

ARNE NAESS

# The Joy of Living Deeply and Well

BY ALAN DRENGSON AND BILL DEVALL

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Arne Naess was a mountaineer, a Gandhian boxer, a professor, an activist, and a student of life's philosophy. In his native Norway, where he is regarded as a hero, outdoor life, or *friluftsliv*, is part of the national culture. Naess was a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters from 1941. He received numerous awards and honors, and was an honorary member of the Norwegian Alpine Club and the Norwegian Trekking Association. In 2002 he was awarded the Nordic Council Nature and Environment Prize. According to the Nordic Council,

Professor Naess is the founder of deep ecological thinking. Since becoming a professor at the age of only 27 in 1939, he has thrown himself into many fields of philosophy. His eco-philosophy deals with basic questions concern-

ing what is required to solve the problems we face today. In his fundamental approach to the problem, Professor Arne Naess is characterized by the fact that his dedication to nature has never detracted from his care for humanity. No other Norwegian philosopher has made as great an impact as Arne Naess.

The selection of his essays that are presented on this website aim to engage readers in some of the most important aspects of Arne's approach to life's philosophy. These aspects are especially relevant during the early decades of the twenty-first century, an era of globalization of economy and accelerating cultural transformation.

Arne Dekke Eide Naess was born, the last of four children, in a house on the outskirts of Oslo with a wild garden that blended into woods. He here developed ear-

ly memories of being in nature and becoming aware of its responsiveness when he waded and played in the water of the fjords near Oslo. He felt an intense sense of belonging and connection with the natural world around him. Through this spontaneous experience of the inner-responsive nature of the world and its many inhabitants, he realized that even the tiniest of beings can respond to us depending on how we act and feel about them.

By the time he was ten, Naess had developed a strong sense of connection with the mountains and especially Mount Hallingskarvet. He began to feel a mythopoetic connection with the mountain that became like a father to him. Eventually, in 1938, he built his own hut high on the mountain at the foot of its massive cliffs, a three hour hike uphill from the train station at Ustaoset. He called his hut and its immediate area *Tvergastein*, which roughly translated means crossed stones. Over his lifetime he has spent together almost twelve years at this hut. It is the place where he has done much of his most original creative writing and other work. At Tvergastein and at the University of Oslo, he explored the history of Western and Eastern philosophy and also the history, biology, and geology of Mt. Hallingskarvet, where his hut is located. At seventeen he started reading Spinoza's *Ethics*. He found in Spinoza's work an inspiring account of emotions that he has explored in his writings and personal experience. Naess's own life's philosophy is called *Ecosophy T*, as it was born in the mountains at Tvergastein. He coined the word *ecosophy* from the ancient Greek words *ecos* for household place and *sophia*

for wisdom. An ecosophy is a personal philosophy of life aiming for ecological wisdom and harmony. He didn't see himself as an academic philosopher but foremost as a teacher who attempts to inspire his students to articulate their own ecosophy.

While still doing graduate studies in 1934 and 1935, Naess spent time in Paris and Vienna. He had decided to study in Vienna because of the mountains there, and because it was a center of philosophical and cultural activity. As early as 1939 he was offered a professorship at the University of Oslo and he served there with distinction from 1939 to 1969. He took early retirement in 1969 so that he could "live and not just function," and to devote his remaining years and energies to active support of the long range, deep ecology movement. From 1991 onwards he worked with SUM, the Center for Development and the Environment, a research institute associated with the University of Oslo.

Naess turned his attention to environmental issues and ecophilosophy during the 1960s. He read books by Rachel Carson, and her sense of wonder for nature inspired him to work on shifting to quality of life values and a nature-oriented sensibility that finds joy in the world of diverse beings. Carson's sense for the interconnected nature of the world and her scientific evaluation of the negative effects of massive herbicide and pesticide use are described in her book *Silent Spring* (1962). This turned him to thinking about the accelerating negative impacts on nature by contemporary industrial civilization and larger issues of ultimate aims and norms.

