The Pacific Crest Trail: A History of America’s Relationship with Western Wilderness

Jenn Livermore
Scripps College

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The Pacific Crest Trail:
A History of America’s Relationship with
Western Wilderness

Jenn Livermore

Readers:
Pey-Yi Chu
Matthew Delmont

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**Introduction**

“Each step faces both ways: it is is both the ending, or tip, of a trail that leads back through our past life, and a new beginning that moves us forward towards future destinations unknown”

- *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*¹

The Pacific Crest Trail, a thin line that traces its way along 2,650 miles of the Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountain ranges from Mexico to Canada, has become increasingly popular since its conception in the 1930’s. Clinton Clarke, most commonly referred to as “the Father of the Pacific Crest Trail,” was responsible for the trail’s initial development, as he achieved the immense logistical feat of persevering against government bureaucracy and right-of-way issues that had previously discouraged others.² Clarke, of Pasadena, California, formed the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference in 1932 and began to lobby for the trail’s creation. He was well connected and thus fit to be a leader for the trail’s development, but at age 59 was too old to do much of the necessary groundwork. Clarke found a worthy assistant in Warren Lee Rogers, 23 at the time and secretary of the Alhambra YMCA. Rogers executed the first scouting of the trail by leading 40 troops of YMCA boys ages 14-18 in a relay through the backcountry between the summers of 1935-1938. Afterwards, Rogers continued working on the trail and took over management duties upon Clark’s death in 1957.³

Housed in the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California are sixty-three boxes of Warren Lee Rogers’s personal files – including Clinton Clarke's original files pertaining to the Pacific Crest Trail. These vast records offer a unique perspective into the development of the trail – the goals, process, organizations, and characters behind its creation. Out of the sixty-three total boxes I was able to access nine and was simultaneously enthralled, perplexed, and heartened by what I found. By comparing the original motives and experience of the trail described in these archives to the realities of the trail today, the trail’s fluid narrative becomes apparent.

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³ Idib.
While this narrative is ever changing, over the course of the trail’s history one theme has remained constant – a notably problematic relationship with wilderness. As William Cronon illuminates in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*,

the idea of wilderness has been a fundamental tenet – indeed, a passion – of the environmental movement. For many Americans wilderness stands as… an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness. Seen in this way, wilderness presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet.  

This belief has not always been widely held; Cronon argues this exaltation of wilderness grew from a convergence of the notions he terms the “sublime” and the “frontier.” The sublime was a concept born from the Romantic era that reached its peak from about 1800 to 1850. Romantics regarded the sublime as an experience where one could glimpse the face of God, an encounter so overwhelming it evoked something that resembled pure terror. Certain dramatic landscapes evoked these emotions, and were consequently revered. The notion of the frontier was presented in 1893 by historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who contended that democracy and American character resulted from contact with the western frontier. Consequently, the end of this era marked a loss of the very source of American values. “Thus, in the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds of wilderness preservation in the United States,” Cronon theorizes, “for if wild land had been so crucial in the making of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past—and as an insurance policy to protect its future.”  

As such, although notably different, both Clarke’s original vision for the trail and the realities of the trail today were born out of a romanticization of nature and a pursuit to preserve the western frontier – the same ideologies from which the notion of wilderness was formed.

Unfortunately, this vision of wilderness has negative ramifications that speak to the shortcomings of the environmental movement at large. Cronon argues, “one of environmentalism’s most important contributions to the moral and political discourse of our time more often than not appeals, explicitly or implicitly, to wilderness as the standard against which

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5 Ibid.
to measure the failings of our human world.”\textsuperscript{6} This creates a core paradox, where “wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural.”\textsuperscript{7} We worship wilderness and perceive it as the purest form of environmentalism, but fail to associate ourselves with the landscape, resulting in an estrangement from the natural world. This distancing also occurs because of the belief that not all wilderness is created equal. Landscapes that foster the sublime and showcase “pristine” nature are the spaces we revere as wilderness. These vistas are sought after as experiences of authentic nature, while the nature that surrounds us every day is forgotten. By compartmentalizing nature in this way and romanticizing certain spaces, environmentalism suffers from a focus on detached parts rather than a fluid whole.

This thesis focuses on how the Pacific Crest Trail’s development over the past eighty years has created an experience that, on the surface, is notably different from Clarke’s original vision for the trail, but is still deeply rooted in a problematic vision of wilderness. Chapter one investigates Clarke and Rogers’s manners and motives behind promoting the trail, finding that these characters envisioned the trail as a means of preserving wilderness and frontier values, and as an antidote to the ills of an increasingly mechanized and commercialized American society. Chapter two examines the visual culture surrounding the trail, from nineteenth century landscape painting to the trail’s presence in social media today. Through time, these representations associate wilderness experiences with a more “authentic” human existence, derived from an individual’s struggle with nature. Because of the increased accessibility of these images and their immense desirability, the trail has been effectively popularized. This mass appeal has created a sort of consumption and commodification of nature, and a growing community of recreational hikers. Chapter three focuses on this community of hikers, and concludes that while the trail has demonstrated a continuous troublesome relationship with wilderness, this community represents certain benefits that have arisen from the trail’s creation. This chapter traces the development of this strong community and examines what it means for the future of the trail.

The Pacific Crest Trail is an interesting lens with which to view our relationship with wilderness because it crosses through the heart of western wilderness that we revere, fetishize, and defend. The problem with much of the environmental movement today is that the basic tools and language used to promote environmentalism are guided by these romanticized visions of


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
wilderness, void of human existence. Preservation and conservation have contributed much to environmentalism, but the creation of a separation between humans and wilderness has been an impediment to the success of the movement. By studying the trajectory of the Pacific Crest Trail, we are presented with a clearer image of why American environmentalism has run into many obstacles. Once illuminated, we can attempt to take a step back and fold humanity’s story into our vision of nature, and move forward evolving in unison.
Chapter 1: The Historic Trail

Thanks to The Huntington Library and Warren Lee Rogers, much of the correspondence, promotional material, and literature regarding the development of the early trail has been preserved. In examining these materials, we are not only given a glimpse into the logistics of organizing the trail, but also the ideologies behind Clarke and Rogers’s mission in developing the trail which were rooted in a problematic definition of wilderness. In a poetic description of the trail, Clarke notes,

In few regions of the world - certainly nowhere else in the United States - are found such a varied and priceless collection of the sculptured masterpieces of Nature as adorn, strung like pearls, the mountain ranges of Washington, Oregon, and California. The Pacific Crest Trailway is the cord that binds this necklace; each gem encased in a permanent wilderness protected from all mechanization and commercialization.  

By comparing fragments of the land to “gems” and “pearls,” wilderness becomes a destination, a refuge, and a pristine space. While appealing, this vision perpetuates a notion of wilderness as a separate entity from human beings.

Regardless, this was the basic perception of wilderness that guided Clarke’s multiple rationales behind the trail’s development. In the most general sense, Clarke wished to create the trail for two reasons: to preserve a threatened wilderness and to use the landscape as a tool to physically and mentally fortify the nation’s youth. By looking deeper into these themes, it becomes clear that Clarke’s desire to preserve this land was rooted in a romanticized vision of wilderness and nostalgia for the western frontier. Through the evolvement of the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps, Clarke’s goal to establish the trail as a serious educational program becomes apparent. Clarke also strongly believed that the wilderness surrounding the trail was a uniquely American asset, which supported his effort to preserve the land. Born from post-frontier ideology, Clarke believed wilderness preservation was the panacea to the damaging effects of modernization.

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Formation of the Trail

Although he was not the first to propose the idea, Clinton Clarke is widely referred to as The Father of the Pacific Crest Trail. Born in Chicago, Clarke spent his summers camping, fishing, and hunting in northern Michigan and Wisconsin and went on to receive a B.A. from Williams College and an M.A. from Harvard. He then moved to Pasadena in 1900, where he founded the Pasadena Playhouse, worked with the Boy Scouts, and was chairman of the Mountain League of Los Angeles. It is unclear exactly how the idea of the trail reached Clarke, but in 1932 he proposed the idea of “a trail along the summit divides of the mountain ranges of Washington, Oregon, and California, traversing the best scenic areas and maintaining an absolute wilderness character” to the United States Forest Service and the National Park Service. The vision for the trail was received positively and Horace Albright (director of the National Park Service at that time) promised Clarke he could count on the National Park Service for their “fullest cooperation” in the project. Clarke was then placed in charge of managing the entire endeavor and securing the private land through which the trail would cross. Clarke also formed the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference in order to organize and promote the trail. Luckily, the Cascade Crest Trail in Washington, the Oregon Skyline Trail in Oregon, and the Lava Crest, Tahoe-Yosemite, John Muir, and Desert Crest Trails in California had already been constructed. As such, only 400 miles of new trails needed to be built, and only 250 of those miles lay outside National Forest and National Park land. Regardless, the feat of organizing, constructing, and publicizing the trail was an enormous task.

Although the country was in the midst of the great depression, the trail made considerable progress in these early years due to the work of three major organizations: the Civilian Conservation Corps, the YMCA, and the Boy Scouts. The Civilian Conservation Corps conducted a preliminary survey of the trail and helped to plan and build remaining trail links,
bridges, and structures. The YMCA also played an integral role, as the first scouts of the trail. Warren Lee Rogers of the YMCA spearheaded this effort. Clarke and Rogers formed a close relationship and Rogers was appointed to lead the first YMCA troops on relay expeditions of the trail. During the summers of 1935-38, Rogers lead 40 teams of boys between the ages of 14-18 through the wilderness to prove that traveling such a trail was possible. Once this feat had been completed, the Boy Scouts made hiking the Pacific Crest Trail part of their program.

