WISDOM SITS IN PLACES

LANDSCAPE AND LANGUAGE AMONG THE WESTERN APACHE

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“The Trail of Wisdom”

June 7, 1982. The foregoing thoughts would have mattered little to Dudley Patterson or the two other horsemen, Sam Endfield and Charles Cromwell, with whom he was speaking on a late spring day some fifteen years ago. Having spent nearly ten hours sorting steers and branding calves, the horsemen were resting in a grove of juniper trees
several miles from their homes at Cibecue. The heat of the afternoon was still intense, and as the men waited for it to subside, their talk was of their trade: the habits and foibles of horses and the dozens of things one needs to keep in mind when working excitable cattle in rough and rocky country. Expert riders all, and intimately familiar with the rugged lands they had explored together for more than forty years, they spoke quietly of such matters, exchanging observations about Dudley's bay mare (strong and quick but reluctant to trot through heavy stands of brush), Sam's roan gelding (gentle and cooperative but apt to bite when hastily bridled), and the spotted maverick bull with curled horns and faulty vision in one eye who could be safely approached from the left side but not from the right. Western Apache shop talk: relaxed, confident, endlessly informative, rising and falling on the soft phonemic tones of the Athapaskan language the horsemen speak with total fluency. As an aspiring speaker of the language and a would-be horseman myself, I am completely absorbed.  

A few minutes later, the group beneath the trees is joined by another man on horseback, Talbert Paxton, who is highly regarded as an accomplished roper and a fearless rider in pursuit of bolting cattle. Considerably younger than Dudley Patterson and his companions, Talbert has worked with them many times before, but for the past three weeks, painfully upset over the collapse of a month-long love affair, he has thrown himself into other sorts of activities—such as drinking prodigious quantities of beer, spreading unfounded rumors about the woman who rejected him, and proposing sex to several other women who either laughed in his face or promised to damage his testicles if he took one more step in their direction. Normally restrained and unquestionably intelligent, Talbert had lost control of himself. He had become a nuisance of the first order, an unruly boister and an irritating bore, and the residents of Cibecue were more than a little annoyed. 

Nothing is said of this or anything else as Talbert dismounts, tethers his horse to a tree, and sits himself on the ground at a respectable distance from his senior associates. Charles nods him a wordless greeting, Sam does the same, and Dudley announces to no one in particular that it certainly is hot. Talbert remains silent, his eyes fixed intently on the pointed toes of his high-heeled boots. Charles disposes of a well-chewed plug of tobacco, Sam attacks a hangnail with his pocketknife, and Dudley observes that the grass is certainly dry. A long moment passes before Talbert finally speaks. What he says deals with neither the elevated temperature nor the parched condition of the Cibecue range. In a soft and halting voice he reports that he has been sober for three days and would like to return to work. He adds that he is anxious to get away from the village because people there have been gossiping about him. Worse than that, he says, they have been laughing at him behind his back. 

It is a candid and touching moment, and I expect from the smiles that appear on the faces of the senior horsemen that they will respond to Talbert's disclosures with accommodating expressions of empathy and approval. But what happens next—a short sequence of emphatically delivered assertions to which Talbert replies in kind—leaves me confused. My bewilderment stems not from a failure to understand the linguistic meanings of the utterances comprising the interchange; indeed, their overt semantic content is simple and straightforward. What is perplexing is that the utterances arrive as total non sequiturs, as statements I cannot relate to anything that has previously been said or done. Verbal acts without apparent purpose or interactional design, they seem totally unconnected to the social context in which they are occurring, and whatever messages they are intended to convey elude me entirely. 

A grinning Dudley speaks first:

Héla! Gízhya‘ítiné dį‘ nandzaa né.
(So! You’ve returned from Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills!)

Followed by a brightly animated Charles:

Héla! ‘lntsá‘ á nadahí nítiyee ní.
(So! You got tired walking back and forth!)

Followed by Sam, on the verge of laughter:

Héla! ‘líizh dictlíi daho’higo bił‘ ‘óohindzii né.
(So! You’ve smelled enough burning piss!)

Followed by Talbert, who is smiling now himself:

Dí‘ji dógosh‘ijdá. (For a while I couldn’t see!)
Followed once more by Dudley:

Da'andii! Gizhyaa'itíiné goyiajo 'áníla' doolee. 'Iská da ñaa naiłdziig. (Truly! Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills will make you wise. We'll work together tomorrow.)

The sudden burst of talk ends as abruptly as it began, and silence again prevails in the shady grove of juniper trees. Nothing more will be said. Still chuckling, Sam Endfield rises from the ground, walks to his horse, and swings smoothly into his saddle. Moments later, the rest of us follow suit. Talbert departs on a trail leading north to the home of one of his sisters. Sam and Charles and Dudley head north-west to a small pasture where they keep their extra mounts. I ride alone toward the trading post at Cibecue, wondering what to have for supper and trying to make sense of the events I have just witnessed. But to no avail. What the place named Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills has to do with too much walking back and forth, burning urine, and making young men wise are things I do not know. And why mentioning them succeeded in lifting everyone's spirits, including those of the troubled Talbert Paxton, remains a puzzling question.

June 12, 1982. Three days later, Dudley Patterson would begin to supply the answer. Short of stature and trim of build, the 54-year-old horseman presents a handsome figure as he emerges from the small wooden house where he has lived by himself since the death of his wife in 1963. Dressed in freshly laundered Levis, a red-checked shirt, and a cream-colored straw hat, he moves with the grace of a natural athlete, and it strikes me as he approaches that nothing about him is superfluous. Just as his actions are instinctually measured and precise, so is the manner in which he speaks, sings, and dances with friends and relatives at religious ceremonials. But he is also given to joking and laughter, and whenever he smiles, which is much of the time, his angular countenance lights up with an abundance of irrepressible good will. Expert cattleman, possessor of horse power, dutiful kinsman without peer, no one in Cibecue is more thoroughly liked than Dudley Patterson. And few are more respected. For along with everything else, Dudley is known to be wise.

It was the merits of wisdom, Dudley informs me over a cup of boiled coffee, that Talbert Paxton needed to be reminded of earlier in the week. But before discussing that, Dudley inquires whether I have lately visited Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills, the place whose name is Gizhyaa'itíiné. I tell him I have. Located a few miles north of Cibecue, its Apache name describes it well—two wooded knolls of similar size and shape with a footpath passing between them that descends to a grassy flat on the west bank of Cibecue Creek. And did I notice the big cottonwood tree that stands a few yards back from the stream? I did—a gigantic tree, gnarled and ancient, with one huge limb that dips to touch the ground before twisting upward and reaching toward the sky (fig. 8). And had anyone from Cibecue told me what happened long ago at Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills?
No, only that the widow of a man named Blister Boy once planted corn nearby. Had I never heard the stories about Old Man Owl, the one called Mih hasiin? No, never. Well then, listen.

Long ago, right there at that place, there were two beautiful girls. They were sisters. They were talking together.

