



## SALLY AND JON SOEST

*former Presidents of the Virginia Wilderness Committee*

We have had difficulty writing down our thoughts about Ernie: it's been hard to accept his absence. He seemed as though he would keep on going forever.

In a way, of course, he will. We all carry his wisdom and the spirit he shared with us so generously. Ernie is a beacon that will shine far into the future.

Ernie was a great teacher. He taught us all how to articulate the value of wilderness, and how to use the tools to preserve it. He was the model for eloquence and steadfast advocacy, his life an example of devotion and a standard against which to measure commitment. When we need the right words, we have only to ask, "What would Ernie have said?" When we seek the right course of action, ask, "What would Ernie do?" When we falter, we need only remember the hope and the persistence of Ernie Dickerman.

Sally writes: My first vivid memory of Ernie dates back to a Wilderness Society grassroots lobbying workshop in Washington DC in about 1970. After several days of workshops, we were sent off to meet with our congressmen and talk about wilderness. But I wasn't ready: I was a very green grass root, and I was terrified. As I

stood quivering outside a doorway of the Rayburn Building Ernie appeared in the hallway. I begged him to come with me to meet my congressman. If he was surprised that I was still so timid, he didn't let on, and in we walked together and were ushered in to see the congressman. Somehow Ernie managed to make it seem as if I was doing all the talking and saying all the clever things. He gave me a shot of courage that day that so far has lasted for 28 years.

Jon writes: Every meeting with Ernie, whether in the halls of Congress or the hills of Wilderness, was a unique experience. I learned something of value from him each time: how to treasure and nourish the dedicated volunteer; how and when to trust a bureaucrat; where to find the beauty of Wilderness, even in the definitely trammled areas of the eastern National Forests; when to draw the line, stand and fight for the preservation of wild lands. I was a college professor when we first met, but quickly found that I had a lot to learn yet about teaching. I hope that, in the things that I do for conservation and in the examples I try to set for others, I can pass along at least a little bit of this heritage. We will miss your physical presence, Ernie, but you are still with all of us who learned from you.

Ernie is one of those shining stars in the conservation sky who rekindle our belief in the power of one individual. He left an indelible imprint on the world, a legacy, an enduring bequest: matchless wilderness and a huge army of support.

He exited with a dignity that was befitting his memory. Wherever he is now, we can be sure their wilderness will be cared for very well.



## SHARON AND ALAN KINCHELOE

*Virginia artists and close friends who loved Ernie dearly*

Sharon writes: Dearest Ernie, I've questioned, Why now, many times since you left. I will miss your sweet presence. We've had so many precious times...

I remember hiking in most of the Virginia Wilderness areas and camping several nights in each one. We always had a lot of fun, food, and good conversations. Alan and I were so glad when we were able to hike and camp in the Utah Canyonlands with you. Also, during the week long trip we took, hiking in the Smokies, I think of the rattlesnakes we walked by...the most memorable canoe trip we took was on the Jackson River one spring. Alan and I got ahead of you, so we decided to wait in an eddy. We first saw your straw hat float by, then your canoe and paddles. We were very concerned until finally we saw you walk

through the woods, soaked to the bone.

We will miss your monthly visits here for dinner and Canasta. I'll miss the hug you always gave me before you left to go home. The past few years when we hugged, sometimes we almost fell over. I could feel that you were losing balance and strength. I remember the last time you were here and we were saying goodbye. All three of us went outside. The sky was so clear that evening. We all just gazed at the stars for a long while and then you said as always, "so long", and then drove away.

Farewell my friend...Thank you for all the energy you shared with us over the last fifteen years. We will think of you often. Love, Sharon.

Alan writes: Ernie is gone, but the



Ernie on a canoe trip down the Yukon and Teslin Rivers with Paul and Judy Bratton and Alan Kincheloe, 1981.

effects of his legacy are only just beginning. Wilderness designation became the framework for Ernie's single minded struggle to protect, forever, wild places. Anyone who knew Ernie, knew of his dedication, his enthusiasm and his belief that mankind needs areas of such undisturbed character, to relax and replenish the human soul. A walk in the deep woods with Ernie proves this point, for no one had more energy, political intuitiveness and eloquence to speak on the subject of wilderness. Ernie loved wild untamed country and was energized and elevated by it.

