

ARNE NAESS

# Our Mutual Love of Mountains

BY DOLORES LACHAPELLE

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I first met Arne Naess in 1977 just after he had just flown in from Copenhagen, where he had received the Sonningen award, the highest award given in Europe for a contribution to culture. Naess received it for his work on Semantics and Spinoza. After reading my first book, *Earth Festivals*, Paul Shepard and Joe Meeker wrote inviting me to meet with them and Arne to set up The New Natural Philosophy Program for International College. I was staying in a room in Meeker's temporarily leased house in Claremont, California. Joe drove to the airport to pick up Arne, arriving back at the house in the middle of the night; there was such a meeting of minds that we sat and talked for hours. Because I knew that Arne was a mountain climber, I told him that I didn't find the Los Angeles area as bad as I thought I would, because in twenty minutes we could be up on Mt. Baldy.

The next morning, after giving a rigorous philosophy lecture to Paul Shepard's class at Pitzer College, he rushed into the room and said, "Let's go." I asked, "Where?" He said, "Up to Baldy." So we left immediately. Picking up a man who wanted to meet Arne, we drove on and started up the trail in mid-afternoon. As long as the two of us didn't talk we managed to keep up with Arne, but when we stopped to look at a lightning blasted tree, he took off like a mountain goat for the ridge. We continued walking leisurely up to a picnic site. I did Tai Chi and my friend worried.

As the shadows lengthened in late afternoon, he finally spoke aloud of his fears. I told him that Arne was a Himalayan climber and if he died it was because he wanted to, so don't worry. We started back down the trail in order to reach the car before dark.

Arne had seen us turn around from high up on

the ridge so he ran down, passing us on the trail—only stopping long enough to say that because he had on shorts and didn't want to get cold, he would continue running. He added: "If you aren't at the car when I get there, I'll run down the road to keep warm." Of course we got to the car well after he did, so I drove down the road some distance and picked him up. I was astonished at his vitality since at the time he was 64 years old. The night before he had been to a big banquet in Copenhagen for the award ceremony and then flown over from Europe. That morning he had given his lecture to Shepard's class and one would have expected he would be suffering from jet lag. Yet here he was running blithely down the highway. Arne just quietly explained to us that he had hoped to see the desert from that high ridge.

During the ensuing days of meetings Arne and I often took time off to discuss mountains and his work protecting the environment in Norway and helping the Lapps (Sami), in their efforts to keep the highways from cutting the reindeer migration patterns. Arne had climbed often in the Himalayas and was working with the local Sherpas in the valley below the beautiful Mt. Tseringma (Gauri Shankar) so that it would never be climbed. His thought was that one mountain should remain unviolated forever. Unfortunately a few years later an American expedition climbed it anyway. He wrote me in February of 1981 that the mountain "is 'subdued,' the climbers were not of the worst kind and paid some homage to the female deity of exceptional charm and goodness."

Arne had always hoped I would come to Norway to ski with him in the spring time north of the Arctic Circle. At that time of year the snow is covered with surface hoar crystals as large as 4 inches in diameter.

We had discussed skiing on surface hoar crystals because few have ever been so privileged as to ski in these rare crystals. As you ski through these glittering crystals they continuously break with a tinkling sound somewhat like melodious breaking glass. I had only encountered them once in all the sixteen years we lived at the ski resort of Alta, Utah, and the crystals there were a mere one to two inches.

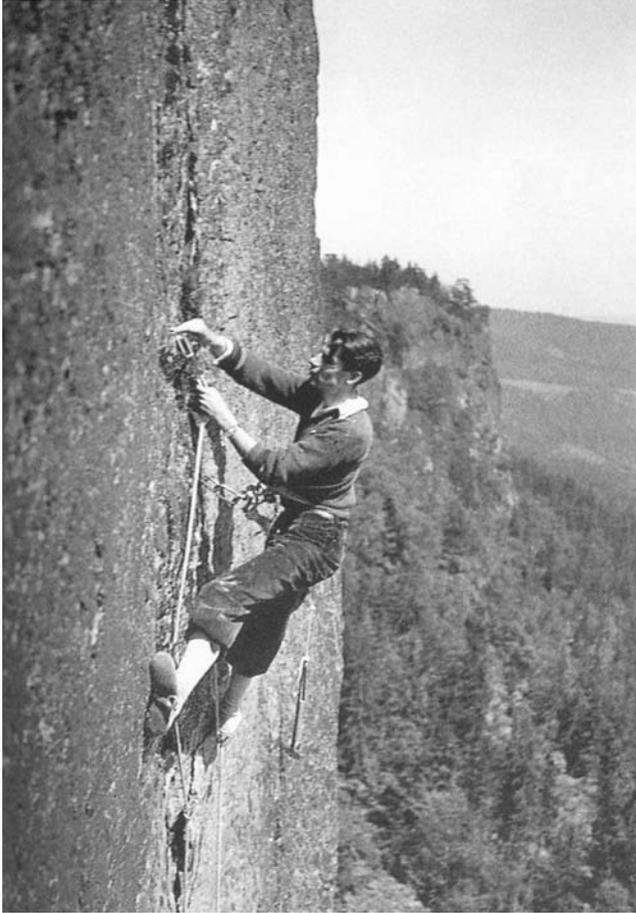
So in June of 1979 he wrote me of his plan. "My idea: You come to Norway this winter, a couple of weeks. Officially as seminar guest, 'Norwegian School of Nature Life,' in Hemsedal, director: Nils Faarlund. I can use my fund to finance the travel. Nils says May 1980 is perfect—the best skiing at that time in the mountains. That meets me also, I am back from China at that time."



