

# Kids' Planet... with Thorne Nature Experience



## WILDERNESS



by Dr. Oakleigh Thorne, II

Today I would like to once again write about wilderness, even though I wrote about it here eleven years ago. The dictionary describes wilderness as “any unsettled, uncultivated region left in its natural condition, especially a large wild tract of land covered with dense vegetation or forests.” It can also be described as an extensive piece of land set aside to “grow wild” and to be left in its natural state, controlled only by the forces of nature.

The United States was the first country in the world to establish a National Parks system that protected huge areas of wilderness. Years later, our U.S. Congress passed the *Wilderness Act of 1964* that was written by Howard Zahniser of The Wilderness Society and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. It created the legal definition of wilderness and protected over nine million acres of federal land in our National Forests.

I was lucky enough to actually live for two decades at Valley Ranch in Wyoming. We were ten miles inside the boundary of the Shoshone National Forest, surrounded by the Washakee Wilderness Area in northwest Wyoming. Since we were only about 12 miles from the SE corner of



Photoby Ralph Maughra

*Washakie Wilderness was designated by Congress in 1964 and contains about 704,274 acres of rugged and beautiful countryside to the east and southeast of Yellowstone National Park in Shoshone National Forest.*

Yellowstone National Park, our oldest, we were officially in what is referred to today as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The May 2016 issue of National Geographic is totally devoted to this area. It has a photo of my friend, Nick Patrick, who had been mauled by a grizzly bear while trying to save his dog that was being attacked. It also has an article on the Yellowstone elk migration, a study by Arthur Middleton, another friend of mine. Some of these elk actually migrated through the Valley area.

You may wonder what it is like to live surrounded by wilderness. Everywhere I looked from Valley there were beautiful mountains, close-by, wild, and untouched by development...true wilderness! I felt blessed to be there. I would walk out into the meadow by our house on a full moonlight night with snow on the ground and it was total magic. At other times, with no moonlight, billions of stars were overhead...also magic.

Often there was complete silence, or maybe only the

sound of blowing wind in the trees. Occasionally I would hear the howl of a coyote, then another, and another...a chorus! That felt to me much better than the noise of city automobile traffic. Instead these were the pure sounds of nature all around me.

There were always special feelings when I would hike or ride horseback into this wilderness. It was somewhat overpowering to realize that this was an environment that humans had not messed up...that nature ruled here.... that I was just a mere creature in this wild landscape, subject to the same problems of survival as the other critters who lived here, subject to the same weather extremes...like a sudden cloudburst. These were BIG feelings because this was BIG country...hundreds of square miles of pure, untouched nature. To this day I still cherish these feelings that I was lucky to have had in my life.

I would like to quote my son David Randall Thorne who said, “The value of pure wilderness as an asset cannot be measured by human

minds.” I totally agree. It’s a profound statement of the importance of wilderness in the World!

In Boulder County we are blessed with lots of nearby wilderness in the Boulder Mountain Parks, Roosevelt and Arapaho National Forests, and Rocky Mountain National Park. If you haven’t already, get out and explore these wonderful wildernesses!

*Dr. Thorne is founder and honorary president of Thorne Nature Experience (formerly Thorne Ecological Institute), a nonprofit organization headquartered in Boulder. For 65 years they have helped “connect youth to nature!” For information about their programs, check their website at [www.thornenature.org](http://www.thornenature.org) or email [info@thornenature.org](mailto:info@thornenature.org) or please call (303) 499-3647, ext. 100.*