Over these years a large part of Clarke and Rogers’s work focused on promoting the trail. Rogers worked to raise interest in the trail through radio programs and some 200 talks before service clubs and school assemblies, while Clarke worked to unite various organizations in endorsement of the trail. By 1937, “Support of the trail idea and membership in the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference” had grown to include “the Boy Scouts of America, California Alpine Club, Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, Los Angeles County Department of Recreation, The Mountaineers, The Mazamas, Rotary International, Shasta-Cascade Wonderland Association, The Sierra Club of California, and the Young Men’s Christian Association.” This initial rapid progress was somewhat stunted during World War II however, and post-war efforts were not enough to complete the trail.

After Clarke’s death in 1957, Rogers acquired Clarke’s files from his estate and started working on the trail again with renewed vigor. He quickly became known as the best information source for many early hikers on the trail. Then in 1968, the National Trails System Act was passed, and the Pacific Crest Trail was recognized as a national scenic trail. Although the trail was incomplete, the Act acknowledged the “ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population,” and thus made a commitment to continue working to fully develop the trail. The trail was placed under the management of the U.S. Forrest Service and Rogers was elected to the trail’s advisory council, where he continued to serve for over 16 years. While Rogers did not live to see the full completion of the trail, which was celebrated on the first National Trails day on June 5th 1993, in 1991 at the age of 83 he was able to attend the Walker Pass ceremony, celebrating the near completion of the trail (except for a small portion over Tejon

14 Ibid.
Ranch in Southern California). In the wake of his death, Rogers left a trail that had grown increasingly popular since its original conception.

The Romantic Frontier Trail

The initial romanticization of the American frontier can be attributed to Frederick Jackson Turner, perhaps the most famous historian in American history. In 1893, when Turner presented his paper in front of the American Historical Association in Chicago, “the contribution of the thirty-two-year-old historian did, if only gradually, provoke such widespread interest and support that it presently became the most widely known essay in American history and literally revolutionized the teaching of American history in the colleges of the United States.”  

Turner’s basic argument was that American identity was born out of contact with the frontier, and the end of this era marked the disappearance of American character. “American development,” Turner stated, “has exhibited not merely advance along a single line but a return to primitive conditions on a continuously advancing frontier line… This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.” Turner argued that the importance of the frontier was invaluable; a claim that resonated with so many Americans it remained the predominant explanation of the nation’s past for many years.

The effect of this widespread belief in Turner’s thesis inspired “a considerable sense of shock” in American’s in the nineteenth century. “Shock,” because contrary to the previous widespread belief that nature was unruly, harsh, and inhospitable, Turner painted a new vision of wilderness as a formative landscape and a treasured piece of heritage that was under direct threat from the expanse of urbanization. As a result, Turner’s writings inspired a sharp rise of popular interest in preserving portions of the American wilderness in an attempt to preserve the frontier and the qualities it bestowed on the American population.

21 Ibid.
inevitable reaction, which began shortly after Turner’s death in 1932”\textsuperscript{22} and “By the 1960’s traditional frontier historiography struck many as racist, sexist, and imperialist in its depiction of western settlement.”\textsuperscript{23} However, the reverberations of Turner’s theory can be clearly seen in Clarke’s motives for creating the Pacific Crest Trail. References to the frontier and its positive effects are seen in multiple instances in Clarke’s writings. In his guidebook, Clarke explicitly states that the trail is worthy of preservation as it is “the LAST FRONTIER.”\textsuperscript{24} This mentality was also reported in a New York Times article about the trail where Clarke stated that because our wilderness is being destroyed by the overbuilding of our mechanical civilization, “The Pacific Crest Trail is the Last Frontier.”\textsuperscript{25}

As a result of his association of the trail with the western frontier, Clarke regarded all scouting attempts of the trail as pioneering adventures. This phenomenon was not specific to Clarke, as during this time period “Pioneering… came to be regarded as important not only for spearheading the advance of civilization but also for bringing Americans into contact with the primitive.”\textsuperscript{26} Because exposure to the primitive was believed to create desirable American traits, untamed wilderness was glorified as a necessity for developing a better America. Clarke hoped that by recreating pioneering experiences, America would have a brighter future. In an interview with the YMCA, Clarke described the scouting trips the YMCA boys were embarking on as “pioneering parties of discovery and adventure” and concluded, “an opportunity to make real pioneering trips like the explorers of old is needed.”\textsuperscript{27} The YMCA was also clearly of this mindset. In a 1935 letter from YMCA’s F.E. Rugg to Rogers about the relay, Rugg expresses his support, writing; “this idea of going into the practically uncharted places is exceptionally valuable. It awakens something of the sleeping Pioneer spirit which is in all of us.”\textsuperscript{28} Even though the validity of frontier theory had been called into question, the pervasiveness of its


\textsuperscript{27} Tallman Trask interview of Clinton Clarke transcript, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

\textsuperscript{28} Letter from F.E. Rugg to Clinton Clarke, Box 14, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
impact is clear in the language surrounding the trail. The landscape about which Clarke cared deeply represented not just an alternative to an urban landscape, but a fundamental necessity in the preservation of American character and values.

Another reflection of the influence of frontier theory is in Clarke’s glorification of primitivism. With the nostalgia that was a byproduct of frontier theory came a “powerful romantic attraction of primitivism” spurred by the belief that “the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to a simpler, more primitive living.” Consequently, Clarke exhibits an almost obsessive relationship with primitivism. In order to maintain an “absolute wilderness character” Clarke believed that returning to more primitive ways was a necessity. In Clarke’s mission statement for the trail, “Pledge to Nature Lovers,” he promises to “To Maintain and Defend for the Benefit and Enjoyment of Nature Lovers the Pacific Crest Trailway as a Primitive Wilderness Pathway in an Environment of Solitude, Free from the Sights and Sounds of a Mechanically Disturbed Nature.” Clarke also promises that “To keep the Pacific Crest Trail System primitive, individual P.C.T.S. Signs will not be added to the local trail signs, and only necessary marking will be permitted.” By creating a trail that allowed its explorers to experience raw nature, Clarke hoped to aid in the strengthening of bodies and spirits. While the frontiersman probably did not view the “primitive” with such reverence, these ideologies were nonetheless glorified and widely accepted as fundamentally beneficial and essential.

In contrast to this idealistic primitive vision was Clarke’s nemesis – the commercialized world. Clarke described this world with distain both because of its effect on people and its effect on natural areas. Clarke believed “It is absolutely vital that a great mountain, waterfall, canyon or forest be kept in its natural state and surroundings as made by Nature; for once molested or disfigured, repairing of wounds is almost impossible.” With urgency, Clarke wished to preserve wilderness areas for citizens and to protect nature and man alike from the consequences of rapid development. “The famous pioneering trails of the world are fast becoming

31 Ibid., 11.
32 Ibid.
mechanized,” Clarke lamented. Proving detrimental, for “In our hurry-scurry world of machines, noise and distractions, the mind becomes confused and our sense of values is lost.” In fact, Clarke thought our experience of the urban landscape was unpleasant and essentially damaging to our morals, the cure being contact with wilderness such as the areas around the Pacific Crest Trail. Clarke believed that the virtue of such a trail, “would lie in helping to preserve wild areas in encouraging people of our ‘too artificial civilization’ to return to a simpler life and an appreciation of nature and the outdoors.” By protecting natural areas and encouraging contact with the primitive, Clarke hoped to preserve American landscape and American values.

**Strong Youth, Strong America**

Perhaps the greatest fear Clarke attributed to an “artificial civilization” was a weakening of the vitality of the nation’s youth. Being actively involved with the Boy Scouts, it makes sense Clarke viewed the future of America through what he observed of the next generation. Repeatedly, Clarke expressed disgust for “Mechanization” as he believed it had “created a soft and flabby civilization” resulting in “a marked deterioration in the physical, mental, and spiritual caliber of our youth.” To restore the hardiness and spirit of the nation’s youth, Clarke saw the trail as a guide to “Open to youth a vision of a simpler and more natural life.” Once again, Clarke expresses his faith in the formative qualities of wilderness and contact with the primitive. Youth embody the future, and Clarke hoped the trail would aid in bettering this future.

Clarke’s view of American youth however, was generally limited to white males. In his guidebook delineating the history of the Pacific Crest Trail, Clarke makes a bold and telling statement about the deterioration of youth. Clarke claims “In a word; too much sitting on soft seats in motors, too much sitting in soft seats in movies, and too much lounging in easy chairs before radios. That is why the negro boys who have not yet had the advantages of our modern

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33 Ibid.
34 Clinton Clarke, *Natural History of the Pacific Crest Trail System*, 1936, page 1, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
37 Ibid.
civilization, and live closer to the soil, take all the athletic prizes.” Clarke envisioned the trail as an antidote to these modern ills for the benefit of white male youth. In this spirit, Clarke comes across as almost competitive, clearly rooting for white American boys. Additionally, Clarke’s glorification of the primitive is uncomfortably apparent and speaks to a narrow worldview.

As a result of his fear for the state of American youth, Clarke hoped the trail would provide a rigorous educational experience for its visitors. “The Pacific Crest Trailway is not a recreational project for the casual camper and hiker,” Clarke proclaimed, “it is a serious educational program for building sturdy bodies, sound minds, and active, patriotic citizenship.”

