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# Introduction

TOM WOLF

Trappers Lake, at the headwaters of the White River, echoed in August of 2014 to the sounds of wilderness lovers celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act. Missing in action, however, was wilderness itself. And in the pandemonium we all knew it: missing in action was the wolf in Colorado.

And yet the wind, blowing up canyon, seemed to bear a still, small voice. The same up-canyon wind that had recently spread a disastrous, watershed-wide wildfire also carried, perhaps, a light, silent sound: a wolf—the howling of a lone and lonely wolf—slipping by the ranchers' rifles, sliding down from Wyoming, searching for a mate. Or was it just the wind?

This same wolf-scented wind blew through a young landscape architect, Arthur Carhart, in the fall of 1919, as he ascended to Trappers Lake through the White River National Forest in northwest Colorado. His assignment from the US Forest Service: destroy Trappers Lake. But then something else happened, something miraculous. Carhart knew that Trappers Lake was (and is) sacred to the Ute Indians. But how did he get from that knowledge to the wisdom of wilderness? Paradoxically, the absence of the wolf at Trappers Lake was as crucial as its presence.

However unlikely a candidate for divining wilderness wisdom, plain-vanilla Carhart was the chosen one, the prophet who heard that ineffable, mysterious, ultimately ungraspable

voice at Trappers Lake. Like Elijah on the mountain in the Book of I Kings, he was commanded to return to his Forest Service bosses in Denver with the most subversive message of all: let it be. Here is the map of Trappers Lake that you ordered me to make, Carhart said, together with all the roads and building sites you wanted. I have done my duty, but now I call us all to a higher duty: let it be. Let Trappers Lake be!

Carhart's superiors in the Forest Service, including Aldo Leopold, knew instantly that this upstart was on to something grander and more glorious than any of them could imagine—something uniquely American, something that could mark America as the Chosen Land, as God's own country.

Such patriotic talk is unfashionable today, uncool. Even less cool is the concept that America's public lands exist in part to make us better Americans—a people with the courage and grace to live with wolves and manage wolf-filled wilderness guided by the best science.

Carhart succeeded in protecting Trappers Lake. Or did he? Just as Carhart and the Forest Service agreed to set Trappers Lake aside, both were enthusiastic participants in a systematic federal program designed to slaughter every last wolf everywhere in America. Given the wisdom of hindsight, how can we today reconcile the seeming contradictions of our past? How can we learn once again to live with the wolf?

Part of being an American is believing that we are always blessed with another chance—another opportunity to listen to the prophetic voice of Arthur Carhart. If there is hope for us, it lies in understanding and resolving the bloody conflicts, the civil wars, of our past. If there is hope for us, it lies in learning to live with the wild, with the wolf.

That is why we return to *The Last Stand of the Pack*.

Ardent Arthur Carhart quit the Forest Service in 1922, soon after deciding that federal bureaucracies were as much the problem as the solution for Americans who love the wild. Free at last, he decided to write the book that became *The Last Stand of the Pack*. Cold-blooded Stanley P. Young, Carhart's coauthor, provided the science for their book, while the enthusiastic Carhart provided the saga. Together, they produced a true thriller—if you recall that *thrill* means “pierce” and *enthusiastic* means “pierced or seized by the divine.”

*The Last Stand of the Pack* was good, but its most important reader thought it was not good enough. After its publication in 1929, Carhart spent the rest of his long life trying to put wolfless wilderness into words. By that measure, he failed. But by 1950, this cheerful curmudgeon had become America's most popular and widely read conservationist.

## INTRODUCTION

It took the great female writer Mary Austin to prod Carhart and alert him to his prophetic potential. As a child, she also had experienced a mystical union with nature. As a friend and neighbor in Santa Fe of the great wildlife biographer Ernest Thompson Seton, she knew that Indian ways with wolves might guide Carhart to fulfilling his prophetic role. Soon after the publication of *The Last Stand of the Pack*, she wrote to Carhart,

*I thought your wolf book might have been truly great if, after mastering all the government reports, you had thrown them in the fire, called on whatever gods you worship and written the story without a thought of its possible audience.*

Carhart promised Austin he would try to write a second wolf book. He never succeeded. Let us hope that someone young is out there, someone young enough to write the imaginative book that will reunite Americans behind a true wilderness—a wilderness with wolves.

