

Sierra
May/June 1984

NOTES FROM THE TROPICS

HARRY MIDDLETON

Naturalist on a Tropical Farm, by Alexander F. Skutch; illustrations by Dana Gardner. University of California Press, 1981. \$7.95, paper; \$18.95, cloth.

Nature Through Tropical Windows, by Alexander F. Skutch; illustrations by Dana Gardner. University of California Press, 1983. \$19.95, cloth.

THESE ARE LUXURIANT BOOKS, the words soaked with Skutch's passion for the tropical forests of South America and their incredibly rich avifauna.

No naturalist since W. H. Hudson has given us such a telling portrait of South America's grand and delicate—and increasingly endangered—wildlife and wilderness.

Skutch traveled about the South American outback for more than a decade, finding lodgings and small jobs where he could, studying and observing the absorbing wildlife and wilderness about him. Then, in the early 1940s, he found what he had been looking for: the good place, a place where he could finally settle down. It was a handsome piece of land in the valley of El General in southern Costa Rica, nine degrees from the Equator. Here he would live the life he wanted to live. He "wished to study living things, especially birds, to reside among them, and to live in harmony with them."

For nearly 40 years Skutch has lived on his tropical farm, the biologist more at home in the field than in the laboratory, more interested in the living specimen than in the dead one. He has lived at the edge of his beloved tropical forest quietly, steadfastly preserving his land while most of the forest surrounding it has fallen to the chainsaw and the bulldozer.

Skutch's piece of tropical forest remains wild, home for guans, tinamous, quail, trogons, toucans, hummingbirds, antbirds, woodpeckers and woodcreepers, manakins, flycatchers, cotingas, tanagers, honey-

Fujinon* High Power, Wide Angle, Ultra-compact All-weather Binocular.

Folds to fit a shirtpocket, offers 8X magnification and high brightness. The wide angle, coated optics give a 430 foot field of view at 1,000 yards.

Convenient center focus with vision correcting eyepiece and fold-down eye cups for use with glasses. Rubber coated for a sure grip and impact resistance. Water-resistant for all-weather use. Lifetime warranty.

Other Fujinon binoculars: Compact 9x28, 10x32, 12x36; Waterproof 7x50, 8x30, 10x70, 14x70, 15x80 and 25x150. See your Fujinon dealer, write for our free catalog, or order directly using AMEX, VISA, MASTERCARD or certified check. 10 day trial with full refund.

*Fujinon is the optical member of the Fuji Photo Film Group (the Official Film of the 1984 Summer Olympics).

FUJINON INC.
672 White Plains Road
Scarsdale, New York 10583
(914) 472-9800



FUJINON



The New
8x20 CFR
Suggested
List:
\$140

NOW YOU CAN PUSH THE BUTTON TO STOP A NUCLEAR WAR.

They have their hotline. Now we have ours. Call toll-free and order your *Nuclear War Prevention Manual*, the detailed guide to nuclear war and everything you can do to stop it. It might just be the most important phone call you ever made. Made possible by the Campaign Against Nuclear War and its affiliated organizations. \$5 suggested donation.



THE
NUCLEAR
HOTLINE

800-528-6050 EXT. 99

Public Media Center

Make A Gift Earn Income Avoid Taxes

You can do all of this through the Pooled Income Fund of The Sierra Club Foundation or Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. Here's how it works:

- Your contribution, generally \$10,000 or more, is placed in the Pooled Fund with similar gifts from other donors. You receive shares or units of the Fund based on the fair market value of the gift relative to all other funds in the Pool.
- All earnings of the Pool during the year are paid out to donors and/or their beneficiaries during that same year on the basis of units held by each.
- Appreciation of gift assets is not subject to capital gains taxation.
- You become entitled to an immediate charitable deduction from income tax.
- Because the assets are removed from your estate, liability for estate tax is reduced.
- At the end of the income beneficiary's lifetime, the units involved are valued and that amount removed from the Pool to be used as you have specified.
- Make an investment in the future of the Sierra Club "family" of organizations!

The Planned Giving Program assists Sierra Club members and friends in creating charitable bequests and life income trusts. These gift techniques offer special income and tax advantages to donors and their beneficiaries, while helping ensure the future strength of the Sierra Club "family" of organizations. For more information, please contact:

Sarah Beebe Stafford
Director of Planned Giving
530 Bush Street
San Francisco, CA 94108
(415/398-8156 or 981-8634)



PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM

Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Inc.
The Sierra Club Foundation

recognizes that Tahoe's beauty has been in large measure its undoing, and that events and people far outside the region's boundaries have helped shape its fate.

A major part of Strong's history concerns water quality, the source of Tahoe's fame. For nearly a century the lake's size (21 miles long by 12 miles wide) and depth (1,645 feet) allowed the water to remain brilliantly blue and clear. But erosion caused by logging, dredging, and commercial development has produced excessive sediment runoff, leading to accelerated algae bloom that could turn the lake green in as little as 40 years. (In just the past 15 years the lake's clarity has decreased by 25 percent.)

