

CONSERVATION COMPASS

Where Have All the Hunters Gone?



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The Boone and Crockett Club focuses on educating youth in the enjoyment of the outdoors and development of a conservation ethic.

For many, it takes a magic moment, an epiphany, to grasp a new vision. My epiphany came in the depths of the Snake River Canyon in the early 1980s. My college roommate at Texas A&M in the mid-1950s, and my best friend, had brought his wife and three sons (ages 20, 15, and 12) to visit my family in northeastern Oregon. We had not seen one another, except briefly, since college days.

My wife and I, and our two sons (ages 17 and 14) lined out what we considered a dream vacation for the two families. The first event was a four-day raft trip down the Grande Ronde River to its juncture with the Snake River. The second event, following a couple of days at home, involved a four-day pack trip/fishing trip and hike into the Eagle Cap Wilderness. I packed in all the camping gear and food for the trip on my pack string and met the rest of the party at an airstrip in the midst of the Wilderness. Flying with a bush pilot in and out of that airstrip, which was located in the bottom of a deep twisting canyon, was an adventure itself. We spent four days traveling and camping along the Minam River and saw a few elk and numerous mule deer, and we caught enough trout for a few meals.

After a few days at our home in La Grande, we were off for the grand finale—a jet-boat trip from Lewiston, Idaho, up the grand rapids of the Snake River to Hell's Canyon Dam and back. We stayed the last night at the outfitter's camp, which provided lodging and meals. As soon as the two jet boats docked, my friend's two younger sons took off at a run for the lodge.

It wasn't but a few minutes until

they came moping back down the trail. The older boy could have stepped on his lower lip and the younger, who was overweight and out of breath, was on the verge of tears. I asked, "What's the matter?"

"There's no television—they don't even have electricity!"

I replied, "Of course they don't have electricity. It's probably 30 miles to the closest road, and there is no generator because nobody wants to listen to the noise after spending a ton of money to experience quiet and solitude. And, besides that, you are at the bottom of the deepest canyon in North America, and you can't get a TV signal down here."

Smiling, I added, "You've just spent two weeks actually doing things that millions of other people only dream of doing. Why would you want to watch television?"

The two boys did not laugh or

showed no appreciation for what they had seen and the adventure involved. That, I am happy to say, was turned around by their father, who was as shocked as I was at his son's response. Upon return to Houston, he began taking more time off from his blossoming law practice to take his sons hunting and fishing. Today, those boys and their children still hunt and fish with dad and grandpa.

A sad situation in the making was rectified by a father who had been too busy to introduce his sons to hunting and fishing and, through that, to an appreciation of nature. The deficit was rectified for three sons and, in turn, for nine grandchildren, and likely for great-grandchildren to come.

For a decade and a half, the Club has provided conservation training for hundreds of youngsters at the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch where the Rasmuson Education Center provides laboratory space, lecture hall, dining facilities, and lodging. Efforts were begun in 1999, in coordination with the Welder Wildlife Foundation in Texas, to train some 20 secondary teachers a year in teaching conservation and wild land biology. The beginning assumption is that "training the trainers" could most efficiently broaden the impact of the Club's conservation message.

A new effort commenced in 1996 whereby the Boy Scouts of America utilize the Rasmuson Center and the Club's educational staff as part of their High Adventure programs. The director of the Club's education programs is finishing up a doctoral program, with her research aimed at establishing means whereby the conservation education community can evaluate the effectiveness of place-based education. It is far past time for the conservation

community to increase efforts, including joint efforts, to enhance conservation education—including the role of fair-chase hunting. Proudly, in keeping with its traditions, the Club is helping pioneer the way. ■

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