

THE ISSUE of STYLE vs ETHICS

Wescott Notes - 2015

Ethics are so you don't screw it up for the next guy, and *style* is so you don't delude yourself into thinking you're so hot. Yvon Chouinard

STYLE

"Style is everything.....Good style helps define a set of ethics for us as outdoor users". Allen and Mike's Really Cool Backpackin' Book, Page 1

"Experts are distinguished by the style in which they travel, not by the difficulty of the trip, the frequency of the trips, or the number of days out. Style and skill are synonymous." Cliff Jacobson

"Good Style – Looking good vs looking "together" (professional)...Being considerate...staying warm and dry...keeping a positive attitude...Striving to camp and travel in good style makes you a better camper in the long run".

"Perfect Style – an absolute cornerstone – naked human soloing a new route on sight. Anything other than that is of lesser stylistic value....the farther you get away from perfect style, the less proud you should be of yourself. As a sport matures it doesn't necessarily get better".

Yvon Chouinard – The Climber's Bill of Rights

For years I adapted summer backpacking techniques [style] to winter, traveling fast and light in the mountains unencumbered by lots of gear. But as the years passed I started taking longer, more ambitious trips deeper into wilderness, and the backpacking paradigm [style] no longer worked. In fact, for transporting loads on long journeys, canoeing is a better model.

Stephen Gorman, AMC Guide to Winter Camping

ETHICS

Ethics is the field that deals with defining what is good and bad, and the moral obligations that ensue.

Yvon Chouinard on Ethics & Style

• *Ethics* concern values, morals, and the principles of right and wrong – not only the rules of conduct among ourselves.....there are some elements of *style* that help to define the rules of the game.

• **The Climber's Bill of Rights** – *You have the right to climb anywhere, in any style you want, as long as you don't alter the medium or infringe on the next person's experience. Many of the solutions to our complex environmental problems will not be achieved with increased complexity. Question every technology. Reject the unnecessary. Keep it simple. Leave room for serendipity. Keep it real and do no harm. We should consider David Brower's advice: "Turn around and take a forward step".*

How Ethics Defined By Others Affect "Best" Practices (Style) for Us All

UNITED BY PRACTICE

From *Zip Lines - The Voice For Adventure Education*, Summer 1996.
Character-based Ethics. by Jasper Hunt - P 12-15.

Before proceeding with the discussion of character-based ethics, it would be useful to explore the issue of what a *practice [style]* is in some detail. When someone pays you money to do certain things for them, you are engaged in a practice with them, e.g., the practice of medicine. We are connected by ethics because we are participating in the same *practice* together. Like families, we might have our fights about one thing or another. Families fight, but families stay together.

A "practice" in the sense in which MacIntyre* uses the term, is a context involving human beings where certain goods can be realized. For instance, a cobbler makes shoes and other footwear. There is a difference between quality and shoddy footwear. MacIntyre makes the point that the best judges of quality footwear are the cobblers themselves. They set the standard by which a particular cobbler is judged as good, bad or mediocre. [I disagree. The market should set the standard for what is acceptable and what is not. Practitioners react to market demands] Practices set standards by which practitioners are judged. It is my assumption here that experiential educators are as much engaged in a practice as are surgeons or dentists. [I'll agree with this statement so long as the practitioners are ethical about what they decide to offer or teach their customers, and that they do not use their control to influence the choices their customers make – hegemony. Right now, our field does exactly that; and those in power use that power to their advantage.]

When you are engaged in a practice, you have the possibility of achieving certain excellences. When you step into a practice, you automatically step into

an arena for fellow practitioners. And those people who you are in the practice with are **the people that help define what it is that you do**. This is really a problem for experiential education people because we are proud of our individualism. But when we step into a practice, we shed a good bit of our individualism in order to participate in and achieve excellence in that practice.

- Alasdair MacIntyre - philosopher, *After Virtue*.

What implications does this idea hold for those who choose not to adhere to the popular hegemony of a practice?

Let's look at this from the perspective of traditional camping techniques and those who choose to use classic style. Does the use of classic gear affect the way in which you practice your craft? Absolutely. Does such simple technology affect your relationship to the environment through the practice of woodcraft (*We call it Woodcraft whenever we use nothing but material found in the woods*. D.C. Beard, 1926)? Absolutely. Can classic style be used in a way that it is not found guilty of the environmental impacts that it was responsible for in the past? Absolutely – almost every impact can be mitigated or avoided in fragile or restricted use areas. It is accepted that the production of some commercial gear creates impacts that can be mitigated (organic Egyptian cotton), but the use of natural fibers creates a more long-lasting piece of gear, reducing impact through less consumption. Classic style is a beautiful and inviting way to camp; if camping in general is a flirtation with nostalgia and romance, why not do it in the most nostalgic and romantic way possible?

Emerging technologies, on the other hand, **brag** that their use separates the user from the environment (and they have a law – The Wilderness Act – that defines that separation) – the use of modern “one-size-fits-all” gear has nothing to do with the place you camp. A camp can be set up in a gymnasium and create no impact as well as leave no trace of having been in that space – the slight of hand is in misdirecting the user into thinking the technology creates no impact anywhere and sort of magically appears in the marketplace; the whole charade is based on deferring impact to another unknown location that the user never sees or cares about. Emerging technologies revel (through hype and marketing) in the fact that their production, consumption and disposal creates no impact. The impacts of such items cannot be mitigated – only camouflaged. The lifespan of emerging technologies is less than that of

classic gear – the average family tent is built with a lifespan of 21 nights of total use. Emerging technologies are designed and sold with a backpacking paradigm – lightweight, compact, etc. Backpacking is only one way of camping and the average modern user is not a backpacker, but a family car camper. Designs are expanded to accommodate larger parties but the engineering is not altered, thus creating inferior products that play to the romance of the woods and mountains reflected by the modern model adventurer, yet provides the user with lesser quality. It's all a scam perpetrated by emerging technology producers and those who spread their gospel – ie. LNT Inc. Long live classic style.

To put all of this in perspective, the reader really needs to start by looking through James Turner's seminal paper *Woodcraft to LNT* to see just how we got to this point. I chose years ago to defy the "standards" set by my peers and the hegemony they now use to influence the relationship of people to the outdoors. It's interesting to see how the pendulum has swung and how many people now see that this "Emperor" has now clothes. Everyone should be able to choose their own practices (style) and use them as a pedagogy so long as there is a market interested in what they have say – and they do no harm (or admit to the harm they do and mitigate it's impact) and don't mess it up for the next guy.

The battle against traditional camping and classic style was started in the late 50s-early 60s to create a constituency that would support the preservation of wild lands without "loving them to death" through overuse or the use of techniques that were not compatible with preservation ethics. Traditions were labeled as anachronisms and their use was only by those who were uneducated or lacked "good ethics". The argument should be that the use of any technique, regardless of its heritage - traditional or emerging – if used improperly or to excess is inappropriate. And if someone chooses to stroll the woods in cotton and wool instead of lycra and fleece, they can do so without threat of moral judgments so long as their "ethic" does not impinge on the activities and style of the other.

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