

Henry David Thoreau is a familiar emblem of the conservation movement, but fitting his writings to the procrustean bed of preservationist ideology was curiously problematic.

THE TROUBLE WITH THOREAU'S WILDERNESS

In a provocative essay published in 1996, environmental historian William Cronon announced that the time had come to “rethink wilderness.” To illustrate the weight that the idea carried, he began “The Trouble with Wilderness” with Henry David Thoreau’s famous phrase, “in Wildness is the preservation of the World,”

a slogan that had animated preservationist discourse since the 1950s. But wilderness, Cronon went on to say, was “not quite what it seems”; it was a “human creation,” an artifact of particular episodes in human history. As such, the concept had been loaded with “some of the deepest core values of the culture that created and idealized it”: the longings, fears, and hopes of each particular age that contemplated these unpeopled lands. In our era wilderness had become, he wrote, an “escape from history,” promoting the “illusion we that can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world.” In saving this imagined world, we “give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead.” Cronon ended his essay by repeating Thoreau’s wilderness declaration, but with a subtle addendum: as Thoreau saw it, “wildness (as opposed to wilderness) can be found anywhere.”¹

“The Trouble with Wilderness” touched off a flurry of criticism and in unanticipated ways left the rationale for wilderness preservation vulnerable to attacks from both right and left.² Yet to highlight Thoreau’s appearance in the essay provides an interesting way to begin rethinking the trouble with wilderness, since he was not only the most ambivalent of wilderness icons but also one of the few who offered resolution to its contradictions.

Thoreau’s eight resounding words were among the most powerful ever written in the defense of nature, but as Cronon implies, they embodied the ambiguities in the movement that claimed them. As a Romantic, Thoreau supposed nature to be tender, benevolent, harmonious, and ordered, but as a scientist acquainted with Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, he knew it to be wild, chaotic, dissonant, and uncaring. Political scientist Ian Box summarized: “In his view we are hungry not only for the security of a provident nature, but even more for the wild caprice of an order which transgresses our self-imposed limits.” To those who read Thoreau carefully, wilderness seemed at odds with his overall experience of nature.³

The tension in Thoreau’s wilderness writing came to light in a speech made by Pennsylvania Representative John Saylor in 1957, one year before Congress took up the debate that culminated in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Saylor quoted Thoreau’s “In Wildness is the preservation of the World” and then explained that the author’s famous book, *Walden*, was set “in the wild lands around Concord,” where Thoreau first discovered the “the tonic of wilderness.”⁴ In his strained attempt to portray the Walden woods as wilderness, Saylor recognized that Americans were willing to pay to protect a sublime wilderness world they would almost surely never experience, but he also knew they longed to connect with nature at a much more personal level—in a place perhaps as familiar

BY RICHARD W. JUDD

as the well-trammeled Walden woods. Thoreau, in fact, offered both. He felt liberated by a western wilderness he could only imagine, but he also felt connected to—and responsible for—the wilderness just beyond his doorstep. In this sense Thoreau not only articulated the trouble with wilderness but also offered solutions.

Thoreau first emerged as a symbol of conservation thought as early as the 1950s, when commentators began to voice fears that the rapidly growing economy would exhaust the world's natural resources.⁵ The decisive turn in his reputation came in 1963 with publication of Stuart Udall's *Quiet Crisis*, a popular historical account that pieced together a national conservation tradition based on the writings of major American explorers, scholars, philosophers, and politicians. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Interior secretary wrote, urged scholars to create a national literary tradition by responding "to the rhythms of the... earth," and this inspired his Concord neighbor to champion the cause of conservation.⁶ During these postwar decades academics and scientists contributed to this conservationist image by taking seriously, for the first time, Thoreau's contribution to natural science. Earlier critics had dismissed his later journal entries, which were chocked full of scientific detail about plant and animal seasonality, habitat, and behavior, as a dissipation of Thoreau's philosophic and poetic energies. Charles Stewart, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1935, was among the first to understand the significance of these observations. Thoreau, he noted, measured snow depths, charted lake bottoms, counted tree rings, inspected birds' nests, and kept careful records of his findings. Those who dismissed these details as minutiae failed to appreciate the scientific implications. "There is no such thing as an unimportant fact," Stewart wrote. "Its significance may depend upon how it fits in with other facts; but you have to get your facts first.... Eventually something will come of them."⁷

