was too much weight where the rope met the branch and we couldn't make the rope slide. We tried for hours that first night while Taylor made sure the girls were fed. Once they were all settled she came to help me and Tori. Eventually we did solve it. I attached the pulling end of the rope to a stick to give me a handle, then walked as far away from the bag as I could in order to give myself more leverage. Then Tori and Taylor lifted the bag as high as they could above their heads and I pulled, walking away from the bag instead of just straight down. The bag went up.

Hanging a bear bag was never harder than it was that first day, but it was never easy. Whenever we were backpacking, I spent a long time each evening hanging the bear bags. I came to really enjoy the challenge and the feeling of achievement when I finally got the bag up into the branches. Still, there were moments of difficulty when I asked myself why I was even bothering. The reality was that if a bear really wanted to get at the bag, no matter how high or far away from the trunk I had managed to hang it, it would probably find a way to get at it. I had to remind myself that this was important. Chances were that a bear wouldn't try to get at the bag I was hanging because it didn't yet know it wanted to. Gulch staff talked all the time about how smart the bears at Yosemite had gotten, for example. There, they told me, one needed a locked bear box which was supposed to be indestructible but which sometimes failed to keep the bears out anyway. They had gotten so used to human presence that they even knew how to get into locked cars.

This is what Gulch treks were trying to avoid. In order to legitimize their intrusion into these spaces, Gulch participants had to put in the work. Caring for the wild animals whose space we were invading while backpacking meant making sure they did not get used to human presence.

Sometimes we failed. After that same backpack in the Gila, Turquoise Trail got back to the Cloud to find our garbage bag had been ripped open. It was clearly something smaller than a bear that had gotten in, but some wild animal had eaten human food because of us. In the end, human presence is human presence. Still, the Gulch taught trekkers and staff that it was worth it and necessary to put in the work to affect the lives of these animals as little as possible.

Keeping the cows out and in

Most of the treks at Cottonwood Gulch practiced labour on smaller, interpersonal levels. They traded labour for a place to sleep, or time spent learning to make Fry Bread. But one trek group, YCC (Youth Conservation Corps) laboured on a much bigger scale. While YCC was as much a part of the Gulch community as any other trek group, the group was part of a larger national program through the US National Park Service. Youth that take part in the YCC are paid for their work, and the mission is to "[engage] young people in meaningful work experiences on national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and fish hatcheries while developing an ethic of environmental stewardship and civic responsibility" (nps.gov).

Cottonwood Gulch's YCC group was working with the Mount Taylor Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest. Their work varied depending on what was needed. They spent a lot of time repairing fence line to prevent cattle from crossing from National Forest land to private land and also installed monitoring cages at various locations determined by the Forest Service in order to keep cattle out of certain areas and monitor the effects of zero-grazing plots. The work was hard and very different from the experience of being on one of the other trek groups. Dylan, one of Youth Conservation Corps' leaders, told me about a reconstruction project they did near Fort Wingate:

It was quite hot when we worked there
It was before the monsoons hit
And there was little shade.
We got lost once heading back toward the road
For there were no trails to and from the fence line …
The terrain was rugged
Lots of gullies
Thick vegetation
Mixed with open grassland
and the occasional pinon or juniper to provide shade.

He told me that they ate "pita pizzas" with leftover tomato paste and cheese mix multiple days for lunch and recalled having to haul heavy equipment to and from their trucks. Still, despite all this he told me that they all gained a better appreciation for pieces of land that from the roadside do not look particularly appealing but are beautiful when one takes a closer look.

The labour that YCC carried out was on an entirely different scale than that of the other groups because what they were caring for was on a different scale. The Gulch truly valued intimate relationships with humans, nonhumans, and the particular pieces of land they existed on. However, the Gulch also recognized that much of the work that goes into keeping the Southwest looking the way it does is invisible. It's in the fences that keep cows in one space and out of another; it's in the pipes that carry water over stretches of desert. By including the Youth Conservation Corps program in the Gulch, it committed to caring for the Southwest overall, the way that the National Park Service decided it should be taken care of.

This approach to caring for the land is interesting when looked at from the point of view of entrenched European perspectives on private property. In particular, John Locke's theories come to mind. In his 1946 Second Treatise of Government, Locke makes a direct link between labour and private property. Part of his argument is that men have a responsibility to improve land (which from his point of view means to cultivate it). He states:

> "God, when he gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labour, and the penury of his condition required it of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, i.e., improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour" (17).