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), organized in its present form in 1980, recently produced a master plan to coordinate growth in the basin over the next 20 years. Adopted in August 1983, the plan will permit moderate tourist-related development and new housing, but under restrictions governed by environmental thresholds established in 1982. This spring, pro-environment and prodevelopment board members temporarily set aside the issue of development of sensitive lands, breaking a months-long deadlock so that the overall plan might be put into effect. This important issue must be resolved by January 1985, however. The move renders moot federal lawsuits by the city of South Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe Sierra Preservation Council (an association of private landowners) intended to settle the issue.

As this book makes abundantly clear, Tahoe is at a crossroads. Strong notes that there is "still no consensus on who should decide the future of the Tahoe Basin or what the future should be." The past has been marred by missed opportunities and rampant opportunism; numerous proposals to create a national park, a national lakeshore, or a national recreation area have all been defeated by short-term local interests, stubborn mistrust among "cooperating" groups, Nevada's powerful gaming industry, and the sheer refusal of many to acknowledge the obvious problems associated with traffic, air pollution, and other aspects of urban encroachment upon the wilderness.

Though Tahoe's future remains in doubt, Strong believes there is reason to be hopeful. Among several positive developments he cites, more than 72 percent of the basin is now in public ownership (though most of the prized—and environmentally critical—miles of shoreline remain in private hands). The biggest landholder is the Forest Service, which under the Burton-Santini Act of 1980 is buying more land and successfully engineering watershed-management projects. Despite the TRPA master plan's provisions for moderate growth, no significant new



Adventure Travel '84

EAST AFRICA

Serengeti Camping Safari
Rwanda Gorillas
Tanzania Walking Expedition
Mt. Kilimanjaro Climb
Botswana River Safari



HIMALAYAS

Mountain, River, Tiger
Ascent Island Peak
Trans Himalayan Trek
Arun-Everest-Annapurna



AND MORE!

Cuzco Machu Picchu Trek,
Nile Journey, Burma
Japan's Northern Alps,
New Guinea Expeditions.

Name _____
Address _____
Zip _____

Overseas Adventure Travel

10-D Mt. Auburn Street #SC
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel. 617-876-0533

creepers, finches, and so many more. Every detail, no matter how seemingly small or unimportant, is of interest to Skutch. In a series of short chapters he outlines the flow of the tropical year, from the mild weather of January to the climax of the rainy season in October, and the months of drought between. Month by month, season by season, Skutch takes the pulse of the rain forest, the moving days of life from the fruiting of the plants and flowers to the nesting and migration of the birds.

In what may prove a controversial chapter, Skutch takes on the notion of good and evil actually existing in nature. Because good and evil are human concepts, it is rather hard to force them on the natural world, just as it is impossible to force the natural world to live by mankind's rules and laws. Even so, Skutch's argument is thoughtful and earnest, if not totally convincing. Photosynthesis is "the basic good of the living world," writes Skutch, "upon which all its constructive processes, its beauty, and its joy depend." On the other hand, predation, says Skutch, is "the basic evil," the cause of most of the ills that afflict the world. Nature, though, knows no good or evil (as we understand them), and therefore bears no guilt, it seems to me, for either the world's woes or man's. In the forest there is no good or evil, no right or wrong—only life,

ongoing and urgent, of which photosynthesis and predation are but two equal, even complementary, elements.

Nature Through Tropical Windows is just that, a gathering of wondrous views, a series of intimate sketches gathered by Skutch mostly from observations made close to home, through windows and doorways. We are on hand as southern house-wren juveniles feed siblings from another brood; we watch the nesting behavior of banaquits; we observe as shy blue-and-white swallows raise their young beneath the roof eaves of the farmhouse. There is a wonderful essay on the small and large in nature—describing how the small are more complicated and better-equipped for life than nature's giants. Another excellent chapter is "The Naturalist's Progress," a warm and glowing portrait of the growth of a naturalist from mere collector of the odd and beautiful to a student "of the endless diversity of creation, of the intricate interactions among its myriad forms, of the startling contrasts between supreme beauty and appalling ugliness, between tender love and violent rage, between beneficent growth and destructive fury, that this baffling world presents. He wishes to know [why] he has been thrust into its midst, what ultimate significance is to be found in his presence here, to what end the whole vast, confusing pageant is moving."

As I said, these are luxuriant books, written by a man whose eye is as keen as Thoreau's and whose spirit is as large and kind; a man deeply committed to the Earth and every life upon it, who from his home at the edge of the rain forest sees and feels and lives the Earth's own harmony, and passes the good news on to us all.

Harry Middleton is a frequent contributor to Sierra.

THE QUIET HORROR OF

ACID RAIN



NEW ACID RAIN ANALYZER NEW

FOR CONCERNED CITIZEN ACTION



pHast Monitor™

RISK-FREE ORDER!
ALL FALCO PRODUCTS MAY BE
RETURNED FOR A FULL REFUND
WITHIN 10 DAYS OF RECEIPT.