THOREAU AS ECOLOGIST

Thoreau was first identified as an ecologist in a 1942 *Quarterly Review of Biology* article by Edward S. Deevey Jr., who considered Thoreau both "scientist and mystic." It was precisely this mix of holistic and particular thinking, Deevey wrote, that made him a pioneer in the field of ecology. Biographer William Condry wrote that Thoreau brought together his two passions—science and poetry—into a single powerful vision, not unlike the vision required to see nature as an ecological whole.⁸ The strongest case for identifying Thoreau as an ecologist was made by Philip Whitford and Kathryn Whitford in a 1951 article in *Scientific Monthly*. Thoreau, they argued, developed a scientific method appropriate to the standards of his own times: he observed closely, questioned the accuracy of his own observations, and kept extended records. He studied a single plant repeatedly over several seasons to understand its entire life cycle, and by careful observation of stumps and sprout wood, he could envision the past composition of a woodlot cut three times over.⁹

The discipline of ecology was politicized in the 1950s by scientists assessing the ecological implications of global population growth and the threats posed by nuclear fallout and chemical pesticides and herbicides. Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring* was a benchmark in the formation of this new, politicized popular ecology. The book sparked a controversy that divided the scientific community, spilled out into the popular media, and landed this "improbable revolutionary," as biographer Linda Lear calls her, at the epicenter of an acrimonious debate over the use of chemicals and the health of the environment.¹⁰ In the years that followed, her citizen-defenders forged the principles of ecology into a new militant ideology while a younger generation of scientific ecologists moved out of the ivory tower and into the public sphere.



JOHN KUOCH

Thoreau's replicated cabin at Walden Pond. It actually sits at the edge of the visitors' parking lot, about a half-mile from its original site.



With the emergence of a new, more activist understanding of ecology, Thoreau's unique fusion of science and poetry gained visibility. University of Illinois English professor Nina Baym emphasized the moral implications in his studies: like a good ecologist, he looked for relationships rather than discrete phenomena, and like a good poet, he drew moral and spiritual lessons from these relationships. His insistence on precise measurement, his search for higher meaning, and his yearning for mystic communion all pointed to a deep ethical regard for plants, animals, birds, and fish. Thoreau's newly discovered ecological sensibilities fit brilliantly into this new outlook. He became, in essence, an ecologically informed advocate for nature—an environmentalist.¹¹

THOREAU AS WILDERNESS ADVOCATE

Thoreau's role as a wilderness advocate followed a similar trajectory. The movement to protect wilderness on the federal level achieved a breakthrough in the 1920s, when regional foresters in the U.S. Forest Service began setting aside primitive areas in the national forests. In 1951 Howard Zahniser of The Wilderness

Society called for a bold congressional offensive to protect undeveloped open spaces in national forests and national parks, and in 1958 Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Representative John Saylor introduced a wilderness bill in Congress. The movement gained popularity during the 1970s, coincident with rising personal income, expanding leisure time, a vigorous outdoor equipment industry, and what *New York Times* commentator Oscar Godbout called an "atavistic impulse to live in a tent"—a camping and backpacking craze.¹²

Long known as an advocate for local conservation reserves, Thoreau's name became synonymous with wilderness preservation. In his seminal *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash began a chapter with Thoreau's well-known proclamation, of which he declared that "America had not heard the likes before." Inspiring Thoreauvian phrases slipped seamlessly into the rhetoric of the preservationist campaigns.¹³

The wilderness movement inspired a new generation of nature books by writers like Bob Marshall, William Byron Mowery, and Sigurd Olson, who described places where the allure of the land depended in good part on its unforgiving,



Mount Katahdin, as seen in 2014. Thoreau had his only real wilderness adventure on the mountain. While in Maine he was an outsider and observer; in Concord he was part of the nature he explored.

indeed unwelcoming character. In this literature, Thoreau was quoted widely, but often in ways that would have been unfamiliar to the Concord naturalist. Sierra Club director Michael Frome, for instance, used his words for inspiration but framed them to project a vision of wilderness—not as a source of poetic inspiration or self-enlightenment but rather as an opportunity for self-mastery and mastery over nature. Wilderness was the thrill of the unplanned moment, the expectation of danger, and the apprehension of beauty amidst a harsh natural environment. Nature became wilderness only when the experience of getting there was “physically difficult.”¹⁴