This type of thinking was often used to justify taking lands from native peoples, including by Locke himself. Since they weren't "improving" the land in the way that Europeans recognized, they had no right to it. Directly connected to this is Locke's view that once a man does labour on the land, it is his: "The labour of his body and the work of his hands we may say are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property" (15). The Gulch did not by any means feel that the labour Youth Conservation Corps put into the lands in the Southwest made those lands their private property. That being said, this labour was part of the way they validated their presence.

During staff training, we camped on the land of a friend of the Gulch in Arizona for one night. In the morning, we spent a few hours cleaning up the rusted cans and other trash that had been dumped there years earlier. The work wasn't easy but it wasn't particularly strenuous either, and considering how many hands were cleaning up, it made light work. By the time we had to leave we had filled a trailer with trash and the space was looking much more habitable. Before we had started cleaning, one of the returning staff members explained why we were doing the cleanup. He told us that it was important to do these service projects for the people who allowed us to be on their land. Before he could continue, Kris interrupted to make a correction. Although he had the general sentiment right, she said that it was important not to use the term "service project" because that gave the connotation that we were the ones doing the service. She explained that the term had a negative history tied up with missionary work and colonization and said that we were not the ones providing the service. The people whose land we were using were doing us a favour, and in exchange we provided work.

This idea of reciprocity, an exchange of labour for space or time, was fundamental to how the Gulch functioned. It was one of the ways that the Gulch legitimated its existence in the Southwest. Because there was a trade, the Gulch was not taking advantage of the relationships it had with other people; it was caring for those relationships with work. Many people at the Gulch understood that the trades weren't particularly even. Yes, it was helpful to pick up sticks on a property, etc., but that labour didn't quite seem to match the value of what the friends of the Gulch offered to trek groups. It was important to do the work of limiting human impact on wild animals, but there was only so much that could be done. However, the Gulch stayed with the trouble of the uneven relationships. It offered what it could and worked as hard as it could to maintain them responsibly. Offering their labour, however humble, sent the message that they appreciated the time and space that they were asking of the local humans and non-humans, and maintained a level of appropriateness in those relationships.

Caring about

Care through labour, as I discussed above, and care through politics, which I'll be discussing next, are about caring for. They are both tangible in their effects and require action. In contrast, care through affect can be better aligned with caring about. Affect is a difficult term to pin down,

but as Kathleen Stewart puts it "*Something* throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation; a something both animated and inhabitable" (1, original emphasis).

It was difficult for me, at first, to see how affect is caring in the way that labour and politics are. But making the distinction between caring for and caring about made things clearer. Caring about is necessary in order for caring for to be genuine. Affective encounters trigger some sort of effect—they "inspire, unsettle, trouble, move, arouse, motivates, and/or impress" (Archambault, 249). The significance of affect lies in the thoughts and feelings it makes possible (3). So, care through affect opens up the possibility to act in a caring way, through labour or politics. It was often affect that brought people at the Gulch closer to the trouble they were dealing with in the first place. Affect creates connections. When something is affective, those who experience the affect are connected to that thing, entangled with it.

The way they looked at Nita

There's a place in New Mexico called Pie Town which is famous, of course, for its pies. The legend goes that cowboys would pass through there and the local people, being as hospitable as they were, would give them a cup of coffee and a piece of pie and became well known for it. When the place got big enough to warrant a post office and hence a name, the people named it Pie Town. Living in Pie Town was a wonderful woman named Nita who, when Turquoise Trail visited, taught the group to make pie.

We set up a table outside and put a red checkered table cloth over it. She brought out all the ingredients and we made the dough, peeled the apples, and made them all into mini individual pies. I loved watching the girls watch Nita. They had been grumpy that day. We had just gotten out of our first backpack in the Gila and Tori, Taylor, and I felt they had taken too long in the shower. We were feeling grumpy with them and they were feeling grumpy with us for being grumpy with them. And then Nita started to show them how to make pie and they were

enraptured. Talking with her and learning from her while they learned to knead and roll out the dough they were more attentive than I had ever seen them.

Figure 17: Making pie in Pie Town. Photo by author.

After we had made the pies with her and eaten dinner, Nita invited us into her home. She didn't always do this with trek groups, but she let us come in. Nita's house was magical. The walls were covered with art and nick-knacks and all sorts of things. She had a collection of rolling pins and different depictions of ducks everywhere. She had lights all over the place, and the different types of shades cast different light out of their corners so that the glow of the place was as varied as the things covering the walls. Everything about the house reflected the joy and enthusiasm that seeped out of Nita herself. It seemed to me that the girls had never seen anything like it before. They looked around in the same way that they had looked at Nita while she was helping them roll out the pie dough. I saw awe and admiration in their eyes for this woman and her strange, wonderful home. They followed her around as she pointed out particular favourite items, like a school group following a museum tour guide. She showed them a collection of tea cups and mugs hanging by their handles in the kitchen. As they moved into the living room she pointed out various paintings and photographs, then a large tapestry on the west wall.