You can't taste it and you can't smell it but over 2,000 of our "acid shocked" lakes and streams have **NO FISH!** Your garden soil, forests, ponds and pools all are turning sour with acid rains. SIERRA readers we need your participation. Your pHast Monitor™ can help stop acid rain! How? An exclusive design now combines rain collection, analysis and measurement in one easy to use monitoring station. Specially developed low ion/buffer strips accurately displays rain acidity. Complete with instructions, color reference and significance charts, test strips, recording charts and more! FALCO ENTERPRISES needs **your results** to assist in an intensive acid rain program. Help monitor the environment! **ACT NOW!**

LIMITED TIME OFFER!
ONLY \$10.95

INCLUDES POSTAGE & HANDLING
CHECK OR MONEY ORDER (No COD)

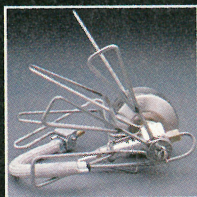
FREE

WITH ALL ORDERS
BEFORE 7/30/84.
MANUAL ON "ACID RAIN
AND DETECTION"

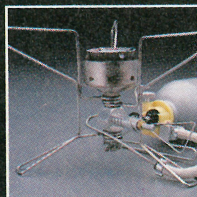
FALCO ENTERPRISES DEPT. SM1
MOUNTAIN RD. BOX 368 PINE BUSH, N.Y. 12566
YES! I WANT TO HELP ANALYZE ACID RAIN.
PLEASE RUSH ME **pHAST MONITORS™**
@ \$10.95 ea. PPD! (Canadian & Foreign Add 20%)

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY/STATE _____ ZIP _____
N.Y. RESIDENTS ADD APPLICABLE SALES TAX

Built with Pride Use with Confidence



Collapsible



Stable leg configuration



Fits in handy bag

The MSR Firefly Stove is uniquely designed to give you what you need in a backpacking and climbing stove: compactness, light weight and dependability. Sturdy, non-rusting stainless steel, brass and aluminum are the materials used in the durable Firefly, that features a flexible, insulated fuel line. Pump and storage bottle become the fuel tank. Fully adjustable from roar to simmer, it burns white gas, and has an efficient windscreen and stable leg configuration. The optional hanging system safely suspends the Firefly for greater versatility.
Wt.: 15 oz. Folded size: 2 1/4" x 6" x 4 1/4."
Field maintainable.



P.O. Box 3978, Terminal Station
Seattle, WA 98124 USA
(206) 624-8573

rule, but it is largely the case that once a battle for control over a piece of land is lost to developers, that ground cannot be regained.

Here are two books that illustrate the point nicely. Both are skillful, articulate case histories of epochal environmental battles. Both take up the ins and outs of environmental politics. And both will find places in environmental curricula. Where they differ markedly is at the beginning, and comparing them makes for a fascinating analysis of the course of conservation history.

The subject matter of these books is remarkably similar. Both conflicts inspired long-running political battles. Both preoccupied the Sierra Club for long periods of its history. Both pitted commercial interests against the interests of wilderness lovers, and both were resolved, in conservationists' favor, by Congress.

But there was an essential difference between these fights. By the time the Save the Redwoods campaign got under way, nearly all the coast redwoods were either gone or in private ownership. Mineral King, on the other hand, was owned by the public (the Forest Service, in this case), an enclave surrounded on three sides by Sequoia National Park. At Mineral King, conservationists started in a position of power; in the redwoods, the fight was to regain a paradise sold.

Mineral King is a small valley lying at about 7,000 feet on the west side of the Sierra Nevada, south of Yosemite. It was visited at least once by a Sierra Club High Trip in the company of John Muir (in 1908). The Sierra Club chose to concede Mineral King to the Forest Service—with all the obvious risk that concession entailed—as a strategic move during negotiations over the boundaries of the proposed Sequoia National Park. The area was designated a game refuge, part of Sequoia National Forest.

Annexing Mineral King to Sequoia thereafter became something of a priority for the Sierra Club, although the effort not only to annex but to protect the valley did not become urgent until the 1960s. That was when the recreation arm of Walt Disney Enterprises—with the active cooperation of the Forest Service—proposed a large ski development for the tiny valley. A battle royal ensued, involving Walt Disney, the Sierra Club, the Forest Service, a skiers' association, and many others. The long and involved legal battle over the valley went to the Supreme Court and then back down to lower federal courts before being resolved in the Club's favor. The story ended happily in 1978, when Mineral King was finally added to the national park.

In the redwoods, the battle was less a legal one than it was political and economic. The first redwoods to be saved were simply

WHALES - TOTUMS BALD EAGLES

Join Jack Parsons
World Traveler & Photographer

10 Days - Vancouver Island
Aug. 17-27, 1984 \$1789

For information call or write:
Travel Advisors
56 N. Santa Cruz Ave.
Los Gatos, CA 95030
(408) 354-6531



offers you the finest
whitewater rivers of the West.
For a free, color catalog of
our trips contact us at:

6529 SC Telegraph Avenue
Oakland, California 94609
(415) 652-1600