

## ***Leave No Trace***

by Maurice Lange

**H**ave you ever found an artifact left over from previous humans who once roamed through or otherwise occupied the place where you made the discovery?

I grew up in a family whose roots lay deep within the ranching/farming culture of south-central Texas. Our family was captivated with hikes on the land and infrequent encounters with **arrowheads**: remnants of Indigenous cultures who, hundreds of years earlier, lived in the same hills and plains. The craftsmanship put into each of these pieces of flint rock tell of the care and pride of the long-ago fashioner. The intricate chipping of the piece to make it aerodynamic also portrays the importance placed upon this tool to harvest animals that provided food and clothing for humans. Much can be told of a people by what they leave behind.



Much can also be told of a people by what they *don't* leave behind. The motto that many current backcountry campers adherently live by is to ***"leave no trace"***: i.e.: these thoughtful folks don't leave any trace that they camped in a certain

spot, so that future humans passing by can enjoy the pristine beauty of the landscape. Similarly, the lack of many artifacts from ancient civilizations likely bespeaks of their living simply and closely with the land.

My wife and I have been living in Virginia now for less than one year. (*We were blessed to find a log cabin on 8 acres near Charlottesville.*) Last evening, I was walking by the namesake of this place “*Green Cedars*”: two large cedar trees with a lovely swing perched between them. I looked on the ground and found an artifact from previous humans who perhaps sat in that same shade. What I found is not often encountered anymore, but was once commonplace some 50+ years ago: a **ring pull-tab** from a soft drink or beer can. This remnant brought back memories...and...also provoked some soul-searching. I remember as a kid how these pull-tabs were all around us---and how we played with these discarded items, and even made chains from them.



And now in early 2024, I looked down on this 5 decades-old artifact and saw it had not decomposed a bit! It could have almost been pulled from a beverage can (and thoughtlessly tossed) just *yesterday*!

This find made me wonder what am **I** leaving behind? No trace?

Hardly! My modern-day western lifestyle leaves behind MUCH in its wake: remnants and otherwise. Some initial taking stock easily brings to mind **what can be seen**: plastic waste, paper, metal, styrofoam and all other sorts of rubbish...

But further reflection further indicts my lifestyle as to what I'm leaving behind that **cannot be so easily seen**: gasoline exhaust, burnt coal, injustice done to people oceans away who make the clothes that I've purchased...

But further pondering evokes my repentance for the innumerable **life forms that have been taken** so that I could live (so well by world standards): the myriad of animals killed from my years eating a meat-based diet, habitats destroyed by my culture's obsession to "develop" land...

Fifty years hence: what will future humans think when they come across the artifacts we've left behind? Will they judge us as thoughtless? Will they read (and deduce from our remnants) that we were indeed very good at consuming?

Or, will future humans know us for having converted our ways to be in keeping with an **ecological economy**. An economy that is based in and is derivative of Earth. An economy that recognizes that a round planet's "resources" are *not* infinite. An economy that reuses and reuses... as on a round planet there is no "away" to throw things to.

What will we leave behind for others to encounter?

Desolation...or...inspiration?

*(Postscript follows on next page)*

**Postscript**—To deepen your ecological vocation and be motivated to leave less of a trace, please take to prayer:

a) Jan Novotka’s song ***“Kyrie – for the Earth”***

Music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95bzvKGSfnk>

Lyrics: <http://www.jannovotka.com/inthenamelyr.htm>

b) these two sayings which call us to right relationship with future generations

***“Live simply, so that others may simply live”***

***“Leave only footprints and take only memories***