"That's for my son," she told them.

Nita explained that her son had died in a random shooting in Albuquerque a few years ago. As she told the girls about the event her eyes welled up and their expressions changed. They were confronted with this emotional dissonance—Nita and her home, at once cheerful, bright, joyous, and deeply sad.

I am quite certain that none of them will ever forget Nita; I certainly won't. She was complicated and strange and very real. Visiting her gave the trekkers a chance to meet a real New Mexico person and her generosity in sharing such emotional parts of her life with them affected them deeply. After just a day and a night of being with her—making pies, touring her home, working on her land—they cared.

At first, I wondered why the Gulch sent groups to Pie Town and Nita's house there. Sure, it's a quirky spot on the map, but what was really the point of going there? It was important for the Gulch that trekkers learn to care about the people living in the places they were exploring. Introducing them to real people with real lives there taught them to care emotionally, affectively for these people. Nita in Pie Town was not the only person they cared about in this way. Visiting with Irene's children and grandchildren and other Friends of the Gulch provided ample opportunities for affective care. These personal relationships gave them a more "authentic" understanding of Southwestern people that wouldn't have been possible through more typical forms of tourism.

"It sounds like they're cheering us on"

It's easy to be affected by things when one is intimately entangled with them. There were many times over the course of the summer when treks felt an intimate closeness with nonhuman beings. This feeling was most prominent during the backpacks. These were the times when it was just trek groups and the beings around them. Hiking through these spaces was the only task, and it allowed time to truly take in the surroundings.

Figure 18: Aspen trees in the Manti La Sals. Photo by author.

During TT's backpack in the Utah Manti La Sals, we were surrounded by Aspen trees. Being with them created a magical feeling. Tori told us that each Aspen grove is actually one big organism. Each "individual tree", she said, is more like a finger poking up through the ground while the rest of the body is connected

bellow. This makes Aspen groves some of the biggest organisms on the planet, besides coral reefs (livescience).

Knowing this gave the group an intense sensation of awe as we walked for miles within what could be just one organism. But as we walked within them the Aspens started to affect us with the smaller forms of their beauty too. Aspen leaves are attached to the branch in such a way that when the wind blows their silver underbelly shimmers. This made our entire backpack sparkle. The wind in the Aspen leaves also made a distinct sound. Perhaps because of the sparkly way the leaves moved in the wind they sounded different than other leaves. It sounded a bit like a running stream. At one point during the backpack when Tori and I were getting a bit nervous about finding water this trickery from the Aspens was frustrating. But in general, it was a welcome sound.

"It kind of sounds like they're cheering us on" one trekker said to me as we were hiking.

As we hiked upwards into the mountains and our legs got tired, our weary bodies took the opportunity to grab onto the Aspen trunks or lean on them momentarily to catch our breath. When we detached ourselves, we would be covered in the white powder that came off the trunks of the trees and we would carry it with us as we moved along the paths. The Aspens quite literally stayed with us throughout our backpack in the Manti La Sals and camping underneath them felt as if we were camping among friends.

Walking among the Aspens—listening to their leaves rustle in the wind and watching them shimmer in the sun, brushing their powder off our shorts and holding on to them for support—animated our relationship with them and allowed intimacy to emerge (Weston, 9). Similar to their understanding of the Southwest being changed by personal affective relationships to people like Nita, the intimacy the trekkers formed with the Aspens and other plants and animals gave them specific examples of nonhumans to care about. Taylor became particularly enamoured with these trees, and although she tried various times while we were hiking, she seemed frustrated at her inability to express to me how much they had affected her. By the time we left the Aspen forests of the Manti La Sals, after the repeated intimate encounters we had had with the trees, there was no other way to describe her feeling towards them than love. This love that she and others on Turquoise Trail felt for the Aspens, like other intimate relationships between humans and plants, is to be taken seriously (Archambault). These relationships were real, and the affect they created was its own kind of care. Caring about these individual beings made caring for the Southwest more

personal. The Ecosystem was no longer just a concept, but a system that involved individuals they cared about personally.

The "wow" effect

The morning after TT camped in Valley of the Gods, I sat on top of the Cloud writing my field notes and absorbing the feeling of awe for what I saw around me. The day before we had been at Muley Point and I had seen Utah from above, looking down into valleys and onto the tops of mesas. But now, in Valley of the Gods, I was looking up at Utah and I felt small next to the wonder that was the world. We had camped in the first spot we found because it was certainly beautiful enough and it seemed like as good a spot as any. I was so struck by the beauty of what was simply the first spot we found that I was very excited to explore the rest of the Valley that day.