There are several important components of this vision. First, this statement references Clarke’s earlier musings about the weakness of American youth. In order to combat this decline, Clarke paints the trail as an exercise in physical strengthening and character building, not a place for casual enjoyment. The trail had a distinct goal of building better citizens, and a clear purpose reaching beyond simply providing wilderness as a leisure opportunity. Clarke’s reference to the building of “patriotic citizenship” also clearly reflects frontier values. An integral part of Turner’s writings was that “democracy was a forest product” and experiencing primitive wilderness experiences “fostered individualism, independence, and confidence in the common man that encouraged self-government.” These values, unique to the American experience, were what Clarke feared was at stake as wilderness disappeared. The common man could be elevated to embrace these values through contact with untamed nature, and the disappearance of wilderness marked these qualities, integral to America’s greatness, as transient. Clarke thus envisioned the trail as a necessity to preserve the roots of democracy.

In addition to restoring these democratic values, Clarke saw the trail as an exercise in ecological education. Clarke was quite the naturalist himself, demonstrated by his extensive documentation of the landscape, flora, and fauna of the Pacific Crest Trail in the guidebooks he published. Indeed, catalogues of the various vistas and life forms existent on the trail made up the majority of content in these guidebooks. As he found in his examination of the trail, “The Pacific Crest Trail offers exceptional opportunity to study an unusually prolific and interesting

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38 Ibid.
Natural History.” For Clarke, the trail provided a way to experience and educate oneself of a unique natural heritage. Clarke believed that “The true explorer and nature lover takes into the mountains a hobby - the study of the trees, animals, birds or flowers. Then every day on the trail is perfect in its fullness of close contact with Old Mother Nature.” In nature’s classroom, Clarke unites education and fulfillment. This comparison further elaborates Clarke’s goal for the trail as a multifaceted exercise in the building of a strong nation. Thoughtful learning along the trail was personally gratifying for individuals and beneficial for the country in that it produced competent citizens.

**Trail Fraternity: Boy Scouts, YMCA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps**

**Crest-line Trail Song**
There’s a Crestline trail a-windin’
Into a land so forlorn,
Where the rocks, and hills, and trees
Proclaim
The old trails reborn.
So, we’ll swing along together,
A hiking song ringing free.
Till we reach our goal,
One happy throng,
A “Y” boy company.
-Anonymous

The combination of Clarke’s belief in the educational potential of the trail, coupled with his desire to better the future of American youth, resulted in a marriage of the “Great character building organizations” in America. These were the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.  

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42 Clinton Clarke, *Natural History of the Pacific Crest Trail System*, 1936, page 1, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
43 YMCA Relays, Box 14, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
44 Ibid.
Conservation Corps, and their labor was integral to the early development of the trail. Clarke was a strong supporter of the Boy Scouts, and was actively involved in the organization. Interestingly there is a clear overlap in Boy Scout ideologies and Clarke’s perception of the trail. The original Boy Scout mission, developed in 1910, was “to teach [boys] patriotism, courage, self-reliance, and kindred values.” Interestingly, Clarke promoted the trail as a platform for the development of equivalent values. “[The] struggle in long backpack trips,” Clarke believed, is “the most efficient program for physical development and, more important, the building up of permanent endurance, moral stamina, and personal leadership. Of equal value, too, is the intimate association in human cooperation found only in wilderness adventures and contact with Mother Nature.” The leadership, morals, and community expressed in Clarke’s view of the trail directly mirrors the Boy Scout mission. Contact with nature, Clarke believed, would foster the development of virtues he held dear.

This happenstance is not a coincidence, as the creation and immense success of the Boy Scout organization was born from the widespread influence of frontier theory. As Roderick Nash states in his book *Wilderness and the American Mind*, “The ending of the frontier prompted many Americans to seek ways of retaining the influence of wilderness in modern civilization. The Boy Scout movement was one answer.” In the 30 years following the first publishing of the original Boy Scout handbook, the guide sold approximately seven million copies, second only to the bible. Like Clarke’s vision for the Pacific Crest Trail, “The scouting movement caught the public eye by offering a solution to the disturbing phenomenon of a civilization that seemed to be tearing itself away from the frontier roots that many felt to be the source of its greatness.” The extreme success of the Boy Scouts was important for the development of the trail. Such a trail was viewed in a positive light as it provided a context for groups like the Boy Scouts to flourish. Clarke proudly describes that in 1936 the Boy Scouts developed an advanced camping program using the trail to traverse “over 700 miles in glorious adventures through the

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48 Ibid. 148.
49 Ibid.
mountain wonderland, making report on their experience and natural history items.” Clarke claimed that this program would “develop a sounder physique, offer cross-country exploration that creates self-reliance and leadership; the romance and adventure of pioneering.” The development of the trail proved mutually beneficial. The Boy Scouts were able to use the trail as a classroom, and in doing so fulfilled Clarke’s goal of perpetuating frontier values. The merging of the trail and the Scouts was thus very logical, and demonstrates the broad reach of frontier ideology.

Another “character building organization” that was integral to the trail’s development was the YMCA. The initial scouting relays of the YMCA proved that such a trail was possible, and set the stage for the type of trail experience Clarke envisioned. During the summers of 1935-1938, forty scouting groups, lead by Warren Lee Rogers, traversed the entirety of the trail. At the time, “This remarkable undertaking aroused great enthusiasm and approval as a character building program.” The excitement was widespread, and at the ceremony for the start of these relays, an estimated 3,500 people came to see the boys off into the wilderness. The thrill of exploring new territory, at a time when uncharted territory was dwindling, aroused nostalgia for pioneering adventure in many and resulted in popular support of the trail.

A fantastic resource regarding these relays are the relay surveys Rogers organized. After each trip, Rogers mailed a survey about the trail experience to the boys and then evaluated the results. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these surveys is the common themes expressed by the boys in their answer for “what was your favorite part of hiking the trail?” Of the documented responses, the most popular answers touched on themes of fellowship, pioneering, and wilderness adventure. In terms of wilderness, boys talked of “Being in the mountains away from people,” “Seeing new places and doing new things,” “The scenery,” and “Being out in the open and being your own master.” Many boys also focused on the relay community, citing

52 Ibid.
54 YMCA Relay Surveys, Box 14, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
“Hiking with some swell fellows,” “Fellowship, experience, challenge,” and “Being a member of such a large and original undertaking” as their favorite parts of the trip. Pioneering qualities were also important. Many boys spoke of “Beautiful virgin territory and good fishing,” “being a part of the first group to hike the trail,” “The fact that I was one of the first fellows to participate in such a conquest of this kind,” “Taking part in the first border to border Pacific Crest Trail hike and knowing it furthered the interests of the trail,” and “Just the idea that we were the Pioneers in this grand work of popularizing the trail.” These responses illustrate how the YMCA furthered a vision of the trail’s purpose as a tool for preserving frontier values. The boys on the trip saw their work as pioneers, exploring uncharted territory in the same way the frontier was explored. These journeys helped to put the Pacific Crest Trail on the map and mark it as a landscape for the modern frontiersman.

Consequently, there was a fair amount of pride associated with embarking on this journey. A letter to Clinton Clarke from a YMCA leader stated,

Leaders connected with other boy organizations have told me that they would give their eyes and teeth to have had their groups make the first hike. And you can bet on it that if they had they would be shouting from the house-tops about it. In fact, now, they do everything they can to reach the public with stories of the things they do which might be construed to parallel our pioneering. The desire to re-create pioneering experiences was immense, and spoke to the perception of wilderness at that time. As a resource for educating the nation’s boys, pristine wilderness experiences were especially desirable and widely sought after.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was also a key part of the trail’s development, and illustrated Clarke’s desire for the trail to provide an employment opportunity. Between 1933 and 1942 more than 3 million men joined the CCC. They planted 2 billion trees, slowed soil erosion on 40 million acres of farmland, and developed 800 new state parks. Clarke was quick to recognize the power of the CCC and worked to use their labor on the trail. To do so, Clarke desired “The Trail to be located, built, marked, mapped, and publicized by illustrated booklets by

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55 YMCA Relay Surveys, Box 14, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
56 YMCA Letter to Clinton Clake, March 20th 1938, Box 15, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
the use of the unemployed, directed by the various unemployment agencies and organizations in the states of Washington, Oregon, and California, and financed by the unemployment funds available in those states.”58 With the use of this labor force, trail construction made great progress.

Clarke also used the nation’s unemployed as a leverage point in arguing for the creation of the trail. Clarke believed that the Pacific Crest Trail “would furnish employment for those out of work in a project that would be a monument of the depression” and that “The unemployed of all classes will enter on this project with enthusiasm for it will be true creative work, that will last through the ages, and be of great value in the progress of our civilization.”59 While Clarke was focused on returning to an earlier lifestyle, he also saw the trail work as a mark of progress. Through the use of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Clarke hoped to create and preserve a wilderness legacy he saw as important to American identity.

While the Civilian Conservation Corps aided immensely in the trail’s development, the CCC’s overall influence was somewhat disputed.

In particular, during the mid 1930’s, the intellectual heirs of John Muir began criticizing the CCC’s recreational development projects. The construction of campgrounds and picnic areas, hiking trails and motor roads by millions of Corps enrollees, argued wilderness advocates such as Bob Marshall, destroyed the primitive quality of national forests. Comprehensive conservation, they countered, must include wilderness protection.60 The CCC was consequently an interesting partner choice for Clarke, because in many ways the organization was at odds with his values. In contrast to preserving expanses of primitive wilderness, much of the CCC’s work involved increasing wilderness accessibility for the population’s pleasure. Nevertheless, the CCC provided a large labor force, and their work on the trail did not involve construction of campgrounds, roads, and picnic areas. Their effort aided in blazing a path through the wilderness, but was not controversial like other recreational development projects.

