

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/30/2024 5:24:30 PM

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Comments: Wilderness in the US is a finite and non renewable resource. Every step we take into the wild forever changes it's character. But we are no longer a frontiersman's land. Almost every corner of this country has been explored, charted, photographed, and advertised to the public as a place where any reasonably fit and trained person can venture. By reading maps, following trails, and utilizing access roads, we can seek a thrill, unwind in nature, and embrace this beautiful earth.

There is a spectrum of access models across the world, from totally undeveloped arctic wilderness with no established trails to paved guided walks and backcountry huts or inns with hut keepers, hot meals, and even showers.

I do not try to change the Forest Service directive of the degree to which permanent installations allowed in wilderness. I acknowledge that it is their prerogative to decide just how accessible the wilderness is, taking into account many factors including environmental preservation, human footprint, and the level of preparedness required by individuals looking to recreate in wilderness.

Bridges allow hikers and backpackers the convenience of crossing streams and rivers without the risk of injury from crossing on boulders or logs, risk of drowning or hypothermia, burden of carrying waders or other water-crossing equipment. Users could be forced to do such things but doing so adds unnecessary complication, preventing access to recreation for all but the most skillful and adventurous. In the event of an emergency, bridges expedite search and rescue not just for professional teams, but offer a chance for self rescue to victims still able to crutch along a standard trail.

A trail signpost is also an installation, providing guidance to less experienced or unprepared hikers to keep them on the right path, prevent them from getting lost, and inform them of difficulties ahead. A map and compass and diligent and accurate use thereof would accomplish the same.

The bolt is a climber's signpost, and the bolted anchor, a climber's bridge. Both could be done away with if all installations are to be banned in wilderness. But they provide to climbers a convenience that allows less experienced users to access routes in the mountains, give them a chance to retreat quickly in the face of impending weather, and orchestrate a rescue with or without outside assistance.

The US has often tended to be very minimalist in the development of wilderness areas for human access. I support their decision to keep wild places wild. However, this must be equally enforced across all outdoor recreation activities.

Thank you,
Forrest Weller