After we packed up we set off on the Valley of the Gods loop to see the rest of it. I had Margaret next to me in the Cloud and was listening (again) to Paul Simon's Graceland very loud. As we drove Margaret sat quietly next to me and every couple of minutes I would make some sort of exclamation.

Wow! Look at that one!
Is this not the most beautiful place you've ever been?
They remind me of giants!

Margaret agreed with me every time and smiled shyly, as she usually did, when I pointed out my favourite structures to her. Margaret was a difficult trekker to get outwardly excited about things, but I knew she was interested in the world. Out of the whole group, she was the one that liked to talk to me about various topics the most. We had had conversations about everything from alternative food systems to Pablo Neruda's poetry. She was the type of kid whom knowledge seeped into. I was confident that pointing out which parts of the landscape had affected me would make her pay attention to them too.

I loved driving through the Utah landscape with the wind in my hair and the music up loud, but at some point, I just wanted to look at it all. I pulled the Cloud over which cued Tori to pull the van over as well. I got out, told Margaret to follow me and told the others I wanted to take some photos. Tori and Taylor got out of the van and we all spent some time gazing at the monuments in front of us and taking pictures. Since I had personally told Margaret to come with

me she stood with us, but the other girls stayed in the van. This frustrated me quite a bit, not because I thought they should take photos, but because I wanted them to marvel at the place we were in without being separated from it by glass. Tori, Taylor, and I let them stay where they were, but I regretted it later on. I felt that I had failed in teaching them how to care about the landscapes. I thought it would be the easiest part—all you have to do is look and see the beauty, but it was more difficult for them to feel the intimacy they had felt with Nita or the Aspen trees. Even so, the hope is that instead of just having a general picture of the Southwest available to them from the media, they would be able to name and picture particular places that meant something to them.

Oh yeah, Muely Point with the view of Monument Valley in the distance.
Oh yeah, Valley of the Gods with the countless spires piercing the sky.
Oh yeah, Mount Tuquanikavatz with it rocky peak with views of the forests below.

That's the hope.

* * *

Care through affect at the Gulch worked to connect trekkers and staff there directly with the Southwest, whether that be the humans, nonhumans, or landscapes there. I suspect that it is this form of care that personally stuck with them the most. It also allowed them to understand their time there better. As Dian Million states, "A felt analysis is one that creates a context for a more complex 'telling,' one that illuminates the deeper meaning" (54). In her article "Felt Theory", Million discusses the way affect has allowed Indigenous women in Canada to create new languages to address the complexities of their histories and the lived experiences that are full of emotional knowledges (54). She gives examples of texts written by Indigenous women that break down the barriers between the personal and the political (59) and explains how the emotional knowledge was what fueled a discursive shift around the history of residential schools in Canada (64).

Along with allowing for a more complex understanding of a situation, history, or place, affect can also be more compelling than viewing a situation through an ideology (Stewart, 3). Affect allows complicated subjects which are difficult to tell or explain be understood. The affective care trekkers and staff at the Gulch practiced allowed them to understand the Southwest more deeply. It allowed them to get that much closer to the trouble and the intimacy made it very difficult for them to separate themselves from it. Once they had affectively cared for those

entangled within the Southwest, they were committed to staying with the trouble. That being said, affect does not replace ideology, and engaging with politics is a vital form of caring.

Politics at the Gulch

I briefly discussed in Chapter One how the Gulch was a rather progressive place, socially speaking. Party politics weren't a common topic, particularly around trekkers, though some explicitly political conversations among staff did occur. Mostly, the politics of the place was felt through the things people there, and the organization, cared about. Some of the most important things on this list included conservation; community; feminism; and inclusivity, particularly in regards to sexuality. Because of where these broad values usually tend to be placed on the political spectrum in the United States, the political leanings of the organization wouldn't have been difficult to label. That said, explicitly political conversations didn't happen around trekkers and while the general feel of the organization was "liberal" in the American sense, it was officially an apolitical environment.

For this reason, the political dimension of care at the Gulch is more complicated to untangle than the dimensions of labour or affect. The Gulch both engaged with and distanced itself from politics, perhaps because it is in the domain of ethics and politics that it tended to run into the most problems. In areas where it saw itself in a good light, such as with its work with young women, the Gulch made clear political statements. In other areas it tended to shy away. There are many ways that the Gulch did practice care through politics both with humans and nonhumans, but the closer these politics got to the sensitive realities of the organization, the closer it got to the real trouble, the more it distanced itself from them.