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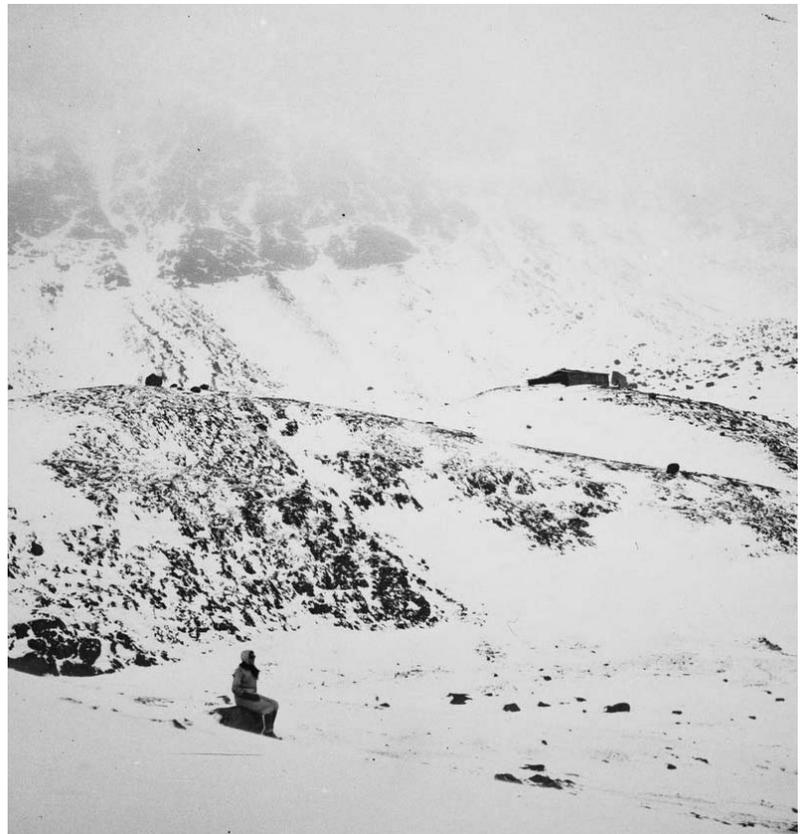
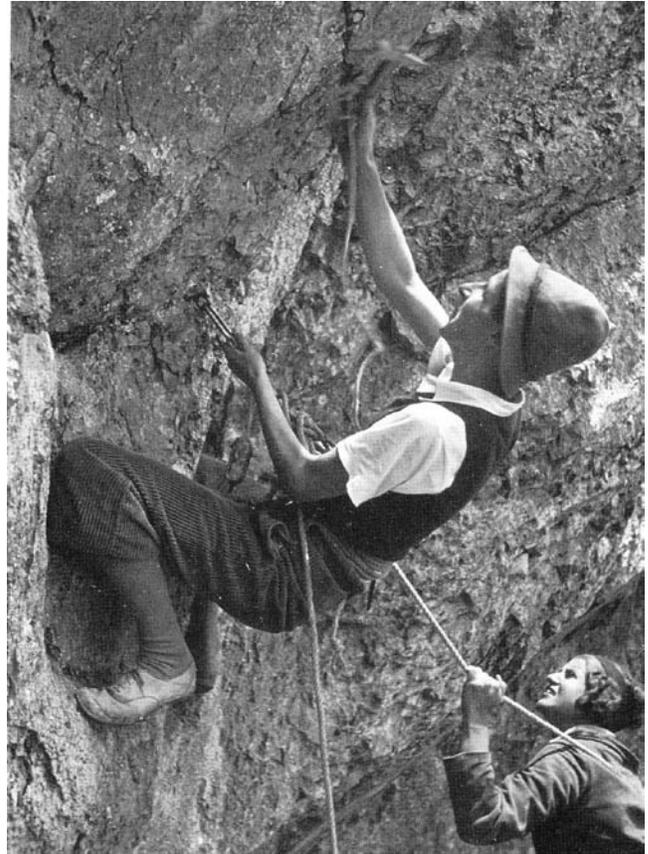
Bill Devall (1938–2009) was trained as a sociologist. He was also a practicing Buddhist who linked Buddhist principles and practices to environmental thought and practices. Inspired by the early work of Arne Naess and the poetry of Gary Snyder, Devall co-wrote the book *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (1985) with George Sessions that became a classic text of deep ecology. Devall devoted his life to protecting nature in the classroom and in the socio-political realm. He was a founding member of the North Coast Environmental Center in Arcata, California and was locally active to protect the beaches, forests, and natural species of northern California. Devall's books *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (1988) and *Living Richly in an Age of Limits* (1993) were further elaborations on the philosophy and practices of deep ecology. With Alan Drengson, he co-edited *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess* (2008).

Early in his intellectual development he began to reflect on the relationships between persons and between nations and wondered how serious conflicts could be defused or even avoided. He had earlier read Gandhi's works and studied his nonviolent campaigns for social justice in South Africa and India. Naess was committed to nonviolent communication and research.

Naess was not an elitist or a member of the cult of the expert and specialist. He was always willing to take a humble role. His playfulness and curiosity were legendary. He was given to becoming transfixed in observing some tiny thing. On the way to a lecture, he became engrossed in observing an insect he had not seen before. He had to be reminded that he was to be at a lecture soon.