In general, this work speaks to the central view of the trail and its surrounding wilderness

as a resource for the betterment of man. Clarke was a naturalist and concerned with protecting pristine wilderness, but mainly because of its value to men. Contrary to an earlier view of nature simply as a material resource, Clarke speaks to a changing view “That wilderness (the environment of solitude) is a natural mental resource having the same basic relation to man’s ultimate thought and culture as coal, timber, and other physical resources have to his material needs.” The desirable qualities wilderness inspired in men were viewed as arguably more valuable than the worth extracted from wilderness as a material resource. This resource was also a focal point in the promotion of the trail. In a poem Rogers read at the end of a radio broadcast about the trail, Rogers claims “Forests were made for weary men, that they might find their souls again.” While intangible, these kind of emotional values were important in portraying the trail in its natural state as a valuable resource.

Regardless of the value Clarke saw in the trail, it is important to note that this resource was largely intended for the betterment of men, and paints a picture of a seemingly exclusive trail fraternity. Clarke intended that the trail be used by “Hardy adventurers who can enjoy the experience and benefits of a friendly struggle with Mother Nature.” This vision was also expressed by Rogers, who described “No weakling, for example, is physically able to carry a load of 85 pounds on his shoulders.” Clarke and Rogers were not alone in their association of wilderness with masculinity. In a 1936 article Sunset Magazine published about the trail, the magazine described that the trail “will never be exploited or violated - that’s the raison d’être of the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference. It will remain a stamping ground for the true outdoor fraternity. That warms Sunset’s heart.” This fraternity was deeply rooted in American culture, as documented by president Theodore Roosevelt’s earlier musings likening wilderness preservation to a “preservation of manliness.” By in large, wilderness was viewed as a predominantly male space.

Clarke’s vision of the trail becomes increasingly exclusive in his description of who he

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61 Tallman Trask interview of Clinton Clarke transcript, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
envisions should be allowed to use the trail. Clarke describes that the trail is not just for a male populace, but a specific type of male. “Care should be taken” Clarke warns, “that the TRAIL never be made popular for the average tourist type of recreation seeker, but that it be kept intact for the true wilderness lover and nature worshipper.”67 Not surprisingly, the focus of this exclusive brotherhood has its roots in frontier ideology. As noted by Cronon, “The mythic frontier individualist was almost always masculine in gender: here, in the wilderness, a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity.”68 As such, the trail represented a preservation of threatened masculinity. Clarke took this exclusivity one step further by describing that the trail itself was not enough to preserve these values. The “average tourist” on the trail was also a threat. By describing the intended exclusivity of the trail, Clarke reinforced wilderness as an asset for a specific male population.

The American Trail

Another interesting presentation of the value of such a trail was in its context on a global scale. Clarke believed another reason for creating the trail was because it represented a uniquely American experience. This references Turner’s earlier statement that “the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influences of Europe, a steady growth of independence on Americans lines.”69 Turner believed that “the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it,” were responsible for “the really American part of our history.”70 Through the development of the trail, Clarke wanted to preserve what he saw as the root of American history. To protect the landscape was to preserve, perpetuate, and exhibit a uniquely American character.

Even so, this American pride is only one piece of the picture. In other instances of Clarke’s writings, he expresses a desire to establish the trail in order to replicate other nation’s walking trails. “In Europe” Clarke writes, “trails and their operation have been for some years an

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67 Clinton Clarke, Pacific Crest Trail Guidebook, 1935, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
70 Ibid.
important factor in the recreation activities of the people.”⁷¹ Using Russia, Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, Ireland, and Britain as examples, Clarke concludes that Americans should have similar trails and places to experience wilderness. In 1932 Clarke wrote a letter to Horace Albright, the director of the National Park Service, singing the praises of these other nation’s trails as rationale for his own project. The trail “will be the focus, the incentive for Youth Movements like the hiking organizations in Germany and the Hostel Associations in Great Britain.”⁷² Clarke viewed the ability of these trails to get youth into nature as invaluable, and wished to replicate this trend in America.

With this focus on the success of other nation’s walking trails, Clarke’s resentment of modern America becomes apparent. “Make a ratio of the number of motors, of the number of tickets sold in movies, and the number of radios sold, compared to our population and compare these figures to any nation in Europe,” Clarke states, ”and we see what an appalling over-mechanization has enslaved the people of the United States.”⁷³ Furthermore, Clarke describes the American urban landscape as inhumane, claiming that after experiencing nature “we return to the slavery of our inhumane world with enlightened mind and revivified soul.”⁷⁴ Strangely, even though roots of fascism had taken hold in Europe, Clarke uses Europe as an example of a population still in touch with the land, and therefore liberated. In contrast, Clarke feared America had failed by moving away from these natural roots, resulting in our enslavement.

American pride coupled with American resentment resulted in Clarke’s drive to create the trail to remain competitive on a global scale. Clarke hoped that “This trail will attract hikers from foreign nations just as Americans are now being attracted to Switzerland and England.” Once built, Clarke envisioned that the trail “would become the most famous mountain highway in the world” and would work to “advertise the Pacific Coast.”⁷⁵ Through this promotion, Clarke wished to replicate the success of trails in Europe, in order to publicize American wilderness.

⁷² Clarke, Clinton, “The Mountain League of Los Angeles 1932,” Box 1, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
⁷⁴ Clinton Clarke, Natural History of the Pacific Crest Trail System, 1936, page 1, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Clarke saw the wilderness surrounding the Pacific Crest Trail as equally majestic to any landscape in Europe, and wanted to make it available to both American and international mountaineers.

**Conclusion**

From an educational tool to a piece of cultural history, from an escape from mechanized civilization to an international wonder, Clarke was passionate about the trail for a multitude of reasons. By promoting the trail as an exclusive space intended to strengthen American youth, teach frontier values, and protect pristine nature, Clarke perpetuated a concept of wilderness as iconic and threatened. By examining Clarke’s motives in creating the trail and the language used in the trail’s promotion, the existence of a troublesome relationship with wilderness becomes apparent. As expressed by Cronon, the definition of “wilderness tends to privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others.” Clarke clearly believed that any land touched by modern commercialization was ruined, and therefore protecting pristine wilderness was of immense importance. In turn, by promoting this definition of pure wilderness, Clarke encouraged a sharp disconnect between humans and nature.

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Chapter 2: The Popular Trail

In order to protect western wilderness and preserve frontier values, Clarke and Rogers extensively promoted the trail to garner widespread support for its creation. Clarke believed that since wilderness is “Explored by only a few adventurers it is unknown and unappreciated by the many; therefore, it can be destroyed without the people understanding what has happened.”\(^{77}\) Contrary to Clarke’s exclusive standards for the trail’s use, he saw widespread promotion of the trail as the answer to avoiding a loss of wilderness due to neglect. Ironically, this promotion aided in the creation of a popular trail, inspiring an increase in “the average tourist type of recreation seeker” Clarke so lamented to hike the trail.\(^{78}\)

This phenomenon was described in a 1980 publication of Living Wilderness, The Wilderness Society’s magazine. Modern environmentalists, the article states, have come to a realization that “The publicizing of wilderness can be a double edged sword… wild areas once publicized and saved… may, because of their fame, become ‘loved to death’ by backpackers and other visitors, through sheer weight of numbers.”\(^{79}\) In many ways, the growing popularity of the trail represents this quandary. This reality is not surprising however, as the growing visual culture surrounding the trail represents the same problematic vision of wilderness Clarke promoted: iconic views, romanticized nature, and an exaltation of pristine landscapes void of human presence. By promoting this fetishized definition of wilderness, it is only natural that these specific landscapes may become “loved to death.”

Interestingly, while Clarke and Roger’s promotion of the trail added to the trail’s visual canon, they were not the first to depict the trail. In fact, the first visualizations of the trail’s landscape were part of the Romantic era from which a reverence for the sublime emerged. Artists such as William Keith and Thomas Hill, among others, found inspiration in the untamed western landscape and sought to depict the sublime in their art. These dramatic paintings evoke the kind of awe inspired reverence for specific landscapes that the flawed foundation of wilderness relies on and that influenced Clarke to create the trail.

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\(^{78}\) Clinton Clarke, *Pacific Crest Trail Guidebook*, 1935, Box 3, Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.  
This core focus on the sublime has continued to influence the visual culture of the trail. One prominent artist – Ansel Adams, was of Clarke’s same mindset that wilderness promotion would result in its preservation. Adams sought to create dramatic images that instilled a reverence and respect for wilderness in the viewer. Clarke’s visions for the trail were also reflected in *The High Adventures of Eric Ryback*, a memoir of the first hiker to complete the entire length of the trail (this feat is officially termed “thru-hiking”). The immense popularity of Ryback’s book marked an important transition in the trail’s history. Many people were inspired by his story and set out to repeat his quest. This growing popularity resulted in the creation of a niche market for Pacific Crest Trail guidebooks. The most popular guidebooks, published by the Wilderness Press, have sold over 100,000 copies and are now in their seventh editions. With better resources, an expanding population began hiking the trail and documenting their unique experiences on the trail. Hikers such as David Green, William R. Grey and Sam Abell all produced accounts of the trail that depict an “authentic” wilderness experience, born from an individual struggle with nature. These narratives served to glorify and popularize the trail experience. The advent of the Internet was also responsible for increasing the trail’s popularity as previous and current hikers published their accounts in the form of blogs. Interestingly, the expanding visual culture surrounding the trail resulted in a positive feedback loop; as greater numbers of people publicized their experiences on the trail, greater numbers of people sought to experience “authentic” nature themselves.