The delicate topic of colonialism

I remember feeling quite relieved after the group visited the Navajo Museum during staff training. It was the first time staff had formally talked about the history of colonialism in the area, and the absence of that conversation had begun to be conspicuous. The Navajo Museum, located in Window Rock, AZ, is both an historical and art museum run entirely by Navajo people. While there, we learned about the Long Walk and other atrocities committed by the US government, some history about Navajo Code Talkers in WWII, and saw art by both past and contemporary

Navajo artists. After the visit, staff also visited Window Rock itself and discussed some important history as a group. TT also visited the museum during one of the road loops, and after visiting we had a discussion about the history of colonialism in the area. Afterwards, I and several other new staff members talked about how happy we were to be addressing these issues, but as the summer wore on, I couldn't shake the reservations I had about the way the Gulch dealt with the history of colonialism.

On the 4th of July the Gulch was invited to see a Zuni rain dance. This was not a tourist event and while it was open to everyone, it was a difficult thing to find out about if you didn't have an invitation. When we went, Kris was extremely serious about how both staff and trekkers were expected to behave. Everyone was instructed to wear modest clothing, and Kris made it very clear that we were not to make a spectacle of ourselves. We had been graciously invited to see this amazing ceremony and we were to be very careful not to block the view of any local Zuni people, to give them preferential placement, not to stand or sit too close to the edge, etc. It went smoothly and everyone behaved very well. After Zuni, the group went to Gallup to see the 4th of July fireworks. I thought it was a strange combination of activities—there seemed to me a dissonance between the traditional Zuni ceremony we had just experienced and this celebration of the founding of the United States. Of course, that's the complexity of the Southwest. Still, it seemed strange that this dissonance wasn't thoroughly unpacked with the trekkers.

There is no doubt that the Gulch's understand of its interactions with local people and spaces had evolved substantially. A publically available video about the Gulch entitled "Cottonwood Gulch Foundation: Prairie Trek and Turquoise Trail the Early Years" shows some of the earlier activities that were considered acceptable. For example, the video shows some early Prairie Trek boys looking for artifacts at a Navajo burial site. They get shot at, "warning shots", the narrator explains, and they run away. This video, while fun to watch in many regards, is a good example of the problematic history the Gulch has had in the area and the insensitivity and lack of respect that used to exist. That type of behaviour would not have been tolerated while I was there, and they certainly made an effort to deal better with the history.

Talking about the history of colonialism in the area was very important—it was important for both trekkers and staff to understand how westward expansion had changed the area and affected the people there. Visiting the Navajo Museum was definitely a good thing to do. The

emphasis on behaviour at the rain dance was also important, and it was clear that the Gulch prided itself on the respect its trekkers understood to give in those spaces. People from the Gulch would not act like the clueless white tourists that so often passed through the area. That said, when it came to political or ethical issues having to do with the Gulch itself, the conversation stopped. In his article "Imperialist Nostalgia", Renato Rosaldo discusses the tendency for people with imperialist histories to justify their past wrongdoings with their current changed perspectives: "Once he was harsh and ignorant, now he is older and wiser" (114). This certainly seemed to be the Gulch's attitude. While it recognized the colonial history of the area and worked to make sure their current interactions with local people were respectful, they used the difference between what had happened in the past and how they acted in the present to hide the need for them to deal with their own complicity in colonialism, past and ongoing.

'Leave No Trace' as a political choice

This type of care isn't always classically political and ethics falls into the same category. It's in this way, the ethical decisions that the Gulch made, that it cared politically for its relationships with nonhumans. The Gulch followed a LNT (Leave No Trace) philosophy which meant, basically, that trek groups were expected to leave every place the way, or better than, they had found it. This ethic was practiced everywhere, but it was particularly important when backpacking and dealing with nonhuman beings. One of the basic tenets of LNT is to stay on the path. Since these places have already been worn down and the dirt has been packed by human feet, walking on the path leaves little impact. Sometimes it wasn't possible to follow this rule. Once, TT got a little lost while hiking and the best way to find the path again was to bushwhack—the group certainly trampled a fair amount of brush that day. Sometimes, there was no path. Some groups hiked in places that not many people went to so there was no path to follow. Still, when at all possible, treks stayed on the path.

Another basic tenet of LNT is to leave things where you find them. I love collecting and get attached to objects, so this was a hard tenet for me to internalize. Instead of collecting interesting rocks, artifacts, and other things one might find, the idea is to appreciate their beauty and then leave them where they are. This was hard. On the very first day that TT woke up together, we took a geology hike with a friend of the Gulch to explore the rocks and pictographs in the

Arroyo del Tajo. As we were exploring, one of the trekkers found a beautiful piece of Jasper. It being our first day, I mostly just wanted her to be happy and the rock made her smile. It was very difficult to tell her she had to leave it where she found it. In the moment it seemed harmless to let her take it with her. Still, our consistency with that rule made it so that by the end of the summer the instinct was to leave things, not to take them.

