MSc Digital Anthropology Dissertation

The "New" Wilderness Experience: US National Parks and Social Media

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss my fieldwork on the relationship between US National Parks and social media. The dominant discourse surrounding this relationship is that social media is negatively impacting the 'wilderness experience' in national parks. Taking this discourse as the starting point, I argue that this relationship is best explored as an intersection of two distinct logics of connection / disconnection: the "old" wilderness experience and the "new". I take the emphasis on the offline, physical connection as the most authentic in the "old" logic. I combine this with the "new" logic's focus on the connection to the 'online' as the most important. I argue that as a result of this intersection the connections / disconnections of each logic are being remade. Through a co-production of connections, Big Bend is being changed both online and offline. The park's presence and image on social media are being co-produced through its audience's connections to Big Bend on these platforms. In addition, these connections made through social media are shown to have both online and offline impacts. I show that the overlapping of these logics is destabilizing and transforming the 'wilderness experience' in Big Bend National Park, simultaneously amplifying and remaking it in the process.

Acknowledgements

The entire process surrounding the writing of this dissertation has been unlike anything I have ever done. All throughout I have had support from countless individuals—all of whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

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Introduction

While sitting in my Shoreditch flat in London browsing Big Bend National Park's Instagram page and dreaming of my future fieldwork there, I contemplated how wonderful it would be to disconnect from the hustle and bustle of city life. I told myself I would treat my time in the field as an opportunity to disconnect not only from an urban setting but also from my omnipresent iPhone. I did not want any distractions—phones or otherwise—that would disconnect me from my research. I wanted to appreciate it in its truest form, to be completely in tune with that which I set out to do. So, I made the decision I would purchase a simple flip phone in lieu of using my iPhone. I felt that a smartphone would hinder my research and ultimately detract from my setting in Big Bend. Thus the day before I made the trek to the park I picked up a Nokia phone for $30 and was all set to say goodbye and good riddance to my iPhone and 'disconnect to reconnect'.[1] No more Facebook notifications alerting me that so and so liked my photo. No more BBC News alerts fanning the flames of political anxiety. I would be disconnected on my own terms, and could connect on my own terms: total control.

When I arrived at my temporary new abode—a century old ranch house in the Chihuahuan desert—I was alone. I moved myself in, got cozy, and flipped open my new

Figure 1: No service

phone to give my parents a call. No service. Alright, not a big deal as service is notoriously spotty in the park anyway. So I drove to the visitor center where I knew there was cell coverage: still no service. Puzzled and feeling frustrated I pulled out my iPhone which I had locked away in my car's glove box with the intention of resurrecting it weeks later

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[1] This sentiment prioritizes the offline connection, championing it as more real than those online. There are even therapies and rehabs that have sprung up around it, such as: http://digitaldetox.org/ Accessed 18 August 2017.

upon the completion of my fieldwork.[2] After booting up, it connected to the network and I had service. Immediately I became peeved wondering why my new flip phone, my chance to disconnect from this smart device in my hand, was not connecting as expected. After a quick Internet search on my iPhone I realized that the while my new phone was on the same network, this area of the country was not covered unless on a smartphone (which require a long term, more expensive contract). I suddenly realized that I felt disconnected, but not in the controlled way I had initially expected.

This dissertation is an inquiry into how social media is impacting relationships surrounding the 'wilderness experience' in U.S. national parks. One of the dominant discourses today regarding peoples experiences in national parks, the great outdoors, and more generally the 'wilderness experience'[3] is that technology is incompatible with it. Given that smartphones and social media are both ubiquitous in America, it was unsurprising that this discourse arose as these technologies and wild places began to intersect.[4] There are countless articles, such as "Turn it off: how technology is killing the joy of national parks"[5], regulations being put in place to limit technology's place in parks[6], and the National Park Service itself speaking out regarding this intersection. For years I have listened to these many voices, both online and offline, all shouting that technology and wilderness cannot co-exist. It was through this listening that I began to formulate the desire to conduct this study. Was this really happening? Were smartphones and social media really changing people's relationship, the way they

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[2] Indeed, I did not completely part ways with my smartphone. My mother insisted I take it along "just in case". This proved to be valuable advice.

[3] The 'wilderness experience' has been defined in numerous ways and largely escapes a blanket definition. However, Benton MacKaye (1950) defines wilderness as "a reservoir of stored experiences in the ways of life before man" (244).

[4] 77% of Americans and 92% of Millennials own a smartphone: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/ Accessed 18 August 2017, as well as 7/10 Americans being on social media: http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/ Accessed 18 August 2017

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/12/america-national-parks-noise-pollution-technology-drones Accessed 5 May 2017.

[6] The NPS has banned the use of drones in parks. https://www.nps.gov/articles/unmanned-aircraft-in-the-national-parks.htm Accessed 10 June 2017.

connected, to the 'wilderness experience'? It was with this question in mind that I set my sights on conducting fieldwork in one of America's national parks.

Big Bend National Park is one America's fifty-nine national parks and is located in southwest Texas on the US-Mexico border. Since my first visit to the park in 2015 I fell in love with its rugged beauty. I was also aware of the park's official presence on social media and personally follow their accounts. The combination of these two factors made it an ideal setting to conduct this research as I could examine both the online and offline. I knew that through my ethnography in Big Bend I could hear some of the voices first-hand. I could listen to their stories and insights, opinions and interpretations, and could share in them. From these I hoped to construct a generalized picture of what exactly seemed to be happening here—to garner an understanding of the relationship between the 'wilderness experience' and social media and to begin asking why does this matter to me, wilderness lovers, and everyone else.

What arose from my ethnography in Big Bend National Park was an intersection of two distinct logics of connection / disconnection: the "old" wilderness experience on one side and the "new" wilderness experience on the other. To briefly summarize these before going into detail in my ethnography, the "old" logic privileges the offline connection to nature. As I will explain in the literature review, wilderness is defined against civilization so that its opposite is its negative.[7] Thus, this logic becomes an all-or-nothing: if anything intercedes into the connection to wilderness, then it is a connection to civilization and thus a disconnection from wilderness. The inverse is that in order to connect to wilderness, one must disconnect from civilization. An important point put forth by Thomas Yarrow et. al. (2015) is that to disconnect is still a form of relating to something.

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[7] Part of defining wilderness in this way means that civilization here is a loaded, catchall term. I acknowledge this, but employ it as such throughout this dissertation.

On the other hand, the connections / disconnections of the "new" logic were far from absolute. This logic was drawn from the introduction of the 'online' to Big Bend and social media in particular. Instead of one supreme relationship of connection / disconnection, there were numerous types and tiers of each. Generally the privileged connection was to the 'online', with a disconnection from it being a negative thing. On the surface it would seem that this "new" logic and the "old" could not overlap. However, it will be shown that the intersection of the two has altered the connections and disconnections surrounding the 'wilderness experience'.

I begin this dissertation with an overview of Big Bend National Park and the methodologies I employed in my research. This is followed by a literature review which serves to frame the discussion of these two logics of connection / disconnection. After setting the scene with the relevant literature I turn to my ethnography, which is divided into two parts. Each chapter is presented as vignettes, each a key piece in this exploration of changing connections and disconnections in Big Bend National Park. Beginning with "You Had to be There" I focus on the privileged connection of the "old" logic and how it is being affected by the introduction of the "new". "Where's the Wi-Fi?" follows in which expectations of connections and disconnections are explored as well as how they have changed. I follow the ethnography with my social media analysis of Big Bend's Facebook page. This serves as a foundation for the chapter "Virtualisms and Social Media" where I discuss the online and offline impacts that connections on social media have had in Big Bend. Finally I summarize what is occurring in Big Bend as a result of these two logics intersecting.

Big Bend as site and Methodology

My fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted in two overlapping parts: participant observation and social media analysis. Participant observation was conducted in Big Bend National Park for a six-week period from 20 May through 28 June. My informants included visitors, researchers, park staff, and locals living in the park. Social media analysis encompassed a sixth month span between 1 January and 30 June and involved the cataloguing and analysis of Big Bend's Facebook posts.

Overview of Big Bend: 'The Great Nothing'

Big Bend National Park is one of the largest, most remote, and least visited of the national parks. It was established in 1944 and is one of the fifty-nine national parks in the United States. It is located in the southwest corner of Texas, approximately 220 miles from the nearest airport in Midland, TX (Fig. 2). It averages around 358,000 visitors annually, ranking 42nd in terms of total visitation receiving just 0.47% of all National Park visitation in 2016.[8] To put this in perspective, Yellowstone National Park received 4.24 million visitors in 2016—eleven times more than Big Bend. The size of the park is vast, comprising over 1,250 square miles of land which is larger than the state of Rhode Island and double the size of the Greater London Urban Area.[9] The park includes 118 miles of the US-Mexico border and was originally established with the intention of being an "international park" between the two countries (Jameson 1996). The international park was never established, as Mexico's ideas of wilderness and

Figure 2: Big Bend location map (NPS.gov)

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[8] https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Ranking%20Report%20(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year) Accessed 7 May 2017.

[9] http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/articles/747.aspx Accessed 30 August 2017.

nature were incompatible with that of the NPS (Jameson 1996). However Mexico has formed two biosphere reserves that now adjoin Big Bend National Park.[10]

Participant Observation

While an online study focusing strictly on social media had the potential for valuable insight, exploring the 'wilderness experience' seemed to necessitate a physical presence a national park. As such I applied for and was granted a research permit by the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct my fieldwork in Big Bend. Per my agreement with the NPS and the desire to protect my informants' anonymity, all names have been changed as well as other identifying factors. All of my informants were made aware of my fieldwork and its focus on how social media and smartphones impact the 'wilderness experience' in national parks. My time in Big Bend was spent mainly with park staff, researchers, and visitors. I shared a bunkhouse with a few researchers during their stint in the park and eventually relocated to the park's headquarters at Panther Junction for my last two weeks, which is where the largest portion of the park staff lives. My informants ranged from early 20s to mid-60s, but the majority fell between 20 and 45 years old.