THOREAU AS WILDERNESS ADVENTURER

By these standards, Thoreau was by no means a wilderness adventurer. While other naturalists of his time were traversing the uncharted spaces in the West, he remained tethered to the hills and hollows of his hometown. Harvard’s Howard Mumford Jones reminded readers that the Walden hermit interrupted his “life in

the woods” almost daily to return to Concord for meals, odd jobs, or conversation with friends. As Paul Oesher wrote in *Living Wilderness*, “He prized the wilderness and saw in its preservation the hope of the world, yet he took comfort in the warmth of Concord village.” His chemistry, Oesher concluded, “requires both positive and negative ions.”¹⁵

In light of the rising interest in wilderness, scholars and activists turned to Thoreau’s essays on the Maine woods, his only real wilderness adventure. His posthumously published *Maine Woods* yielded any number of vivid aphorisms attesting to the spiritual value of wild nature, but as an endorsement of the wilderness experience, it was confusing. To even the casual reader it was evident that Thoreau was not at home in this vast and dreary place. He acknowledged at the outset that there would be “no sauntering off to see the country,” and indeed he stuck mostly to the rivers, trails, and haul roads carved out by North Woods lumbermen and river drivers.¹⁶ In his Concord writings he had carefully crafted the illusion he was part of the nature he explored; in Maine he

was an outsider and observer, traveling under the watchful eye of Indian guides and seldom venturing into the forest itself—except to get lost.

Nowhere was this ambiguity more apparent than in his September 1846 ascent of Mount Katahdin, described in the first of the three essays that make up *The Maine Woods*. His party camped near the base of the mountain, and in the morning Thoreau ascended to the high tableland. Across this immense space he spied the summit, still distant and barely visible through the mist. Standing astride the barren rocks, he realized that there was nothing metaphorical about this windswept, cloud-raked field of boulders, and this terrifying sense of barrenness yielded, as literary biographer R. D. Richardson wrote, “one of the best statements in American literature about what happens when one comes face to face with the primeval world of matter and force.”¹⁷

Thoreau had climbed the mountain expecting, as always, to use his observations as a foundation for exploring higher truths about humanity, but as he stood bracing against the driving mist, he realized that the aggregation of loose rocks and stubble on the tableland yielded none of the rich human metaphors he had discovered in the Concord woods. True wilderness, he concluded, was not nature but the primal inorganic material out of which nature was made—“raw materials of a planet dropped from an unseen quarry.” Where poets and painters before him had kindled the mountain sublime into soaring inspirational themes, Thoreau felt empty.¹⁸

On his descent, he passed through a swath of recently burned land, and it was in this dynamic patch of early succession growth, rather than on the mountain, that he reconnected with the regenerative natural forces that he described so beautifully in his Concord nature writing. The contrast with the summit triggered some of the most salient wilderness imagery ever penned. “This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man’s garden, but the unhandseled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever,—to be the dwelling of man, we say,—so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can.”¹⁹ He returned to Concord convinced that the poet must, “from time to time...drink at some new and more bracing fountain of the Muses, far in the recesses of the wilderness.”²⁰

Thoreau clearly found the Katahdin experience transforming, but in ways perhaps too subtle to be understood in the heat of the 1970s preservationist crusades. Taken aback by the severity of Katahdin’s barren landscape, he concluded that true wilderness was completely separate from humanity—wild, chaotic, and as uncaring as the sea that claimed so many lives off Cape Cod, his only other encounter with wilderness landscapes. The “mighty streams, precipitous, icy, savage” that fell from Katahdin’s rock-strewn ravines replenished the soul, as he wrote, but those who

crafted these words into a call for preservation missed the point that the panoramic sublime ruled out any personal contact with nature.²¹ Wilderness fed the soul, but at the expense of another spiritual sustenance: the intimate communion with nature he enjoyed on his Concord saunters. His deeper sympathies lay not with wilderness but with wildness—a subtly different experience he discovered in places far more familiar than the windswept heights of Katahdin.

