

EDITORIALS

# Let's plan for more jobs in Back Mountain

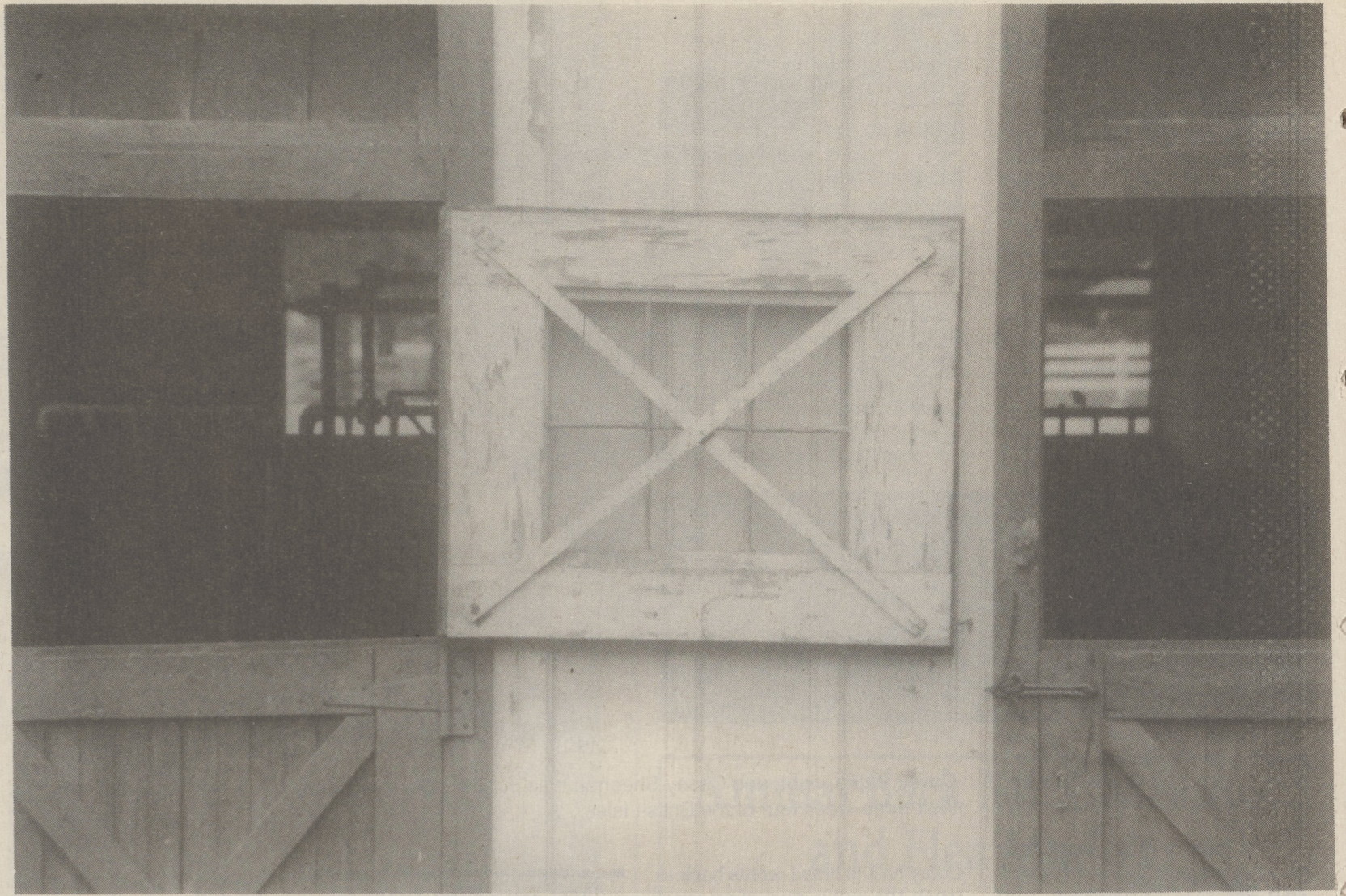
Land use is always an important topic in the Back Mountain, and meaningful strides have been taken to preserve the habitat and vistas that make this region so attractive. There's more to be done, of course, because the pressures of development are continually increasing, and once property has been converted from fields to subdivisions there is no turning back. But there is another side to the land use issue, and a positive response could make a huge difference in the quality and prosperity of our lives.

With a few notable exceptions, the Back Mountain has become a magnet for home building as job-creating development has stagnated. While Mountaintop, Hanover and Plains have become home to substantial new businesses, the number and variety of jobs available here has barely wavered. There has been growth in the retail sector, in response to the larger population, although even that industry hasn't kept pace with its customer base. Manufacturing and technology have probably shown a net loss in recent years, as Native Textiles has closed and ALLTEL prepares to move about 200 employees to Wilkes-Barre. Those jobs paid far better than store clerk positions, and will be sorely missed.