Perhaps the best example of LNT was our relationship with Cryptobiotic Crusts, known to many as Crypto. I first encountered Crypto on the new staff backpack during staff training. Cob and Koby pointed it out to us and explained its importance. Crypto crusts are living soil crust that cover the surface of desert floors and are populated by many different kinds of bacteria, algae, microfungi, lichens, and mosses (nps.gov). They play a vital role in desert ecosystems and while they take centuries to build up, it only takes one footstep to destroy them. The new staff learned to look out for Crypto on that first backpack, and when the trekkers arrived we taught them how to look for it and avoid it too. Sometimes the group would come across Crypto crusts that spread out wide. The sight of watching people jump from one Crypto-free spot to the next trying desperately to avoid stepping on it was funny and it perfectly demonstrated the lengths trekkers and staff went to avoid disturbing the nonhumans around them.

It's interesting to me to think about how the politics of care for non-humans was almost exclusively about not interfering. While care is often thought of in terms of being close to someone or something, in this case the ethics required distance. Care for nonhumans through ethics at the Gulch often conflicted with care through affect. Since affect required a certain amount of intimacy and closeness, it was often difficult to perform an affective care and a political care simultaneously.

Troubling Wilderness

On our first backpack in the Gila, Tori explained to the trekkers how different types of park lands were defined. She explained the difference between national parks, national wilderness areas, range land, etc. Since we were in the Gila Wilderness area, she explained, there were no motors allowed and the park service had to clear the paths using only two-person saws and other equipment that didn't require motors. The girls were interested in what she had to say on the topic, but the conversation stopped there.

Conservation politics were very important to the Gulch as an organization. The existence of wilderness areas and national parks were vital to its programming, but also symbolized their belief in the wild. Multiple times I overheard conversations between staff members about the "tragedy of the current moment", referring to Donald Trump's 2017 decision to drastically reduce two Utah national monuments—Bear's Ears National Monument by 1.35 million acres and Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument by 1.88 million acres (National Geographic). Trump's intention was, indeed, worrying as the plan was to open mineral, oil, and gas leasing opportunities, ease drilling regulations, and roll back habitat protections for endangered species (National Geographic). The protections that wilderness and national park/monument designations give are significant, and for that reason the Gulch's approval of them is understandable. However, the concept of wilderness is a highly debated one.

In his 1995 chapter, "The Trouble with Wilderness", William Cronon tells the reader that "the time has come to rethink wilderness" (69). Although he understands that this idea directly contradicts the work of many environmentalists, he argues that although many people envision wildernesses as the last places on Earth that have not been spoiled by humanity, they are, in fact, human creations (69). Cronon traces the evolution of "wilderness" from its biblical meaning (70) to the frontier myth (75) to the romantic discarding of society by writers like Henry David Thoreau (73). He reminds the reader that the preservation of wilderness has often meant removing Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands or preventing them from carrying out traditional subsistence activities (81). Cronon celebrates the beauty and power of the things wilderness contains, but not the idea of wilderness itself (69). The assertion that wilderness is inherently problematic has been debated (see Hays 1996) and many theorists, environmentalists, etc. maintain the usefulness of the concept. The conversation on the topic is certainly not closed.

Still, in conversation with the trekkers at the Gulch, these debates were never brought up. It seemed problematic to me that a program so entangled in traditional Indigenous land never discussed the ethical issues surrounding wilderness and championed it as an objective good. The topic of wilderness offered opportunities to tackle many political problems surrounding the Gulch. It would have forced the staff and trekkers to ask questions about land access, the difference between land use and land exploitation, who has the privilege of using land, and different value systems tied up to the idea of wilderness. These are just some examples. Like all the other

complicated political issues at the Gulch, this would have been a difficult topic to tackle with children. Still, caring politically for the landscapes means staying with their difficult, troubling aspects.

Pedagogy is political

The very fact that the Gulch was an educational organization made it political. Ultimately, a pedagogy is a philosophy or an ethic in that certain systems of education inspire certain philosophies and morals (Compayré, xiv). So, when the Gulch was practicing a particular pedagogy, they were perpetuating a certain ethic. The Gulch's pedagogy was very clearly outlined for staff during training and was, as they called it, "place-based pedagogy". As they explained, successful learning at the Gulch meant awareness of where one was, what one was doing, and who one was with—in short, the situation. The goal was to allow kids to learn from their surroundings, to open up opportunities for the land to teach them.