Despite these ambiguities, *The Maine Woods* became a classic in American wilderness literature. For some, the three essays simply affirmed the adventure of back-country travel. According to Condry, Thoreau was wild as the land itself. “He stayed in settlers’ outposts, learned to navigate a batteau in the rapids, made long and strenuous portages round waterfalls, rowed miles along the lakes by moonlight, slept under the stars by log-fires, watched ospreys and bald eagles by day and listened to wolves and owls by

night.”²² Joseph Wood Krutch pointed to Thoreau’s conviction that in desolate places we “witness our own

limits transgressed.” Here indeed was a power that transcended human existence, and at a time when technology was hurling humanity toward oblivion, Krutch thought, this was a useful reminder: wilderness taught hubris. Others learned the importance of solitary movement through wild spaces. The Katahdin ascent was “inward” as well as outward, Philip Gura suggested. Thoreau was “changed, transformed, created anew,” Stanley Tag added, by a “simple, uncluttered encounter with an environment where the present is more easily embraced than elsewhere.”²³ These judgments and others breathed life into the phrase “in Wildness is the preservation of the World.”

Readers in the 1970s may have overlooked the sense of alienation Thoreau felt in the chill air atop the mountain, but they well understood it in their daily lives. The mass protests of the previous decade had been aimed at clearly identifiable agents of injustice, whether corporations, governments, race supremacists, male chauvinists, or the military-industrial complex. Although the sources became more difficult to define, this sense of oppression lingered into the 1970s. Thoreau’s term “quiet desperation” echoed through the press, interpreted in various ways to mean disassociation from work, society, people, the self, or nature.²⁴

The 1970s debate on alienation, coming as it did in the midst of the environmental movement, highlighted awareness of the separation between society and nature. In an article titled “A Thoreau for Today,” Edwin Smith observed that the “deliberate cultivation of kinship with nature, common enough in Thoreau’s day, is notably lacking among us a hundred years later,” and Charles Seib, borrowing from Henry Beston’s *Outermost House*, described the 1970s as “sick to its thin blood for lack of elemental things, for fire before the hands, for water welling from the earth, for air, for the dear earth itself underfoot.” Separation from nature impoverished the world, as Thoreau taught, just as connecting to nature preserved it.²⁵



This iconic photograph was taken in 1856, about a month before his fortieth birthday.

Preservationists who searched *The Maine Woods* for inspiration found themselves enmeshed in a subtle contradiction: in all his writing Thoreau celebrated his immersion in nature, but in true wilderness he found himself at the antipode to human experience. On the wilderness flanks of Katahdin he was taken aback by his alienation, and he rejoined nature only in the burn below: “*Contact! Contact! Who are we? Where are we?*” Just how much he needed this contact became clear in the descriptions of his Penobscot guide, Joe Polis, whose intimacy with nature was everything Thoreau’s Katahdin experience was not. According to Stanley Tag, Polis

dresses a deer skin, makes campfires, finds dry bark, constructs fir-branch beds, makes a birch-bark bowl, candle, and pipe, splits spruce roots, mixes pitch for repairing his canoe, cleans and cooks fish, spots, shoots, skins, and cooks moose, finds ingredients for and cooks lily [root] soup, follows animal trails and tracks, imitates snakes, owls, and muskrats, knows birds by sight, knows medicinal uses for plants, knows about the lives and behaviour of red squirrels, herons, caribou, and mosquitoes, navigates through woods and waterways, ...and paddles and portages canoes through rough water and terrain.

Even in the starkest wilderness, immersion in nature was possible.²⁶

The Wilderness Act, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, demonstrated the nation’s resolve in protecting untrammeled landscapes most individuals would never see for themselves, but as John Saylor’s 1957 speech suggested, Americans also longed for a wildness they could experience personally. How, then, could Thoreau’s ambivalent wilderness sympathies help resolve the “trouble with wilderness”?

As Loren Baritz points out, Thoreau personified the idea of the wilderness West as freedom. “Eastward I go only by force,” he wrote in his essay on walking, “but westward I go free,” into the future and into the realm of the truly liberated. Embroiled in the slavery controversy and disoriented by the shift to a commercial economy, he found his faith in America wavering, but he saw potential for renewal on the western horizon. “Surely good courage will not flag here on the Atlantic border,” he wrote, “as long as we are flanked by the Fur Countries.... The spruce, the hemlock, and the pine will not countenance despair.”²⁷ On this level, *The Maine Woods* expressed the clearest vision of Thoreau’s celebration of nature. Maine was his “West,” Don Scheese writes. “Thoreau ultimately links wilderness and civilization by arguing that the latter depends, literally and symbolically, on the former; wilderness is civilization’s necessary complement.”²⁸