This intense focus on a specific wilderness area is reminiscent of Cronon’s warnings about the trouble with defining wilderness based on notions of the sublime. “By teaching us to fetishize sublime places and wide open country,” Cronon argues, “these peculiarly American ways of thinking about wilderness encourage us to adopt too high a standard for what counts as ‘natural.’” As such, we focus too much on places we do consider natural, diluting their significance and tragically ignoring the value of less sublime landscapes. In the case of the Pacific Crest Trail, the trail’s growing popularity has resulted in an unfortunate commercialization and commodification of nature. Today, images from early accounts of the trail have shown up in fashion blogs as style inspiration, and in art blogs highlighting an

appealing vintage feel. Additionally, trail memorabilia can now easily be purchased in the form of matted digital prints, hats, necklaces and more. Thus, while the visual culture of the trail represents the trail’s changing narrative, it also speaks to a consistent detrimental obsession with pristine wilderness, iconic vistas, and compartmentalized nature.

**Visual Representations and Trail Narratives**

Even before the existence of the Pacific Crest Trail, romanticized depictions of western wilderness spoke to the type of revered frontier that later prompted Clarke to create the trail. After the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, California’s scenic and pristine wilderness became increasingly accessible. As a result, “The grandeur of the rugged Sierra Nevada, giant redwoods, and Yosemite Valley became a magnet to artists from the eastern states and Europe. The California landscape became the symbol of western expansion and America’s destiny, mythologized as an exotic unspoiled Eden.” This virgin landscape was a muse for many artists. Thomas Hill and William Keith were two artists who were inspired by this environment, and painted the wilderness that the Pacific Crest Trail now crosses. Influenced by romanticism, these artists sought to represent nature as a sublime, emotional, and aesthetic experience. While Hill and Keith painted many years before the Pacific Crest Trail’s creation, the vivid wilderness they depicted laid the foundation for a reverence for awe inspiring wilderness like the areas around the trail.

These qualities can be clearly seen in Thomas Hill’s painting “Mount Hood Erupting” and “View of the Hetch Hetchy Valley” as well as in William Keith’s painting “Landscape with Mount Shasta.” In “Mount Hood Erupting” Hill paints this majestic mountain in soft pastels contrasted against a foreground of deep green and golden foliage. Staring out at the viewer is a buck with a full crown. The chilling yet glorious quality of the painting illustrates the American west as a fantastic and dramatized place. Hill’s painting of Hetch Hetchy Valley also evokes similar qualities. The viewpoint of the painting is from far above the valley, giving the viewer a perception of vast wilderness. The expanse of the landscape is almost overwhelming and evokes a reverence for the grandeur of the land. William Keith’s work “Landscape with Mount Shasta”

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also paints the pre-trail wilderness in this light. The extreme lushness of the scene depicts a staggering, even disorientating, abundance. Mt. Shasta towers above and the deep green palate of the landscape presents the scene as somewhat ominous, eerie in its majesty. These dramatic landscapes illustrate the way in which western wilderness was framed and romanticized. It was images such as these that inspired a reverence for awe-inspiring landscapes, and formed a definition of wilderness rooted in these specific aesthetics. In turn, it was this vision of wilderness that prompted Clarke’s reverence for the landscape of the American west.

Thomas Hill, *Mt. Hood Erupting*

Thomas Hill, *Hetch Hetchy Valley*
While this style of landscape painting fell out of favor in the early 20th century, romanticized landscape depictions found new life in the form of photography. As a supporter of the Pacific Crest Trail (in fact a member of the executive committee of Clarke’s Pacific Crest Trail Council) and wilderness preservation in general, Ansel Adams became known for using dramatic images of wilderness as a tool for conservation. Subscribing to Clarke and Rogers’s belief that successful conservation stemmed from promotion, Adams used photography as a persuasive medium to protect the landscapes he held dear.84 In his book *Sierra Nevada, The John Muir Trail*, Adams notes “In no other mountain range may be found a more benign climate, more favorable conditions for life out-of-doors, wider opportunity for the study and enjoyment of nature, more exciting temptations for the mountaineer… For the artist and all others seeking the intimate splendors of the natural world the Sierra is an inexhaustible well of aesthetic and spiritual stimulation.”85 While Adams believed the landscape provided an “inexhaustible well” of

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inspiration, he was also aware that the landscape was not an inexhaustible resource. Adams believed that “Everyone has a *right* to visit Yosemite. But no one has the privilege of usurping it, distorting it, and making it less attractive to those who seek its experience in its simpler, unmanipulated state.” Without preservation, Adams feared the many opportunities and virtues provided by the wilderness were threatened. Nonetheless, Adams was also guilty of perpetuating the same problematic relationship with wilderness as Clarke. Through crafting these glorious images showcasing specific parts of wilderness, Adams popularized the concept of wilderness as an area defined by awe-inspiring splendor. Ironically, just as in Clarke’s case, this focus effectively popularized this sacred wilderness, resulting in heavy use of the areas that were previously perceived as un-manipulated.

Nonetheless, this tactic did result in successful conservation. After publishing his book *Sierra Nevada: The John Muir Trail* in 1939, Adams sent a copy to Stephen Mather, the Director of the National Park Service. Mather was so impressed by the book he showed it to President Franklin Roosevelt, who was so taken by the work he kept it for himself and Mather had to request another copy. Closely following this exchange, Roosevelt established Kings Canyon as a National Park. Shortly thereafter Mather wrote to Adams, “I realize that a silent but most effective voice in the campaign was your own book, Sierra Nevada: The John Muir Trail. So long as that book is in existence, it will go on justifying the park.” Through the creation of these powerful images, tapping into a widespread reverence for dramatic landscapes, Adams had notable political impact.

Clarke also employed the persuasive quality of visuals in his 1945 Pacific Crest Trail guidebook. Clarke hoped, “May this little book, which is simply a guide or catalogue to some of the treasures of Mother Earth, be helpful in preserving their protection and eternalness.” As part of this catalogue, Clarke commissioned twelve illustrations of the most iconic views along the Pacific Crest Trail. While these sketches are not exactly spectacular works of art, the fact that Clarke wished to include these illustrations speaks to the powerful quality of iconic vistas.

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89 Ibid.
Additionally, throughout the book Clarke has scattered small emblem-style illustrations. Titled “Knapsackers,” “Mountaineers,” and “Explorers,” these illustrations depict small figures strutting across various mountainous landscapes. These visuals speak to the types of people Clarke envisions on the trail – hardy young men overcoming obstacles before a backdrop of pristine nature. Clarke romanticizes this form of “authentic” wilderness experience and paints these activities and the landscape in which they are performed as desirable. Through this visual documentation of scenery, Clarke developed a multifaceted approach to promoting the trail in order to preserve a vision of pristine wilderness.

Clinton Clarke, The Pacific Crest Trailway, Illustrations by Merle Lozier
After many years of trail promotion, in 1970 an 18-year-old boy by the name of Eric Ryback became the first thru-hiker of the trail. His completion of the trail was widely celebrated, and the book he published a year later about his journey, *The High Adventures of Eric Ryback*, sold over 300,000 copies. While Ryback’s motives for hiking and publicizing his experience of the trail did not stem from a desire to preserve wilderness through promotion, his journey was rooted in wilderness philosophies similar to those of Clarke. Ryback’s journey was truly a “friendly struggle with mother nature”\(^91\) and mirrored Clarke’s earlier Frontier ideologies. Indeed, Ryback hiked the trail because of a desire for “Accomplishment, adventure, solitude, freedom - whatever the need is, it is chronic and irreversible, a relentless drive to follow routes unknown to other men.”\(^92\) Ryback’s quest also became an epic achievement in survival, as he was forced to carry an 80-pound pack because “In making plans in conjunction with the district rangers of the Forest Service, I found that there just weren’t many places along the route where I could establish food and supply pickups. Most of the areas I would be covering were completely uninhabited, with sometimes as much as 100 or more miles from the trail to the nearest outpost.”\(^93\) This struggle in pristine wilderness was exactly the kind of modern pioneering experience Clarke envisioned.

Ryback’s experience proved to be a comfort to members of Clarke’s generation who, like Clarke, feared for the lack of frontier values in America’s youth. In an article published in the Los Angeles times titled “Canada to Mexico on Foot” the author praises Ryback as a token of hope for his generation saying, “Ryback is the stuff that youth is made of. He is confident, fearless, proud, ingenious, rugged. With the future in the hands of men like young Eric Ryback, there’s little for adults who wring their hands over the next generation to worry about.”\(^94\) Through The Pacific Crest Trail, Ryback proved to a generation notably influenced by frontier values that younger generations were capable of being pioneers and maintaining a romanticized vision of pure American character.

The vivid and gripping accounts of Ryback’s pioneering adventures effectively popularized his story. Readers were drawn both to the drama of the peril he faced and the


\(^{93}\) Ibid., 3.

descriptions he painted of the stunning wilderness landscape. In part of his book, Ryback describes looking at maps in preparation for his journey. While helpful, “They said nothing of the cold and cutting winds, the snow and ice, the slicing rocks and underbrush. They could not show the wind-burned and frightened face of an 18-year-old alone, 200 miles from civilization and sealed off by rugged mountains and threatening snow… nor could they reveal the incredible natural beauty - the ice capped crests basking in the sun, the enormous silent vistas at dusk, the gentle birth of two fawns, the deeply felt moments when I was at peace with and a part of nature and her wilderness.”