Whether he was reflecting on modesty in mountain climbing, on how to interpret the call for "sustainable development," or when he was investigating the ecology of self, Naess's approach was one of continuous open inquiry, of always going deeper to get to the roots of a problem or issue. Why are we using this policy? Why is this form of education not working? What are our ultimate values? What is the best forestry for this watershed? What values take priority in this development? Naess embodied the spirit of philosophy in its original sense as a loving pursuit of wisdom.

Arne Naess was a pioneer in cross-cultural, interdisciplinary research and especially the study of nonviolent, grassroots, socio-political movements and worldviews. International studies helped him to describe the long range, deep ecology movement as one of the three important global movements of the twentieth century: social justice, world peace, and ecological responsi-



Above: Arne Naess climbing at Kolsås, with his first wife Else Hertzberg. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

Below: Else Hertzberg with Tvergastein in the background, 1940.

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bility. In fact, Naess was the first to use the words deep ecology movement to refer to the international grass-roots ecology movement that is united by a number of platform principles he called the *Eight Points*. The first two principles emphasize the intrinsic value of all beings and of richness and diversity in life-forms and cultures.

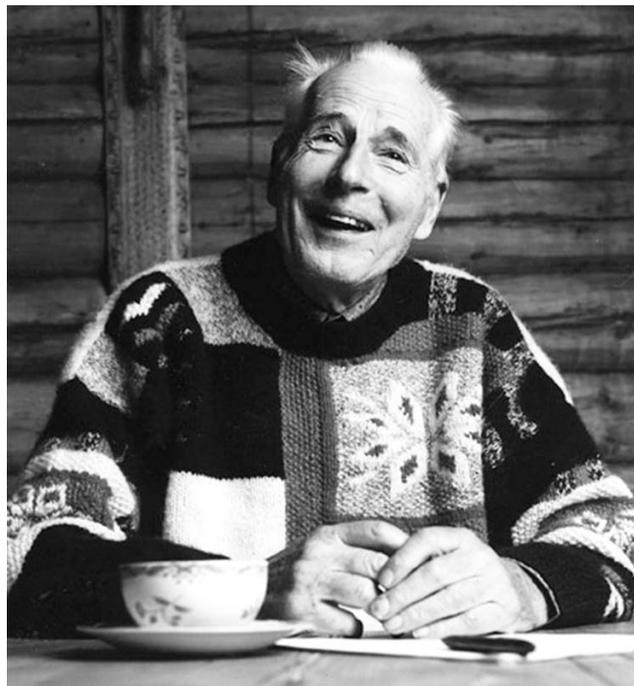
A deep response to the environmental crisis involves getting a “total view,” to use Naess’s words, which goes beyond the forms of knowledge in specialized conventional Western disciplines. A person who wants to live wisely realizes that many environmental problems are not merely technical, but are also personal and local; they have community *and* global dimensions. Their global extent poses the question: How can our diverse human family, living in so many different cultures and places, work together to end violence, improve social justice, promote world peace *and* harmony with nature?

Being with Naess at Tvergastein was to share in details of his personal ecosophy that one would miss when one would have visited him in Oslo. He talks of different things in the two different places: The way he sparingly used water and fuel; the Spartan diet and uncluttered, simple surroundings; the tales about the plant life around the hut; the story of the dream that led to building the Eagle’s Nest, which is a smaller cabin that is now perched high above Tvergastein on the edge of the escarpment cliffs of Mt. Hallingskarvet; the fantastic view from Naess’s desk in the library of the hut looking south over the Hardangervidda, the largest mountain plateau in Norway, which still has large herds of wild reindeer; the tiny and beautiful wild flowers that grow around the hut in which he takes such delight; the joy he gets from appreciating how each rock he picks up is a unique individual with its own story to tell, these and so many other things are part of Naess’s living Ecosophy T with Tvergastein as their home place.

Over the long years, Naess had developed a very deep and extensive identification with this whole place. He knew its geology, history, and its relationships to Norway’s highest mountains, which are immediately to the North, the Jotunheimen. All of this

is interwoven with his love of the mountains and his extensive climbing experience in Norway, and around the world. This was his home place with which he had a deep identification.

Ecological wisdom, as Naess made clear, is not just knowledge and information. It involves intuition and insight that energizes our spirits, minds, feelings, and senses with unified understanding. It gives us an embodied *sense* for our ecos and place. Since we are always learning more about ourselves, other beings, relationships, places and contexts, our sensibilities are constantly modified by new discoveries; our actions are thus guided by awareness of our ignorance and limitations. Diverse ecosophies add to ecological complexity, create greater richness and result in a higher quality of life. Through them we can enjoy friendship with each other, companionship with other beings, community and the joy of living deeply and well in harmony with Nature. From other beings we can learn about their forms of ecosophy or ecological wisdom: in harmony with, and suitable for, their unique and complex deep places.



Arne Naess. PHOTO: NANCY BUNDT, GYLDENDAL NORSK FORLAG