Then they saw Old Man Owl walking towards them. They knew what he was like. He thought all the time about doing things with women. Then they said, “Let’s do something to him.”

Then one of those girls went to the top of one of the hills. Her sister went to the top of the other one. As Old Man Owl was walking between them, the first girl called out to him. “Old Man Owl, come here! I want you to rub me between my legs!” He stopped. He got excited! So he started to climb the hill where the girl was sitting.

Then, after Old Man Owl got halfway to the top, the second girl called out to him. “Old Man Owl, I want you to rub me gently between my legs!” He stopped! He got even more excited! So he turned around, walked down the hill, and began to climb the other one.

Then, after he got halfway to the top, the first girl called out to him again in the same way. He stopped! Now he was very excited! So Old Man Owl did the same thing again. He forgot about the second girl, walked down the hill, and began climbing the other one.

It happened that way four times. Old Man Owl went back and forth, back and forth, climbing up and down those hills.

Then those beautiful girls just laughed at him.

Fairly beaming with amusement and delight, Dudley wastes little time beginning a second story about Old Man Owl at Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills.

Those same two sisters were there again. I don’t know why, maybe they went there often to get water.

Then Old Man Owl was walking towards them. They decided they would do something to him.

Then one of the girls climbed into the branches of a big cottonwood tree that was growing there. The other girl went to the top of one of those hills.

Then the girl in the tree lifted her skirt and spread her legs slightly apart. She remained motionless as Old Man Owl walked beneath her. Suddenly, he looked up! He had noticed something!

Now he got very excited! “Hmm,” he thought, “that tree looks a lot like a woman. I really like the way it looks! I’d best bring it home. I think I’ll burn it down.” His eyesight was very poor. Old Man Owl was very nearly blind.

Then, having piled some grass at the base of the tree, Old Man Owl set fire to it. The girl in the tree pised on it and quickly put it out. Old Man Owl looked all around. “Where’s that rain coming from?” he said. “I don’t see any clouds.” So he started another fire at the base of the tree and the girl pised on it again and quickly put it out. Now he was very confused. The other girl, the one on top of the hill, could hear all that Old Man Owl was saying to himself. She was really laughing!

Then Old Man Owl did the same thing again. He started another fire and the girl in the tree pised on it and put it out.

He was looking around again. “Where’s that rain coming from? Where’s that rain coming from? I don’t see any clouds! There are no clouds anywhere! Something must be wrong!”

Then he tried one more time and the girl in the tree did the same thing again. Old Man Owl stood there shaking his head. “Something must be very wrong!” he said. “I’d better go home.” He walked away with his head hanging down.

Then those two beautiful girls joined each other and laughed and laughed. They were really laughing at Old Man Owl.

As Dudley Patterson closes his narrative, he is laughing himself. It is obvious that he relishes the stories of Old Man Owl. Moments later, after pouring us another cup of coffee, he as much as says so—the stories are very old, he has heard them many times, and they always give him pleasure. Besides being humorous, he says, they make
him think of the ancestors—the wise ones, he calls them—the people who first told the stories at a time when humans and animals communicated without difficulty. These are thoughts I have heard expressed, before, by Dudley and other Apache people living at Cibecue, and I know they are strongly felt. But I have yet to learn how the tales of Old Man Owl played into the episode involving Talbert Paxton. If the point was to inform Talbert that beautiful women can be deceiving, or perhaps should not be trusted, or sometimes enjoy toying with the emotions of unsuspecting men, why hadn’t the horsemen just come out and said so? Why had they beat around the bush?

Uncertain of how to ask this question in Apache, I attempt to convey it in English, which Dudley understands with more than fair success. He catches on quickly to the thrust of my query and proceeds to answer it with gratifying thoroughness. Speaking for Charles and Sam as well as himself, he explains that there were several reasons for dealing with Talbert as they did. To have criticized Talbert explicitly—to have told him in so many words that his recent behavior was foolish, offensive, and disruptive—would have been insulting and condescending. As judged from Talbert’s apologetic demeanor, he had reached these conclusions himself, and to inform him openly of what he already knew would be to treat him like a child. In addition, because Talbert was unrelated to ties of kinship to either Dudley or Sam, and because he was related only distantly to Charles, none of them possessed the requisite authority to instruct him directly on matters pertaining to his personal life; this was the proper responsibility of his older matrilineal kinsmen. Moreover, the horsemen were fond of Talbert. He was a friendly young man, quiet and congenial, whose undemanding company and propensity for hard work they very much appreciated. Last, and beyond all this, Dudley and his companions wanted Talbert to remember what they would urge upon him by attaching it to something concrete, something fixed and permanent, something he had seen and could go to see again—a place upon the land.

So the horsemen took a circuitous tack—respectful, tactful, and fully in keeping with their status as nonrelatives—with Dudley leading the way. His opening statement to Talbert—"So! You’ve returned from Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills"—was intended to focus the young man’s attention on the place where Old Man Owl encountered the two Apache sisters and to summon thoughts of what transpired there. Dudley’s comment was also meant to suggest that Talbert, having acted in certain respects like Old Man Owl himself, would be well-advised to alter his conduct. But in presupposing that Talbert was already aware of this—in announcing that he had returned from Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills—Dudley’s comment also affirmed his friend’s decision to refrain from drinking and resume a normal life. Thus, in a sidelong but deftly pointed way, Dudley was criticizing Talbert’s misguided behavior and at the same time commending him for rejecting it as unacceptable.

The ensuing statements by Charles and Sam—"So! You got tired walking back and forth!" and "So! You’ve smelled enough!"—sharpened and consolidated these themes, further likening Talbert to Old Man Owl by alluding to key events in the stories that recount his misadventures with the pair of beautiful girls. But these assertions, like Dudley’s before them, were couched in the past tense, thereby implying that Talbert’s resolve to behave differently in the future was a good and welcome development. The horsemen’s strategy must have worked successfully because Talbert responded by tacitly admitting that his actions had indeed resembled those of Old Man Owl; simultaneously, however, he registered his belief that the resemblance had come to an end. In effect, his reply to the horsemen—"For a while I couldn’t see!"—conveyed a veiled confession of improper conduct and an implicit declaration not to repeat it. But more was conveyed than this. At one level, Talbert’s statement intimated a forcefully simple truth: he had been cold sober for three days and now, having recovered his physical senses, could again see clearly. But at another level, and perhaps more forcefully still, the truth was allegorical. Unlike the myopic Old Man Owl, who never curbed his sexual appetites and remained hopelessly at odds with everyone around him, Talbert was intimating that he had regained his social senses as well. Obliquely but sincerely, he was informing the horsemen that his moral vision had been restored.

Which was just what Dudley Patterson wanted to hear. As Dudley told Talbert before he left to go home, his imaginary visit to Trail
Goes Down Between Two Hills would help make him wise. And maybe it would. With assistance from Old Man Owl and his two alluring tormentors, Talbert had been firmly chastised and generously pardoned, all in the space of a minute in which no one uttered a harsh or demeaning word. In a very real sense, involving at base a vividly animated sense of place, Talbert had been taken back into an important segment of the Cibecue community. He would return to work tomorrow, and that was why the horsemen, including Talbert himself, were still smiling broadly when they left the grove of juniper trees and went their separate ways.