Who was Arthur Carhart? It is not enough to remind readers that he was more than a lifelong Christian and Republican. Like the wolf in the wilderness, he remains elusive. True prophets are never appreciated in their own lifetime—or in their own country. Carhart lived from 1892 to 1978. Growing up in East Denver, I knew him as both a neighbor and a magnificent storyteller. Maybe someday some imaginative kid will wander into another of Carhart's creations, the Conservation Collection at the Denver Public Library. And maybe that kid will grow up to write the wolf book we need.

In the meantime, *The Last Stand of the Pack* will have to remain literally true for Colorado's children. They will have no wolves in Colorado until we learn to say to hell with our differences and reunite behind our true heritage as Americans: a wild wilderness.

## Foreword

### The Day Wanes

There was plenty of food for the gray wolves before the white men came. The great armies of shaggy bison that moved northward with the summer or sought some sheltered spot during the days of winter cold, were a constant source of meat for the wolves that followed them like gray shadowy death.

Calves, old bulls that were too weak to keep up with the stream of their fellows or were driven away from the herd by stronger bulls, and weakened cows, fell to the lot of the big gray lobos. Indians killed bison, to be sure. But the red men left little of the meat for the wolf packs to snarl and fight over. The red brother killed only for necessities; for meat, robes that were needed by that individual hunter and his family, and not for so-called sport which was actually slaughter.

For centuries those great masses of bison were a never failing supply of sustenance for the wolf packs. Pronghorns too, in plenty, populated the plains. Fleet they were, bounding away with their white-flagged rumps showing as a snowy spot when they ran from danger. But there were cripples among these, too; old worn-out bucks and does. Little fawns, foolish, inquisitive, helpless, made wolf meat when the stalking killers came across these baby antelope when mothers were absent or frightened away.

When winter's robes swirled over the open plains and frayed out in long streamers from the mountain ridges, the hunting was poorer for the wolves. They would sometimes come

close to humans then, prowling around the winter lodges of Crow, Pawnee, Comanche and Cheyennes. The Indians did not make a business of hunting the gray wolf. To some men of the wolf clans, the big gray was a brother, a fetish not to be harmed. To others he occasionally gave his skin for their usual adornment or clothing.

There were some natural enemies of the wolf. But few there were that could stand before the rush of the little packs that formed where there was good hunting. Occasionally fighting in the pack itself, between dog wolf leaders, would eliminate some old lobo too slow with his flashing, slashing teeth, or one who was not springy in aged muscles that once had carried him to leadership.

Famine took its toll too. The law of the wilderness was inscribed by fang and tooth; kill or be killed. With most foes the wolves could hold their own. Famine, when it stalked, was one enemy that the gray wolf could not conquer.

Men in shining armor came one day from the southwest. Pigmy thunder, carrying death, belched from sticks they carried. Gunpowder and ball came into the life of the gray wolves of the great plains. It was the beginning of the invasion of white men and with it came the first step toward the doom of the great gray killers.

Other expeditions with gay banners and with brown-cloaked friars riding beside the adventurers followed those first men that were seeking the mythical treasure cities. They trailed in winding, sinuous lines over the grassy plains working their way along the foothills, or following the streams that flowed to the eastward, until they came almost to where the Missouri bends toward sunrise seeking the great Father of Waters as it swirls to its union with the great gulf.

These men were seen by the wolves. But to the ancestors of Lefty, Unawep, Rags, Whitey, Three Toes and the rest of the renegade leaders of the last days, this coming of the men of whiter skin meant nothing. Occasionally these invaders shot a wolf with a blunderbuss. More often they killed deer, pronghorns or bison, cut the choice meats from the loin and left the carcass for the wolves to gorge on and then later be a place where coyotes congregated around weathered white bones.

Coyotes followed the gray killers of the plains. Sometimes they were camp followers of an individual wolf or a pack, picking the scraps after the wolves had finished in their blood and meat feasts. With all the great hordes of wolves that traveled the unmarked highways of the prairies and the countless coyote scavengers that followed them, there was no mixture of these species. Wolf stood distinct and coyote remained coyote throughout these years. They were sometimes at war, the wolf driving the coyote away when he felt so disposed,

sometimes undoubtedly killing the tawny skulker-scavenger. Never has there been half-breed wolf and coyote.

A man pushing up the Arkansas and leading a band of half-starved soldiers from the United States was a vital event for western wild life. Winter gripped the little command when they reached the sandy bars where the Fontaine qui Bouille, the creek of the Boiling Spring and the Arkansas River come together. To-day there are steel plants on that site, busy with clanking machinery and sweaty, working men and the railway station with its many tracks carries the sign "Pueblo." Perhaps not even a sagacious scholar of the man tribe could have foreseen that a century and a quarter after Pike and his men camped at the site of Pueblo there would be a city there at the streams' junction.

