

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

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The questions, "Where have we been and where are we going?" are not as easily answered as they might seem. In the first place the questions must be translated to mean, "What have we achieved to date, and what can we achieve in the future?". There is still a third translation which is probably the most realistic, "What have we been trying to do up to now? What are we going to try to do from now on?"

I don't believe anyone could complete a discussion of this subject in twenty minutes or even twenty hours, because there will be inevitable differences of opinions as to the degree of success we have had in the past and as to the course we should set for the future.

I have arrived at a partial inventory after having read every word of all the papers we have published, the recorded bull sessions we have had, and the minutes of our business meetings. I read them all and re-read some of them several times. I made notes as I read and began to put the notes into two columns, one black and one red -- one positive on the success side; one negative, on the failure side. I would earnestly urge this task on all who are seriously concerned with the activities of this Council.

I found much on the positive side, and eventually I began to see where we have been and what we have been doing. For the past nine years we have been at school learning the trade, the profession, which many of us may have thought we had already mastered -- the job of protection and management of the Desert Bighorn and his habitat.

This has taken some doing. In 1959 the Transactions asked this question "Where are we now?" Then answered it in this way: "Our attitude toward our lack of knowledge of the bighorn sometimes reminds us of the general attitude toward money during the Great Depression of the '30's, 'Nobody has any, so why worry?'. The relaxed, 'we're all in the same boat' attitude prevailed for several years and many people remember it as one of the most comfortable periods of their lives. Through no fault of their own they were relieved of the responsibility of being successful. It was easy-going and comfortable for us here as long as we all keep saying, 'We don't know anything about bighorn -- no one does.' It seems

to us, however, that the Bighorn Council is about to jar us into maturity. Sooner or later we will be forced into admitting that-we do know something about sheep and if this Council continues to function it will force us into accepting our responsibility of learning about them."

Read the Transactions and you will see that this has happened -- up to a point. Then comes the negative column. It could be argued that the Council has not matured as it should have. It still suffers from certain taboos, some issues are not faced. For instance, is there any actual need of predator control in the Bighorn Management program? Is it possible that predator control may even be a threat to bighorn welfare? Are we squarely facing the issue of exotic introductions into bighorn habitat? Have we had our say about human encroachment in the form of highways into the Desert Game Range? Flooding bighorn habitat by damming the Grand Canyon? The spending of millions on building roads and trails into ancestral bighorn strongholds throughout the desert for every hundred that it spent on it's protection?

And have we come as far as we should until we establish some sort of criteria for our publications? If there anything to be gained by the publishing in 1964 of a rehash of Dr. Buechner's rehash of Seton's rehash of everything he could get hold of prior to 1929?

In 1965 the Transactions published in one paper this astonishing array of misleading statements about the bighorn and burros of Death Valley:

The average male desert bighorn will weigh from 250 to 300 lbs.

The Death Valley bighorn tends to migrate according to the season. There is a definite downward migration during spring from the higher elevations, a summer residence at low levels and then a distinct fall migration back to high country.

Copulation takes place during the months of September and October.

The most important single problem occurring in Death Valley National Monument today is the wild burro competition for the bighorn forage.

The burro causes heavy pollution of the water by defecation.

In the Panimint Range the bighorn were present in the 1930's, but left in 1935.

Ample proof of the fallacy of all the above statements has already been published in the Transactions and elsewhere.

Should we keep saying that once a ram reaches 7 years of age he is no longer useful to the herd? And that killing the best specimens over seven, the "trophy rams", will not harm the population? Should we ignore the many observations of these "trophy rams" being deferred to during the rut by not only the younger rams, but the smaller rams of the same age?

A thirteen year old ram sired a lamb in the San Diego zoo. That left him six more years of productivity than we have been allowing him. Does it not follow that as the Trophy Rams of seven years and up are harvested the ratio of breeding opportunities for the inferior rams is increased?