Back at his house in Cibecue, Dudley Patterson drains his cup of coffee and leans forward in his chair. On the ground near his feet a band of red ants is dismantling the corpse of a large grasshopper, and within seconds the intricate patterns of their furious activity have captured his attention. This does not surprise me. I have known Dudley for twelve years and on other occasions have seen him withdraw from social encounters to keep counsel with himself. I also know that he is mightily interested in red ants and holds them in high esteem. I would like to ask him a few more questions, but unless he invites me to do so (and by now, I suspect, he may have had enough) it would be rude to disturb him. He has made it clear that he wants to be left alone.

We sit quietly together for more than ten minutes, smoking cigarettes and enjoying the morning air, and I try to picture the cottonwood tree that towers beside the stream at Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills. I am keenly aware that my perception of the tree has changed. The stories of Old Man Owl make its impressive size seem decidedly less important, and what strikes me as never before is its standing in the Cibecue community as a visible embodiment of myth, a leafy monument to Apache ancestral wisdom. I am also aware that the place-name identifying the tree’s location—Gizhyaa’itine—has taken on a vibrant new dimension. Formerly nothing more than a nicely descriptive toponym, it has acquired the stamp of human events, of consequential happenings, of memorable times in the life of a people. As a result, the name seems suddenly fuller, somehow larger, endowed with added force. Because now, besides evoking images of a piece of local countryside, it calls up thoughts of fabled deeds and the singular cast of actors who there played them out. Gizhyaa’itine. Repeating the place-name silently to myself, I decide that Dudley Patterson’s narratives have transformed its referent from a geographical site into something resembling a theater, a natural stage upon the land (vacant now but with props still fully intact) where significant moral dramas unfolded in the past. Gizhyaa’itine. In my mind’s eye, I can almost see the beautiful Apache sisters . . . really laughing at Old Man Owl.

Still engrossed in his ants, Dudley remains oblivious to the sights and sounds around him—a pair of ravens perched on his tool shed, the distant wailing of a distressed child, a vicious dogfight that erupts without warning in the tall grass behind his house. It is only when his older sister arrives on foot with a dishpan filled with freshly made tortillas that he glances up and sets his thoughts aside. He explains to Ruth Patterson that he has been talking to me about the land and how it can make people wise. “Wisdom,” Ruth says firmly in Apache. “It’s difficult!” And then, after inviting me to stay and eat with them, she enters Dudley’s house to prepare a simple meal. Ruth’s remark prompts a surge of ethnographic gloom, forcing me to acknowledge that I know next to nothing about Apache conceptions of wisdom. In what is wisdom thought to consist? How does one detect its presence or absence? How is it acquired? Do persons receive instruction in wisdom or is it something they arrive at, or fail to arrive at, entirely on their own? And why is it, as Ruth had said, that wisdom is “difficult”? If I am to understand something of how places work to make people wise, an arresting idea I find instantly compelling, these are matters I must try to explore.

And who better to explore them with than Dudley Patterson? He is known to be wise—many people have said so—and I have to begin somewhere. So without further ado I put the question to him: “What is wisdom?” Dudley greets my query with a faintly startled look that recedes into a quizzical expression I have not seen before. “It’s in these places,” he says. “Wisdom sits in places.” Hesitant but unenlightened, I present the query again. “Yes, but what is it?” Now it is Dudley’s turn to hesitate. Removing his hat, he rests it on his lap and gazes into the distance. As he continues to look away, the suspicion
grows that I have offended him, that my question about wisdom has exceeded the limits of propriety and taste. Increasingly apprehensive, I feel all thumbs, clumsy and embarrassed, an impulsive dolt who acted without thinking. What Dudley is feeling I cannot tell, but in less than a minute he rescues the situation and I am much relieved. “Wisdom sits in places,” he says again. And then, unbidden, he begins to tell me why.

Long ago, the people moved around all the time. They went everywhere looking for food and watching out for enemies. It was hard for them. They were poor. They were often hungry. The women went out with their daughters to gather acorns, maybe walnuts. They went in search of all kinds of plants. Some man with a rifle and bullets always went with them. He looked out for danger.

Then they got to a good place and camped there. All day they gathered acorns. The women showed their daughters how to do it. Now they stopped working for a little while to eat and drink.

Then one of the women talked to the girls. “Do you see that mountain over there? I want you to look at it. Its name is Dził Ndeezé (Long Mountain). Remember it! Do you know what happened long ago close to that mountain? Well, now I’m going to tell you about it.” Then she told them a story about what happened there. After she had finished she said, “Well, now you know what happened at Long Mountain. What I have told you is true. I didn’t make it up. I learned it from my grandmother. Look at that mountain and think about it! It will help make you wise.”

Then she pointed to another place and did the same way again. “Do you see that spring over there? Look at it! Its name is Dobject Bigowñé (Fly’s Camp).” Now she told them a story about that place, too. “Think about it,” she said. “Someday, after you have grown up, you will be wise,” she said. Everywhere they went they did like that. They gave their daughters place-names and stories. “You should think about this,” they said.

The same was done with boys. They went hunting for deer with their fathers and uncles. They didn’t come home until they had killed many deer. Everyone was happy when they came back. Now they had meat to eat.

Then, when they were out hunting, one of the men would talk to the boys. “Do you see where the trail crosses the wash? Look at it! Its name is Ma’ Tłihilzhé (Coyote Pisses In The Water). Something happened there long ago. I’m going to tell you about it.” Now he told the story to them. “Don’t forget it,” he said. “I want you to think about it. Someday it’s going to make you wise.”

Then they would stop at some other place. “This place is named Tsée Deeschii’ Ts’ysé (Slender Red Rock Ridge). Something happened here, also,” he said. He told them that story. “Remember what I have told you,” he said.

It was like that. The people who went many places were wise. They knew all about them. They thought about them. I’ve been all over this country. I went with my grandfather when I was a boy. I also traveled with my uncles. They taught me the names of all these places. They told me stories about all of them. I’ve thought about all of them for a long time. I still remember everything.

Sitting with my back to Dudley’s house, I cannot see that Ruth Patterson has come to the door and is listening to her brother as he speaks of places and wisdom. I sense her presence, however, and when I turn around she is looking at me, her comely face arranged in what I interpret as a sympathetic smile. “It’s true,” she says in a bright tone of voice. “Everything he says is true. It happened that way to me.”

One time—I was a young girl then—I went with my mother to Nadah Nch’ii’élé (Bitter Agave). That was in 1931. We went there to roast agave. There were other people with us, quite a few of them. They were all my relatives.

Then we made camp, right below that point at the north end of the mountain. We camped by the spring there. My mother was in charge of everything. She told us what to do.
Then we dug up a lot of agave and brought it back to camp. It was hard work. It was hot. We were young girls then. We weren't yet strong and got tired easily. We really wanted to rest.