Through evocative descriptions such as these, Ryback increased the appeal of the trail as an authentic experience in nature. Yet it was only “200 miles from civilization” that Ryback was able to feel as if he were “a part of nature.” Through these vibrant descriptions of his adventure, Ryback inspired a craving for this type of wilderness experience in many, and promoted a vision of wilderness as a place far removed from a human context.

After Ryback published his account, the fervor surrounding his success created a unique market for Pacific Crest Trail guidebooks. In 1972, Thomas Winnett, founder of the Wilderness Press, sent five authors out to scout the trail and create the trail’s first guidebook. The first edition (Pacific Crest Trail Volume 1: California) was published on May 10th 1973, and the Oregon and Washington guide closely followed in 1974. These guidebooks are still in print today, and have collectively sold over 100,000 copies. The success of these guidebooks would be heartening to Winnett, who believed that “People in general are not going to do anything to protect the wilderness unless they have been there personally and enjoyed it.”

Just as Clarke and Rogers, Winnett exhibited a reverence for western wilderness and saw publicity as a means to achieve conservation.

With continuously more resources available to hikers, ever more explorers placed dusty boots along the trail. One of these teams of men was William R. Grey and Sam Abell. In 1975, National Geographic sponsored these two men to record their trail experience through photography and text. The resulting product was a compelling work of photojournalism. In retrospect the photographs seem slightly dated, but the extensive documentation of the vivid colors, hiking characters, and sweeping landscapes found along the Pacific Crest Trail were new

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97 Ibid.
for the time. These visual aids gave readers a window into what life was like on the Pacific Crest Trail and largely romanticized the journey. As these images entered the public realm, their artistry painted a desirable wilderness experience that many sought to recreate.

Another hiker who was inspired to experience the Pacific Crest Trail after hearing about Ryback’s success was David Green. Green published his own poetic account of the trail, *A Pacific Crest Odyssey*, with the Wilderness Press in 1979. His highly descriptive work produces an almost contagious reverence of nature. Similar to Clarke’s belief in pristine wilderness, Green hiked the trail out of a “desire to immortalize the experience of wilderness perfection.”

Throughout the book, Green paints sensational images of “wilderness perfection” with his words. In one instance, hiking through the Cascades, Green stopped to admire the landscape. He describes, “The heady aroma of damp earth, the scent of fecundity, filled the air. There was only that sound that is no sound, but more a presence, soft and ephemeral as an angel’s whisper, rhythmic and constant as the heartbeat of the earth.” Through this description and many others in his book, Green paints wilderness as true earth, the very heartbeat of the planet. By exalting the pureness of wilderness, Green’s words glorified the trail as a sacred and desirable place.

While the rising popularity of the trail cannot be attributed to a particular author or artist, all of these works had the effect of building off of each other, enforcing the virtues of the trail as an authentic wilderness experience. The Pacific Crest Trail Association keeps a list of all the thru-hikers of the trail, documenting the ever-rising popularity of the trail. Through these numbers, Ryback’s influence on the trail becomes clear, as do the other author’s works. Another interesting spike in the data coincides with the rise of the Internet. The Internet allowed trail information to become more accessible, and hikers who were not authors or artists were able to publish their accounts of the trail. With this free mine of information, the trail experience was further promoted.

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Through the Internet, current hikers began publishing their accounts of the trail in the form of blogs, and past hikers of the trail uploaded details of their previous adventures. One hiker who used the Internet to document his journey was Monte Dodge who hiked the trail in 1977. Dodge’s experience of the trail was not widely publicized, but in the early 2000’s Dodge presented his extensive collection of photographs from his journey online. While Dodge did not document the trail for any particular reason other than to have a personal record of his experience, his photographs speak to the type of early experience hikers had on the trail. In many of his photo captions, Dodge writes in a somewhat nostalgic manner, yearning for the type of adventure he experienced in the trail’s early days.

One interesting part of Dodge’s experience is his longing to experience the trail in a way that Ryback did. Through Dodge’s photos it becomes clear Dodge worshiped Ryback as a mountain man idol. One of Dodge’s images is of his camp, a messy assortment of camping supplies. While it is hard to make out exactly what is happening in the photo, the captions states, “if you look closely on right side of photo is the only shot I can find of my ‘Vintage Metal Fuel Flask’ I carried on my 1977 hike, which is like Ryback's but only a half liter instead of a liter as

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Eric packed in 1970.” Although you can barely make out the flask, the image is prominent in that Dodge felt an urge to replicate the type of experience Ryback had along the trail. This explicit reference to Ryback demonstrates the profound influence he had on future hikers. Ryback’s trail experience was viewed as an authentic quest that others aspired to replicate. Another way in which Dodge expresses nostalgia through his images is in his pictures of food. One of Dodge’s photos depicts a “hikers feast” of hotdogs, Lay’s chips, and Coors beer, while two other pictures illustrate a sage grouse and a line of trout that Dodge ate for dinner. The image of Dodge’s “feast” illustrates a new kind of experience on the trail. Contrary to the hundreds of miles Ryback had to travel between pockets of civilization, the presence of this type of food demonstrates the commercial world growing ever closer to the pure wilderness experience its visitors held so dear. In contrast to this food is the wild sage grouse and trout Dodge was proud to catch, depicting a different time on the trail. As Dodge notes, “In 1977 there were few hikers along the PCT. Killing a grouse today would be bad. In 1977 it was like taking a hand full of sand off the beach.” In this way, Dodge nostalgically describes an earlier time when the trail was less populated by visitors. Ironically, it was the growing predominance of images such as Dodge’s that inspired more people to hike the trail, inevitably changing the trail experience.

While the trail is becoming increasingly less like the pristine wilderness Clarke envisioned, the quest for an authentic natural experience has not been lost. In 2011 a man named Kolby Kirk hiked the trail with five moleskin journals instead of the typical camera. Kirk’s journals speak to a desire to create a trail experience of substance; with growing numbers of people on the trail, it becomes desirable to personalize the trail experience. Kirk illustrates the journey as a personal quest, to gain strength, inspiration, and peace from the landscape. His journals are filled with reflections and events, in addition to pressed flowers and leaves, postage stamps, smudges of dirt and blackberries, and other reminders of his trip. While very personal, Kirk was able to publicize his journals via the Internet, reaching a broad audience and encouraging others to seek authenticity on the trail.

As our world has moved into the age of the Internet, interesting reflections of the Pacific

101 Idib.
Crest Trail have begun showing up in unexpected places. For example, through my research I found reproductions of Green’s, Dodge’s and Gray and Abell’s trail experiences in art, fashion, and lifestyle blogs. The blog Une Collecte, an aesthetically assembled collection of scanned images from the bloggers’ personal collection, is one example of this phenomenon. In one post, the user uploaded images from William Grey and Sam Abell's book *The Pacific Crest Trail* into a stimulating collage of images.103 Most of the posts in this blog have a vintage feeling, contrasted with the modern medium through which they are displayed. The highlighting of these images as pleasing visuals, taken out of the context of the trail, reveals a deep fascination with images of nature as discrete aesthetic experiences. Broken up into separate frames then pieced artistically together, this blog represents a tendency to fragment and compartmentalize landscapes. Nature is revered not as a complex whole, but as slivers of breathtaking beauty.

Odd representations of the trail can also be found in Jake Davis’s blog, a filmmaker in New York who posts about what inspires him. Although far removed from the trail, Davis pulled Dodge’s images and Green’s book into his own blog under the caption: “Inspiration: Vintage Pacific Crest Trail Hikers.” In his commentary Davis notes “The style, the vibe, the feeling is all so amazing. Hopefully you can find some inspiration in it for your wardrobe or life. The boots, hats, shorts, landscapes, cottages, and views are all so good… It’s not some fabricated image a fashion house is trying to create. It’s real and has absolutely nothing to do with fashion. I think that’s why I like it so much.”104 Even though Davis has probably never hiked the trail, the authenticity of these images is inspiring to him. Far removed from the context of wilderness, Davis’s use of these images is a telling example of how the trail’s influence has spread far beyond Clarke’s original intentions. Clarke wished to preserve the trail as a counterpoint to mechanized society, but as the popularity of the trail has grown, its influence has been reflected and fragmented back into the mechanized world. As such, the trail represents a certain commodification of nature.

This peculiar representation of the trail is also found in the Need Supply Co., a luxury fashion and lifestyle blog that sells clothing, accessories, specialty food, beauty products, and more. The antithesis of Clarke’s focus on the primitive, the Blog glorifies material wealth. Even

so, this blog found inspiration in Dodge’s images of the Pacific Crest Trail, and published them within the context of urban luxury. The caption underneath the photos reads “Have ya’ ever hiked the Pacific Crest Trail? Probably not, and you probably don’t look as cool as these dudes do.” The appearance of these images in such a context symbolizes the manifestations of a flawed vision of wilderness. In a metropolitan landscape, wilderness represents a desirable authenticity that has been removed from the realities of urban life. This blog has latched onto this desirability and used it to sell products. Wilderness is supposed to be an escape from consumer society, but as we exalt it as a concept separate from ourselves, it comes to represent an intangible desire that we attempt to materialize and consume.

