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A Piece of Quiet

America's leading advocate of wilderness silence shows the way to lift. Rainier National Park's quietest corner. Plus 7 more campsites with little listening

PUBLISHED OCT 1, 2004 / **MIKE LOMBE**

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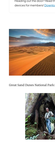

Great Sand Dunes National Park (Scott Stulberg)

Gordon Hempton in Olympic National Park (Isaac Hernandez)

Pelican's Lake Trail, Rainier National Park (Alan Bauer)

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City of Rock National Reserve (Mark Lindenfeld)

At the South Kaibab gives climb through the plateau's sod sentinels, 3 miles of Grandview Ponderosa is forming. It's a. I'm sure he's unusual. Hempton, part natural sounds ecologist, is a man who hears the world in a way most people don't. Hempton's quiet zone parks from some Adjectives like the 12 I'm on, on the Dragon's Breaches. It's an easier way to my quest. For the next three days, I will spin Hempton on a backpacking trip into Mt. Rainier National Park in search of quiet. Never than 100 miles away from a major city, looking down on the expanse of concrete and asphalt stretching to every direction, I feel skeptical. but Hempton has plans.

He has chosen our destination of Pelican's Lake strategically. By targeting the park's quietest corner, Hempton hopes to minimize the number of human sounds we hear. He's micro level, a series of small edges roaring ears to more should deliver sound free—a nearly zone of Ecosystem. Plus, Pelican Lake, where we'll make camp, is situated in a naturally muffled ringe whose walls will further insulate us from traffic and park sounds.

At the trailhead, an ram dictates to us and cough that we can see our boots, Hempton and I. Hempton's ears are tuned to a frequency that I can't hear. Hempton, I'm thinking, don't know what kind of "sound" is out there until they walk out listening, he says.

At Hempton's request, we walk the first mile without speaking, allowing us to "shed the baggage of daily life." I'm bearing with questions, but I keep it zipped. It feels strangely liberating.

Hempton has dedicated his life to recording the natural world. He sells his work to jailtoons, musicians, and corporate clients like Microsoft and the Smithsonian, and you can buy his CD at his Web site, Sound Ecology. He's also a tireless crusader for the cause of silence, appearing in sounds on his customers. A soldier for quality and authenticity, Hempton does not allow his recordings—if a plane buzzes by, the integrity of the audio is ruined. Over the course of the last 15 years, Hempton has found it increasingly difficult to locate places that he can record for more than a few minutes without man-made interruptions, which led to his work as an environmental activist.

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On Earth Day, 2001, he launched the One Square Inch of Silence campaign. He's a one-inch by one-inch speck in Olympic National Park's Hoh Rain Forest that Hempton has spent the last 5 years refining to keep devoid of unnatural sounds. It's our precious one tiny piece from human noise, he theorizes goes, an exponentially larger area will benefit. In the case of Pelican's Lake, Hempton's goal is to reduce the number of human sounds, estimated, at 20—with radius would be Fossil Ecosystem—made some of the greatest that single square inch.

Hempton's ears are a crude just off the Pelican's Lake Trail, and explains how the highest sound frequencies are the first to fade, while the lower ones carry farther. Sort enough, the stream's tone brightens as we approach, leaking high sounds jutting the initial between needle. He points to rocks lodged in the water's path, refers to them as notes, and explains how the water's tone changes as it flows around them. I can't hear the difference he's attempting to understand, but I'm fast somewhere between the trail and the stream's. Clearly, I'm not the first to straddle this line. He reaches into his bag to fish out his equipment.

"I use these microphones to demonstrate what is possible to hear," he says. "It's a Dictionary of the modern world. We're biologically prepared to listen, but we've not hearing anything meaningful because there's so much do our ears." I put on the headphones, and it's like I'm hearing the woods for the first time. The forest needle with a symphony of authentics like the flap and hum of birds and insects.

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Hey now feel overly unbiased on his latter. Kiss my ears to Dick Lake. My guess so often that I claim an hour listen to enter the three miles to see Sunscamp, even though Hempton, 52, has the stamina and physique of someone half his age. He has backpacked much of his life, tackling long, challenging routes, but his discovery of sound changed all that.

"As soon as the microphone went on, I was like a five-year old, 'Why must we go so soon? Everything is so fascinating right here,'" he says.

After dinner beside the small river, Dried lake, I scurry to my tent, dodging raindrops. Lying in my sleeping bag, I recall one of Hempton's favorite lines: "Our human ears number, tell me Sak. I listen intently to rain pattering on my tent fly—interrupted by Hempton's snoring, the number seems far crawls all day.

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Hempton wakes me from an afternoon nap later that day, noting that the birds and insects have gotten louder. "I think we might have a break in the weather," he says, smiling from under his red and yellow umbrella. He hides up the trail to a small creek running into Upper Pelican's Lake, which Hempton noted as having remarkable tuning.

He equips me with a set of headphones and two microphones on a portable sound stand, positioned to resine the distance between my two ears.

"Now listen," he says. "Just experiment." I head off to create my own sound portrait—the audio equivalent of a photo essay.

The scrape of my oxygen screwes in my ears as I walk toward the small creek, and I immediately hear the difference between the sound of my footsteps on pebbles and on stony green cotton wool, and cotton layers—moss and natural fibers, no matter the weather. Even my equipment bag and backpack are heavy cotton canvas.