Then my mother talked to us. "You should only rest a little while. Don’t be lazy. Don’t think about getting tired. If you do, you’ll get careless and something might happen to you."

Then she told a story. "Maybe you’ve heard this story, but I’m going to tell it to you anyway." She pointed to that mountain named Túzh’ Yaahigaiýé (Whiteness Spreads Out Descending To Water). "It happened over there," she said to us.

"Long ago, on the east side of that mountain, there were lots of dead oak trees. There was a woman living with her family not far away. ‘We’re almost out of firewood,’ she said to one of her daughters. ‘Go up there and bring back some of that oak.’

"Then that girl went up there. She started to gather firewood. It was very hot and she got tired fast. ‘I’m getting tired,’ she thought. ‘I’ve already got enough firewood. I'll go back home.’

"Then she picked up as much firewood as she could carry. She started walking down to her camp. She got careless. She stepped on a thin flat rock. It looked strong, but she forgot she was carrying all that heavy oak. The rock broke when she stepped on it. She stumbled and fell down. She hit her head on the ground. For a while she was unconscious.

"Then she came to and noticed that she was bleeding from cuts on her cheek and chin. She walked unsteadily back to her camp. She told her mother what had happened.

"Then her mother talked to her. ‘You acted foolishly but you’re going to be all right. You failed to see danger before it happened. You could have fallen off the trail and gotten killed on those sharp rocks below it. You were thinking only of yourself. That’s why this happened to you.’"

That’s the end of the story. After my mother told it to us, she spoke to us again. "Well, now you know what happened over there at Whiteness Spreads Out Descending To Water. That careless girl almost lost her life. Each of you should try to remember this. Don’t forget it. If you remember what happened over there, it will help make you wise."

Then we went back to work, digging up more of agave. I got tired again—it was still very hot—but this time I didn’t think about it. I just tried not to be careless.

Nowadays, hardly anyone goes out to get agave. Very few of us do that anymore. The younger ones are afraid of hard work. Even so, I’ve told that story to all my children. I’ve told them to remember it.

I thank Ruth for telling me her story. She smiles but her eyes have filled with tears. Unable to stem the rush of her emotion, she turns away and goes back inside the house. Dudley is not visibly concerned. He explains that Ruth is recalling her youth. That was during the 1920s and 1930s when Ruth and her sisters were still unmarried and worked almost daily under the close supervision of their mother and two maternal aunts. Back then, Dudley says, Cibecue was different. There were fewer people and life was less centered on the village itself. Whole Apache families, including Dudley’s own, spent weeks and months away upon the land—tending cornfields, roasting agave, hunting deer, and journeying to remote cattle camps where they helped the horsemen build fences and corrals. The families traveled long distances—old people and children alike, on foot and horseback, through all kinds of weather, carrying their possessions in heavy canvas packs over narrow trails that now have all but vanished. It was a hard way to live—there were times when it got very hard—but the people were strong and hardly ever complained. They had able leaders who told them what to do, and despite the hardships involved they took pleasure in their journeys. And wherever they went they gave place-names and stories to their children. They wanted their children to know about the ancestors. They wanted their children to be wise. Ruth is remembering all of this, Dudley reports, and it makes her a little sad.

The aging horseman leans back in his chair, crossing a boot over his knee, and spins the rowel of his spur. Vrmmm! He does this from
time to time when he is thinking serious thoughts. He rolls a cigarette and lights it with a battered Zippo he has carried for years. *Vmmnn!* Spinning and smoking at the same time—his thoughts must be serious indeed. Several minutes pass before he speaks. When he does, he tells me that he has not forgotten my question: "What is wisdom?" He now intends to address it. He will use his own language, and to help me understand he will try to keep things simple. He stubs out his cigarette, rolls and lights another one, and then goes to work. *Vmmnn!* What follows is poetry and a great deal more about wisdom.

The trail of wisdom—that is what I'm going to talk about. I'm going to speak as the old people do, as my grandmother spoke to me when I was still a boy. We were living then at Ták'eh Godzigé (Rotten Field).

"Do you want a long life?" she said. "Well, you will need to have wisdom. You will need to think about your own mind. You will need to work on it. You should start doing this now. You must make your mind steady. You must make your mind resilient.

"Your life is like a trail. You must be watchful as you go. Wherever you go there is some kind of danger waiting to happen. You must be able to see it before it happens.

You must always be watchful and alert. You must see danger in your mind before it happens.

"If your mind is not smooth you will fail to see danger. You will trust your eyes but they will deceive you. You will be easily tricked and fooled. Then there will be nothing but trouble for you. You must make your mind smooth.

"If your mind is not resilient you will be easily startled. You will be easily frightened. You will try to think quickly but you won't think clearly. You yourself will stand in the way of your own mind. You yourself will block it. Then there will be trouble for you. You must make your mind resilient.

"If your mind is not steady you will be easily angered and upset. You will be arrogant and proud. You will look down on other people. You will envy them and desire their possessions. You will speak about them without thinking.

You will complain about them, gossip about them, criticize them. You will lust after their women. People will come to despise you. They will pay someone to use his power on you. They will want to kill you. Then there will be nothing but trouble for you. You must make your mind steady. You must learn to forget about yourself.

"If you make your mind smooth, you will have a long life. Your trail will extend a long way. You will be prepared for danger wherever you go. You will see it in your mind before it happens.

"How will you walk along this trail of wisdom? Well, you will go to many places. You must look at them closely. You must remember all of them. Your relatives will talk to you about them. You must remember everything they tell you. You must think about it, and keep on thinking about it, and keep on thinking about it. You must do this because no one can help you but yourself. If you do this your mind will become smooth. It will become steady and resilient.

You will stay away from trouble. You will walk a long way and live a long time.

"Wisdom sits in places. It's like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive, don't you? Well, you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened at them long ago. You must think about it and keep on thinking about it. Then your mind will become smoother and smoother. Then you will see danger before it happens. You will walk a long way and live a long time. You will be wise. People will respect you."

*Vmmnn!* Rising to his feet without another word, Dudley walks away in the direction of his outhouse. His suspicions were correct; I have had trouble grasping his statement on wisdom. No one from Cibecue has broached this subject with me before, and few have spoken with such eloquence and grace. I am moved by what I have heard but uncertain of what to make of it. And understandably so. Dudley delivered his comments in a distinctive verbal register characterized
by conspicuous grammatical parallelism, marked lexical redundancy, and the measured repetition of several dominant metaphors. This resembles the language of Western Apache prayer, and therein lies one of my problems. While the economy of Dudley’s speech rendered portions of his statement readily accessible, the metaphors that anchored it—boldly figured, densely compressed, and probably very old—stood well beyond my reach. What, for example, is a “smooth mind”? A “resilient mind”? A “steady mind”? There is another problem as well. I can safely assume that Dudley’s account was supported throughout by a covert cultural logic that imbued its claims with validity and truth. Yet it is unclear to me what that logic is. What sort of reasoning supports the assertion that “wisdom sits in places”? Or that “wisdom is like water”? Or that “drinking from places,” whatever that is, requires knowledge of place-names and stories of past events? Maybe I have gotten in over my head. Dudley’s statement caught me off guard and has left me feeling unmoored. For a split second I imagine myself a small uprooted plant bouncing crazily through the air on a whirlwind made of ancient Apache tropes.

