



Sunday morning, August 16th. A day for a daydream. Cerulean blue skies, light airs, a whisper of fall in the alder trees, a pending road trip culminating in a concert pairing two hero-legends of the folk-string style, the "Doc" and the "Dawg." A convocation of the usual desperates, the Brothers Logan, Uncle Dean Bonde and your Professor gathered together for our long anticipated pilgrimage to see the good doctor from North Carolina and his mandolin-frenzied crony, the "Dawg," David Grisman. Lots of doctors practice; few heal. Arthel "Doc" Watson possesses the musical prophylaxis and curative power necessary for curing the human spirit. The very air hummed electrically in anticipation.

The boys and I had parlayed together and decided, by mutual consent, to follow a route that wound lazily through secondary roads to the French Prairie area near Newburg where the concert would be held. We eschewed the freeways. Dashing to a Doc Watson concert on the jangle of freeways seemed sacrilege. In our minds we wanted to travel up the lazy river in the noonday sun. My mates were primed and ready. Someone brought a six-pack of our favorite barley-pop, a few road sodas for the pilgrimage. Chief Bonde had blessed the journey with his special shamanic offerings to the powers. The sun was in the heavens and all was right with the world.

We traipsed and lolled our way slowly through the Coast Range, noting the latest toll on the forests of the Tillamook Burn, indulging in tales of what once was, revelling in good company and comradeship. Our path toward Newburg glanced off Highway 26 at Manning and meandered through farms and foothills, hawks in the air, sleepy thickets of willow in the bottomland, fall corn assembled like armies at attention, deserted ball diamonds in little towns like Banks and Carlton, an old dog shambling down a clover meadow.

Our destination, specifically, was Champoeg State Park. One hundred and fifty years ago, Champoeg was the site of events important to Oregon and regional history. In the region called "French Prairie" (an area burned over by the Indians to keep down brush and shrub) on May 2, 1843, Joe Meek, the infamous "Mountain Man," and a gathering of rough and ready settlers, trappers, and French Canadian voyageurs gathered to decide if the region should remain allied with Great Britain and the Hudson Bay Co. or align itself with the United States as a territory, the "Oregon Country," that would include Oregon, Washington, Idaho and parts of Montana and Wyoming. In accounts that have become somewhat apocryphal at this late date, 102 settlers gathered at Champoeg to decide the fate of the region. By some accounts, a line was drawn on the ground. 50 settlers stood on the British side of the line; 50 stood on the American. Two French-Canadians, Stephen Mathieu and Etienne Lucier, strode to the American side after some politicking by Meek. Oregon became a territory of the United States.

Travelling to this place of legend to watch and listen to two legendary musical heroes seemed particularly meet and proper.

Attending a concert featuring artists like Doc Watson and David Grisman is like visiting the Louvre. You've seen paintings in books, Titians, Turners, Rubens, Monets, but you've never really seen them. It catches your breath. The magic transports you. "So that's it," you say to yourself. Watching and listening to Doc Watson and Grisman is that kind of experience.

The first time I listened to Doc Watson perform years ago, I was struck dumb. As a teenager, I just figured he must have had a much better guitar than anyone else had. Whew! When those fingers flew across the neck of the guitar, I was mesmerized like a jackrabbit fixed by the headlights of a car. After all these years, for both of us, he still has that string magic par excellence. I have heard legions of guitarists drag their Martins and Gibsons out of the case and pick, but in my mind he has no peer.

For those of you who know me, few things bring me to tears. A good poem does it, a song certainly can. On this Sunday at Champoeg, when Doc, David Grisman and his quintet worked through the *Kentucky Waltz*, *The Beaumont Rag*, and *Shady Grove*, my eyes were more wet than dry. It's the best of what we can be. Like Tiresias, Doc Watson is blind but can "see." I'm sorry if you missed it. His like only comes down this road once.

What's the use of a house if one doesn't have a tolerable planet to put it on.

Henry Thoreau



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FROM THE LOWER LEFT CORNER

To Build A Fire...Or Not
Victoria Stoppielo

At Yuba Lake in the dry hills of southeastern Utah, sheep bleat in the background and a grebe's hoarse call rises from the water. Two boats have gone by, runabouts with fishermen. The campful of young people nearby is still quiet. They had a bonfire last night and therefore were seduced into staying up late.

My interest in campfires has steadily waned. I remember camping in Tuolumne meadows in Yosemite National Park 30 years ago. Being among the first few campers that early spring night, I was so afraid of bears that I insisted on having a fire all night. Of course, my fear wasn't totally unfounded. A year or so later, a friend was snow camping in the Sierras and awoke in the middle of the night to see a bear literally walking over him in search of a late winter snack.

Thirteen years ago, however, my views had begun to shift. I irritated fellow backpackers when I resisted building a fire to fry fresh trout. In the middle of an 85 degree day in the Steens Mountains of southeastern Oregon, already hot and irritable, I had a poorly articulated, multipurpose policy about camp fires: They should be employed only when needed to produce warmth and light, as well as a means of cooking.

On that hot afternoon, we had plenty of heat and light without a campfire. We had a backpacker's stove with us, so we had a cooking alternative. We were camping in an arid region without abundant firewood. Cottonwood, aspen and sagebrush don't burn well, and the chokecherry and other hardwoods that grow there are sparse and slow growing. It would take the environment a very long time to reproduce the wood that we burned. I felt a fire was therefore a waste of fuel and an unjustified taking from our immediate environment.

Nowadays, I've learned more and added even more reasons to my rationale. Dead and downed wood is the only wood truly cured enough to burn, but left on the forest floor it will slowly compost to provide nutrients to the plant community. Then there's the problem of global warming: All the combustion of fossil fuels from our vehicles, the emissions from coal-fired electricity generation, the slash and burn approach to rain forest agriculture—these are all contributing to the greenhouse gas layer that enhances global warming, then climate change, triggering larger and more powerful El Niños. Ha! you say, my little fire is just a puff of emission compared with these global, industrial forces.

However, am I any better than the person running the coal-fired plant at Four Corners, the plant whose plume can be seen from space as a murky blotch? Am I not part of the same consciousness or unconsciousness? Who am I to criticize a big industrial polluter if I behave the same way in my own puny undertakings. I don't believe I have the moral right to criticize if I haven't examined my own behavior and corrected it. Then there's the issue of incremental impact. If a great mass of individuals change their behavior, won't that change be felt? And best of all, once in a while an individual who has developed conscientious habits moves into a decision-making position and can determine how one of the big organizations will do business.

This perspective is pretty far afield from a simple campfire, but I've found that I get reinforcement in a more, down-to-earth fashion. Anyone who has sat around a campfire late into the night knows the syndrome: Your front stays toasty while your backside gets cooler, then cold. Occasionally you have to stand with your back to the fire to warm up.

Meanwhile, stars twinkle in a black velvet sky, but blinded by firelight you miss them. Dew is forming on the grass and the day's warmth is radiating from the earth to the black hole of the night. The warm microclimate around the fire lulls you to the fact of the deepening cold and the freezing sleeping bag waiting in your tent. Oh! those minutes shuffling around inside it, trying to warm its now frigid interior, your body heat warming the bag instead of vice versa.

The seduction of the campfire—and now it's time to pay. If I'd only gone to bed a few hours earlier, my sleeping bag would be that much warmer. Just one more reason not to build a fire.

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