Pike, leader of that ragged band of western heroes, built a tiny earthwork fort. He had been following the homeward trail of Melgares, Spaniard, who had penetrated earlier in the year far into the Pawnee Republic, and now that Pike was near territory claimed by Spain, the American must needs be cautious.

This little fort, huddled in the sandy river bottom, was a landmark in the conquest that finally made life a gamble with death for the last of the gray wolves. But such a state of affairs did not come to the wolf legions at first. Rather there followed days when food was easy, could be had for the taking without stalking, and the wolves became fat, sleek followers of the mountain men that rode fearlessly on dangerous trails some of which were not even blazed by daring explorers.

Long haired, these mountain men were, sometimes boisterous, sometimes quiet. They lived in a hostile land by virtue of the trueness of their aim and their readiness to kill. During the fur season they combed the streams of the mountain lands for the prime pelts of beaver that were, in those days, the equivalent of treasure. As summer opened the ice-bound streams and the fur bearers lost the silky thickness of their coats, these men in worn, fringed buckskin found their way to Taos and bartered, drank and made love to the dark-eyed Spanish girls or fought with hot-tempered sons of Dons.

A little mud fort and trading post sprang up where Pueblo now stands. Another was at a point on Grenaros Creek which flows from the mountain called Greenhorn, or in Spanish, Cuerno Verde; some say named for a Pawnee Chieftain known as Cuerno Verde and others say because the mountain is green and in the shape of a horn when outlined by a map. Another important trading point was Bents Fort near where La Junta now stands.

These were bonanza days when wolves glutted themselves for buffalo robes were in demand. Every home must have its shaggy robe from the bison of the plains. Every dandy must have his buffalo skin coat.

Butchery followed. Some men killed thousands in a season. Buffalo robes were selling in the middle west at the startling figure of \$5.00 to \$10.00. A good coat made from the hide of a bison could be bought for some \$20.00 or \$30.00. Slaughter surged over the plains. Carcasses were left to rot. Only the hides were of value. Sometimes only the loin or liver was taken by the hunters for the meal of the day. Most of the time they would not touch the meat.

Raw hides were selling at 11c apiece over the counter at the trading post at Pueblo!

At that time a good hunter would make himself right good wages for the bison were inexhaustible! They were everywhere on the plains; these buffalo were even a detriment to the first railways for they often streamed across the tracks in their migrations and delayed the anxious passengers in the gorgeous little day coaches that to-day would seem so stuffy, small, and uncomfortable.

This killing of bison brought days of plenty for the wolves and their ilk. They did not even have to down the game. It was there ready for them to tear and chew and gobble. The hunter was their friend. He reached out with his long-barreled rifle, brought down the bison, skinned it even, and left the carcass for a feast for the carnivores. Rarely did hunters kill wolves or coyotes. They were handy in cleaning meat from the carcass and preventing the great stench that might otherwise arise from skinned buffalo bodies.

But lean days came. The "inexhaustible" supply of bison dwindled. Prong-horns were next. And later the market hunters began the senseless slaughter of the deer which has resulted in depleted game ranges of the west where there should to-day be the best hunting in the country. Wolf meat was becoming hard to get; the packs became gaunt and ready to kill anything that promised a good meal.

Then came men with trundling wagons over which billowed the grayish white of canvas tops. Settlers were only a few years behind the traders and trappers. The frontiers were beginning to crash and fall before the men that were following the trail of Pike and his band of fearless soldiers.

With these homesteaders came horses, sheep and cattle. It was a new supply of food for the wolves. Between the remnants of game and the domestic stock, the wolves got along. Settlers grumbled but steers were not worth much on the hoof so far from markets and when meat was wanted there were still deer or elk to be killed and hung up in the log buildings to chill and freeze.

Wire fences appeared. Open range passed. The great trail herds that formerly wound their way from the plains of Texas into the wide meadowy stretches of Wyoming and Colorado, ceased to come north under the care of the happy-

go-lucky, hard riding, hard fighting cow hands from the Panhandle. Domestic stock increased. With the increase the wolves got more of a food supply than they had had for some years. Still domestic stock was not so valuable but that some tribute could be given to the killers of the plains by ranchers.

Stockmen invaded the hills. Cattle herds increased. Wolves followed the mountain migration. Range was cropped until it lost its character and new forage was not there the following spring. The Forest Service was created and the great National Forests established. Grazing regulations came. Brisk demands arose for this public range at nominal fees. Every good grazing unit was taken over by some rancher and grazed as much as it would carry under the regulations.