When Dudley returns he is smiling. “Did you understand?” I shake my head. “No, not much.” Ruth is also smiling. She is standing in the doorway and looks fully recovered from her bout with nostalgia. She has combed her hair and is sporting the triumphant look of one who knew all along. “I told you!” she says sharply. “It’s difficult! Now my brother has made you think too much. Now your brain is really tired! Now you look kind of sick!” Ruth’s assessment of my mental and physical condition does little to improve it, and I look to Dudley for help. “I gave you too much at once,” he says. “You just need to think about it.” Ruth agrees. “That’s right! You really need to think about it!” Then she flashes her broadest smile and tells us our food is ready.

But before we go inside Ruth presents us with a suggestion. On the coming weekend, when the horsemen will be off work, Dudley and I will catch up our horses and go for a ride. It might last all day, so we will need to take food. Ruth will provide the fresh tortillas. I will contribute two cans of sardines, a box of Ritz crackers, a slab of longhorn cheese, and four bottles of Barg’s root beer. Dudley will take me to different places, teach me their names, and tell me what happened at them long ago. Then, maybe, I will understand something. When we get back home Dudley will speak to me in English—"Boy Keez, I’ll see you sometime." Then he will leave me alone to think. In return for these services, he will receive two sacks of flour, two cans of MJB coffee, one sack of sugar, a pail of Crisco, and twenty dollars cash. Now, what about it? For all her endearing qualities—and she has them in abundance—Ruth Patterson is not a person to challenge when her mind is made up, and Dudley, who on prior occasions has pointed this out himself, wastes no time in endorsing her plan. Neither do I. “Good!” says Ruth, whose reputation also embraces an unswerving willingness to capitalize on promising business opportunities whenever they arise. “Good!” she says again. “My brother will help you out. I think you’ll really like it.”

“Wisdom Sits in Places”

June 15, 1982. Even the most experienced horsemen occasionally get hurt. That is what people say as news of Dudley’s mishap circulates through Cibecue. Yesterday, trailing the spotted maverick bull with poor eyesight at the base of a rocky slope named Tsé Deeshí’é (Long Red Ridge), Dudley’s mare lost her footing, went down hard, and abandonned her rider to walk home with bruised ribs, a dislocated shoulder, and a badly swollen lip. Dudley’s first concern was for the welfare of the mare, who returned to her pasture later in the day with nothing more than a few minor scrapes and a glassy look in her eye. This morning, wrapped in a homemade sling that keeps slipping off, Dudley is stiff and sore and in excellent spirits. We sit on the porch of his house as visitors come and go. Ruth has launched a get-well campaign whose main objectives are to accumulate gifts of thick beef broth and to surround her brother with as many children as possible. The children come in shifts to stand beside his chair. He tells them the story of his mishap, and their eyes grow wide with excitement, and he smiles his warmest smile and tells them to be careful around horses and cattle. A little girl steps forward and gives him her orange Popsicle. As I stand to leave, Dudley tells me to come back tomorrow—things will be less busy and we can speak again of matters raised before. I accept his invitation. A small boy approaches his chair and hands him
a piece of bubblegum. Dudley is delighted. Ruth’s campaign is already a success. Dudley will rejoin the horsemen in less than a week. Our ride together has been postponed.

June 16–19, 1982. For the next four days—drinking coffee, watching ants, and pausing now and then to speak of other things—Dudley and I engaged in a series of conversations about his earlier statement on wisdom and places. At my request, we began by examining some of the statement’s linguistic features, focusing attention on the morphology and semantics of its several primary tropes. We then moved on to consider the internal logic of Dudley’s account, exploring in some detail the culturally based assumptions that invest its claims with coherence and credible sense. Our discussions dealt with fairly abstract matters, and now and again, when Dudley sensed his pupil was getting muddled, he responded by telling stories that linked his generalizations to illustrative sets of particulars. It soon became apparent that Apache conceptions of wisdom differ markedly from those contained in Western ideologies. More interesting was the discovery that the former are grounded in an informal theory of mind which asserts that wisdom arises from a small set of antecedent conditions. Because these conditions are also qualities of mind, and because they vary from mind to mind, the theory explains why some people are wiser than others.

Stated in general terms, the Apache theory holds that ‘wisdom’—‘igoyá’i’—consists in a heightened mental capacity that facilitates the avoidance of harmful events by detecting threatening circumstances when none are apparent. This capacity for prescient thinking is produced and sustained by three mental conditions, described in Apache as bini’ godilüqoh (smoothness of mind), bini’ gont’iz (resilience of mind), and bini’ godziil (steadiness of mind). Because none of these conditions is given at birth, each must be cultivated in a conscientious manner by acquiring relevant bodies of knowledge and applying them critically to the workings of one’s mind. Knowledge of places and their cultural significance is crucial in this regard because it illustrates with numerous examples the mental conditions needed for wisdom as well as the practical advantages that wisdom confers on persons who possess it. Contained in stories attributed to the ancestors, knowl-

edge of places thus embodies an unformalized model of ‘igoyá’i’ and an authoritative rationale for seeking to attain it. Although some Apache people embrace this knowledge eagerly and commit it to memory in exhaustive detail, others are less successful; and while some are able to apply it productively to their minds, many experience difficulty. Consequently, in any Apache community at any point in time, wisdom is present in varying degrees, and only a few persons are ever completely wise. By virtue of their unusual mental powers, wise men and women are able to foresee disaster, fend off misfortune, and avoid explosive conflicts with other persons. For these and other reasons, they are highly respected and often live to be very old. Likened to water because of its life-sustaining properties, wisdom is viewed first and foremost as an instrument of survival.

