

Why Do I Do This?
by L. Walker

As I trundled along backpacking in the breathtaking Buckskin Gulch and gorgeous Paria Canyon this May, a strange question popped into my head, “Why do I like to do this so much?” I usually never think about such things when I’m on the trail; I will compose poems or think of appropriate quotes to describe a trip. One of my all time favorite quotes used to describe passage through the tough country of the American southwest is–

“I defy anyone to make his way over this country without the aid of profanity. Many and many a time... I have come to some confounded canyon of piled-up rocks and slippery precipices, which would have been utterly impassable for myself and men if we had not literally cursed ourselves over.” –*US Cavalry Officer in Arizona 1870’s.*

Trust me, it comes to mind more often than you would imagine. These are the things that usually occupy my thoughts while hiking. Of course, I’m trying to look around and absorb every drinkable drop of beauty to behold instead of turning my eyes inward or just downward. But the “Why?” question piqued my interest. All the standard answers of course came immediately to mind–

- Camaraderie and fellowship with kindred souls
- Seeing the handiwork of God up close and personal
- The physical challenge and sense of accomplishment – pride
- Because it feels good when you quit
- The crunch of grit in my grits
- The odiferous bouquet of myself and fellow hikers
- Escape and time away from almost everything in our common lives
- Stress release and the total mental distraction
- Educational and historical tie with our past
- The joy of watching life at its core existence without our interference
- A brilliant night sky accented by the Milky Way and speeding satellites
- The site of the evening’s first bat
- The sounds – a chorus of river, crickets, frogs, and hardy snoring
- The taste of fresh, clean, cool spring water
- A brisk bath in the bracing cold water of a river or spring
- All food is delicious on the trail: hunger is the best sauce
- The amazing animals you stir up and get to see
- The extreme comfort of my sleeping bag after a long hard day
- The nostalgia in relating with the cowboys and pioneers of olden days
- And, oh, the geology of the canyon lands is quite a stunning thing

But what is it really? What is the foremost attraction that keeps me coming back time and time again? Certainly, all of the above reasons are enough, most even of themselves, to beckon me back as often as possible. Is there something else? It occurred to me that there is a more

fundamental reason at the heart of almost every adventurous activity I do: I do them simply because I can.

I want to embrace and treasure and cherish everything that I'm blessed enough to experience in this life. God has given us a tremendous gift in physical existence: He loves what He created and indeed it gives me great pleasure as well. I do fear that there will come a day when having an adventure such as backpacking in Buckskin Gulch or Paria Canyon or anywhere somewhat wild will not be possible or even allowed.

My physical well being will surely be the first thing to go; you know what they say, "There are only so many swings on a door hinge." Hearts and knees and backs and bodies grow old, no matter how careful we are or how we fight it. But also, there are forces at work in our world that want to remove people from wilderness or even wilderness from people: be it radical environmentalists or short-sighted capitalists who only see the green of their money. Who knows what the planet will look like when there are 9, 11, or even 25 billion people inhabiting?

I will keep venturing out into the "back of beyond" as long as I can because I can. I feel sorry for a future where wilderness is something that's only read about in a book.