The most significant challenge I faced during my fieldwork was in fact a facet of what I was researching. My ranch house accommodation did not have cell service or Wi-

Fi, so my ability to connect and setup interviews with informants, schedule outings, or even arrange personal job interviews was severely constrained. There was no instantaneous way to call, text, or email therefore I had to

Figure 3: K-Bar Ranch House

[10] https://www.nps.gov/bibe/learn/nature/mexareas.htm Accessed 11 May 2017.

plan accordingly. What became interesting was the acceptance of this amongst my informants, a general understanding that a response or request from someone would only come when the person was connected. In contrast, when I would connect to people outside of the park—such as a potential employer—they found it puzzling that I could not just hop on a call with little to no planning. There was a general sense that those in the park had an expectation that people were normally disconnected, whereas those outside the park expected people to be constantly connected.

A more practical issue I faced was the seasonality of Big Bend's visitors. The summer is usually the slowest time in the park as temperatures regularly exceed 100°F (37°C). As such, my access to visitors was limited due to there simply not being many in the park. For almost every other national park these same months are the busiest time of year, but not so in Big Bend. From May-July in 2016 Big Bend averaged 25,000 visitors a month whereas for the same time frame Yellowstone averaged 760,000.[11] I originally believed visitors would comprise the majority of my informants and that my access to park staff and researchers would be limited. However, this quickly proved to be the opposite given that I lived amongst researchers and staff and was able to form close relationships to them. While I still did have a decent number of visitors as informants it would have been preferable to have more.

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[11] https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Ranking%20Report%20(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year) Accessed 7 May 2017.

Social Media Analysis

Figure 4: Big Bend's social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

Being physically present in Big Bend was not only an incredible experience in and of itself but also an invaluable portion of my fieldwork. However, to garner a better understanding of the relationship between the 'wilderness experience' and social media I believed it best to couple my participant observation with an analysis of the park's social media accounts. I wanted to get a sense of how Big Bend was present on social media, and Facebook as a platform was chosen due to the park's regular posting activity. Facebook was also selected due to its familiarity to me, its dated time stamps on posts (something that Instagram lacks as a platform), and the volume of posts I would have to analyze. I originally hoped to examine both Instagram and Facebook to see how the two related and diverged, but Instagram's platform made this type of quantitative analysis much more difficult. Instead I focused solely on Facebook and actually found out more about Big Bend's Instagram account during my time in the park than I would have through a personal social media analysis.

For cataloguing Facebook posts I waited until a month's time had elapsed after the posting date. This time delay was to allow for 'interactions' on posts to stabilize, as most users interacting with the posts would only do so for a short window of time before the posts became buried in the timeline. I would then screenshot and file each post. Each post was tabulated and the relevant data added to a table for analysis. I defined

interactions on Facebook as a form of connection between the audience and Big Bend, which allowed me to quantify them in a way I had not been able to with participant observation.[12] In order to get a sense of how the audience interacted with the park and how the park presented itself online, I focused heavily on the relationship between posts with photographs or videos versus those with text. This focus was a result of what I uncovered during my literature review on the relationship between nature and social media. In addition I recorded the post with the most interactions per month as well as the lowest to hopefully uncover a pattern. Two tables were developed from this analysis: a summary of all posting data and a comparison of top posts and low posts. I dedicate an entire chapter to this analysis later in this dissertation.

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[12] My definition of interactions as connections will be expanded upon in Part 3 of this dissertation

Literature Review

Wilderness

Figure 5: "The Window" Chisos Basin

In 1964 the United States federal government passed legislation that defined 'wilderness' in America under federal law:

> "A wilderness, in *contrast* with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, *where man himself is a visitor who does not remain*." (Wilderness Act of 1964, emphasis added)

A few things in this definition stand out. First, it is wholly unique to America. This aspect will be discussed at length in an ensuing paragraph but it is an important point to begin on: wilderness is a "cultural construct" (Cronan 1996, 34). Second, wilderness is denoted as a contrast to civilization—they are defined against one another. The two can only exist as concepts and places so long as the other does. Third, there must be no pre-existing human influence upon the land in order to meet this criterion. As such, National Parks as entire entities could not be labeled as wilderness under this act. Only those portions of the parks that are 'untrammeled' could be classified as such. In addition, penning humans as a visitor in wilderness reifies the gap between civilization and wilderness. It presumes that one can only connect to wilderness temporarily—that society and civilization are one's true home. In a sense, it sets humankind apart from

the natural world. Lastly, as wilderness is defined as a place apart from civilization, wilderness is itself paradoxical—its borders must be clearly demarcated and humans must actively manage it to preserve it.

So what led to the passage of this act, this need to protect wilderness as the opposite of civilization? How is it possible to think about these two polarizing concepts in which there is no middle ground? Tracing wilderness back through American history helps to illuminate how this definition came to pass. The attitudes necessary to precipitate the Wilderness Act of 1964 stemmed from a national consciousness to protect these natural areas as "perpetual frontiers" (Nash 1982, 151). There was a burgeoning desire in the United States in the early 20th century to set apart wilderness in a system of protected areas that Americans could enjoy for generations to come. One of these first initiatives was the creation of a "Nation's park" (Catlin 1913, 294-295). However, the strategy for creating the first of these 'Nation's parks' was different than wilderness as presently defined. In establishing Yellowstone National Park in 1872, the first of the national parks, the goal was "not to justify the park positively as wilderness, but to demonstrate its usefulness to civilization" (Nash 1982, 112). This 'usefulness' to America was based in a utilitarian vision of wilderness. This interpretation gradually began to change, ultimately culminating in the definition as set forth in the Wilderness Act, but before delving into the current attitudes I turn to this utilitarian vision—the pioneer gaze.

The colonists in America believed the fledgling nation to be a vast, empty landscape—completely devoid of human influence—that was ripe for subduing. Never mind the fact that Native Americans had been altering the landscape for millennia prior to and concurrently with the arrival of Europeans.[13] The American settlers living on the

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[13] Charles C. Mann (2005) outlines the extent the North American landscape had been altered by Native Americans prior to the arrival of Columbus.

edges of civilization, the frontier[14], were the pioneers. These settlers were subduing nature by making their living in it. The pioneers were viewing wilderness "through utilitarian spectacles" (Nash 1982, 31). It was a cornucopia of resources separate from civilization that would aid the advancement of the young nation. To the pioneers, wilderness simply had "value as potential civilization" (ibid, 33). In their quest to subdue it, the pioneers "lived too close to wilderness for appreciation" (ibid, 24). Even while physically being there, trying to survive off the wild land, the pioneers were unable to see wilderness as anything other than a material resource. The forest was timber with which to build a cabin, its animal residents were wild game to hunt and eat. Once the forest was cleared for lumber the land could be farmed to supply America's growing cities. Simply stated, there was no apparent appreciation for wilderness as wilderness.

This strictly utilitarian viewpoint is intertwined with Christian narratives. Genesis 1:28 positions humankind above the world, calling them to "fill the Earth and subdue it".[15] As a result, this Edenic narrative has reinforced the evisceration of nature from its vast web of complexities and relationships (Slater 1996). The countless narratives that have spawned from this disconnection between humankind and the natural world are what grounded and perpetuated the utilitarian point of view. Roderick Frazier Nash expanded on this in that humankind's fall from Eden has "embedded into Western thought the idea that wilderness and paradise were both physical and spiritual opposites" (1982, 15). Before wilderness was set aside as an opposite to be protected and cherished in America, it was an opposite to be used and abused. Nonetheless, this attitude set the course for centuries for how America

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[14] Turner (1932) said, "the frontier is determined by the reactions between wilderness and the edge of expanding settlement" (183).
[15] Genesis 1:28—"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

conceptualized wilderness, encouraging an arrogance towards the Earth rather than respect (Nash 1982, 193).

This attitude began to change as the frontier closed and wilderness was becoming scarce.[16] There was a direct relationship: as civilization marched across the continent with the frontier leading the way, wilderness declined proportionately. Nash describes this attitudinal shift in outlining how the beginnings of appreciation for wilderness as wilderness began amongst "those who did not face wilderness from the pioneer's perspective" (1982, 51). This implies that in order to appreciate wilderness, to find a value other than a utilitarian one, there must be a separation or degree of disconnectedness for appreciation to manifest. This shift in attitude is succinctly addressed in James D. Proctor's (1996) discussion of intrinsic versus instrumental value. Nature's intrinsic value pens its worth as "independent of its utility to humans" (ibid, 280). Contrasting this is instrumental value, which is akin to the utilitarian value previously mentioned. Instrumental value finds that nature's "worth depends on its ability to serve human ends" (ibid, 280). These two opposing values are illustrated in the debate between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot at the beginning of the 20th century. Nash sums up their debate well: "Pinchot's ultimate loyalty was to civilization and forestry; Muir's to wilderness and preservation" (1982, 135). While these two sides clearly clash, Proctor points out that as both of these values benefit humans—albeit in different ways—they "can be labeled anthropocentric" (1996, 281). No matter the value found in wilderness, it all is based in the human perspective.

It is this gap that lies between civilization and wilderness that need be explored further. As Proctor extolls, the wilderness label as defined in the Wilderness Act "gives us no guidance on what to do with areas in between—those that don't meet the

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[16] Turner (1920) famously declared the frontier in America closed at the end of the 1890s (244-245).

wilderness label" (1996, 286). This all-or-nothing labeling leads to certain areas of nature in America being privileged over others (Cronan 1996, 86). Those places in between wilderness and civilization lie in a sort of purgatory. William Cronan further touches on this sentiment explaining that due to this dualist nature of wilderness, "any use is cast as ab-use" (1996, 85). Now the utilitarian spectacles have been cast away and wilderness need simply to exist unused—prioritizing the intrinsic value over the instrumental. Proctor draws a comparison to a garden, wherein "humans are an active and appropriate part of nature" and contrasts this with wilderness where man is seen as an intruder (1996, 287).

