
Book Review

Mother Earth's little eco-terrorist helpers

by Margaret Sexton

Desert Solitaire

by Edward Abbey
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990
269 pages, paperback, \$9.95.

Hayduke Lives!

by Edward Abbey
Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1989
308 pages, hardbound, \$18.95.

Edward Abbey, who died in 1989, was the founder of the eco-terrorist group Earth First!, the so-called environmentalist group perhaps best known for driving metal spikes into trees slated to be logged. When the trees are cut down, the chainsaw hits the spike. Many loggers have been killed or maimed.

Desert Solitaire, first published in 1968, consists of essays and yarns on the general theme of Abbey's working as a National Park Service ranger at Arches National Monument, Utah. While the book contains amusing anecdotes about cattle ranching, even lovely descriptions of the beauty of the desert wilderness, there is an ugly punchline.

Abbey is a quintessential eco-fascist, who hates people, and loves "nature." The desert Southwest is hauntingly beautiful, and should be celebrated; who likes tourists who dump trash all over the place, or drive off-road vehicles up and down, causing erosion?

But Abbey takes the idea that man should take care of his

environment to the misanthropic extreme:

"It will be objected that a constantly increasing population makes resistance and conservation a hopeless battle. This is true. Unless a way is found to stabilize the nation's population, the parks cannot be saved. Or anything else-worth a damn. Wilderness preservation, like a hundred other good causes, will be forgotten under the overwhelming pressure of a struggle for mere survival and sanity in a completely urbanized, completely industrialized, ever more crowded environment. . . ."

Never mind that in the 20 years since Abbey wrote those words, the U.S. birthrate has fallen to below replacement levels. Never mind that the United States has collapsed, and our economy is based on "services," like fast food restaurants and paper shuffling. Never mind that the U.S. has to import food, and that millions of people living in underdeveloped nations are, at this moment, starving, or dying of diseases like AIDS.

Eco-terrorist recruitment manuals

Hayduke Lives! is the second of Abbey's two novels concerning the members of the "Monkey Wrench Gang," which, while superficially entertaining, seem to serve a far more sinister purpose: as training and recruitment manuals for eco-terrorists of the Earth First! stripe. *Hayduke Lives!* is dedicated in part to EarthFirst! founders Dave Foreman, Bart Kohler, Mike Roselle, and Howie Wolke, whom Abbey calls "true American heroes."

The true American heroes of Abbey's 1975 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Avon Books) specialize in sabotage and destruction of earth-moving equipment, bridges, trains, fences, helicopters, and so on, in the Utah-Arizona canyon country. In that novel, their dream is to blow up the Glen Canyon Dam, though that act of sabotage is never realized. After a manhunt throughout the canyon country by (apparently) the National Guard, the gang of four is caught by the evil, fascistic authorities, and does jail time—after they plea bargain, of course.

In the second novel, we find three of the foursome initially retired from the eco-terrorist milieu, and enjoying a middle-class lifestyle of working, raising families, and playing poker with their probation officer. But George Hayduke, the psychopathic Vietnam veteran, who was never caught, and was for a time believed to be dead (hence the title of the book, *Hayduke Lives!*), is still acting as an "eco-warrior" against the evil (Mormon) promoters of uranium mining and nuclear fission, strip mining, electric power plants, logging, and other resource extraction industries.

Hayduke's character (besides his own statements that he is a psychopath, after his Vietnam experiences) is evidenced by his intense involvement with his penis. He drinks gallons of beer, and is always having to urinate (polluting the groundwater) and otherwise spends a lot of his time (as do most of the male characters in the book) thinking about having, or

having sexual intercourse with whatever woman happens to be around.

Sabotage doesn't pollute?

Hayduke specializes in gaining access to projects he doesn't like, using various disguises, and then sabotaging them. He is dressed as a cleaning lady, and throws radioactive waste on the table at a board meeting of the uranium cartel in Denver; he dresses as a security guard to blow up the cyanide leaching plant; and he engineers the spectacular destruction of the Goliath Earth-moving Machine, which includes—gunfire, and the murder of a security guard. This is a change, since the other members of the Monkey Wrench Gang—jack Mormon “Seldom Seen” Smith, “Doc” Sarvis, and Bonnie Abzug-Sarvis, each eschewed violence, at least until *Hayduke Lives!* After the GEM incident, Hayduke flees (in an automobile that burns fossil fuels and pollutes the air) and while he could have been caught by the Feds, is allowed to escape to Mexico.