**Conclusion**

Hiking the trail today is a very different experience from Clarke’s initial vision. Grounded in ideas of preserving eternal wilderness, Clarke and Rogers hoped to protect this pristine landscape by publicizing its virtues. In many ways, Clarke and Rogers were successful. Today the trail is complete, and many have experienced the landscape’s majesty. However, as an unintended consequence of this promotion, the trail has become popularized as a recreational experience and in some ways commercialized and commodified. Indeed, today is it possible to purchase a wide array of Pacific Crest Trail memorabilia including hats, t-shirts, necklaces, and full size digital prints of the landscape. The trail has also served as an aesthetic muse for the mechanized world as both art and fashion blogs have found inspiration in historic visuals of the trail. The mining of the trail’s virtues for innovation in an urban context was probably not what Clarke had in mind when he sought to publicize the trail. As such, the trail’s history truly represents the inherent paradox of wilderness. As we seek to protect the values we believe wilderness holds, its resulting popularity results in unhealthy fetishizing and fragmentation of nature.

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106 Interestingly, Ansel Adams’s photograph *Detail Devil’s Postpile* was used as inspiration for the Bank of America building in San Francisco.

Chapter Three: The Trail Community

Although problematic in some ways, the development of the Pacific Crest Trail is not entirely negative. As increasing numbers walk the trail, a growing supportive community has formed. Reduced to the basics, hikers find that this shared outdoor experience fosters strong and supportive relationships. A far cry from Clarke’s exclusive vision of the trail, there is a new of “everyone can do it” mentality about hiking the trail. In fact, a thru-hiker just this year likened being on the trail to being part of a “moving village.”107 This village consisted of people from all walks of life with a shared goal of completing the trail, reaffirming “her belief that anyone could hike the trail.”108 This is not to say today’s trail experience is perfect; the ability to engage in outdoor recreation is in many ways still dependent on class and income, leisure time, and accessibility.109 Even so, the present trail supports a much wider range of hikers than Clarke originally intended. For the trail’s travelers, the experience is extremely bonding and equalizing as hikers share common goals and struggles. As such, today’s journey on the trail is often painted as inspirational, rich, wholesome, and restorative.

Even so, the pull of this community has served in popularizing the trail, which is a reflection of our fallacious relationship with wilderness. The trail provides context for meaningful relationships to form because of the mindset we assume when entering this sacred place. Once again, wilderness represents an unfortunate fragmentation. It is this specific space in which we assume authenticity lies, so we forget to search for authenticity within ourselves and in the environments we inhabit. This search for fulfillment has lured increasing numbers to the trail each year, resulting in a strong trail community and a growing number of individuals aiming to find restoration, inspiration, and wholesomeness in nature. It has also resulted in a perpetuation of problematic wilderness ideals, which has lead to instances of overuse of the trail and a certain commercialization of the trail experience.

The popularization of the trail due to its growing trail community is illustrated by

108 Ibid.
documentsations of the trail experience over time. Gray and Abell’s National Geographic publication was the first popular representation of the trail’s community. The photographic compilation of their journey not only captures breathtaking landscapes, but also portraits of the other hikers they encounter on the trail. Green’s *A Pacific Crest Trail Odyssey* also illustrates the influence of community, as he gives advice to future hikers in his book. Other instances of this rich community have been recorded in various newspaper articles about individual’s experiences on the trail, and in documentaries about the trail such as *Tell it on the Mountain, The Muir Project*, and *Walking the West*. Perhaps the most influential recent account of the trail has been Cheryl Strayed’s best selling novel *Wild*. Published in 2012 about Strayed’s long distance hike in 1995, the novel has piqued interest in the Pacific Crest Trail – resulting in hundreds more boots on the trail each year. Wildly unprepared for her adventure, Strayed’s story is one of personal triumph, aided by the trail’s community. This story effectively reinforces the draw of the trail’s community and the “everyone can do it” mentality. Contrasting this experience, another sort of community has resulted from the trail – a group of extreme endurance hikers attempting to hike the trail in record times. These super-human feats illustrate the wide reach of the trail. The trail’s presence in social media, especially Facebook, also speaks to a growing trail community. Through these various examples, the breadth and influence of the trail’s enriching community becomes clear. At the same time, the lure of this community represents the paradox of wilderness. As we flock to its depths and popularize its virtues, we both destroy the standard of purity we expect from wilderness and forget to search for authenticity closer to home.

**A Shared Experience**

One of the first published examples showcasing the community aspect of the trail is William R. Grey and Sam Abell’s 1975 National Geographic book about the Pacific Crest Trail. The stunning photographs in the book showcase the human experience of the trail and demonstrate how the trail changed from a solitary wilderness experience to the beginnings of a communal trail experience. Spaced throughout images of the breathtaking landscape are pictures of people they met on the trail – thru-hikers and day hikers alike. Couples like Denise Myers and Hal Simmons traveled along the trail, as well as an elderly couple up in Washington. In one striking photograph, Abell captures Grey and companion Doug Gosling hiking in the Cascades, bathed in warm light with a darkened background behind. While many accounts of the trail
emphasize the staggering isolation felt on the trail, these images illustrate the human component of the trail. In this way, the trail becomes an inviting place not just as a wilderness experience, but also as a human experience.

Other hikers of this time period such as David Green also hinted at the growing trail community. Even though his book is very much about an individual act of exploration, at the end of his book is a section of tips for future hikers. In this way, Green presents himself as part of a larger community. Green was also aware of the hikers that came before him and noted Ryback as a strong influence in his desire to hike the trail.\textsuperscript{110} Green did not hike the trail in order to meet Ryback or other Ryback-like characters, but was influenced by the group of hikers that came before him. Additionally, Green promoted the concept of the trail as being unique in its power to inspire thoughtful reflection stating, “to walk in the mountains for six months would be as much an exploration of the wilderness within myself as of the wilderness around me.”\textsuperscript{111} By painting wilderness as the context in which personal exploration occurs, Green perpetuated a reverence for specific wilderness areas. Focusing on this one landscape, Green also increased the trail’s appeal and thus fostered the growth of the trail community.

Early trail accounts in newspapers also highlight the importance of the trail community. In 1976 Teddi Boston was the first woman to complete a solo thru-hike of the Pacific Crest trail. That year, the Los Angeles Times ran an article about her titled “Mother of Four Takes on the Pacific Crest Trail” in which Boston stated she hiked the trail because “The Pacific Crest Trail needed [her] footprints. Everyone is pretty sure it’s the first time a woman has done it alone.”\textsuperscript{112} Knowingly, Boston acknowledged her influence as a role model. Assuredly, her journey marked an important step in expanding the trail community from the realm of white males. When asked about her favorite part of the experience, Boston replied, “The fantastic people you meet - I guess that’s what really makes it. The human contacts. It’s so materialistic in the asphalt jungle. Out here it’s not. It’s just that simple.”\textsuperscript{102} Through this enriching community Boston was able to complete a successful and fulfilling journey, leading the way for others to follow in her footsteps.

\textsuperscript{110} David Green, \textit{A Pacific Crest Odyssey: Walking the Trail from Mexico to Canada}, (Berkley, Wilderness Press; First Edition 1979,) xi.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
One woman who stepped foot on the trail in 1995, having no backpacking experience whatsoever was a woman named Cheryl Strayed. In 2012 Strayed published *Wild*, her memoir about her journey, and the book soon became a New York Times bestseller. Before her book, the number of annual thru-hikers of the trail averaged in the mid 100’s. The summer after Strayed’s book was published, 358 people completed a thru-hike of the trail (see graph p.32). Her book struck chords with many readers and inspired countless hikers to explore the trail for themselves. One reason why Strayed achieved such popularity was because she embodied an “anyone can do it” vision of the trail. Wildly unprepared for her journey, Strayed set out on the trail in an attempt to change, “Not into a different person, but back to the person I used to be - strong and responsible, clear-eyed and driven, ethical and good.”

Strayed was at a low point in her life - her mother had recently died, her family had scattered, her marriage had fallen apart, and she was experimenting with drugs and sleeping with too many men. After picking up the Wilderness Press’s Pacific Crest Trail guidebook at REI (an outdoor store), “The thought of the photograph of a boulder-strewn lake surrounded by rocky crags and blue sky on its cover seemed to break me open, frank as a fist to the face.” While it was this photograph that inspired her to hike the trail, it was the community along the trail that kept her going. Cheryl's first experiences along the trail were ones of immense pain, and she had almost given up when she met another hiker along the trail. After talking with him about her rough first experiences, Strayed realized that “despite his clear superiority, he was my kin.”

The rest of Strayed’s novel is as much about her physical and mental quest to rejuvenate herself as it is about the numerous characters that enriched her journey.

Strayed’s novel speaks to the influence of the growing trail community in many ways. Her experience was not so much about a desire to experience pristine wilderness, as it was a personal quest for self-reflection. The people she met along the way aided and enriched her quest for rejuvenation, healing, and wholesomeness. Because of her flaws, her candid writing, and her likability, the trail is painted as challenging, but widely accessible. If Strayed could do it, with all her physical and mental baggage, the immense feat of completing the trail seems less daunting. As a bestseller, Strayed’s novel took the trail far beyond the reaches of backpacking and outdoor communities, and into the general public. Her story is poised to have an even greater audience,

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114 Ibid., 56.
115 Ibid., 87.
as Fox Searchlight is currently making the book into a film featuring Reese Witherspoon. The making of this movie holds certain ironies, given Clarke’s initial lamentations about youth partaking in “too much sitting in soft seats in movies.”  

Indeed, Clarke envisioned the trail as a counterpoint to the mechanized world, not as a part of its leisure activities. However this trajectory into the commodification of the trail is not so surprising, given the troublesome vision of wilderness the trail is rooted in. As an idealized space, wilderness becomes defined as a mine of inspiration and source of rejuvenation that is appealing to the masses. In our reverence for wilderness we seek to consume its virtues.