With the scene now set to explore wilderness in America there are a few things to bear in mind regarding its subsequent employment as a framing device in this dissertation. First it is imperative to recognize that this wilderness definition that posits it as separate from civilization is strictly American. For example, Barbara Deutsch Lynch (1993) found in her study of the environmental discourses of Latin American immigrants in New York City that there was a refusal to separate humanity from nature (118)—a clear contrast from wilderness as defined here. Second, wilderness is "an experience best defined in terms of human perception" (Nash 1982, 324).[17] John Passmore (1974) added to this sentiment in explaining that aside from the human experience there can be no idea of wilderness. Michael Pollan (1991) extends this line of reasoning: "we know nature only through the screen of our metaphors; to see her plainly is probably impossible" (191). Wilderness is simply a word, a label, through which humans know and understand a piece of nature. Following this focus on perception and wilderness in the abstract, Pollan asserts, "wilderness is more a quality than a place" (ibid, 192). As wilderness is strictly defined under the Wilderness Act of 1964 as a place,

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[17] Now, I acknowledge DeCastro's (2005) idea of perspectivism, but getting into that argument would require more space than I am willing to permit here. And, as will be shown, it is the human perspective that creates and defines wilderness.

the connections and disconnections regarding the 'wilderness experience' become less absolute when it is envisioned as a quality, abstracting them into realms other than the physical. The 'wilderness experience' it would seem is a fluid one that escapes a single definition.

That said, I take the definition of wilderness as defined in the Wilderness Act and treat it as logic of connection and disconnection. This experience, that in which wilderness and civilization are eternally at odds, is what I take as the root of the "old" wilderness experience. Given that the sides are defined as inverses, I treat a connection to one as a disconnection from the other and vice versa. Any form of connection to civilization while one is in wilderness, such as finding cigarette butts on the ground, human waste, or beer cans, would be seen as a disconnection from wilderness. The "old" logic is governed by the connection to wilderness and the disconnection from civilization. It is in this governance that a controlling of connections / disconnections is undertaken. The offline and physical realm is the privileged form of connection—all others are futile. It is this seemingly void middle ground of the 'wilderness experience' that I wish to explore in employing this logic. Similar to Cronan's (1996) earlier point regarding the areas that do not fit the label, I use this polarizing logic in combination with that of the "new" to determine what the connections and disconnections are in the middle ground.

Social Media

I begin this section with the literature focusing on the relationship between social media and nature which is characterized by commodity fetishism and spectacle. However, this literature does not explore the connections / disconnections surrounding this relationship. In contrast, the majority of literature regarding connections and disconnections on social media focuses on relationships between people and the sociality of these platforms. To understand this as a logic of connection / disconnection I move to a grounded discussion on social media's ability to connect and disconnect. After addressing these two stances I will move to position social media as a "new" logic of connection and disconnection to contrast with that of the "old".

Social Media and Nature

Social media and nature, as I outlined in the introduction, are typically regarded at odds. However, this relationship has been written about largely through the lens of commodity fetishism and spectacle. Guy DeBord (1967) defined spectacle as "the mediation of relationships between people by images" (thesis 4). James Igoe and Bram Büscher (2013) went on to explain that how these relationships are mediated by images depends immensely on the "concealment of connections and contexts that define those relationships" (290). Given DeBord's (1967) assertion that images are mediating the way people connect and relate to one another, it would seem that it would be intensified by social media platforms that are primarily image-based. In addition to this, DeBord (1967) asserts that for mediation to occur there must be a disconnection from the web of complexities that underlie these relationships. N. Katherine Hayles's asserts that through spectacle nature becomes an object of visual consumption (1996, 411). She explains that when nature enters a state of spectacle it has undergone a shift from first-hand experience to a constructed experience (ibid, 411).

This process of disconnection is expanded upon by Igoe (2010) who explains that fragmented images are combined to form a spectacle which becomes "a timeless whole" (386). Spectacle, in the way that it disconnects images from their contexts and relationships to create a whole, becomes a fetishized product[18] with no reference to the relationships that produced it (Carrier and MacLeod 2005). Susan Davis (1996) compliments this in her assertion that the relationship to nature through heavily photographic media is a simple and unobstructed one (208). It is the process of simplifying this relationship, the creation of spectacle, in which fetishization is exemplified. Obscuring the contexts and realities of these images, the first-hand, and combining them with others to form a constructed and cohesive spectacular whole does two things. First, it separates these images from the realities that produced them, disconnecting them from those first-hand relationships. Second, it allows for an easier connection to be made to the produced spectacle. It eliminates the vast number of connections in favor of a streamlined one.

This literature surrounding the relationship between social media and nature brings forth important arguments around fetishization and spectacle but it does not delve extensively into connections and disconnections. This relationship will be important in my social media analysis, but as social media in this dissertation will be treated as a logic of connection / disconnection it is important to also touch on literature regarding connections on these platforms. While the subject of these next pieces focuses primarily on social media's ability to connect people, it will aid in intervening in the debates around social media and nature.

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[18] Fetishization was put forth by Marx (1867) originally but is neatly summarized by Brockington et. al. (2008): "The basic argument for fetishization is that commodities appear for our consumption in ways that appear almost as magic" (144).

Social Media and Connections

There are two authors that I will refer to throughout this section due to their differing positions on connections made through social media: Sherry Turkle and Daniel Miller. While they do share some sentiments, the contrast between the two will help frame the logic of connection / disconnection I put forth.

Sherry Turkle (2012) posits that social media and smartphones allow for users to control their connections in unique ways. They have led to what she deems the "Goldilocks effect" in which "people can't get enough of each other, if and only if they have each other at a distance, in amounts they can control" (2012). She asserts that the most important thing regarding these technologies is control over where attention is put.[19] Turkle recognizes that these devices and platforms can connect people but believes that these connections lack depth and authenticity—championing the face-to-face connection as the most real. As a result she believes that "we expect more from technology and less from each other" (2012). She shares Miller's (2012, 157) belief that the migration of social media to smartphones has led to an 'always on' sense developing amongst users.[20] However, for Turkle this 'always on' is one form of a constant connection which has created expectations of being continuously connected, as well as "new anxieties of disconnection, a kind of panic" (2011, 16).[21] In essence, the types of connections made through these technologies are controlled, shallow, and serve to isolate people both while connected to them as well as disconnected from them.

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[19] The attention economy has arisen alongside the proliferation of smartphones. Users of smartphones and social media are the citizens of this new economy. Crawford (2015) sums it up in that "attention is a resource—a person only has so much of it" (11). As a result app developers, product designers, and countless forms of media are all competing for the users' attention. Attention is defined as the "focused mental engagement on a particular item of information. Items come into our awareness, we attend to a particular item, and then we decide whether to act" (Davenport & Beck 2001, 20).

[20] 'Always on' can be seen in American millennials—on average they check their phones 157 times a day (Klein 2016).

[21] Interestingly, Turkle's choice of 'panic' parallels wilderness: "The word 'panic' originated from the blinding fear that seized travelers upon hearing strange cries in the wilderness and assuming them to signify Pan's approach" (Nash 1982, 11).

Daniel Miller contrasts Turkle's belief that social media and these technologies diminish the real and isolate their users. Instead, he asserts that social media actually reinforces and bolsters sociality. These technologies and platforms are being appropriated to do social things and therefore are just as social as other forms of connections (Miller and Horst 2012, 3). This ties closely with Miller and Sinanan's (2014) 'theory of attainment', in which they cede that there might be new forms of connections created by these technologies, but they "refuse to view a new technology as disrupting some prior holistic state" (12). In opposition to Turkle, this theory suggests that people's relationships to people, experiences, and technologies cannot be disentangled from each other (ibid, 3). So rather than believing that these new connections are diminishing the real, these technologies are instead realizing what was "already latent in the condition of being human" (ibid, 12). [22] In addition, while simultaneously realizing these latencies technologies also create them (ibid, 15). This realization-creation relationship is exemplified in their study of the rise of webcams. Miller and Sinanan explain that the introduction of the webcam "destabilizes and problematizes the notion of home, but then in turn reconstructs a concept and experience of home in its own right" (ibid, 18). Rather than these technologies disconnecting people from the real by remaking connections, they instead create, transform, and amplify connections.

What both Turkle and Miller agree on is that social media and smartphones have impacted connections in some way. In contrast to the "old" logic of all-or-nothing with connection / disconnection, this "new" logic would occupy the middle ground. The various forms and types of connections created through the introduction of these technologies are what will directly intersect with the "old" logic. Most importantly, these debates about connections / disconnections on social media and the 'wilderness experience' were

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[22] Latency defined as "present but not visible, apparent, or actualized; existing as potential" (Dictionary.com).

taking place amongst my informants. These concepts and logics were being worked out and negotiated in the field. As such there will not be a right or wrong answer regarding their intersection. Instead, I describe what is happening as a result of these logics clashing together.

Ethnography

"You had to be there"

Figure 6: Sierra del Carmen

Sitting on the porch of the one hundred year old ranch house turned researcher bunkhouse, Louis and I were drinking Lonestars and enjoying the sun's last ray's dancing along the Sierra del Carmens, a mountain range across the Rio Grande in Mexico. This harmony of cold beer and Texas sunsets became an evening ritual of sorts for Louis and I. We had been chatting about how even with my fancy new DSLR camera, photos would still not do the sunset justice. After mulling over this while taking a sip of beer, Louis expressed that the point of national parks was to experience them first-hand. He found it a shame that due to Big Bend's remote location, not many visitors come to appreciate its beauty—to experience it in person. When I asked him his thoughts on people seeing the park on social media, such as pictures of the sublime sunsets, and finding an appreciation for it there, he thought for a moment. His response: "If you're seeing the park from your couch, what's the point?"