The wild things that lived on the range were crowded out. Food for them was taken by domestic stock. Poaching, too, helped to hasten the process; for a certain class of settlers even to-day do not hesitate to "get a little venison" in defiance of the protective laws. But the most powerful factor in almost smashing the deer, elk and antelope herds has been the over appropriation of their hereditary food supply by the dogies of the ranchers, often under the direction of agencies of the State.

The old world of the wolves now was falling about their heads. There began to be bounties on them. Even in the then remote sections such as the place where Caywood settled near Meeker, the cattlemen had begun to pay bounties for the scalps of the gray wolf slaughterers. With a very nominal bounty on wolves, Caywood soon after he took his homestead, in less than a month killed enough of these "varmint" to buy a new wagon, new harness for his team, outfit his family with some new clothes and lay in the seasons provisions from bounty money. What Caywood did near Rio Blanco, others did in other sections of the hills and on the plains. Hunters picked up many dollars from stockmen and Government agencies.

The gray wolf is no fool. He rapidly became educated. He had to learn or lose his life. Some failed. But others gained knowledge of men. Campaigns against them became more keen. Greater bounty was offered. Stock was no longer cheap and one critter lost made an appreciable dent in the yearly returns.

White faces crowded out the old long horns. Pure bred bulls took the place of scrubs. Beef went soaring with the demand for meat to feed armies that battled in the fields of France.

Bounties went up again to unheard of amounts. Men made it a business to try to get certain notorious wolves. They trapped, poisoned, hunted, and always those wolves that were able to survive by the aid of sharpened wits,

became more canny, more elusive, wiser in the ways of predatory man. They eluded these independent hunters and kept on with their killing.

Finally the U. S. Biological Survey and its Predatory Animal Control work stepped in where the bounty hunters had failed. Men were put on the trail of stock-killing wolves. These hunters were on salary. They had only one general instruction. It was "get your wolf"

War to the death had been declared when Hegewa came into Burns Hole looking for Lefty, the killer.

Many wolves fell into their hands through ordinary methods. Some of the younger, less experienced, were taken by the poison route. Others were trapped.

But there were certain pack leaders, renegades, that had become wise beyond all other wolves, in keeping out of the snares of the hunters, that stood head and shoulders above the common run. They were past graduates at avoiding traps, knew poison and the methods man practiced in giving it to them, knew when a man was armed with a gun and when he was weaponless.

Nine of them were thus outstanding. Nine of them were wolves of super training, almost unbelievable intelligence. With the old world of their kind gone forever, they made last defiant stands against man and his death machines. They tested the cunning of the best wolfers that the Biological Survey ever employed.

The buffalo are gone. The pronghorns, the antelope, are barely holding their own on isolated ranges, often able to live only through the constant friendly care of the ranchers who have come to realize that earlier action of settlers has made an almost gameless country, where once good hunting prevailed. With the old food supply gone, the wolves had turned almost wholly to the domestic stock. And from that time they were fated to fall before man.

These last nine renegades in Colorado and the killer packs they led marked the passing of a typical figure of the old west; the big buffalo or gray wolf; sometimes called lobo wolf. Never did more intelligent wolf live than some of those nine. Never were more dramatic hunts for man or beast planned and carried out than those campaigns planned by some of the hunters that trailed these renegades, stock-killers.

That the old gray wolf should pass without some record of his exit on the western stage being written seemed likely. He would simply cease to be and his final dramatic defeat would remain unregistered. Buried in dusty files of the Biological Survey were the terse official reports of the hunters. Locked in their minds were the many little incidents, the side lights that are so important as incidents of those dogged hunts.

But a happy combination of events made it possible to get from these records the facts. Additional information was gleaned from the field men. All possible data was gathered, sifted, and the truth retained. Every possible quirk of the mind and actions of the renegade, remnants of the once numerous buffalo wolf, has been put into this record. All vital incidents of each hunt are true. All wolf lore is positively fact. Those who have worked on this record have tried to make this a book so full of wolf lore that nothing that is true of these old gray, heady, cruel killers was left out.

Man has won. The wilderness killers have lost. They have written their own death warrants in killing, torture, blood lust, almost fiendish cruelty. Civilization of the white man has almost covered the west. And with that nearly accomplished, there was no place left for the gray killers, the renegades of the range lands.

They were great leaders, superb outlaws, these last nine renegades. They deserved and received the profound respect of those men who finally conquered them. Defiant, they were striking back at man, playing a grim losing game but never acknowledging defeat until fate had called the last play.