

Editorial

A TOUR THROUGH THE DEEP WEST

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Deep West is a geographical area; it is also a state of mind.

Deep West is to be distinguished from the Northwest (keywords: seacoast, Boeing, forest, rain, Seattle, Portland, Rajneesh) as well as from the Midwest (farming, agribusiness, flatlands, corn, Willa Cather) and the Southwest (Navaho and Hopi, Grand Canyon, Phoenix, adobe, Spanish, RVs). However, the Deep West has an affinity with the Southwest, as both include high deserts and Indian sacred grounds and both tend to be colonies of the military. Witness Los Alamos and the INEEL (both “experimental” nuclear installations); witness uranium mines with radioactive tailings leaching into scarce water supplies on both Navaho lands in New Mexico and in the Black Hills, sacred to the Lakota Sioux.

Tailings litter the Rocky Mountain West too, from which the Deep West is also to be distinguished. Although the Rocky Mountains stretch from Mexico deep into Canada, with John Denver we tend to identify the Rocky Mountain West with Colorado. This state, because it harbors a big city, Denver, and a new age outpost, Boulder, and one of the more fashionable ski resorts, Aspen, is decidedly more populated and popular and sophisticated and therefore politically powerful and certainly more networked as far as peace groups go than the Deep West will probably ever be.

And Deep West has no links whatsoever to the West Coast, i.e., California, except through those who've migrated here from there. Some blend in fine; some don't. Witness a popular bumpersticker: "Don't Californicate Idaho."

Perhaps the most unique feature of the Deep West, what unites all the various states within it more than anything else, is the pickup truck. Pickups are everywhere, in all sizes and colors, new and old, polished and filthy, with or without giant tires, mud flaps, gun racks, dogs; there are at least as many pickups as cars.

The military tends to refer to our part of the country as a "national sacrifice area." So do real-estate brokers, multinational energy companies, logging and mining operations, those who would doom grizzlies, deep westerners, and other wild things. Joel Garreau, who wrote *The Nine Nations of North America*, calls the Deep West part of the "Empty Quarter."

We could have called it the "old west" or the "wild west," had these phrases not been so corrupted by movies, rodeos and Louis L'Amour.

Deep West is a state of mind. Much like the Deep South is a state of mind. The two intense Okie banjos introducing the movie *Deliverance* are echoed by "Sawmill Creek" and other local bands any night of the week at the Cowboy Bar in any small town out here. Saturday nights are special. They come from miles around to stomp floors which bend and squeak.

Deep West is a set of values we don't talk about much, though we watch newcomers carefully to see if and when they relax. Newcomers are likely to talk too much, and to ask us "what school did you go to?" and other baffling questions.

Deep West people tend to go their own way and hold their own counsel on important matters; and they stop to help when your car breaks down on a lonely road. Slow, sure, patient, jerry-rigging, they try everything they can think of with barbed wire and the tools at hand. And if they can't fix it, "Well, Ma'am, it must be broke."

Mountain men and real cowboys and Annie Oakleys are Deep West, though there aren't very many of 'em left, and they too, keep pretty much to themselves.

Some Indians are Deep West. Though still reeling from the centuries-old shock of being systematically butchered and their remnants rounded up into reservations, more and more of them are once again bowing to the four directions and greeting all their relations on Grandmother Earth. They are remembering the ways of their elders, and what their elders say now about us:

We have heard of the protest activities against the arms race, in distant places, and even among Native American groups. We approve of this growing awareness, but must emphasize that protest alone will not stop the war, any more than weapons will. Only a life lived on the basis of the natural order of the Creator, which no person can alter, can avert the third war in the pattern of events we have studied through the centuries. — David Monongye, Elder, Sovereign Hopi Nation, Hotevilla, Arizona, October 3, 1982

The original pioneers who settled the West were trading an unknown future for a past which had lost its allure. They traveled into the vast open spaces of this magnificent heartland and made their mark, slowly but surely, on the ground beneath their feet. Deserts succumbed to the white man's shovels and then his mechanized earth movers. First excavated for our need of minerals, earth is now stabbed by our missiles in the name of life. Ferocious rivers were tamed to meet civilized needs. Like coal slurry lines. Like coolant for nuclear power plants.

Our majestic mountains were carved out for tunnels and roads, their trees and wild creatures "harvested" and their hearts hollowed out to provide shelter for military command centers.

Our sky is scarred with jet trails and our air shattered with their thunder.

Our air, water, and earth; our very souls are contaminated.

Nature is life, is God, Gaia. The Indians knew that. As nature shrinks back, receding to the sting of man's touch, we begin to remember our kinship with her, our dependency.

The dream haunts us. Vague, shadowy, out of focus, it is almost visible, out of reach.

We grow anxious.

The dream moves closer, it stares us in the face. Glowing, beckoning, it beseeches us to stop!

We weep.

We weep for our mother.

We weep for ourselves.

And our weeping cleanses us. Centuries of accumulated toxins leach out of bones, shoot into bloodstreams.

The result, toxic overload, stresses earth's body profoundly. Dis-ease breaks out, small wars, volcanoes, boils, erupt on earth's skin. Earthquakes break her bones, and reset differently. Storms ravage her face. Earth is changing.

So are we.

According to John McNamer, Montana Rancher for Peace, "The MX is to be the lightning rod which unites the West.

Yep.

Update 2023: Unfortunately, despite our mighty protests, Reagan did succeed in installing the MX missile, of which a total of 110 were produced. This ICBM, also known as "Peacekeeper," was first installed at Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming, and remained active for 20 years, from 1985 through 2005.

The "Deep West" has yet to take off as a relevant moniker for the values, attitudes, and land masses noted above.