In many of my encounters, a sentiment began to appear which I came to recognize as a "you had to be there" mentality. I noticed an underlying predilection common amongst many of my informants, one in which to truly connect to the park you had to physically be there. This is clearly exemplified in Louis and I's discussion, but it also brought something else to light. Connecting to the park online, just as Turkle (2012) asserts in discussing connections between people, was a less 'real' connection than being in the park itself. Embodying the "old" wilderness logic, this mentality privileges the physical connection to Big Bend as a place. This exemplifies the "old" logic's dual nature: a physical disconnection from civilization is necessary to connect to the 'wilderness experience'. What has changed is how this disconnection / connection is made. No longer is physically being in the park enough to justify a disconnection from civilization and a connection to wilderness. Now, there are two requirements—one must be disconnected both offline *and* online from civilization.

I first noticed this change when I kayaked the Rio Grande with Sharon, a schoolteacher in Big Bend who has lived there for over twenty years. She is the mother to a teenage daughter and when she found out what I was researching she told me her golden rule for family camping trips: "no iPhones or iPads allowed". Sharon felt much like Louis in that smartphones detracted from the first-hand experience of these places, of the experience of being disconnected. It seemed that the ability to connect online would create a disconnection from the offline, 'real' experience that was superior and all-important in the "old" logic. In accordance with the "old" logic, these online connections effectively were 'prostheses of civilization'. To combat this Sharon chose to leave the smartphones at home. To make the privileged connection of the "old" logic, Sharon felt that she needed to physically disconnect herself both offline and online.

Sitting at the bar in the basin lodge, one of the few places in the park with Wi-Fi and cold beer, I struck up a conversation with a visitor next to me as we compared our

activities for the day. Doug, as I soon came to know him, was a retired doctor traveling through the park on his way back to Maine and had stopped for a few days to explore. After telling him why I was in the park, we had a dialogue about his personal experience with his smartphone while in Big Bend. He greatly enjoyed not having cell service while at his campsite, as he did not feel pressured to connect to anyone or anything. Rather than feeling "anxieties of disconnection" (Turkle 2012, 16) as a result of being 'offline', Doug relished in it. For him it was a break from the constant connection of the online, "a chance to get away from it all". Similar to Sharon, but without feeling the need to physically break from his device, the 'online' in the broadest sense was an extension of civilization as put forth by the "old" logic.

Echoing the 'you had to be there' sentiment, he said "It's a shame we have to have these things [smartphones] in national parks, isn't it?" Doug, just as Louis and Sharon, felt that these devices had the potential to detract from the 'real' experience of the park. He further clarified this statement for me in saying that while in the park his phone was only used as a camera, "not a communication device". This separation between communication and camera within the same device was fascinating. It exemplified control over how he connected—he recognized its ability to connect online but was actively choosing to be disconnected. He was managing his connections and disconnections so as to get the 'real' experience. In contrast to Sharon feeling that she must physically disconnect from her smartphone, Doug felt that he could control his disconnection while having the device on his person. Doug's experience of this disconnection problematized Turkle's belief that "if we're not able to be alone, we're going to be more lonely" (2012). She explained that this loneliness stems from the inability to "cultivate the capacity for solitude" (2012) as a result of being constantly connected. In Doug's case, he did not find that the constant connections made him feel any more or less alone, nor did being disconnected.

Figure 7: View from summit of Emory Peak

In the early 2000s Laura visited Big Bend over a long weekend. She had just purchased her first cell phone—a Motorola—and brought it along to the park. There was an innate understanding that service would be sparse and just as her previous visits to the park she expected to be disconnected. One morning she threw together her hiking gear and set off to climb Emory Peak, the tallest mountain in the park. The trail to the top is a winding one that snakes along the mountainside, rising some 1,500 feet from the basin floor before reaching the granite summit. As she stepped onto the summit, winded after the three-hour hike, she sat and had a snack while catching her breath. While resting she dug through her backpack and found a passenger previously unbeknownst to her: the new cell phone. For the fun of it, fully expecting there to be no service, she switched it on. Much to her surprise she connected to the cell network. After the initial bewilderment waned, Laura's new unexpected connection allowed her to call her parents. While on the phone together they marveled at how she could make this connection from such a physically remote place.

Almost twenty years later, Laura refuses to take her cell phone (now a smartphone) on hikes. Instead, she sees it as a 'prosthesis of civilization' due to its constant connection, and chooses to leave it at home. When hiking and exploring the park she makes this form of disconnection, just as Sharon and Doug, in order to connect

to the 'real'. For Laura, however, there were two disconnections she sought to control. The first was from civilization and its extension through the online. The second was tied to the first, one where a looming compulsion to snap photos and share on social media was reassuringly absent. This made disconnection from social media specifically is related to the 'always on' connection that has resulted from these platforms migrating to mobile devices, as aforementioned by Miller. Adding to this, Zeynep Tufekci (2017) outlines how the architecture of social media platforms is designed to persuade users to remain continually engaged and connected. In consciously disconnecting from these platforms, Laura is controlling her connection and exerting a form of agency in the process. For Laura, this controlled disconnection from social media must be made in order to connect to the "old" wilderness experience.

With these stories I noticed an overlapping of the logics. There was a wish to maintain the privileged connection to nature in line with the "old" logic. Just as Turkle (2012) argued, this was deemed the most authentic connection and any connection made online would be lesser. Now, in order to make this connection, there had to be an active disconnection from these devices and platforms. For Louis, Sharon, Doug, and Laura it appeared as if the online and social media were a hindrance in the ability to connect to the park. For them these technologies made these first-hand experiences of the park more difficult to connect to. While Sharon, Doug, and Laura held to the "old" logic, having to physically disconnect both offline and online, the ways in which they made these disconnections and reasons for doing so were different.

Escape

In addition to a physical presence in Big Bend being a requirement for a 'real' connection in the "old" logic, there was also a different form of disconnection that I found to exist: escape. While getting dinner in a nearby town one evening I was seated with some of the law enforcement rangers. As we sat around sharing laughs and taking turns buying rounds, the conversation varied but was marred by a taboo, omnipresent topic: the proposed border wall.[23] Zach, one of the rangers, was an ex-border patrol agent who worked all along the US-Mexico border. While driving back after dinner under the moonless sky emblazoned with thousands of stars, Sharon asked Zach what he thought of "the wall". He calmly outlined how ineffective and fiscally irresponsible it would be to install. Zach knew that the unforgiving terrain, 'the great nothing', was the largest deterrent to illegal crossings. In closing he said, "You come out here and see the Milky Way, all these stars, and hardly any other people and you get to escape politics."

Being physically disconnected was seen as removing oneself from politics and more generally life outside of Big Bend. For Zach, all it took was the physical isolation to escape and disconnect, but this disconnection was not made in order to make some privileged connection. This idea of escape was unique in that it privileged disconnection. Despite being located literally on the border, on federally owned land, and constantly questioned by visitors and press both online and offline about the proposed border wall, this escapist belief was widely held amongst my informants. It was an offline equivalent of the "Goldilocks Effect" (Turkle 2012). It was as if physical isolation held all of these issues at arms length, no matter how much they may encroach through other connections such as the online. The disconnection could be controlled through physical distance. However, this disconnection was still a way of relating to civilization and

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[23] President Trump wants to build a wall along the entire US-Mexico border, which includes Big Bend National Park. http://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526612415/in-big-bend-texas-theres-bipartisan-consensus-no-border-wall Accessed 1 September 2017.

politics specifically. Most importantly, this escape to wilderness in the "old" logic implies an impermanence. Since one in wilderness is "a visitor who does not remain", Zach could never truly disconnect or escape.

Half-There

Following from these made disconnections / connections with the offline, there was a new form I noticed where someone connected to the online while in Big Bend could be "half-there". Laura regaled me with a story about a post she had seen on Facebook where a group of hikers was on one of the park's most strenuous trails, the South Rim, and were camping there for an evening. Their campsite was considered in the backcountry, a label that comprises the same regulations as wilderness but is limited to national parks.[24] As a thunderstorm rolled in bringing hail and lightening, one of the hikers live streamed their experience in the storm on Facebook. Laura saw this and was frustrated, saying that this "look at us! We're in the moment" attitude, exemplified in their live broadcasting of their experience, was disconnecting them from the real experience.

Laura's original reasons for seeking wilderness were purely personal. Only she needed to know that she had been there, that it was just her and her alone. Now she believed that "people's self enjoyment isn't enough anymore". This attitude could be a result of Turkle's argument that "constant connection is changing the way people think about themselves" (2012). To Laura, what has changed is that these constant connections do not allow for the cultivation of a 'real' connection.

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[24] "The term backcountry is a generic descriptor for areas of a park unit outside of highly developed front-country zones. Nearly all wilderness-eligible lands are within undeveloped backcountry areas in existing parks. It is often true that many of those undesignated backcountry areas, even today, are wild and highly natural in the minds of visitors and managers alike. However, unless such areas have been identified and evaluated in a formal wilderness review process that confirms the presence of sustainable wilderness values, the supplemental legal mandate to preserve wilderness character does not apply." (National Wilderness Steering Committee, 2005)

Laura believed that social media fostered a proclivity to share things instantaneously through the 'always on'. She acknowledged that the desire to share the offline 'wilderness experience' and the love that these users have for it was a positive thing. It would hopefully allow more people to connect to it through these platforms. However, she thought that these people "were missing out on something by not totally being there." In a way the hikers were 'half-there', grounded in the offline connection to Big Bend but disconnected through their use of Facebook. This connection to the online negated the offline connection. Social media in this instance was removing the user from the 'real' or offline connection, pulling them back into a web of online connections that previously was inaccessible in such a remote place. If following the "old" wilderness logic, the user's physical connection to the park, as well as any connections made online, was less 'real'. What was interesting is how to connect to the real 'wilderness experience' one must disconnect from both the online and offline. However, to connect back to civilization, it would only require a connection to one of the two.

Connection by Proxy

Both Laura and myself personally experienced this notion of being 'half-there' as well. Much to Laura's chagrin, even when she went through the effort to disconnect by choosing to leave her phone behind she would find others out on the trails using their devices. To Laura this was a slap in the face: "I'd want to get away from it all, and then I would see all these people on their phones or posting to social media." It angered her to see others using these 'protheses of civilization' as it diminished the disconnection that she worked so hard to make. Just being near people who were connected to the online was a form of connection to civilization for Laura. This novel type of connection is what I deem 'connection by proxy'. This type of connection is one that cannot be personally

controlled or made. This directly clashes with the earlier examples, where both the offline and online could be managed.