Being trained in this philosophy immediately reminded me of Leanne Simpson's "Land as Pedagogy". In this article Simpson discusses emerging thinking on Indigenous education, particularly the thinking of Vine Deloria and states that it is "not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual traditions unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes" (9). Through the story of Kwezens, a young girl who learns to extract sap from a tree with the help of a squirrel and her supportive family, Simpson shows how learning with the land teaches Anishnaabe children the importance of careful observation and learning from nonhuman teachers (6). For Simpson, this is Nishnaabeg intelligence. This approach to education has political connections to land dispossession (21) and is key to Indigenous resurgence (23).

The philosophy and ethic behind the Gulch's place-based pedagogy was valuable—I witnessed the beauty that type of education can produce. However, the Gulch staff teaching this pedagogy didn't bring up the long history of Indigenous place-based learning, not to mention its role in Indigenous resurgence and politics. Many of the things the Gulch was teaching, not only a place-based pedagogy but also the ethical treatment of land and nonhumans, is central to local Indigenous cultural understanding as well. I spoke to Walter about what his experience as a trekker at the Gulch had been like, particularly as a Navajo kid.

For me growing up, we already had this sense of respect for the land
and it was engrained in us.
You're just here.
You don't really own it.
You don't own anything on the planet basically.
You're just here for this amount of time
so just to respect the land
the plants.
Everything has its place here, you have your place here.
So, I mean we grew up learning this stuff
from my dad
from my grandpa
basically my whole family.
We're pretty traditional.
So it wasn't anything new to me when the subject came up.

He also told me that he liked seeing Gulch staff try to instill this understanding in the other trekkers. It is, ultimately, a good and important thing to learn, especially for kids who don't have an instinct of respect when it comes to the land. Still, when training staff in this pedagogical philosophy, the Gulch should have been clear about its connection to Navajo and other Indigenous peoples. Particularly considering its geographical location, it is important that the Gulch engage critically with Indigeneity. Their pedagogy is political, and it's important to be aware of the politics around it.

Care through politics was certainly the most complicated type of caring the Gulch engaged in. I don't mean to say that the Gulch failed to care politically for the Southwest at all. There were certainly plenty of examples in which they did so. The insistence of respect for the native communities and their adoption of LNT practices, for example, were tied up in politics whether or not the staff or trekkers there saw them that way. But recognizing these things (and everything else the Gulch did) as being political would have been key. Engaging consciously with the politics of their activities would have helped them care more deeply. Caring through politics is the most complicated aspect of care, especially for the Gulch. It's the politics of the situation—the politics of the Gulch's continued existence in the Southwest—that's the most difficult to legitimize.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, I wasn't alone in being relieved after staff visited the Navajo Museum for the first time and finally addressed the topic of colonialism. New staff, in particular, often expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the organization dealt with these issues, and to them the caginess around it was conspicuous. Taylor, for example, expressed her reservations to me explicitly:

I remember initially feeling very odd about the way Kris interacted with Walter
and the way that he was viewed almost as a spokesperson for his culture.
And that weirded me out a little bit
and also the fact that we are like supposed to be representatives of Southwestern culture
but most of us are from the east coast
and most of us don't understand a lot of the background.
And even if we do understand we just aren't spokespeople.
We aren't.
We can't do that.

I should note here that when I talked to Walter about moments Kris or others asked him to explain aspects of his culture, he said he wasn't bothered. He told me that although he had initially felt strange about it, he was okay with the way people at the Gulch approached him. According to Walter, they always asked him ahead of time if he'd be willing to speak about a certain topic. He said that as long as people understood that he didn't speak for his entire culture, he was happy to share his knowledge.

I had both of these conversations with Taylor and Walter as part of separate interviews with each of them. I can't help but wish that they had had this conversation with each other. I imagine Taylor would have felt relief in the opportunity to express some of her anxieties and that Walter would have appreciated having an open conversation about what he found appropriate. In general, newer staff members in particular often wanted to confront these issues head on but didn't find the opportunity to. They had to negotiate their opinions and concerns about the organization with their position as new staff members trying to learn and fit in with the culture of the Gulch.

It would be unfair for anyone, staff members or anthropologists, to expect the care the Gulch practiced in the Southwest to completely heal its relationship to the area. It cannot be up to one organization to "solve" the problem of colonialism. It's a problem that may never be truly

solved and it's certain that the future will not look like the past. But, as Haraway explains, what's important is to attach oneself to the trouble and to begin working with it.

> "The decisions and transformations so urgent in our times for learning again, or for the first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimagenesis on a damaged planet, must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who are not oneself—and not safely other, either" (98).

The Gulch worked to legitimize its place in the Southwest through practicing care. Whether or not it succeeded is not a question I can answer, nor is it really the point. The point is that it stayed— from the moment I'm writing it continues to stay—and has begun to be more response-able about its place in the ecosystem of the Southwest.