There are undoubtedly many people who will argue that the Back Mountain doesn't need more businesses; that commercial development brings with it yet more traffic congestion, pollution and unsightliness. Why not continue our march toward becoming a classic "bedroom community?" they will say, and leave the dirty work to places we can commute to. That's a valid perspective, but we don't think it's best in the long run. Whatever pollution or inconvenience local industries might create would surely be no greater than that caused by commuting, and the economic benefits would provide funds for amenities that would more than offset any drawbacks.

If the Back Mountain is to develop and retain a strong identity and fiscal health, it must become more self-sufficient. People who both live and work here will naturally pay more attention to the region's government, institutions and environment. If they spend both their work and leisure time near home, they'll find driving to distant malls and shopping centers more inconvenient than appealing. Income and property tax collections will flow to local towns from both employer and employee. The list of benefits is long and obvious.

The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry is preparing a plan for land use after the year 2000. We think the chamber, the Back Mountain Business and Professional Association, local government officials and anyone interested in the long-term prospects of the Back Mountain should plan for responsible light industry and commercial development here, as one component of a master plan to make the best use of the region's resources. Being an affluent suburb has its charms; becoming a healthy, progressive, self-sufficient community is better.



Dutch door, Hillside Farms. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

## A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

I am writing this column on my son's laptop computer in Portland, Oregon. My husband, Mike, and I have spent the past two weeks traveling across the country exploring areas we have never seen before. Along the way, strains of two songs have repeated themselves in my head — "This Land is Your Land" and "America, the Beautiful." Never before have the phrases amber waves of grain and purple mountains' majesty meant so much. Never before have I truly understood the implications of the fact that this land is considered the property of all Americans.

Our Land is a land of contrasts. On the one hand, we were pleasantly surprised that many rest areas in the northern plains were equipped with banks of recycling bins for every conceivable category of trash. But, we were dismayed that the pictures we had seen of the clear cut forest areas in Washington state did not do justice to the actual devastation. The slopes of the mountains are so severe

## This Land is Your Land, for better or worse

that in Pennsylvania no logging would be allowed on them at all. But, there, whole hillsides are devoid of cover. The timber companies have tried to replant, but the soil in many areas erodes before the seedlings can take hold. Large sections are covered only by gravel and rocks where huge trees once stood.

On Saturday we hiked several miles in the Salmon Huckleberry Wilderness Area in the Mt. Hood National Forest. Except for a half dozen small groups of fellow hikers, the only animals we saw were birds and slugs (they have huge banana slugs out here!). Eagle Creek followed our trail and provided background music as it rippled over the rocks Douglas firs sometimes reached diameters of two meters or more (6-8 feet) and, judging from the rings of one downed giant, were in excess of 400 years old. Western red cedars were only slightly smaller. There were hemlock and Oregon maple in abundance. And, most of these trees — both large and small — were festooned with mosses on trunks and branches so that it looked like we were in a fairy tale wonderland. However, on our way in and out of this pristine area, we drove through forest service lands that had been cut and replanted at various times in the past. In one section, the new Douglas firs

were about the size of Christmas trees. Instead of clearing brush and unwanted deciduous trees with axes, the area had been sprayed with herbicides. Everything was brown except for the evergreens.

Contrasts are evident in other ways, also. We drove through areas of western Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois where there had been much too much rain in recent weeks and months. Whole fields were under water or had obviously been planted very late. Bridges were washed out, necessitating long detours. Then we visited areas of the U.S./Canada border region in Saskatchewan and Montana where annual rainfall has been less than the normal by 15 to 20 inches. Fields were very dry. Hay was stockpiled in huge shelters for use when grazing lands were too dry to supply the herds of cattle and for winters after poor harvests of hay.

There are natural contrasts in Minnesota and North Dakota which add variety to the landscape in most interesting ways. On July 25th we were driving on I-94 in Minnesota when we spied a small flock of very large birds. We were not sure what they were until we saw more in a wetland less than a mile further. That precipitated the first of many stops to view birds in the prairie potholes

of the northern plains. These particular large white birds' turned out to be American whitepelicans. Beautiful! We also saw many coots, our first red-necked grebes, and ducks of all kinds. I had read of these pothole habitats but was impressed much more by being there in person.

When people refer to the west as big sky country, they are only partially correct. I would characterize it as simply big. The expanses of fields of wheat and yellow canola plants appear to go on forever. Homes are often two or more miles apart. Range areas encompass whole hills and valleys. I have never seen so much hay in my life. Bustling farm towns are interspersed with dried-out villages where little more than sagebrush survives.

Yes, Our Land is one of contrasts. There are hopeful signs such as the excellent salmon run which we observed at the Seattle locks. And there are strange ironies such as the beautiful Portland train that travels a line where no one wishes to go. Our trip has reinforced my belief that all our struggles and successes are intertwined. We are connected as Americans for better or for worse. Let us take every opportunity to learn from our neighbors and to care about all parts of this marvelous land.

## Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



So, do you think life began on Mars, and was transferred to Earth on a chunk of rock? Or would you rather believe all life in the Universe is contained on our little planet? Until the evidence is stronger, I think you can pick either of these options, or one of many others and feel as confident as Carl Sagan in your convictions.

The supposed piece of Mars that was found to contain — well, *maybe* to contain — evidence of life, raises interesting possibilities. I've never doubted that life, even of the intelligent variety, *might* exist on other planets, although it's a stretch to believe we have cousins on Mars or any other of the orbs in our solar system. There's a very good chance that some planet circling the sun of another solar system among the billions of galaxies is home sweet home to a life form that could rival or surpass humans, assuming the principles of mathematics we've developed are accurate. That doesn't mean I think superior beings from Planet X have visited Earth and are responsible for runways in the Andes or crop circles in Great Britain. I'm a genuine skeptic on that subject; until an alien lands in my backyard and introduces himself, I won't believe they have come to call.

It's good to keep in mind that scientific "discoveries" sometimes turn out to be incorrect, or at least subject to revision. Remember when it was universally believed that dinosaurs were cold blooded? Then, it was thought they might have been warm blooded. I think the latest tack is that, well, some might have been each. So, I wouldn't advise setting up the landing lights just yet; unless you want to attract moths.

## Do you agree? Disagree?

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## As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

You've seen the work of those brainless vandals who deface blank walls with spray-painted swirls and flourishes. Not art exactly, the designs are dictated by the need to keep the can moving and they all seem pretty much the same. And you've read of the few arrests and the drive to ban sales of spray cans to minors. But here's some background you may not be aware of.

It is all, of course, a form of "graffiti," a term derived from an Italian word meaning scribbling or scratching, and something which has been with man almost forever. Ancient buildings had it as often as our modern ones do today. They featured basic graffiti, some of it just about as warped and obscene as those scribbled on modern bathroom stalls.

Graffiti in Pompeii was preserved almost intact when Mt.

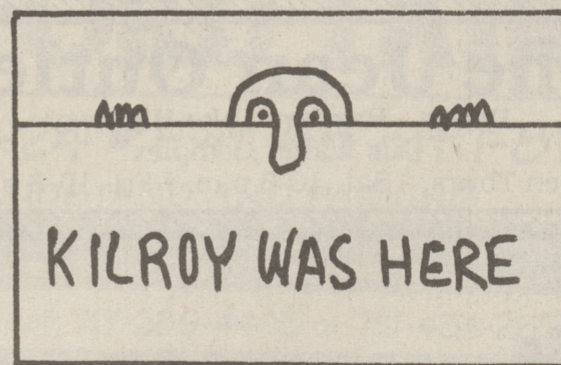
## Ageless signs of the times are found on any available blank surface

Vesuvius erupted in 79 A.D. and buried the city under volcanic ash. Some of it was political: "The United Fruitmen with Helvius Vestalis urge you to make Marcus Holconius Presieum with judiciary powers."

In ancient Rome someone left his message in the catacombs: "While I lived, I lived well. My play is now ended, soon yours will be. Farewell and applaud me." And in a medieval English alehouse: "Claudia lay here/With a young Cavalier/With her Heart full of Fear/For her husband was near."

Humor abounded. This message appeared in frontier American courthouses: "Patrons are forbidden to leave seat while bowls are in motion." And who, remembering outhouses, can ever forget that timeless classic, "Here I sit, brokenhearted..." (Sorry, there is no way I can finish that one here.)

Graffiti artists liked messages, like these from bathroom walls:



WORLD WAR II GRAFFITI

"You're never alone with schizophrenia." "We are the people our parents warned us about;" "Marie Montessori taut me to rite at age too;" "Carry me back to old virginity;" and "May your life be like a roll of toilet paper - long and useful."

Sometimes griffitists start talking back to each other and a dialogue takes place. One wrote, "My mother made me a homosexual" and scribbled underneath was the reply, "Will she make me one too?"

How much wool does she need?"

The notorious Kilroy became familiar and duplicated by many WWII vets...a simple line drawing of a fence with a long-nosed face peering over it, two sets of fingers on either side, and the slogan "KILROY WAS HERE."

Supposedly Kilroy was an infantry soldier who got tired of hearing the Air Force brag that it was always first on the spot. Kilroy certainly showed up in unbelievable places, like the top of the Statue of Liberty and in the bathroom reserved for Truman, Stalin and Attlee at the Potsdam Conference.

Graffiti is not about to die out or be legislated away. It is free, it is uncensored, and the slight discovery risk makes it a daring thing to do, the sort of thing man has never been able to resist.

A New York bathroom stall says it all: "Everything has its place, even the stupid writings in this cold john. Amen."

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