Louis and I had ventured deep off of the trail searching for the endangered bird species he was monitoring. At this point we were miles from the car having waded through all kinds of thorny plants, across countless steep ravines, and encountered rattle snakes along the way. After doing this day in and day out for a week I was already on my second pair of jeans as the first had been ripped to shreds. We arrived at our furthest point and stopped to rest along the base of the cliffs that rim the perimeter of the Chisos Basin. Sitting in silence, we gazed out across the vast desert sprawling out below us. Interrupting the silence came a birdcall, but not a real bird—Louis's text tone. Somehow, in our exact spot, he unexpectedly connected to cell service. This was met with a bit of surprise and some delight by Louis, who began to check emails and sent his wife a photo of our view.

Just as with Laura doing everything on her own to disconnect from the online before venturing out into the wilderness, I had done the same on my adventure with Louis. While I actively made a disconnection for myself, I felt connected through Louis for a number of reasons. First, as with the "old" trope, it shattered my experience of being "out there" because his connection was an extension of civilization. His unexpected connection to cell service led to an unexpected disconnection from the 'real' wilderness for me. Just as Laura, I was 'half-there' in a way—and not by choice. However, the most prominent disconnection I felt in that moment was more so from civilization than from the wilderness. Seeing Louis use his phone really created a compulsion for me to use mine. I felt as if I was missing out on a connection—that I was isolated because I could not get online. Rather than relishing in this isolation of disconnection as Doug had, the lack of control I had led to me feeling anxious just as Turkle explained. Unlike Laura in

feeling that I was 'half-there' by being disconnected from the offline experience, I felt I was 'half-there' in that I could not fully connect to the online.

Un/Expect the Un/Expected

What was most interesting regarding the "old" logic's intersection with the "new" and the resulting connections / disconnections were those that were unexpected. In contrast to the others explained in this chapter, these unexpected connections and disconnections did not need to be actively made by individuals. Instead, they required effort be put into their inverse and in some cases were uncontrollable.

One form of an unexpected connection existed solely in the offline and was encountered in my research while on a river trip up the Rio Grande. Myself, Hannah, Corbin, and Hans canoed into Santa Elena canyon so Corbin could get some shots for a film he was working on. We spent the night nestled in the bottom of the canyon on the banks of the Rio, sitting around a fire drinking sotol and singing songs. The next morning we ventured up Fern Canyon, a slot canyon that intersects with Santa Elena. A large group of locals had met up with us in the morning and we spent the afternoon enjoying the cool pools in Fern. We drank beer and a few were smokers, but all of them firmly asserted that we must pack out all our trash, any traces of our visit, so as to not "break the spell of wilderness" for the next visitors. Here the goal was to not let a future visitor encounter an unexpected connection to civilization. If encountered, the visitor would be connected to civilization in a way they could not control. Their efforts would then have to be focused on re-making a disconnection from civilization.

These unexpected connections occur with the "new" logic as well. One example would be when a visitor is out in the park with the expectation that they will not have service, but connect to it without planning or making an effort to—such as Louis. However, in contrast to the "old" logic where a connection to civilization is bad, to Louis

this connection was good. His attitude here parallels Laura's during her first experience on Emory Peak, where her unexpected connection was a positive as it allowed her to share her experience. In this case Louis did not see the online as affecting his offline connection to the park. Given that the "new" logic privileges the connection to the online, this form of unexpected connection is a good thing. In contrast, as the "old" logic prioritizes the connection to wilderness, the unexpected connection would be a bad thing.

"Where's the Wi-Fi?"

Figure 8: Wi-Fi map icon

In this chapter I examine how types of connections in Big Bend have evolved over the last 30 years through the introduction of various technologies. I begin this brief history with payphones and how their status in the park changed with the advent of cell phones and later smartphones. This change in status is illustrated in my conversation with Lauren where I draw in the theory of attainment to ascertain the impact of these changes. Moving to present day I describe the debate amongst Big Bend staff over the installation of Wi-Fi. Lastly I show how payphones and Wi-Fi in the park are more similar than they may appear.

Payphones

Up until 2010 the only way visitors could connect to the outside world while in Big Bend was via payphones. These were installed at all of the visitor centers,

campgrounds, and at the basin lodge. The locations of these phones were not listed on any park maps as illustrated by an archived map from the mid-2000's below (Figure 9):

Figure 9: Big Bend map comparison: mid-2000s (top), 2017 (bottom)

Now, these payphones are being phased out of service as cell phones have become ubiquitous. Given that a growing number of visitors to the park have smartphones, payphones are seen as outdated and redundant. As sections of the park have been connected to cell towers, the payphones that existed therein have been removed but their skeletons still remain as seen in Appendix A. Two things intrigued me about payphones in Big Bend. First, if someone wanted to connect through one they had to physically travel to the location of the phone in order to do so. Second, there was only one form of connection possible through the phone.

Cell service has been improved in the park over the years but coverage is far from all encompassing. Currently a single payphone survives in the park—in the Chisos Basin—as no cell coverage can penetrate the surrounding mountain walls. This relic of a time past fascinated me so I raised the question during a discussion with Kyle. As he has lived and worked in the park for over thirty years, I knew he would have some insights into how these connections have changed. Kyle said that the basin's payphone has been left in operation, as it is the sole way visitors can contact the outside world

while camping in the basin. Expanding on this, Kyle said Big Bend's official position on the matter is that visitors must have the ability or option to connect should they need or want to, with the payphone allowing them to do so.

Kyle was quick to say that the basin's phone will be removed in a short time. This decision was made due to two reasons. First, the payphone is rarely if ever used. It is located in the Basin Lodge that now has a Wi-Fi connection that visitors prefer to utilize in lieu of the phone. Second, the company who operates the phone has been pressuring the park to remove it in favor of installing cell service in the basin. As we were in a group setting during this discussion, Megan was quick to chime in: "Well, at least you still won't get service in other parts of the park." To her, the introduction of cell service in the basin and more broadly to the park was a negative. Not having service, being disconnected, was seen as a positive thing that contributed to the allure of Big Bend. Much like Doug she enjoyed being disconnected from what she saw as a constant connection, but for Megan it seemed as if she did not even want the option or temptation to connect.

"Natural Progression"

The progression of devices allowing for visitors to connect to the 'outside world' began with the payphone in Big Bend. A payphone is rooted in a physical place and affords one type of connection: a phone call. The cell phone uprooted this type of connection and meant that it could be made anywhere as long as there was cell coverage. The cell phone also added another form of connection: text messaging. Today, in the latest stage of this progression, is the smartphone. This device includes its predecessor's forms of connections and adds to them countless more. In addition, they require Wi-Fi or cell service as a prerequisite to making these connections.

I discussed the near universal presence of smartphones amongst visitors in Big Bend with Lauren. She had been working in the park for a little over two years and was in her mid-20s. To Lauren, smartphones entering into the park was "just part of the natural progression". She did not see any controversy or conflict arising from their introduction to Big Bend. To her it was irrational to think that the park would try and resist rather than adapt to this change. For Lauren these technologies were not "disrupting a prior holistic state" (Miller and Sinanan 2014) as the "old" logic would believe. Instead they were realizing an existing latency. Smartphones were simply realizing connections previously unavailable through payphones or cell phones. Accordingly the relationship between smartphones and the park was not inherently tragic, but rather was transforming, amplifying, and creating connections.

Wi-Fi: Good or Bad?

Prior to 2016, there was no public Wi-Fi in Big Bend National Park. Before 2010, there was hardly any cell service. 2016 was the centennial anniversary for the National Park Service. In order to celebrate this monumental occasion, the NPS initiated a centennial goal: diversify park audiences and get more visitors into the national parks. As such, there was a push to adapt to new audiences' desires and expectations—many of which involved the ability to connect online. In addition, there was an understanding on the institutional level of NPS that millennials[25] were a largely untapped audience for the national parks and many of the centennial initiatives were tailored to target this demographic.

One of the impacts of the NPS's centennial goal in Big Bend was the installation of Wi-Fi at the visitor centers and the basin lodge. According to Laura, this was a hugely divisive issue amongst the park staff as well as on the individual level. One faction saw

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[25] In America, this generation is considered to be those aged 18-35.

Wi-Fi as the beginning of the end for Big Bend. No longer would the park be a bastion of disconnection, one of the last few places "off the map".[26] Wi-Fi and the seamless, constant connection it would bring was the first step down the path towards permanently altering Big Bend. The opposite side believed Wi-Fi was an invaluable addition to the park. They held that it would greatly improve the visitor experience and help draw a range of audiences to the park in accordance with the centennial goals. It would open the door for new ways to connect to Big Bend.

Louis touched on this debate, explaining that the NPS as well as his employer the U.S. Forestry Service have both been grappling with a general contradiction. As an organization, the NPS is trying to adapt its values, practices, and policies to keep up with the changing times while still desiring to remain grounded in the original values and ideals that it was founded on. Louis explained that it has become a difficult task to balance these two sides within one organization. Many of my informants held both viewpoints in parallel on a personal level, understanding that this was not a cut and dry issue. Laura and Bruce were two of these people.

Laura held both sides of this issue together like a coin standing on edge. She knew that Wi-Fi in Big Bend directly fit with NPS's centennial goal and would help bring a new audience into the park. She understood that these new visitors would harbor an expectation that they would be able to connect online during their stay in the park. However, her own personal views on the 'real' way to experience the park indicated that she was torn. Laura, as many others of my informants, felt that it would affect the way Big Bend was experienced—connected to—in a negative way. Her logic of connection was grounded in the "old" wilderness experience where the offline was championed as the authentic. She struggled to find the middle ground on which these two logics could overlap.