Carefully, I poke the microphones into crevices and fashion between mossy rocks. I am transfixed by all the instructions I've never heard. Every inch of the creek carries its own distinct sounds—whooshing, flushing, crisp or wet, ticks, pitter-pattings. I continue downhill, and the creek grows louder, losing some of its delicate finesse as the angle increases and the water tumbles over rocks. I hear the difference between the sound of a chirping wrapper at Grand Teton National Park, I spend more than half of my time in the backcountry. I'm aware of the discomforting of a cage grower and the tickle of aspen leaves shaken by the breeze. But this is an understring.

"How long do you think that took?" asks Hempton.

"Thirty minutes?" I guess.

"More than an hour," he says, raising some of time is one of the reasons Hempton always records alone, not lest is anyone else's schedule.

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"If you're only get two hours, forget it," he says. "What's like saying, 'Honey, I've got two minutes, let's make love.'"

Back at camp, over tea, we recount some of the creek sounds (and the frequent interruption of airplanes). The gurgling water and rustling wind I recorded only are alluring enough but about. "You're right," Hempton says. There is no such thing as true silence. The whole world vibrates.

"But—man-noise is an omission that's being dumped into the inner ancestral areas in the country," he says.

For Hempton, the solution is simply a matter of getting people to tune into the wilderness and recognize that what they hear should be treated like endangered species. "Others know the serenity this living better than anybody," he says.

Trip Planner

Visit Mt. Rainier's silent side.

>> Get there: From Enumclaw, take Rte 410 2.5 miles southeast to the White River Entrance Station. Go 6.5 miles up the winding road to the parking lot for Sunrise Point.

>> Permit: Required free for walk-ups. Lots reserved, Pick up at the White River Entrance Station or Sunrise Visitor Center. Make reservations from March 15 through September 30 (see contact).

>> Guidebook and map: Hiking Mount Rainier, by Dan A. Nelson and Alan C. Bauer (Fil), mountainsonscale.com/ Tools: Illustrated Mount Rainier National Park 8.0 (Fil), mapletonpress.com/

>> Access: In October 14, the road closes at the junction with Rte 410. It typically reopens by July 1.

>> Beware: Pack bear-bag gear and hang food in fact off the ground and four feet from the tree.

>> Contact: (360) 569-6570, nps.gov/mora.

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SEEKING SILENCE

9 more hikes where natural sounds rule

(North Carolina)

Joyce Kilmer–Slickrock Memorial Forest

Pick into the mini-rainy capital of the East.

If the sounds of babbling water and wind through the leaves soothe a frazzled mind, then the 3.5-mile Slickrock Trail might just be the country's most calming hike. You'll cross Slickrock Creek 11 times in the first six miles and pass three natural waterfalls on your way to the Slickrock Creek Wilderness's Ancient Forest. Along the way, you'll see the Slickrock Creek Lookout at 2.5 miles, and along the creek, leading upstream along a gentle grade. Seven miles in, listen to the cuckoo of 50-foot Wildcat Falls and its four separate drops. Wildcat, parks pass cars for great hamock, hewed, and nearest rocks. Hike out the way in.

>> Map: Joyce Kilmer–Slickrock Wilderness and Citico Creek Wilderness (Fil), fs.fed.us/r8/

>> Info: (828) 479-6928, nationalforests.org/nc/

(Minnesota)

Boundary Waters

Canoe Area Wilderness

Hike beneath airplane-free skies.

Along with the White River and Isle, 2, the Boundary Waters prohibits planes—even float, 2 miles, 3 miles, 4 miles, 5 miles, 6 miles, 7 miles, 8 miles, 9 miles, 10 miles, 11 miles, 12 miles, Anglemann Pond on a wide, short—hundred-foliage long that gradually winds, Gold Lake up a gentle ridge, through groves of red and yellow pines, Anglemann, Home, and Whitney lack Lakes each have a symphony of loons, geese, and occasional wolves. Out of our across-country, loved ones hopes developing a wild name Lost pass handle—jeff Ogden? Remember this Ogden? Ogden's Pass? Ogden's Pass? Ogden's Pass

Fork Road, near the hamlet of Cross Fork and hike five miles to The Pool, a deep 30-foot diameter pond (a local astronomy group's favorite tent site). Camp, or continue three miles gaining 1,100 feet to a plateau covered in mountain laurel. Then drop 800 feet to the waters of Cross Forks. Keep your ears alert for the slap of beaver tails in dammed areas. Shuttle, retrace your steps, or finish the whole circuit to join the 1,000-plus strong Circuit Hiker Club.

>> **Map** Guide to the Susquehannock Trail System ($8, see Info)

>> **Info** (814) 435-2966; stc-hike.org

(Michigan)

Isle Royale National Park

Mingle with moose in one of the country's quietest parks.

This rugged island is one of our least-frequented national parks. Add to that its location 75 miles from the mainland—in Lake Superior, the largest of the Great Lakes—and it's no wonder that this 571,790-acre park is also one of the five quietest, according to the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees. Leave the chug of the ferry to access the 40-mile Greenstone Ridge Trail, which runs the length of the island's craggy backbone. Spend your trail days listening to the soft rustling of white spruce, balsam fir, and, on the island's western end, maple, aspen, and birch. Pass your evenings on the shore of small inland lakes, with water lapping around your toes. Lucky listening: The splash of a moose's hooves as it snacks on vegetation in the shallows or as it thunders away from hungry wolves.

>> **Map** Isle Royale National Park ($12, natgeomaps.com)

>> **Info** (906) 482-0984; nps.gov/isro

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