So it would seem.that there is a great deal of the positive and some of the negative in where we have been and what we have been doing. This it all down in black and white and clearly discernible to all who will read it.

Where we are going is not so easy to see. Certainly we should continue to stay in school, so to speak, to continue to learn. And it may be that if this Council continues to function, our first step into the future would be to accept, fully, our responsibility for doing something about what we have learned -- by stepping out boldly on the path we know we should follow.

This is not easy. We may know what the path is, where it is, and how to take it. But we find the footing insecure and obscured by the clouds of dust raised by the road and trail building into and through the areas we are supposed to be protecting. And the air grows murky with smog as the traffic roars through spewing beer cans and Kleenex over the countryside. Sometimes we find the way completely blocked by the blizzard from Olympus leaving insurmountable drifts of memorandums behind. And as we shovel these drifts aside we find ourselves up to our necks in a quagmire or red tape from which very few of us ever completely extricate ourselves.

Let me once more recommend the Transactions to you, particularly the paper by Dr. William Graf in 1964. He said, "Reduced to its essence the situation is that while a number of dedicated people, largely this group, are much concerned over the welfare of the desert sheep and have gathered together much information about them and have made many worthwhile suggestions that would improve sheep management, nothing has been or is being done, to implement these suggestions. What is the reason for this?"

Then Dr. Graf gives the following answers:

The lack of an administrative decision making policy for the solution of sheep problems.

The lack of delegated authority to qualified field men.

The lack of an organized and coordinated study and research program

Then he wonders whether we really want to do something for the bighorn or are we just going to stand by with a holding action while the sheep become extinct or "are at best reduced to museum pieces in the field."

I am not rehashing now, I am quoting because what he said needs repeating and cannot be over-emphasized:

"In view of the lack of action, I wonder whether the various Federal agencies, or many of the state agencies involved, really want more sheep -- or any sheep for that matter. I have good reason to believe that at least some of the administrators of some of these agencies would be much happier if we have no sheep at all -- then we would have no troublesome Bighorn Council to listen to, not to mention even more troublesome academic points of view."

If asked about this, these administrators would vehemently deny this -- but their actions would bear it out. Let's look at a typical instance, and let me assure you that this is the rule and not the exception.

As most of you know, Mrs. Welles and I, in 1960, completed a ten-year project of bighorn, burro, and water source research in Death Valley. As set forth in our contract, we left behind us a record of all the wildlife water sources in the Monument with recommendations for their maintenance and protection.

In 1965, we visited the Monument and inquired about these water sources to see how our renovation work had stood up and how our recommendations had worked out. There was no one there that we could find who even knew the names of these springs, let alone where they were or what condition they might be in.

Why does this happen? In another area I asked an administrative assistant how much, about what percentage, of the mountain of mail on his desk had to do with the all-pervasive people-service orientation, the philosophy which dictates that all energies must be bent toward aiding the exploding population of this planet in its enjoyment, its use, and its abuse of our natural resources, and what percentage of it dealt with the conservation, the preservation of these resources for the future. He said, "About 99% of it reflects the people-service orientation, but that is what we are, a people-service organization." "Yes", I said, "but isn't the preservation of these areas the first service we are supposed to perform for the people?" "Oh, yes", he said, "But I guess that's just taken for granted!" And therein lies the gravest danger to the bighorn and to all wildlife on this planet. It is taken for granted, not only by the government agencies charged with the responsibility for preservation -- but by almost everyone else mistakenly believing that simply because these areas are once set aside for the present and all future generations to enjoy, they are therefore safe, that the supply is inexhaustable, and that there should be no limitation set on how it is to be enjoyed, or how much or how fast it is used up.

Let me say again that we cannot effectively deal with the bighorn problem without placing man at the top of the list. Our job is not so much one of knowing how to manage bighorn as it is how to manage ourselves. Unless we make a positive approach to this proposition we may not be going anywhere.