The film Wild is new in terms of its presence in pop culture, but film representations of the trail are not new; there have already been several less publicized films that speak to the community the trail fosters. The Muir Project, a documentary about the John Muir Trail (part of the Pacific Crest Trail) documents the experience of a group of artists traveling through this stunning landscape. The goal of the film is “to inspire others to share in the beauty that is our world” and to “motivate others to make that big leap, or small step, and go after their dreams.”

As such, the trail becomes a motivational story, urging others to follow in these artists’ footsteps. The sweeping breathtaking panoramas of the scenery, as well as the intimate shots of this intimate communities shared experience on the trail, romanticize the experience. Through film, the artists have created a sort of propaganda for the trail, exploring lofty goals such as “going after your dreams” and “taking leaps.” The film emphasizes that it is specifically within the context of this wilderness that such goals are attainable. As such, the film is persuasive, both in selling the community that the trail fosters, and the beauty at the fingertips of these travelers.

Another film, Walking the West, is a documentary about the experiences of two men, Dale Brosnan and Miles Murphy, who quit their uninspiring jobs to take on the trail. Winner of Best Documentary of the California Independent Film Festival (2002), the Audience Award at Vancouver mountain film festival (2005), and many others, the film is a somewhat humorous account of the trials two friends face on the trail. Filmed with a handheld camera, the film does not seek to glorify the trail experience. Yet the makeshift representation of the trail appeals to the “anyone can do it” mentality surrounding the trail. Before setting out on the journey, Dale

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admits, “We don’t have a lot of experience… Miles has been in the Boy Scouts and we’re really leaning heavily on that.”

This blind faith is appealing to an audience from an entertainment standpoint. The film is deeper than entertainment however, as it paints wilderness as a desirable escape from the ills of mechanized society that anyone can experience.

Yet another documentary produced in 2013, Tell it on the Mountain, follows half a dozen individuals on their journeys along the Pacific Crest Trail. The stories they tell are as much about individual experiences as they are about the trail’s community. Even though these backpackers may not see another soul for many days, there is still a sense of being part of something greater. Additionally, the documentary largely focuses on the wide accessibility of the trail. On the promotion website, text explains that, “It takes a special kind of person to drop everything and walk through the woods for five months. But in a way, these hikers are just like you and me. They have jobs and families, they love their creature comforts. Yet something pulls them to be in nature, to leave everything behind and embark on what’s called a thru-hike.”

Even though “these brave souls face bone-dry deserts, raging rivers, snow-covered mountain passes, mosquitos, blisters, torrential rains… and the urge to quit” they continue to walk until the trail’s end. The conditions are tough, but by taking a camera directly into these individuals’ journeys, the trail experience is glorified. As such the trail becomes appealing in that it offers a challenge, but one that seems wholesome, restorative, reflective, and achievable.

While some portrayals of the trail depict broad accessibility, others illustrate incredible physical feats achieved on the trail. ESPN ran a story in 2013 about Josh Garrett and Heather Anderson, the two record-setters for fastest hiking time on the Pacific Crest trail. Even though their achievements illustrate beyond-human feats, their stories work to effectively publicize the trail. Like any popular athlete, their premier abilities don’t discourage others from taking up the sport, but rather inspire others to try. By defining a new group of trail users, these awe-inspiring backpackers add to the rich community found on the trail and inevitably expand this community.

Another way in which community is displayed through the trail is in terms of social media. A relatively new phenomenon in the history of the trail, social media sites such as

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118 Myles Murphy, “Walking the West,” Film, directed by Myles Murphy (2002).
Facebook have provided a platform for individuals to come together over a shared experience and share tips about hiking the trail. There are a variety of groups on Facebook that connect hikers from all over. The Pacific Crest Trail “class” of the 1970’s has 22 members, and there are also Pacific Crest Trail “classes” of 2010 through 2013. The Pacific Crest Trail group itself is expanding rapidly. In fact, when I first found this group in mid-October it had 3,426 members. In mid-December I looked back at this group again, finding it had grown to host 3,700 members. Interestingly, the reference to these communities as “classes” speaks to the educational component of the trail. The trail community is formed not just by a shared interest in hiking the trail, but a shared education on the trail. While each experience is different, the type of education received on the trail is profound and bonding for many. This community has made it easier than ever to be a part of something big and to complete a hike of the trail.

**Conclusion**

Today, the journey from Canada to Mexico on foot relies on personal endurance, but the individual is inseparable from a larger hiking community. This community is what keeps many hikers going, and even what draws many to the trail in the first place. This lure is not just about the people one meets on the trail, but also about becoming part of the larger history of Pacific Crest Trail hikers. Hiking the trail appeals to many as an act of restoration, an experience of peace, a mental feat, and a physical achievement. Through others accounts, people are able to visualize themselves on the trail and long to be a part of this experience.

The positive that has come from the trail illustrates that the history of the Pacific Crest Trail is more complex than a simple manifestation of a flawed relationship with wilderness. Many people have benefited from the trail, and as the trail’s popularity increases, greater numbers of people are able to experience the wholesome, restorative, and fulfilling experience of hiking the trail. Yet while the community of the Pacific Crest Trail is valuable, it is threatened by the very characters that make it strong. As our collective obsession with wilderness grows, there is an ensuing fragmentation and commodification of this environment. By fetishizing this space as a place to engage in acts of restoration and authenticity, we forget to search for authenticity closer to home and within ourselves.
Conclusion

American’s relationship with the environment has been largely influenced by a fundamentally problematic definition of wilderness. We idolize wilderness, we crave wilderness, we bring it into our homes. We name our cars in its honor, we recite quotes about its importance, and we post glorious photos of our experiences in it on Facebook. Yet through our obsession, “wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism.” At the end of the nineteenth Century, the perception of nature as an endless hostile environment gave way to a fear that this landscape was actually limited and threatened, and that its disappearance marked the loss of our uniquely American identity. Through a romanticization of the western landscape and the creation of frontier theory, a pendulum shift occurred. Suddenly, wilderness was defined as a sacred space in need of preservation. But the rush to preserve specific landscapes has resulted not in a widespread respect for the environment we inhabit, but in an unhealthy obsession with sensational landscapes. The Pacific Crest Trail was created as a result of this dramatic shift. By studying its roots and how it has changed over time, we are given a unique perspective into how the trail’s changing narrative is inevitably linked to a troublesome relationship with wilderness.

Clinton Clarke and Warren Lee Rogers’s original goals and visions for the trail were largely influenced by romanticism and frontier ideologies. These two men perceived the trail as an escape from the oppression of the mechanized world, a cure for the nation’s sluggish youth, and an educational tool for building strong bodies and sound minds. The Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps were integral parts of the trail’s development and demonstrated the exclusive fraternity the trail represented. Through promotion of these ideals, Clarke and Rogers hoped to preserve a wilderness they saw as containing intrinsic value for man.

Visual depictions of the trail over time speak to a changing trail narrative, yet one grounded in the same problematic definition of wilderness adopted by the early trail. Sublime landscape paintings and romantic photographs gave way to captivating narratives and an increase in trail guides and other trail resources. The Internet also served to popularize the trail by making individual’s narratives easily accessible. As trail accounts and images became widely distributed, the trail’s popularity created a certain commodification and commercialization of nature.

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The growing popularity of the trail has also largely been a result of the draw of the trail’s strong, supportive community. Photojournalism, media publications, and documentary films illustrate the pull of this newfound community. These sources demonstrate that much good has come from this community and that an increasing number of hikers have benefited from meaningful contact with nature. Yet in some ways, this meaning is formed by a self-fulfilling prophecy that wilderness creates. An adoration of wilderness allows visitors to have profound experiences in its midst because experiences like these are expected of wilderness. Thus, the trail represents a flawed relationship with wilderness not because it is cherished, but because it is valued at the expense of “lesser” landscapes. An obsession with wilderness has deemed this space a destination, unassociated with the wild within ourselves and in the environments that surround us daily. It is no wonder then that we feel detached from our routine environment, for we look predominately to the remoteness of wilderness to find values we believe nature contains.

As we move into a future affected by an unstable climate, we will be forced to re-examine our relationship with nature. In the future, achieving sustainability will be essential. It is easy to confuse environmental sustainability with wilderness, for we are currently guided by principles mirroring Thoreau’s famous quote that “in Wilderness is the preservation of the world.”122 But without achieving sustainability, preservation becomes irrelevant. Wilderness and sustainability are in fact grounded in two very different systems of thought; sustainability based on perceiving the environment as a fluid whole, while our understanding of wilderness is fundamentally dualistic. Nevertheless, wilderness does have an important role to play in the transition to a sustainable future. As Cronon concurred, “If the core problem of wilderness is that it distances us too much from the very things it teaches us to value, then the question we must ask is what it can tell us about home, the place where we actually live. How can we take the positive values we associate with wilderness and bring them closer to home?”123 Indeed, the true test for the trail in years to come will be in its ability to fulfill one of Clarke's original guiding principals of nature as a valuable educator. For future hikers, the trail should not serve as a temporary escape from the mechanized world, but as a teacher from which to learn how to purposefully exist in a symbiotic relationship with nature as a whole.

Appendix

Pacific Crest Trail Association Magazine, 1976,
Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Pacific Crest Trail Association Magazine 1976,
Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Photos of Clinton Clarke,
Warren Lee Rogers papers, Manuscripts Dept., Huntington Library, San Marino, California.