Although Western Apaches distinguish clearly between an individual’s ‘mind’ (bini’) and his or her ‘brain’ (bitsighap), both are described with a classificatory verb stem: (p) that designates portable objects whose shape is roundish and compact. However, only bini’ can be modified with adjectival constructions beginning with the prefix go- (space; area), an instructive bit of morphology which indicates that the mind is conceived of as a region within the brain. This notion is illustrated by the expression bini’ godilüqoh (smoothness of mind), which identifies the primary mental condition required for wisdom. When the adjective dilüqoh is used without prefixes, it serves to describe the texture of smooth and even surfaces, such as a pane of glass or a piece of varnished wood. But when dilüqoh is combined with go-, it conveys the sense of “cleared space” or “area free of obstructions,” such as an agricultural field from which all vegetation has been carefully removed. This is the sense in which godilüqoh is used in the Apache metaphor of the smooth mind. Like cleared plots of ground, smooth minds are unobstructed—uncluttered and unfettered—a quality which permits them to observe and reason with penetrating clarity. Skeptical of outward appearances, smooth minds are able to look through them and beyond them to detect obscured realities and hidden possibilities. Unencumbered by obstacles to insightful thinking, smooth minds “see danger before it happens” and “trouble before it comes.” Thus does wisdom flourish.
Mental smoothness is believed by Apaches to be the product of two subsidiary conditions—mental resilience and mental steadiness—which ward off distractions that interfere with calm and focused thought. These distractions are grouped into two broad classes according to whether their sources are external or internal to the individual. ‘Resilience of mind’ (bini gondžil) combats those of the external variety, while ‘steadiness of mind’ (bini gonlžiži) works to eliminate the internal kind. Turning to the first of these expressions, it should be noted that the adjective nldžiži is used alone in the familiar sense of ‘hard’, thus describing a wide array of objects whose rigid surfaces resist damage and destruction from outside forces. But when nldžiži is combined with the spatial prefix go-, the resulting construction, gontižiži, takes on a meaning equivalent to an ‘enclosed space that holds its shape’. A tightly woven basket, yielding but strong, is properly described as gontižiži, as is an inflated vinyl ball or a flexible cardboard box that withstands the weight of a child. And so, too, is a resilient human mind. Resistant to the unnerving effects of jarring external events, resilient minds protect their interior spaces by shielding them against outside disruptions that threaten quiescent thinking. Mental smoothness is thereby promoted and preserved. According to Dudley Patterson, fear and alarm present the greatest threats to maintaining mental resilience. Being aware of this, resilient minds guard themselves against shock and consternation, keeping these reactions at bay by centering themselves on what must be done to deal with the problem at hand. Resilient minds do not give in to panic or fall prey to spasms of anxiety or succumb to spells of crippling worry. Largely immune to emotional turbulence, they do not become agitated or disoriented. Even in terrifying circumstances, resilient minds maintain their ability to reason clearly and thus neither “block themselves” nor “stand in their own way.”

While resilience of mind contributes to mental smoothness by blunting the effects of external distractions, ‘steadiness of mind’—bini gonlžiži—accomplishes this objective by removing the sources of internal ones. The sense of ‘steady’ conveyed by the adjective nldžiži is that which one associates with a post driven firmly into the ground. The post is stable, it does not wobble, and therefore it is reliable. But the post itself is not responsible for these desirable attributes. As interpreted by Apaches, the post’s steadiness is imparted by the hole in which it is lodged, and this is the notion—a ‘supportive and accommodating space’—that is evoked by the form gonlžiži. Conceived of and described in analogous terms, steady human minds maintain themselves in a manner that ensures their own stability and reliability. This is achieved by relinquishing all thoughts of personal superiority and by eliminating aggressive feelings toward fellow human beings. As a result, steady minds are unhampered by feelings of arrogance or pride, anger or vindictiveness, jealousy or lust—all of which present serious hindrances to calm and measured thinking. Because the essence of mental steadiness lies in a capacity to do away with self-serving emotions that exploit or demean the worth of other people, wise men and women rarely encounter serious interpersonal problems. Free of conceit and hostile ambitions, steady minds “forget about themselves” and conduct their social affairs in harmony and peace.

Except for the mentally impaired, every Apache who enters the world can legitimately aspire to wisdom. Yet none is born with the three conditions of mind required for wisdom to flourish. Cultivating these conditions, a long and uneven process involving much introspection and many disheartening setbacks, has both private and public aspects. On the one hand, it is the responsibility of individuals to critically assess their own minds and prepare them for wisdom by cultivating the qualities of smoothness, resilience, and steadiness. On the other hand, instruction is needed from persons sympathetic to the endeavor who have pursued it themselves with a measure of success. Although instruction may begin at any age, it usually commences when preadolescent children become aware that adult life entails an endless flow of demands that need to be met with special skills and abilities. Young people who have reached this level of understanding are told to be constantly alert to what goes on around them, to remember everything they observe, and to report on anything out of the ordinary. They are also urged to pay close attention to the words and actions of older people whose general demeanor is deemed worthy of emulation. And they are regularly invited to travel, especially in the company of persons who will speak to them about the places they see...
and visit. It is, in these excursions, the relationship between places and wisdom is first made explicit. “Drink from places,” Apache boys and girls are told. “Then you can work on your mind.”

This view of mental development rests on the premise that knowledge is useful to the extent that it can be swiftly recalled and turned without effort to practical ends. A related premise is that objects whose appearance is unique are more easily recalled than those that look alike. It follows from these assumptions that because places are visually unique (a fact both marked and affirmed by their possession of separate names) they serve as excellent vehicles for recalling useful knowledge. And because the knowledge needed for wisdom is nothing if not useful, the adage that “wisdom sits in places”—*iégo* *í goz’* *á sikáá*—is seen to make perfect sense. But there is more to the adage than truth and logical consistency. The verb *sikáá* (it sits) incorporates a classificatory stem (*káá*) that applies exclusively to rigid containers and their contents. The prototype of this category is a watertight vessel, and thus the adage creates an image of places as durable receptacles and the knowledge required for wisdom as a lasting supply of water resting securely within them. This same image supports the assertions that preparing one’s mind for wisdom is akin to a form of drinking and that wisdom, like water, is basic to survival. As Dudley Patterson remarked during one of our conversations, “You can’t live long without water and you can’t live a long time without wisdom. You need to drink both.”

The knowledge on which wisdom depends is gained from observing different places (thus to recall them quickly and clearly), learning their Apache names (thus to identify them in spoken discourse and in song), and reflecting on traditional narratives that underscore the virtues of wisdom by showing what can happen when its facilitating conditions are absent. Drawn from different story genres, these narratives juxtapose a character whose mind is insightfully smooth with one or more characters whose minds are not. Distracted by troubling events or excited at the prospect of achieving selfish gains, characters of the latter type fail to understand the true nature of their situation and perform impulsive acts that bring them and others to the brink of disaster. In sharp contrast, characters of the former type remain calm and unperturbed, grasp the situation for what it really is, and avert misfortune by exercising the clear and wary vision that is the hallmark of wisdom. The social group survives, shaken but whole, and the qualities of mind responsible for its continuation are made clear for all to see. Wisdom has triumphed over stupidity and foolishness, and the difference between them—a difference sometimes as large as life and death itself cannot be ignored.

The two stories that follow were offered by Dudley Patterson to illustrate these themes. The first story deals with serious problems stemming from a lack of mental resilience; the second depicts a near catastrophe brought on by a lack of mental steadiness. In both stories, alarm and confusion run rampant until mental smoothness, accompanied by wisdom, comes to the rescue in the very nick of time.

Long ago, some people went to gather acorns. They camped at Tséé Náált’ii’é (Line of Rocks Circles Around). They gathered lots of acorns near Tséé Dit’ige Naaditíné (Trail Extends Across Scorched Rocks). They almost had enough but they went on anyway. They were going to K’át Cho’ ʔO’áhá (Big Willow Stands Alone). They stopped on their way where the trail crossed a shallow stream. They had been walking fast and were very thirsty. They wanted to drink. It was hot.