CONCORD’S WILDNESS

Alive to the meaning of wilderness on this vast, open frontier, Thoreau searched for the same untamed quality in his own Concord backyard. According to naturalist John Burroughs, he “ransacked the country about Concord in all seasons and weathers, and at all times of the day and night; he delved into the ground, he probed the swamps, he searched the waters, he dug into woodchuck holes, into muskrats’ dens, into the retreats of the mice and squirrels.” The quest for wildness flavored all his Concord rambles.²⁹ Concord was, as he said, a “tamed and, as it were, emasculated country,” but despite its two hundred years of settlement it was still surprisingly wild on its margins, and in these pockets of unimproved nature he was reminded of the western wilderness

he had so long imagined. Alone in some forgotten corner of the township, he could feel the “marrow of nature” and stand “nearer to the origin of things.”³⁰ His Concord wilderness was important for three reasons. First, it was a source of adventure and intense experience. “I feel as if I were in Rupert’s Land, and a slight cool but agreeable shudder comes over me,” he remembered while standing in Beck Stow’s Swamp. “What’s the need of visiting far-off mountains and bogs, if a half-hour’s walk will carry me into such wildness and novelty?” Second, as one who cultivated “no tame garden,” he found in the isolated swamps and high pastures a harvest of fruits and berries that lasted from late spring through late summer. Foraging bonded him to the land and to the essence of the turning season. “I taste and am strengthened.” And finally, in these lush, primitive settings he could grasp the fundamental realities of nature, putting himself in touch with his own deep consciousness—with the “the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have.”³¹ Thoreau was in fact the first in a long line of American writers to express what he called a “singular yearning toward all wildness,” but he was also first to see wilderness as a state of consciousness as well as a description of place. It was in this manner that he made Concord the seat of his wilderness experience. This spirit—the connection between landscape and imagination—made all places seem wild.³²

The phrase “in Wildness is the preservation of the World” came from his essay “Walking,” a celebration of the western wilderness, but he had explained its meaning more carefully in an earlier essay. To the senses, he wrote in “Winter Walk,” a winter scene appears cold and dead, but to the imagination, it exhibits a “glow of thought and feeling.” Frigid air sensitized the walker to subtle sources of warmth—sunlight on the bare rocks or steam rising from a spring in the woods. And beneath his feet was yet another source of warmth: a “slumbering subterranean fire in nature which never goes out, and which no cold can chill.”³³ It was this latent wildness, the promise of a resurgent springtime nature in the ground beneath his feet, that Thoreau saw as the hope of the world. He tasted this wildness in the tang of a wild apple, smelled it in the musky odor of a wet meadow, saw it in the “dazzling and transcendent beauty” of a pond pickerel laid out on the ice, and sensed it in the minnow’s instinctive struggle upstream against the current.³⁴ The Maine woods taught him to appreciate nature’s elemental energies, but it was in Concord that he formed a deep communal connection to these energies. There, a mile or so from home, he experienced nature’s wildness “with all his senses”—standing, as he said, “up to [his] chin in some retired swamp a whole summer day, scenting the wild honeysuckle and bilberry blows, and lulled by the minstrelsy of gnats and mosquitoes.”³⁵

Wilderness bolstered his faith in the character of the American people, but wildness structured his thoughts on his Concord saunters. “Thoreau clearly identifies ‘wildness,’” Laura Dassow Walls wrote, as “something ineffable and strange and raw at the heart of the most common experience.” It was the “great pulse”—the anima coursing through all living things. He read the colonial naturalists who spoke of “Cape Ann Lions” prowling the coastal woods and imagined this unbounded profusion of life still lurking in Concord’s subterranean fires. This was the frenetic search for wildness that John Burroughs so admired in Thoreau: the quality that set him apart from all other nature writers.³⁶ The dual awareness—wilderness near and far—renewed his faith in society and bonded him to his Concord environs.

Thoreau sensed this illusive quality as he sampled wild fruits



This cairn at Walden Pond sits adjacent to the original site of Thoreau's cabin. Friends of Thoreau's started it shortly after his death as a memorial. The photograph dates between 1900 and 1910.

or berries on his walks. Apple trees, growing free and unclaimed in the high pastures, were among his favorite forage. Cattle, he observed, cropped these saplings so low to the ground that they spread outward rather than upward. In time, they became their own fences, and then, at some point, an interior shoot “darts upward with joy: for it has not forgotten its high calling, and bears its own peculiar fruit in triumph.” This lesson in cow-apple ecology assured him that nature was irrepressible—and it provided him with “the choicest of all apples.”³⁷ Standing alone in the high pasture, savoring the taste of this acrid fruit, he contemplated the primitive energies circulating just below the surface—the “howling wilderness” his Puritan forebears had been so intent on eradicating.