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[26] Minor Tillotson, Southwest regional director for the NPS, often referred to the park as the "last frontier of America". *Alpine Avalanche* 8 May 1942.

Another park ranger who had lived in Big Bend for over a decade was not as diplomatic as Laura. In fact, Laura recommended I speak to him due to his hardline position on the matter. Bruce and I met outside the visitor center one afternoon. He was tall, with long salt and pepper hair tied back in a ponytail. He wore sunglasses despite the dense cloud cover and seemed to constantly surveil his surroundings throughout our discussion. He spoke with intensity—the subject seemed to be something he was quite passionate about.

Bruce believed that with the addition of Wi-Fi was the result of the proliferation of "stupidphones, not smartphones" and that Big Bend would never be the same. He asserted that smartphones ruined visitors' experience of the park because "people are constantly tethered to them". As with Laura, he believed that they made it near impossible for visitors to disconnect, preventing them from connecting to the park. He added that not only were visitors physically tethered to these devices, but they also had developed a "mental dependency" on them and were "no longer able to think for themselves". Bruce believed that as a result of this constant connection to their devices and subsequent mental dependency, visitors were now putting more trust and credence into their devices than they were in themselves or the park staff. As Turkle put it, they were expecting "more from technology and less from each other" (2012).

This example of tethering and mental dependency exposes a shift in a connection. Turkle asserted that smartphone users, especially those in younger generations, have "an expectation of continuous connection: always on, always on them" (2012, 17). The 'always on' here is not specific to social media but instead is the more general connection to the online. Bruce's belief that people are physically tethered to their phones falls under this expectation too. What this expectation has shifted is the connection desired amongst visitors while in Big Bend. In a way the connection to the online was being privileged while experiencing the offline.

Location, Location, Location

In a way, it was as if there was a frontier of sorts in its death throes. One that was not necessarily a physical closing as it was with the pioneers, but instead an ever-encroaching ease to seamlessly connect to Wi-Fi or cell coverage. As Laura said during our interview, "People looking to get off the map will now have to go further than Big Bend." Getting off the map has shifted from physically disconnecting from civilization to having to disconnect from the online extension of it as well. I found that the common sentiment was that it has become more difficult to disconnect due to the ease of connections made possible through Wi-Fi and cell service. Sure you can still strike a course deep into 'the great nothing', getting away from other visitors, cars, and civilization. But now you can also be in parts of the great nothing and get a call from your boss.

However, even with the addition of Wi-Fi and improvements in cell service in Big Bend, there were some intricacies amongst the types of connections. Just as with a payphone, visitors still had to physically be at a location to connect to Wi-Fi or cell networks. The locations with Wi-Fi in the park during my research always resembled oases in the desert. No matter the time of day, even after the building had closed, I would always see someone outside connecting his or her phone to the network. At popular times there would be multiple people—from whole families to individuals—all engaged with their devices outside or inside the visitor center. In contrast to a payphone that has just one type of connection, Wi-Fi / cell coverage and the online affords countless types of connections ranging from social media to email. The combination of Big Bend not falling under total cell coverage and the changing expectation of being continuously connected has led to the park publishing a flyer in the visitor centers called "Finding the Sweet Spots". This outlines all the areas in Big Bend where cell service is reliable.

Bruce also discussed how despite visitors believing they could connect to the online anywhere while in the park; location still plays a huge role. According to Bruce, many people come to the park with the expectation that they can use their smartphone to plan trails to hike, use the GPS to navigate, and call for help in an emergency. He noticed that as part of this expectation of connection, smartphones had become a sort of "safety blanket" for visitors while in Big Bend. To Bruce, this meant that visitors were more prone to taking risks while in the park, not fully preparing in advance and not understanding the potential consequences of their actions. As a result, when a visitor was lost or injured while out in the park they would have an expectation that help was just a call away. However, unless they were in range of a cell tower or Wi-Fi this call for help could not be made.

A fortunately minor case of this occurred with Mary, a recent college graduate who was visiting the park with a group of friends. They set out on a trail in the basin with just their smartphones running Google Maps, no paper maps or knowledge of where to go. While initially they had Wi-Fi at the lodge and could chart their route they became lost on their return as they could not connect online. Quickly they realized that their smartphone's GPS was no longer working. The group had expected to be connected throughout their hike and when they became disconnected they felt anxious and isolated. Their "safety blanket" had been ripped away and their "mental dependency" exposed.

What truly is unique to Big Bend is the location. Connections in Big Bend today, just as thirty years ago, must be actively made. What have changed are the types of connections that can now be made in the park. While smartphones brought new forms of connections into Big Bend, the physical location can disconnect them. Megan, Laura, and Bruce all felt that these new connections made it more difficult to connect to the "old" wilderness experience. With more connections came more things to disconnect

from—more 'prostheses of civilization'. However, if taking this same example in the "new" logic there is an inverse. The location of Big Bend makes it harder to connect to the privileged online. Instead of effortlessly connecting through these devices, visitors must actively make them by traveling to a location. In this "new" logic it became easier to disconnect from all of these new connections.

Social Media Analysis

In this section I begin with an overview of Big Bend's official guidelines for social media. These guidelines are then explored through my own social media analysis of Big Bend's Facebook page. This analysis serves to intervene into the ongoing debate around social media as framed in the literature review. I wanted to treat Facebook interactions as one form of connection. In contrast to the other connections and disconnections encountered in my ethnography, this form of connection could be quantified. The questions that arise from this are numerous—what is being connected to? What is the content of these connections? What is the quality of these connections? What are these connections doing? I draw on the impacts of these guidelines and the findings of my analysis to discuss connections to Big Bend through social media.

In 2014 Big Bend established a set of guidelines for the use of social media in order to standardize their presence and image on these platforms. The three platforms that the park uses are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Of those, Facebook and Instagram will be what I focus on in this analysis, as they are the two most used. Below I have summarized some key points from the official guidelines (Table 1).

Figure 10: Big Bend's social media guidelines--key points (Table 1)

Purpose	• Use social media to provide information, interpretation, and education about Big Bend • Use social media to create lasting relationships between people, the park, and the park service
Goals	• Encourage visitation and new audiences • Use to improve understanding of visitor needs • Share park stories in new ways
Audience	• Push to get new audiences • Past / present visitors to the park • Park community
Facebook	• Use: provide emergency updates, educational and informational content, and interpretive content • Minimum posts of 3 a week, up to once a day • Must respond to comments if necessary within 3 days
Instagram	• Recognition that it is popular among millennial generation • "Best used for beautiful, captivating images" • Need to post often to keep a following • Never can post more than twice a day in order to ensure maximum audience reach for each post • Focus on image in lieu of text—keep it short
Guidelines for Posting	• Voice of the park: official stance of NPS and Big Bend • Respond to comments and follow guidelines • Be conversational • Use platforms independently: Each has a different audience

There are a few things that are important to draw from these guidelines and that were also touched on heavily during my interview with Laura. First is the desire to use social media to connect and "form lasting relationships" between Big Bend and its audiences online. Second is the push for new audiences, which directly relates to the NPS's belief that millennials, Big Bend's target audience according to Laura, chiefly use Instagram. The guidelines for Instagram are the most detailed of the three and an emphasis is placed on photography—partly due to the nature of the platform. Third, all posts must fall in line with a consistent official voicing of the park. Lastly, as stated in both the guidelines and discussed in my interview with Laura, "each platform must be used independently as each has a different audience".

Overall, Big Bend's mission was to employ social media as a tool through which the offline, first-hand experience could be replicated online. It is this replication—the construction of the park's image and presence on social media—that the guidelines were

designed around. There would be a different type of connection made to the 'online', one that would be easier to make. This is where the literature on the relationship between social media and nature, specifically spectacle, plays a key role. Rather than seeing the relationship between social media and nature as a negative regarding spectacle and fetishization, it seems Big Bend's guidelines parallel Anders Hansen's (2010) argument. He agrees with Igoe that images of wilderness and nature are being abstracted from specific locations and environments to then be crafted into universal and iconic representations (2010, 3). However, Hansen believes that in doing so, this practice helps "build public vocabulary of the environments and environmental issues" (ibid, 3). As my focus is not on environmental movements or issues per se, this is best seen in an abstract fashion. Similar to the "new" logic set forth here, there is an emphasis on making a connection to Big Bend and its audience on these online platforms.

Susan Davis (1996) explains that the relationship to nature through heavily photographic media is a simple and unobstructed one. The process of obscuring the contexts and realities of these images, combining them with others to form a cohesive spectacular whole does two things. First, it removes these images from the realities that produced them, disconnecting them from those local relationships. Second, it allows for an easier connection to be made to the spectacle that is produced. It eliminates the vast number of connections in favor of a streamlined one. It is this process that I wish to delve into, as well as the types of connections created as a result.

In taking the offline Big Bend and translating it to social media, I wanted to understand how connections were being created, remade, and transformed. Was this process inherently bad as Davis or Igoe would believe? Or, following Hansen's reasoning, could this process of streamlining be a positive way to foster meaningful connections to the park? It is with these questions in mind that I turn to be my analysis of Big Bend's Facebook page as seen below in Table 2:

Month	Total Postings	Per. w/ Photo	Per. w/ Text	Total Interactions	Total Photo Interactions	Per. Of Total Interactions	Total Text Interactions	Per. Of Total Interactions
January	23	96%	4%	8476	8435	99.50%	41	0.50%
February	16	88%	12%	7875	7427	94%	448	6%
March	19	84%	16%	6515	5845	90%	670	10%
April	19	79%	21%	6710	5820	87%	890	13%
May	28	61%	39%	9298	7481	80%	1817	20%
June	17	71%	29%	6663	6012	90%	651	10%
TOTALS:	122	~80% average	~20% average	45537	41020	90%	4517	10%

Figure 11: Social media analysis of Facebook (Table 2)

For the six-month duration of my analysis there were a total of 122 Facebook posts. These were divided between those that had a photograph or video and those with just text. The goal was to see if the park's audience on this platform had a preference for photographic posts or text posts, with this preference determined through the quantification of interactions each post received.