The chief “villain” in *Hayduke Lives!* is Mormon Bishop J. Dudley Love, an exaggerated archetype of the hypocritical “jack” Mormon (he takes a second wife) who is making piles of money because he allows the destruction of the earth through strip-mining of coal, the mining of radioactive metals such as uranium and strontium, which cause cancer deaths, and otherwise flattening Utah, by means of the Goliath Earth-moving Machine, the largest earth-flattener known to man.

Abbey blames much of the degradation of the earth's environment on overpopulation; in the dedication to *Hayduke Lives!* we find that Mr. Abbey fathered five children. So if he is contributing a goodly number of family members to walk this Earth, where is it overpopulated? This reviewer can also vouch for the fact that Utah, Arizona, and the Southwest in general, are *not* overpopulated.

The Earth First! motto is “We stand *for* what we stand *on*.” Well, the acts of eco-terror sabotage described in these books surely do a lot of environmental damage: pushing bulldozers over cliffs, causing explosions and fires, etc., would result in substantial air pollution from burning fossil fuels, water pollution from leaking fossil fuels, and the needless deaths of little animals and plants, when tons of machinery land on them.

‘Monkey wrenching’

On top of which, we find graphic enough descriptions in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* of “monkey wrenching”—sabotage—that a dedicated Earth First!er would certainly get the idea of how to put a bridge out of commission: “She found Hayduke and Smith mixing their powders, rolling them back and forth in a big closed canister: three parts iron oxide to two parts pulverized aluminum equals thermite. Then the igniting mixture: four parts barium peroxide to one part magnesium powder.”

In *Hayduke Lives!* we find the basic techniques for spiking trees: “They were not dressed as skiers should be, in fashionable nylon stretch suits of gaudy orange, blazing blue, flashy yellow and hotdog red but in baggy wool pants and loose forest-camouflage coats from Goodwill, Bob's Bargain Barn, Woolco, K mart and Yellow Front. Each of the four carried a big olive-drab pack on his or her back; two of them . . . carried green canvas ammo bags slung across one shoulder. The athlete also carried a three-pound singlejack hammer, attached by a lanyard to his wrist; the young woman an ordinary carpenter's hammer of medium weight.

“At every third tree of saw-timber quality the man with the sledge stopped, pulled an eight-inch helix spike from his ammo sack and drove it into the trunk as high as he could reach, leaving the head protruding slightly. As soon as he moved on the girl followed, driving two 60-penny nails into the same tree, at a lower height, also letting the heads jut forth a bit. Behind them came the man with another hammer and the bolt cutters. He clipped the heads from the spikes, hammered the spikes deep into the beneath the bark, and disguised the shiny dots of hot metal—where necessary—with a dab of brown ink from a Permo-Marker.”

The process is described by Abbey as “vaccinating the trees for protection against a possible chainsaw massacre in the future.” But of course, “when the Forest Service was informed and interested logging companies tipped off, as they would be, by anonymous communication, about the preventive measures taken here, it was then most probable that the timber sale would have to be canceled and this particular patch of forest saved. There is nothing that the clearcutting timber corporations hate more than a tract of forest defended by direct citizen action: one spike in a log can strip the teeth from a ten-thousand-dollar circular saw, put a crimp in profits, deter further logging, and thus preserve those living breathing respiring trees whose right to continued existence is at least as legitimate as that of any other creature including, but not limited to, the human.”

We ask the question: Do Earth First!ers use forest products in their own lives? Or are they like George Hayduke, who uses juniper twigs instead of toilet paper—still a forest product, but at least bypassing the paper industry? And what about the danger to human life, if a spiked tree should be felled? Much more than a chainsaw would be ruined.

The overall philosophy preached by Edward Abbey is that there are too many people, that man has used up his natural resources, and is destroying the Earth.

What Abbey and the Earth First!ers overlook is that man is a problem-solver. And if man has caused a problem, he can solve it. And must solve it. While eco-terrorists exploit the fruits of man's technological ingenuity, and use the same products of man's “stewardship”—from agriculture to manufacturing—they would deny to millions of people suffering from the lack of even the basic necessities of life the right to enjoy what they, the Earth First!ers have. What hypocrites.