NATURE NEAR AT HAND

The difference between wilderness and wildness became apparent in a 1962 Sierra Club publication that borrowed Thoreau's phrase for its title. *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World*, one of a series of large-format glossy coffee-table books distributed by the club to promote wilderness preservation, presented seventy-two magnificent, high-resolution color photographs by well-known nature photographer Eliot Porter, each linked to Thoreau's observations. *In Wildness* went through two printings of 10,000 copies each in its first two years and was, by one account, “the finest series of photographs ever made to illustrate texts by Thoreau.”³⁸

Porter's photographs were clearly inspired by Thoreau's philosophy of nature. Ansel Adams, whose *This Is the American Earth* preceded *In Wildness* in the Sierra Club series, captured the grand sweep of monumental natural features—Half Dome, Death Valley, Yosemite Falls, Mount McKinley. Porter, by contrast, concentrated on intimate details: close-ups of running water, iridescent pools, rock textures, lichens, willows, fallen leaves, and patterns in sandstone. In the introduction to *In Wildness*, Joseph Wood Krutch wrote, “Other writers and other photographers are prone to seek

out the unusual, the grandiose, and the far away.” They “shock us into awareness,” he continued, “by flinging into our faces the obviously stupendous.” But Porter, like Thoreau, searched for higher truths in the familiar landscape, in “the daily and hourly miracle of the usually unnoticed beauty that is close at hand.” His images not only conveyed a poignant message about the impact of brute-force technologies on delicate features that had taken thousands or millions of years to create, they also illustrated Thoreau's message: true connection with nature implied an intimacy not readily experienced in the sublime.³⁹

Thus, while *The Maine Woods* inspired young Americans to climb towering mountains and explore vast forests, *Walden* offered the tonic of wilderness—or wildness, at least—in nature nearby. If the trouble with

wilderness was its separateness, Thoreau offered a means of connecting to nature near at hand. “At a time when few of us can afford the rejuvenating escape to exotic wilderness spaces,” Sandra Harbert Petrucci and Laura Dassow Walls wrote, “Thoreau gives us instead the ‘wild’ of backyard places.”⁴⁰ At Walden Pond, less than two miles from Concord Village, he connected to nature in a way that would have been impossible in the Maine woods. Animals “accepted him as one of their own,” biographer Walter Harding wrote. “The rabbits nested beneath his cabin, bumping their foolish heads on the floor as they made their hasty exists. The squirrels explored his furnishings, searching for newer nut supplies. The field mice came to nibble crackers in his fingers.” He labored shoeless in the warm soil in his bean field, cultivating a deeply personal relation to the land.⁴¹

British poet and naturalist Geoffrey Grigson once observed that American nature writers had been impoverished by their obsession with remote and monumental places. The spectacle of towering peaks and panoramic views distracted them from the endless natural diversity at their feet. For this reason Grigson preferred the more subtle descriptions of nature in British writing. Krutch agreed that writers like John Muir and Enos Mills had been seduced by grand vistas, but in Thoreau, he discovered a credible synthesis of sublime scenery and personal connection. In recording his Katahdin emotions, Thoreau stood with the American Romantics who understood the inspirational meaning of great swaths of unoccupied space and time; in his allegiance to Concord, he was kin to England's Gilbert White, “fixed and content within the compass of a parish.” He ventured along the wilderness trails of Maine and windswept beaches of Cape Cod, but he also discovered an infinitely varied wildness in the Concord fields and meadows, where the imaginative walker could connect to primitive energies not altogether different from those he witnessed on the slopes of Katahdin. Preservation of the world

depended on both wilderness and wildness. For this discovery alone, if for nothing else, Thoreau earned his reputation as a symbol of American environmentalism.⁴² □

Richard Judd is a historian at the University of Maine and is the author of *Finding Thoreau: The Meaning of Nature in the Making of an Environmental Icon, forthcoming from the University of Massachusetts Press.*

NOTES

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7. Charles David Stewart, "Word for Thoreau," *Atlantic Monthly* 156 (July 1935): 114. See Raymond Adams, "Thoreau's Science," *Scientific Monthly* 60 (May 1945): 379–80.
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21. Thoreau, *Maine Woods*, 71.
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