

sundance
NATURE CENTER

THE WRITTEN WORD

OCEAN MEETS MOUNTAIN

THE CONNECTIVITY OF WATER ON OUR PLANET

by *Jean-Michel Cousteau*

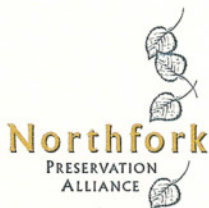


OCEAN MEETS MOUNTAIN
THE CONNECTIVITY OF WATER ON OUR PLANET

by Jean-Michel Cousteau

*Written in celebration of the role that
Sundance plays in discovery.*

Labor Day, 2005



sundance
NATURE CENTER

ON ART AND NATURE
A Series of Commissioned Essays and Poems
2005



OCEAN MEETS MOUNTAIN

THE CONNECTIVITY OF WATER ON OUR PLANET

by Jean-Michel Cousteau

Many years ago, my dear friend, the late John Denver, invited me to Snowmass, Colorado, to lecture at a conference on the environment. As I got up to speak, a witty fellow in the back of the audience shouted, "Hey Cousteau, what's an ocean guy doing in the mountains?"

After a murmur of uneasy chuckles settled in the crowd, I decided this question deserved an answer instead of a rebuke.

"Because my ocean is on top of your mountains," I matter-of-factly responded. My inquisitor, and many in the audience, looked at me with a completely blank stare. It was then that I realized we humans suffer from a serious disconnect with nature, our planet and, most importantly, water.

Many people see land and water as two separate and distinct entities, functioning as independent systems with little or no correlation. This is particularly true of mountains and the ocean. Mountains are here,

the ocean is there. Two points on a map, usually hundreds, if not thousands, of miles apart. Then, there are people who live on the plains, deserts and farmlands of the world who see both mountains and the oceans as exotic locales seldom seen outside vacation posters at the nearest travel agency.

How did this partitioning of the planet occur? The intellectual dilemma is centuries-old. More than 100 years before Nicolaus Copernicus first conceived the structure of the universe, our planet was given the name "Earth." This may have been one of the great mistakes in scientific history.

It's difficult to fault humans in the 15th Century for their decision to label our globe after the firm ground upon which they walked. Yet, had they the perspective of looking at our planet from space, they would have realized that the globe was covered almost three-fourths by water. Our planet should have been named "Ocean," and that different identity may well have altered how we see ourselves and where we live.

For many visitors to Sundance, including myself, the panoramic images of Mt. Timpanogos, autumn-dappled aspens, and dense stands of evergreen trees are the first things that come to mind. Yet, from the



moment I arrived at this special place for the first time, I heard the pulse of nature here...in water. From the glaciers atop the Wasatch Mountains that grow and melt in their seasonal renewal, water drips, runs and pours over Stewart Falls and down through dozens of rivulets into the North Fork, on to the Provo River and beyond. It all begins far away as our ocean perpetually evaporates into clouds, is carried by the winds to this watershed and returns to the earth in snow and rain. Then the cycle begins over again.

If the mountains and forests are the flesh and bones of this planet, water is its circulatory system. Everything in nature is connected, and the singular thread that weaves the global ecosystem is water. From space, it is imperceptible where salt water and fresh water diverge, ever replenishing the living architecture of Earth. One system, one world.

Water shows itself at its most peaceful and its most powerful here at Sundance. After a soothing rain, it is the quiet droplet beaded upon a leaf or spooned at the creek's edge into the beak of a bird. It is also the ancient, crushing force of ice and flood that carved these mountains and etched these canyons millennia ago.

Although pervasive, water is not inexhaustible. It is more precious than gold, diamonds or oil.

Water is the only condition of our lives, without which, the clock starts ticking toward the hours we have left to live.

All species, all life on Earth, is connected irrevocably to water. Humans pollute it, dam it, sell it as a commodity, take its bounty insatiably, and fight over it on a grand scale. Water is the timeless topic of lore. The very origin of the word "rivalry" is to "contest over rivers."

It was on a river, the Amazon, where my guiding philosophy was forged. During an expedition with my father, Jacques, our crew came upon a river otter that had been injured and was partially blind. We nursed the animal slowly back to health and he became a mischievous mascot and a precocious delight for our team aboard Calypso. When



the expedition drew to a close, we faced a dilemma: turn the otter loose in the wild, where it would likely meet a grim fate from predators, or find him a home at a nature refuge.

After much debate, we located a nature preserve that would accommodate our friend. As we loaded equipment into a helicopter, the river otter was loaded aboard as well. Moments later, the helicopter lifted off and disappeared into the sky. People went about their chores and my father and I were suddenly alone along the riverbank, silent except for the sounds of the jungle.

We stared at each other with a quiet sense of loss. It was then that my father turned, put his hands on my shoulders and looked me straight in the eyes.

"You know, Jean-Michel," he said, "people protect what they love."

Clearly, for all of us, we should love the ocean and the water system it creates. For without it, there is nothing left to save.

Sense the water everywhere. Protect what you love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Explorer, environmentalist, educator, film producer--for more than five decades Jean-Michel Cousteau has used his vast experiences to communicate to people of all nations and generations his love and concern for our water planet. With his father, Jacques Cousteau, and his legendary family, he has become a much-honored ambassador for the environment. He has made over 70 films, and been awarded the Emmy, the Peabody Award, the Cable Ace Award, and the 7 d'Or, the highest television prize in France. He was named an "Environmental Hero" by then Vice President Al Gore in 1998, the first "Ocean Hero" in 2003 by Oceana, and was the first to carry the Olympic flag representing the Environment at the 2002 Olympic Winters Games in Salt Lake City. He is the founder and president of Ocean Futures Society.

ABOUT SUNDANCE Nestled at the base of 12,000-foot Mt. Timpanogos, Sundance is a 6,000-acre community preserve dedicated to maintaining the balance of art, nature and community. Sundance offers diverse mountain recreation experiences and encourages the cultivation of art and self-expression, as well as the preservation of the land. Created by Robert Redford, Sundance is a haven for discovery and inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT Sundance Nature Center Commissioned Essays and Poems is made possible, in part, by a generous contribution from Julie and Dwight Anderson.

ABOUT THE SUNDANCE NATURE CENTER This programming arm of the North Fork Preservation Alliance (NFPA), a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization, is run in partnership with Sundance. The center is an important new educational resource and interpretive center for residents and visitors. The Sundance Nature Center showcases the incredible diversity of life in the canyon, and helps people understand why and how we can all be a part of protecting it for future generations. The center provides a fitting complement to Sundance's commitment to nature and the arts.

ABOUT OCEAN FUTURES SOCIETY The mission of Ocean Futures Society is to explore the global ocean, inspiring and educating people throughout the world to act responsibly for its protection. This includes, documenting the critical connection between humanity and nature, and celebrating the ocean's vital importance to the survival of all life on our planet. Ocean Futures Society is based in Santa Barbara, CA, USA and also has offices in Paris and Lucca, Italy.

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Jim Knowlton, Ocean Futures Society
Pages 5: James N. Perdue, www.rvinteractive.com
Pages 2,7: Carrie Vonderhaar, Ocean Futures Society

JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU'S OCEAN FUTURES SOCIETY
325 Chapala Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101
805-899-8899
www.oceanfutures.org

© 2005 Sundance. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written prior permission of Sundance. All rights reserved.

sundance

RR3 BOX A-1, SUNDANCE, UTAH 84604

(8 0 1) 2 2 5 - 4 1 0 0

www.sundanceresort.com