Then their leader said to them, “Don’t drink until I tell you to. I want to look around here first.” He went off. Their leader was wise. He saw danger in his mind.

Then, as soon as he was gone, a young woman said, “My children are very thirsty. They need to drink. This water looks safe to me. I’m going to drink it.” The others agreed with her. “Yes,” they said, “we must drink. This water looks good.” So they started drinking.

Then, pretty soon, they began to get sick. They got dizzy and began to vomit violently. All of them got sick, including the children. They got sicker. They vomited and vomited. They were scared that they were dying. They were crying out in pain, crying out in fear.

Their leader was the only one who didn’t drink. He walked upstream and looked on the ground. There were fresh tracks
by the stream and he saw where Coyote had pissed on a flat rock that slanted into the water. Drops of Coyote's piss were still running off the rock into the water.

Then he went back to the people. "Stop!" he told them. "Don't drink that water! It's no good! Coyote has pissed in it! That's why all of you are sick."

Then one of those people said, "We didn't know. We were thirsty. The water looked safe. We were in a hurry and it didn't look dangerous." Those people trusted their eyes. They should have waited until their leader had finished looking around. One of those children nearly died.

That's how that crossing got its name. After that, they called it Ma' Tchalizhé (Coyote Pisses In The Water).

And again:

Long ago, here at Cibecue, just when the corn was coming up, an old man saw a black cloud in the sky. It was moving towards him. He watched the cloud come closer and closer. It was made up of grasshoppers, a huge swarm of grasshoppers! Soon they were eating the corn shoots. Ch'izid! Ch'izid!

It sounded like that.

Then that old man got worried. "If this is allowed to continue we will have nothing to eat. All of our medicine men should work together on this for us." That old man was wise. He had seen danger in his mind. His mind was smooth. He knew what had to be done.

Then he spoke to some people and they went to the camp of a medicine man with strong power. The old man spoke to him. "Something terrible is happening to us. All of our medicine men should work together on this for us."

Then the medicine man said to them, "What you say is true but I will work alone. I will pray and sing. I will help you. I will bring a great rainstorm to kill these grasshoppers."

Then, that same evening, he started to sing. He sang throughout the night—but nothing happened! There was no rain! In the morning, there were still no clouds in the sky. The grasshoppers were still eating the corn. Ch'izid! Ch'izid!

Then that medicine man sang alone again. He sang all night. "I will bring lots of heavy rain," he told the people. But still there was nothing! In the morning there were still no clouds in the sky. Ch'izid! Ch'izid!

Then another medicine man went to him and said, "We should work together on this. Something very bad is happening. If four of us sing together we can bring heavy rains and destroy these grasshoppers."

Then the first medicine man thought about it. "No," he said. "The people came first to me. I will bring heavy rain if I sing four times alone." So he started to sing again. He sang all night. It was the same as before—nothing happened. Those grasshoppers were still eating the corn. Ch'izid!

Now the people were very frightened. Some were crying out in fear. They saw what was happening to their corn.

Then that medicine man sang one more time alone—and still there was no rain!

Then four medicine men got together. "That old man was right. We should have worked on this together. Let's get ready, we'll start tonight. That man who sings alone is far too proud. His mind is not smooth. He thinks only of himself."

Then those four medicine men started singing. They sang together throughout the night. They didn't stop to rest! They didn't stop to drink! They kept singing, singing, singing—all through the night.

Then, early in the morning, there was a loud clap of thunder! It started to rain. It rained hard. It rained harder and harder. It rained still harder! It rained for four days and four nights. The people were afraid. They thought their homes might be swept away.

Then it stopped raining. An old woman went outside and looked around. Everywhere there were dead grasshoppers. Their bodies covered the ground. The ground was dark with them. Then that old woman started to walk to her cornfield. To get there she had to cross a wide arroyo. When she got there she saw a long pile of dead grasshoppers reaching from one side to the other. "Grasshoppers piled up across," she said.
Then that old woman knew these four medicine men had worked together well.

Then that old woman went back and told the people what she had seen. “We have very little corn left,” they said. “Most of it has been eaten. We will surely get weak from hunger. All of us will suffer because of one proud man.”

Afterwards, they called that place Na’ischagi Naadeez’áhá (Grasshoppers Piled Up Across).

While cautionary narratives like these are appreciated by Apaches for their aesthetic merits (their hard-edged terseness, steady forward motion, and mounting suspense can be exploited by gifted storytellers to gripping effect), they are valued primarily as instruments of edification. For persons seeking wisdom, such stories provide time-honored standards for identifying mental flaws and weaknesses, thereby revealing where remedial work is needed and often instilling a desire to perform it. This kind of self-reflexive activity, which is described in Apache as bini’ nasíyik’e’iziig (working on one’s mind), is understood to be a drawn-out affair that becomes less and less difficult as it becomes increasingly habitual. For it only stands to reason that the more one scrutinizes one’s mind—and the more one acts to improve it by reflecting on narratives that exemplify the conditions necessary for wisdom the greater the likelihood that wisdom will develop. Disciplined mental effort, diligently sustained, will eventually give rise to a permanent state of mind.

Despite this encouraging premise, which for many Apaches is a source of early confidence, the trail of wisdom is known to be fraught with pitfalls. The human mind is a vulnerable space, and protecting it against obstacles that threaten incisive thinking is a formidable task. Life is full of alarming events—deaths, fights, illnesses, frightening dreams, the nefarious doings of ghosts and witches—and the forces of fear are hard to overcome. One tries to surmount them, and later one tries again, but repeated failures take their toll, and attaining the goal of mental resilience begins to look unlikely. Just as difficult is the challenge of ridding one’s mind of self-centered thoughts that find expression in harsh and heated ways, antagonizing other people and causing them to retaliate with aggressions of their own. Again one makes determined efforts, and again they fall short, and again one must deal with uncertainty and doubt; mental steadiness joins mental resilience in seeming out of reach. And then there is the never-ending problem of everything else. When one is caught up in the demanding swirl of daily life—caring for children, keeping peace with relatives, trying to get by on very little money—pursuing the trail of wisdom can become just another burden. There is enough to do already without thinking about places and working on one’s mind! And so it happens, often with reluctance but also with a welcome sense of relief, that the work is abandoned. At different points on the trail of wisdom Apache men and women simply decide to stop. They have traveled as far as they are able or willing to go. Wisdom, they have learned, is more easily imagined than achieved.