Arne climbing near Tvergastein. PHOTO: JOHAN BRUN

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From her home in the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado, Dolores LaChapelle (1926–2007) operated The Way of the Mountain Learning Center—publishing, writing, teaching, skiing, sharing ceremony and music. Dolores was first and foremost a philosopher and researcher. She climbed all 14K (above 14,000 feet) mountains of the Colorado Rockies by age 20. Her books include *Earth Wisdom* (1978), *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex: Rapture of the Deep: Concerning Deep Ecology and Celebrating Life* (1992), and *Deep Powder Snow: Forty Years of Ecstatic Skiing, Avalanches, and Earth Wisdom* (1993).



A young Arne Naess climbing Kolsås. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

But that spring was the Earthday X Colloquium, which introduced the Deep Ecology Movement principles to this country when both George Sessions and I gave papers on that subject; so I never got over to Norway. During the years Arne and I carried on an on-going correspondence which not only concerned environmental matters but also the possibility of skiing together. One year he wrote that he might be able to join me at Alta “with sleeping bag and teapot, of course.”

I want to quote at length from one of the most interesting papers which he sent me, because it was so far ahead of its time then. It was titled “Holism and Ecology” and presented at a conference in 1978 under the sponsorship of the United Nations University Human and Social Development Programme. He discussed “Gestalt-thinking, not atomism.” He states: “A human being is not an organism with an environ-

ment, or a spirit imprisoned in a material world, but an everchanging whole from which we abstract such concepts.” He goes on with a specific example:

Gestalts comprised work relations. Characteristic of the destruction of gestalts due to commercial tourism is the downgrading of their complexity and order until mere esthetical and entertainment aspects remain. Life in the mountains as hunters and gatherers degenerated into anthropocentric “conquests” of mountains. Sherpa feasts in honor of mountains changed into stultifying acclaim of their subduers. One of the great aims of today is the establishment of ecologically sane ways of life in nature, which again implies the reestablishment of work, not mere recuperation or sport, in complex natural settings.

Further on he states “Cultures are now destroyed by means of what today corresponds to the glass-pearls at the time of Livingstone, easy money, industrialization, commercial tourism.” He states that “In general, abstract principles do not work in a vacuum, but in a social framework. The general principles introduce widening concepts of society.” By that he meant also to include wolves, bear, and sheep into the “mixed community,” as he called it.

The type of community which is imbued with ritual such as he mentioned above, “Sherpa feasts in honor of the mountain,” interested him very much, thus he kept in close touch with the work I was doing on this through the years. He sent me a copy of a letter which he had written in August of 1983 to another person because he wanted me to see what he thought of my new book, *Earth Wisdom*.

My own style of thinking and writing is such that I am completely unable and unwilling to write like LaChapelle does, but I appreciate her way and hope many others would follow

her trail. She contributes to the awareness and appreciation of what is left of (more or less) untouched nature. She helps many people to be aware of their own sensitivity and to develop it further. It is impossible for me with my dry style to contribute verbally to this increase of sensitivity. What I sometimes am able to do is to lead people into the mountains in such a way that their awareness increases. But I cannot reach thousands of people that way. To do so is an accomplishment of authors like Dolores LaChapelle.

In 1982 George Sessions sent me an interview with Arne Naess done by Stephan Bodian and published in *The Ten Directions*, a publication of the Zen Center in Los Angeles. In this interview Arne provided the best succinct insight into Deep Ecology of anything yet published. Halfway through the interview, the question is posed: “You coined the term deep ecol-

ogy. What do you mean by deep ecology?”

Arne answers: “The essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions. The adjective ‘deep’ stresses that we ask why and how, where others do not.” Arne refers to the usual way people talk about economic growth and then continues by saying, “But in deep ecology, we ask whether the present society fulfills basic human needs like love and security and access to nature, and, in so doing, we question our society’s underlying assumptions. We ask which society, which education, which form of religion, is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole, and then we ask further what we need to do in order to make the necessary changes.”

When I read the above statement I realized that no one was providing ongoing information on each of these aspects, so I began my annual *Way of the Mountain* newsletter to provide this service. On each issue I print the above statement at the beginning of the newsletter to remind everyone of the real questions.