It immediately became apparent that the audience prefers to connect and interact with photographic posts. The photo posts garnered 90% of the total interactions. In addition, the park chose to post photos over text at a ratio of 4:1. The only anomaly found was the month of May, which saw a spike in text posts. However, this was due to a wildfire burning in the park for a week in May. This prompted the park to utilize Facebook for news updates and emergency statements regarding the fire.

From this initial analysis I drew on the dichotomy between photos and text posts. I chose to examine the top post for each month based on interactions versus the low post for each month. The findings for the top posts are found in Table 3:

Top Posts			
Month	Photo?	Total Interactions	Percent of Months Interactions
January	Y	1800	21%
February	Y	2200	28%
March	Y	1000	15%
April	Y	1900	18%
May	Y	1900	20%
June	Y	1700	26%
TOTALS:	100%	10500	23%

Figure 12: Top Facebook posts (Table 3)

These six posts that comprise just 5% of all posts analyzed account for 23% of the total interactions for the studied period. Each of these posts has two things in common: a visually striking photograph and a brief snippet of text. It is clear that month over month the emphasis is on photographs. These six posts can be seen in Appendix B.

Low Posts			
Month	Photo?	Total Interactions	Percent of Months Interactions
January	N	41	0.5%
February	Y	39	0.5%
March	N*	27	0.4%
April	N	57	0.8%
May	N	25	0.3%
June	N	40	0.8%
TOTALS:	17%	239	0.5%

Figure 13: Low Facebook posts (Table 4)

As with the top posts these comprise 5% of the total posts analyzed. Four of these posts were plain text posted as status updates. The March post was a flyer for a local event that was uploaded as an image, but just displayed text. This was treated as a plain text post for the purpose of this analysis. The only photo post was of a snake and included a brief text description reminding visitors to be safe. So, discounting the photo of the snake—they are scary after all—five out of the six low posts were text.

Comparing the results of my analysis with the guidelines put in place by Big Bend, I begged the question: are the guidelines working? Are visitors / these audiences connecting to the park through social media? The answer is a resounding yes, but with a catch—the connections being made are not necessarily those intended. These unintended connections fostered through social media are both online and offline.

The park's guidelines for Facebook seem to fit with my findings. The top posts for each month all were essentially the same format. Each had a beautiful, captivating image with short lines of text. These two qualities for a post are completely in line with the park's guidelines for Instagram posts. It is curious to see how this same type of post performs well, garnering the highest number of interactions, cross-platform. This is

especially curious given Laura's insistence that each platform is different, with each requiring specific posting habits, voicing, and being comprised of a unique audience.

Rather than treating each of these platforms as distinct in my own analysis, I employed the theory of polymedia, which asserts that platforms such as these can only be understood if taken in relation to one another (Madianou and Miller 2012). Through this analysis it is shown that Facebook's audience has a propensity similar to that of Instagram. Given that Instagram is arguably the park's most popular platform it makes sense why the Facebook posts that resemble those on Instagram garner the most interactions. In taking these two platforms together, it seems that the online connection the audience wishes to make with the park is one based in visual media that is simple and easy to connect to.

In a sense, there is a co-production of connections occurring between the park and the visitors on these platforms. Igoe et. al. (2008) explain that protected areas, such as wildlife preserves and national parks, "tend to be homogenized and packaged in ways that appeal to external tastes" (142). It becomes a sort of cyclical paradox in which the audiences' wants are formulated from the connections they have made to these simple, unobstructed wholes on social media but through these connections the audience also directly impacts how the 'whole' is constructed. This cyclical relationship in combination with other connections on social media has led to unintended connections being made both online and offline. These will be explored in the upcoming chapter "Virtualisms and Social Media".

Virtualisms and Social Media

What I observed in my social media analysis as well as my ethnography was that the connections to Big Bend on social media were impacting the park both online and offline. Online, the audiences' expectations were altering how the park constructs and controls its image on Facebook. Offline, the park physically had to manage landscapes and visitor habits as a direct result of connections made through social media. In many cases the two overlapped in a middle ground that involved both online and offline connections.

Online

The impact of the audiences' connections on social media was most apparent in the melding of Facebook posts to match those of Instagram. This showed that Big Bend was adapting to the audience's desires while still trying to remain within their guidelines. With this in mind it seems that park's audience on Facebook was changing the park's image, asserting through their interactions which Big Bend they wished to connect to. This recursive relationship between the park and its audience on social media fits with West and Carrier's (2004) assertion that tourists' expectations and desires about the natural destinations they visit actually change these places, in this case both online and offline, as a result of "virtualisms" (Carrier 1998). Virtualisms are explained by Igoe et. al. (2008) as assemblies of discourses, ideas, values, and images that "reproduce the material world according to the ways they imagine it to be" (193).

One of these changes was seen in Laura's most recent visit to Emory Peak. She and another ranger on her team hiked to the summit and conducted a Facebook live stream where they showcased the peak, educated visitors on the geology of the Chisos Mountains, and discussed the wildlife inhabiting the mountain environment. For Laura, this was a way to engage the park's audience on social media in a novel way in line with

Figure 14: Facebook live stream, Emory Peak.

the park's guidelines. This technique allowed for the audience watching to connect to the park, fostering a relationship to it through social media. In doing this Laura was able to replicate the offline experience of Big Bend online in accordance with audience expectations, allowing for new types of connections to the park to be made. Not only had the social media team live streamed from the top of Emory Peak, they also had encouraged visitors to take 'selfies' on the summit and post them to social media platforms. Their goal was to get visitors to interact and connect to the park on social media while being physically present in the park.

Figure 15: Selfie flyer posted on Big Bend's Facebook page.

There was a paradox created here: when the park used social media as a 'tool' to garner new audiences and help promote visitation it was a positive connection, but when used in the same way by visitors it was viewed as a disconnection. This paradox exemplifies the "old" and "new" logics overlapping. Laura seemingly held both logics together at once. The "old" logic informed her that any form of connection other than the privileged offline one to the 'wilderness experience', such as connecting to the park on social media, would be inauthentic as the audience would not really be there. The "new" logic told her that these technologies could expand the connections to the park in new ways. Laura religiously controlled her personal disconnection from these platforms in order to connect to the 'real' wilderness—but used these platforms to connect people to the 'real' experience in her official capacity on Big Bend's social media. The overlapping

of these logics is far from neat. Rather than simply online versus offline, civilization versus wilderness, the "new" logic fills the middle ground. The connections and disconnections that are amplified, diminished, and created all occupy this space in between the two.

Offline

In the same discussion with Lauren about the natural progression of smartphones in Big Bend, she also explained how during her tenure in the park it was not so much that smartphones or social media were affecting the park, but that visitors were. Her first point was that the increase in visitors had changed the staffs' management tactics. Previously Big Bend could comfortably accommodate visitors even during the peak season as its infrastructure—campgrounds, parking, staffing—was designed around low visitation numbers. As the park's busy season had ballooned, people management became a top priority whereas previously it was a non-issue. Secondly, the identity and image of the park had been changed. Big Bend throughout its history has been called 'the great nothing', one of the least populated places in the continental United States. The park had been associated with such traits by the NPS itself and the image it conveys in various media, including social media, has focused on its isolation. Lauren outlined that as more visitors came to the park it simultaneously made it less isolated.

Her third point extended this line of reasoning: visitors were affecting other visitor's experience of the park simply by being there. Since there were more visitors in the park, the ability to find isolation—moments or spaces disconnected—was increasingly difficult. By physically connecting to the park the visitors were also changing the park that was being connected to. So not only could Big Bend be physically changed as a result of connections on social media, these changes could also occur

independently of the online. As Lauren illustrated, the expectation of isolation has changed due to offline connections. This example is poignant given Nash's assertion that the impact of one wilderness lover on another wilderness lover is what is leading to the death of wilderness (1982, 325).
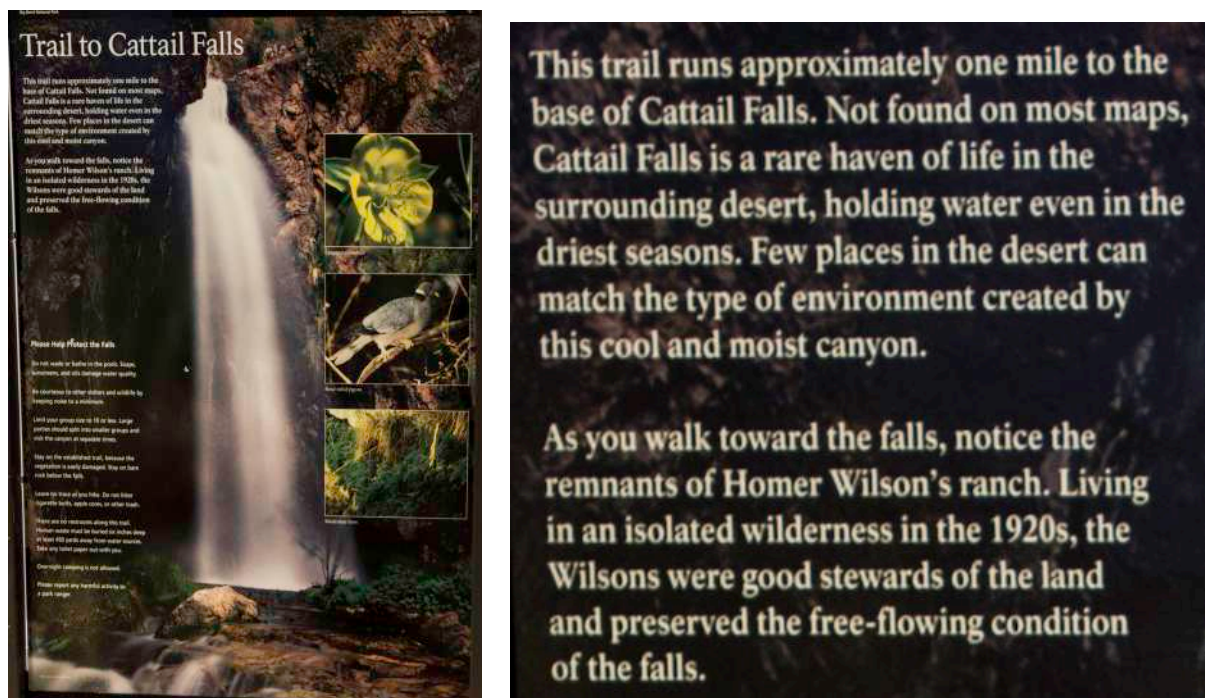
The Middle Ground

Figure 16: Cattail Falls trailhead sign

Tucked away at the base of the Chisos Mountains is a small waterfall that flows year round. Cattail Falls is one of the most ecologically fragile places in the entire park. Even at the turn of the 20th century when the pioneer gaze of conquering wilderness was still alive and well, the local ranchers in the area respected this area due to its unique ecosystem and stunning beauty. Given the sensitivity of Cattail Falls, Big Bend's management knew to take precautions in order to protect it. This site has never been listed on any public maps even though it is accessible via a maintained trail. Up until 2014, the trail that leads to the smaller Cattail Falls trail was drivable for the first few miles. However, as of a year ago, the park gated off the road at its start, thus no longer allowing visitors to drive it. The reason? Cattail Falls had seen a surge in visitation.