As I've shown, the Gulch's hesitation to recognize its own complicity in ongoing colonialism made it difficult for people in the organization to care for the Southwest politically, although they may have wanted to. Staff members' satisfactions with the organization often aligned with where the Gulch was most willing to stay with the trouble—how it cared through affect and labour. The dissatisfaction or awkwardness that I witnessed lay in places where the Gulch backed away from the trouble. The task is not only to quiet the trouble, but also to make trouble (1). Staff felt this and the desire to stir up the history that had settled and engage with both the positive and negative parts of the Gulch's political position.

CONCLUSION

Figure 19: On the road in Utah. Photo by author.

Staff at Cottonwood Gulch were adamant that the goal of the program continued to be centred around the Southwest and not on "growing great kids". My time there lead me to accept this as largely true. It would have been impossible to copy the programming of the Gulch and paste it onto another region since it had grown out of particular relationships in the Southwest. Still, it's undeniable that what the trekkers learn has implications that stretch beyond their summers there. The relationship trekkers and staff at the Gulch formed with the Southwest allowed them to understand their own place within the various ecologies they were a part of. Pursuing the freedom ideal that was so important to the program required this less anthropocentric understanding. And ultimately, that freedom ideal is something to strive for.

The kind of freedom I'm talking about is particularly American. The historian Frederick Jackson Turner theorized that the expansion across a "free land" created a unique form of American political equality based in forward-looking individualism (Grandin, 1). Freedom of movement, specifically movement forward across the frontier became inseparable from American political identity, a mythology invoked by almost all U.S. presidents (2). Of course, freedom is an inescapably problematic term, especially in the context of the United States. It has been and continues to be contingent on identity—certain people have had the right to be free and others haven't. The idea of freedom being limitless was only possible because of "the domination of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and Native Americans, as slave and cheap labor transformed stolen land into capital" (273). Even Martin Luther King, Jr., in the middle of his fight for equal rights and freedoms for African Americans argued that the freedom ideal fed into racism, violent masculinity, and a morality that celebrated the rich and punished the poor (4). It's these problematic ideologies that make the classic Western films I discussed in Chapter One seem so outdated.

There is no denying the problems associated with the idea of freedom in America. Looked at in this way, that the Gulch worked to instil the freedom ideal in its trekkers, which I discussed in Chapter One, could be seen as equally problematic. Where is the benefit in perpetuating this ideal that has racism and violent masculinity so wrapped up into it? But as I pointed out in that same chapter, the shift in values expressed in pop culture through subversive Western films suggests that maybe the freedom ideal can exist without these things.

Perhaps beyond avoiding doing harm, instilling the freedom ideal, an updated more inclusive freedom ideal, is an important thing to do for America's youth right now. America is in a moment of closing off. While for decades (centuries?) the country defined itself with the frontier myth, the dominant conversation currently suggests the opposite. As Grandin states, the concept of the border is "America's new myth, a monument to the final closing of the frontier" (9). In the midst of Donald Trump's administration, "Public lands and resources are being privatized, tax cuts are continuing the class war against the poor, and judicial and executive agency appointments will increase monopoly rule" (275). Freedoms are being restricted on many fronts, and nothing symbolizes this better than the notorious border wall which, if it's ever built, would physically restrict freedom of movement, exactly the freedom that the Gulch works to highlight the importance of.

It's because of this that I appreciate how the Gulch was teaching kids to value freedom in its own way. Perhaps, after being taught that it's important, they'll want to fight for the rights to freedom of movement, freedom to explore. But in order for it to actually be positive, my points in Chapters Two and Three are equally important to consider. In Chapter Two I discussed how the participants at the Gulch learned that freedom is not about independence but about dependence. If an understanding of ecological entanglement can replace the aspect of Westerns that idealizes independence, then freedom can come to mean not only a responsibility to one's self but a responsibility to others as well. Following this, Chapter Three looked at the responsibility to care for the people and spaces that allow those with privilege to "pursue freedom". Further, it's important to recognize what caring fully actually means. Only then can the American freedom ideal be inclusive enough to be worth pursuing.

Conducting ethnography in an educational institution was interesting because there was such an emphasis on hope. Teaching kids is all about hope, hope for the future they're expected to bring to fruition. Of course, there are limits to the change a group of people like those at the Gulch can bring about. Still, if it's possible to teach kids to think critically about their place in the environments they inhabit, to realize that their actions are connected to beings and events bigger and stronger than they, as well as those smaller and more vulnerable, they might be more willing to listen and work with diverse "others" and stay with the trouble we have all found ourselves in.

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