But a handful of persons resolve to persevere. Undaunted by the shortcomings of their minds, they keep striving to refine them—committing to memory more and more cautionary narratives, dwelling on their implications at deeper and deeper levels, and visiting the places with which they are associated as opportunities arise. Little is said of these activities, and progress reports are neither offered nor requested. But progress reports, as Dudley Patterson was quick to point out, are usually unnecessary. As people move forward on the trail of wisdom, their behavior begins to change, and these alterations, which become steadily more apparent as time goes on, can be readily observed by relatives and friends. Most noticeably, inner strides toward mental smoothness are reflected in outer displays of poise and equanimity—signs of nervousness fade, irritability subsides, outbursts of temper decline. There is also to be detected a growing consistency among attitudes adopted, opinions expressed, and judgments proffered—personal points of view, built upon consonant themes, cohere and take definite shape. And there is increasing correspondence between spoken words and subsequent deeds—promises made are promises kept, pledges extended are pledges fulfilled, projects proposed are projects undertaken. As Apache men and women advance farther along the trail of wisdom, their composure continues to deepen. Increasingly quiet and self-possessed, they rarely show signs of fear or alarm. More and more magnanimous, they seldom
get angry or upset. And more than ever they are watchful and observant. Their minds, resilient and steady at last, are very nearly smooth, and it shows in obvious ways.

And always these people are thinking—thinking of place-centered narratives, thinking of the ancestors who first gave them voice, and thinking of how to apply them to circumstances in their own lives. Having passed the point where cautionary narratives are mainly useful for disclosing mental weaknesses, these people now consult the stories as guides for what to do and what not to do in specific situations. As described by Dudley Patterson, what typically happens is this. Something unusual occurs—an event or a series of events—that is judged to be similar or analogous to incidents described in one of the stories. Unless these similarities can be dismissed as superficial, they stimulate further thought, leading the thinker to treat the story as a possible aid for planning his or her own course of action. This is accomplished by picturing in one’s mind the exact location where the narrated events unfolded and imagining oneself as actually taking part in them, always in the role of a story character who is shown to be wise. If a powerful sense of identification with that character ensues—if, as some Apaches put it, thinker and character ‘flow swiftly together’ (ndaqgho kednlip)—the experience is taken to confirm that the narrative in question will be helpful in dealing with the situation at hand. If this sort of identification fails to occur, the narrative is discarded and other stories, potentially more instructive, are consulted in similar fashion. It is important to understand that wise men and women are able to consult dozens of cautionary narratives in very short periods of time. Such concentrated effort is not required of them under ordinary circumstances, but when a crisis appears to be looming they set about it immediately. Serene and undistracted, they start drinking from places (in times of emergency they are said to “gulp” from them), and soon enough, often within minutes, they have seen in their minds what needs to be done. Wisdom has finally shown its hand. And when it does, as Dudley Patterson remarked in English the day he cast off his sling and prepared to rejoin the horsemen, “It’s sure pretty good all right.” “Yes,” he said thoughtfully. “That’s sure pretty good all right.”

“Our Ancestors Did That!”

August 10, 1982. But for a gate left carelessly open—and some thirty head of cattle that soon passed through it to lose themselves in a tumbled maze of rock-strewed buttes, meandering arroyos, and dry box canyons—my instructional ride with Dudley Patterson might have proceeded as planned. The day began on a calm and peaceful note. We mounted our horses shortly after dawn, rode out of Cibecue on a trail leading north, and then turned east as the rising sun, a brilliant crimson ball, moved into view above a tree-covered ridge. The morning air was crisp and cool, and all one could hear was the comforting squeak of saddle leather and the hooves of the horses striking softly into the earth. A red-tailed hawk barked on the wind in a vast blue sky.

After lighting a cigarette with his antique Zippo, Dudley broke the silence. “Do you see that ridge over there? We call it Tsé Dotl’izhi Deez’ahá (Turquoise Ridge). My grandmother took her family there when the smallpox came in 1922. So many people died—it was terrible. My grandmother was a medicine woman and knew what to do. She prayed each morning as the sun came up. Day after day she prayed. All of her children survived the sickness.

“And that ravine over there, the one with long white boulders on the far side? Its name is Naagosch’id Tú Hayigeedé (Badger Scoops Up Water). Badger lived there a long time ago, next to a spring where he went to drink. There was no daylight then and the people were having a hard time. Badger and Bear wanted to keep it that way—they liked the darkness—but Coyote outsmarted them. He gambled with them and won daylight for the people. They gambled up ahead where those four round hills sit in a row. Those hills are named Da’iltañé (The Mounds).

“And way over there, that little clump of trees? We call it Ti’is Sikaaadé (Grove of Cottonwood Trees). There’s a spring there, too. It used to give lots of water but now it’s almost dry. Nick Thompson’s mother camped there with her parents when she was a young girl. One time an airplane went shooting by. She didn’t know what it was. She crawled under a bush and covered her face with her hands. Her body was trembling all over. She stayed under the bush for two days, trembling.
“And that red bluff over there...”

Dudley stops speaking. Two riders have appeared in the distance and are moving toward us at a fast trot. Minutes later, Sam Endfield and Charles Cromwell rein in their mounts and deliver the troubling news. Someone forgot to close the gate near the top of Háyaagokizhé (Spotted Slope), and a large bunch of cattle—cows, calves, and the spotted maverick bull with one bad eye—has moved into the tortuous country behind Kjhe Dóti'žhé (Blue House). Judging from their tracks, the cattle crossed over yesterday afternoon. They should be rounded up without delay; otherwise they will scatter over a wider area and make the job more difficult.

Dudley listens quietly, points once with his lips in the direction of Blue House, and off we go to spend the next seven hours searching for wily creatures keenly uninterested in letting themselves be found. A day of quiet learning turns into a punishing game of hide-and-go-seek, and no one finds it the least bit enjoyable. But slowly the work gets done, the open gate is wired shut, and by two o'clock in the afternoon most of the cattle are back where they belong. Only the spotted maverick bull is missing. His tracks disappear at the head of a narrow canyon. Dudley is unconcerned. The bull is strong and smart. He will rejoin the herd when it suits him. One day he will reappear. That is his way.

We have been working in land without water and the heat of the day is hard upon us. Horses and men are edgy with thirst, so instead of returning directly to the village we ride southeast to the nearest accessible point of Cibecue Creek. As it happens, this is Trail Goes Down Between Two Hills, the place where Old Man Owl was shown to be a fool by the two Apache sisters. It is wonderfully cool beside the stream and everyone drinks his fill. Sam Endfield, wearing his pants and hat, decides to go for a dip. Charles Cromwell, whose tender modesties preclude displays of unclad flesh, ambles off behind a thick stand of willow bushes. And Dudley, having twice bathed his face and neck with his handkerchief, sits down beneath the cottonwood tree whose massive lower limb dips to touch the ground. Joining him under the tree, I glance upward into its shade-filled branches, a wholly spontaneous act to which he responds by slapping the ground and bursting into peals of high-pitched laughter. Sam stops splashing in the water, and Charles, looking mildly alarmed, comes stumbling out of the willows trying to button his fly. What is going on?

“Our ancestors did that!” Dudley exclaims with undisguised glee. “We all do that, even the women and children. We all look up to see her with her legs spread slightly apart. These places are really very good! Now you’ve drunk from one! Now you can work on your mind.” Still laughing, the weary horseman takes off his sweat-soaked hat and places it on the ground beside him. Then he lies down, cradles his head in the crook of his arm, and goes soundly to sleep. Beneath the ancient cottonwood tree the air is alive with humming insects.