Bumping the gate out further and forcing visitors to hike the whole way was an attempt to limit traffic to the falls. This influx in visitation was the result of visitors posting about Cattail Falls on social media and these posts being seen by a wider audience. Even though it was not listed on maps, visitors were now putting it on the map when posting about it.

As a result Big Bend was forced to step in and manage this. The original managed disconnection strategy for Cattail Falls was to have it unlisted on maps. Now, Big Bend has assumed the role of gatekeeper in response to the online connections of its visitors. In addition to the physical gate now in place, the social media policy clearly outlines how to handle Cattail Falls in the 'Instagram Don'ts' section: "[don't] post about places or things protected from public knowledge (i.e. Cattail Falls)". So not only were the online connections having real, offline effects they were also leading to changes in the way the park posted on Instagram. These virtualisms in which connections made to Big Bend on social media were impacting offline connections trouble Turkle's assertion that connections made online were less 'real'.

During my interviews with Bruce and Laura, another instance of social media connections impacting the offline came to light regarding the visitor center. Previously visitors would arrive in the park and consult the various literatures available to them at the visitor center, as well as discuss with the Park Rangers where to go and what to do during their visit. Now, according to Laura and Bruce, visitors will turn up at the welcome center with a Facebook photo pulled up on their smartphone, asking the ranger where it is in the park so they can go find it for themselves. These visitors wanted to replicate their online connection to Big Bend when visiting the park. The connection they made online to the simple, unobstructed image was the same type of connection they wished to make offline.

Figure 17: Feeding of the Mexican Jay

One afternoon as Laura conducted her usual curating of Big Bend's Instagram account, ensuring that the user posts Big Bend had been tagged in met the park's guidelines, one in particular caught her eye. It was a photograph of a woman holding birdseed in the palm of her hand and a Mexican Jay, a prolific bird species in the Chisos Mountains, perched on a rock eating the seeds. The user's caption was filled with excitement over how absolutely breathtaking it was to be so closely connected with nature. Needless to say, Laura was furious. She immediately messaged the user urging her to take the picture down. To Laura it was against the rules of the park. Mexican Jays were notorious for bullying other species over food and thus hand feeding them would negatively impact other forms of wildlife. When I pressed her on this she said that, "People come here not knowing that this is wilderness and has rules".

In this example Laura was trying to control how Big Bend was connected to both online and offline. For the user, they were awed by this first-hand connection. The experience they wanted to have while in Big Bend was exactly their interaction with the Mexican Jay. They wanted to share their 'real' offline experience with their followers on social media to illustrate just how incredible Big Bend is. The user, just as Laura, was

taking the offline and translating it to the online. However, Laura saw this photo as a blemish on the image of the park she wished to convey on Instagram. She requested it be taken down to ensure that future visitors did not see it and believe this type of behavior to be permissible. After the two had a private dialogue through messages on Instagram, they came to a mutual understanding that the photograph would be taken down.

What is of intrigue in this story is how Big Bend's image online and the way it is formed is not limited to what is posted by the park. Instead there is a need to control what visitors post about the park so as to standardize the 'whole' of the park as presented on these platforms. Laura was not just able to craft the image of Big Bend online; she also must control how it is co-created by its audience through the management of connections. Big Bend must manage what it is that is being connected to on social media as well as how it is being connected to. It has forced Big Bend to become a gatekeeper of sorts. The staff must manage a choreography of connections and disconnections both online and offline.

Conclusions

Throughout this dissertation I have explored the relationship between social media and U.S. National Parks. My participant observation and social media analysis in Big Bend National Park led to two distinct logics of connection / disconnection arising around the 'wilderness experience': the "old" and the "new". The "old" logic of the 'wilderness experience' is grounded in the connection to the offline, 'real' world. In this logic, all disconnections from civilization must be made in order to have the authentic connection. In contrast, the "new" logic privileges the connection to the online. Any disconnection from the online would be a negative thing and must be overcome by making a connection.

'You Had To Be There' presented the first clash in which the "old" logic and its tie to place was examined. This chapter explored the various forms of disconnections / connections around this sentiment: escape, 'half-there', 'connection by proxy', and unexpected connections / disconnections. "Where's the Wi-Fi?" outlined the progression of connections in Big Bend as related to payphones, cell phones, and smartphones. The debate over Wi-Fi in the park exemplified the overlapping of these two logics. Each of these ethnographic chapters illustrated how the intersection of these two logics cannot be defined as good or bad. Instead, the connections / disconnections in Big Bend are being amplified, created, and remade as a result.

My social media analysis of Big Bend's Facebook page examined the way Big Bend constructs its image on these platforms. In comparing the official guidelines with my own results, the complex web of connections to the park both online and offline was uncovered. These resultant connections made through social media were shown to have unintended effects. "Virtualisms and Social Media" outlined how the expectations visitors have of the park are formed through the connections they have made online. It demonstrated how these expectations can have impacts both online and offline.

The relationship between these logics is best summed up in a discussion I had with Louis. After dinner one night at the ranch house, Louis, Megan, Hannah, and I were sitting on the back porch. Louis was looking at pictures on his iPhone and said, "The day K-Bar gets Wi-Fi will be a great day". Megan was quick to respond: "Yeah, but then we won't sit around and talk to each other. We'll all just be on our phones." Louis ceded the point, adding "Yeah, you're right. You can't have the best of both worlds". In essence, Louis wanted to make both privileged connections at once. He desired to maintain the real, authentic experience of being physically in the park while simultaneously being connected to the 'online'. This example reveals a middle ground where connections and disconnections are constantly being managed and controlled. It reifies Oelschlaeger's assertion that "the idea of wilderness is what anyone or group cares to think" (1991, 281)—the connections and disconnections one chooses to make are what ultimately create a 'wilderness experience'.

Appendix A

A 1: Payphone booth, Chisos Basin

A 2: Inside payphone booth, Chisos Basin

A 3: Working paypone, Chisos Basin Lodge

A 4: Working payphone, Chisos Basin Lodge

A 5: Payphone, Castolon Store

A 6: Payphone, Castolon Store

A 7: Payphone, Rio Grande Village

A 8: Payphone, Rio Grande Village

A 9: Payphone, Persimmon Gap

A 10: Payphone, Persimmon Gap

Appendix B

B 3: January Top Post

January 28 · 🌐

Brrr! Winter strikes again! A light dusting of snow settled on the Chisos Mountains last night and this morning the roads crew was busy!

#FindYourPark

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➦ Share

👍❤️😮 1.8K   Top Comments ▾

B 2: February Top Post

February 1 · 🌐

The first of this season's Bluebonnets have begun to sprout along trails and roadsides. Taller than most Bluebonnets, the Big Bend Bluebonnet (Lupinus havardii) usually blooms Feb-April. To help protect these new blooms while driving safely on park roads, pull over onto paved or gravel pullouts. Watch for many more blooms to come!
#WildflowerWednesday #Bluebonnets

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➦ Share

👍❤️😮 2.2K   Top Comments ▾

Big Bend National Park
March 16 · 🌐

Hidden away in the Dead Horse Mountains is Ernst Tinaja. Tinaja means large earthen jar in Spanish and these interesting geological features are formed by intermittent streams and waterfalls carving into the bedrock to form smooth pockets. These pockets can then fill with rain serving as an important source of surface water. Ernst Tinaja is one of the biggest and best examples of this in the park and is likely filled by an underground spring as it has never dried. Javelina, mountain lions, migrating birds, and many other creatures make stops at Ernst Tinaja to re-hydrate while wandering the Chihuahuan desert. Remember to tread lightly on this and any other water sources you may come across in Big Bend, leaving behind nothing that could contaminate these amazing resources.
The one mile roundtrip Ernst Tinaja Trail is located 4.6 miles North from the South end of the Old Ore Rd, requiring high clearance to access the trailhead.
#HikeBigBend

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➦ Share

👍❤️😮 1K   Top Comments ▾

172 shares

B 1: March Top Post

B 4: April Top Post

B 5: May Top Post

B 6: June Top Post

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APPENDIX G
Dissertation Submission Form

University of London

UCL ANTHROPOLOGY

Name of Student: John Holden Gibson III

Degree: Msc Digital Anthropology

Exact Title of Dissertation (in full): ...

The "New" Wilderness Experience: US National

Parks and Social Media

I certify that the work submitted for the above dissertation is my own and that any quotation from the published or unpublished work of other persons has been duly acknowledged.

Please tick as appropriate:

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☐ I do not give permission for my dissertation to be used as electronic reference material for subsequent Masters students in the Anthropology Department.

Signature:

Date: 5 September 2017

THIS FORM MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THE DISSERTATION

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