Ernie was a wonderful friend, traveling companion and adventurer. I, like most friends of Ernie in this area, met him through mutual friends in the 70's. Over the last two decades, it has been an immense pleasure to have been in the company of Ernie on many adventurous trips. I'll always remember the Teslin River (Yukon Territory) canoe trip. Ernie didn't really want to make the long bus trip from Virginia to the Yukon, so he flew to Whitehorse and met myself and two other good friends, Paul Bratton and Judy Price, at Johnson's Crossing on the Teslin. Our bus let us out just

across the bridge at around two or three in the morning and we then went down to the river and rolled out our sleeping bags. That morning we awoke to find Ernie under a small tree, bundled in his bag with a military style poncho over and under him. Later, after dividing up the gear, we pushed off on a float that consisted of long days spent glassing the surrounding hills for bear and other wildlife, wonderful afternoons exploring around camp, and evenings by the fire discussing the history of the Yukon and many other subjects. Over the two weeks and 300 miles that we floated to Dawson on the Yukon (which is where Ernie left us), we would stop early to fish many afternoons. Paul and I were lucky to catch enough grayling for many suppers. The three of us noticed, one evening, as we were standing around the fire eating, that when Ernie finished his fish (as if an ear of corn), he would nonchalantly toss head and bones over his shoulder. Well, we knew we were in grizzly country, and we could come up with only two possible answers for his actions. Either Ernie was thinking, I'm old and this may be my last chance to be eaten by a bear on the Yukon, which

suits a fellow of my ilk. Or, he simply had no fear for all the good karma he had generated for such places... We had plenty of reason to believe either of these scenarios to be true, however we were not prepared to meet such heroic ends, nor had any of us developed quite that level of good karma. So, during the evening, we would find the fish remains and toss them back in the river. Everyone slept well and awoke alive in one piece. There were other encounters with danger on that trip and Ernie always seemed to come through, sometimes by wit and the ability to think fast on his feet and other times as if guided by the hand of some unseen wilderness spirit. Ernie was more able, than anyone I have known, to use both his intellect and his wilderness spirit to further his cause.

We will miss Ernie's warm and lively visits, but he will always be with us, especially on travels to places that literally would not exist without his steadfast determination.



DAVE FOREMAN

reprinted from *Wild Earth*, Volume 8, number 3, Fall 1998

*Chairman of the Wildlands Project and publisher of Wild Earth.*

One who understood well that the modern ecological arguments for Nature protection did nothing to undermine the wilderness idea, but rather strengthened it, was Ernie Dickerman. He was deeply loved for his passion for wilderness and for his unflinching encouragement of his fellow wilderness defenders. Before he left us, *Wild Earth* profiled him, and he was, according to Jack Humphrey, the uncontested star at this May's wilderness mentoring retreat, where he inspired a whole new generation of wilderness advocates. Though I am saddened by his leaving, he picked a good time - his own time.

Ernie was a dear friend and mentor of mine since 1973, when he took me - then a young Wilderness Society staffer new to the big city - around Capitol Hill and taught me how to work Congress. He was more than a master congressional lobbyist and inspiration to younger conservationists, though. As "father" of the 1975 Eastern Wilderness Act, Ernie forced the Forest Service to accept Wilderness Areas east of the Rockies and thereby added to the character of the National Wilderness Preservation

System. Note that I said "added to," not "changed," not "replaced."

Indeed, I believe that Ernie Dickerman is one of the half-dozen or so giants who molded the character of our Wilderness Areas system - and of the "revealed" wilderness idea, so sneered at by the post-modern deconstructionists. In 1973, the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands held hearings on the Wilderness Society's proposed Eastern Wilderness Act. The Forest Service argued up and down, frontwards and backwards, that no areas in the National Forest System east of the Rockies qualified for Wilderness Area designation because they were not "pure" or pristine enough. Ernie Dickerman responded in his testimony:

*It is part of the genius of the Wilderness Act that it embodies two quite separate sets of standards. First there are the standards for suitability of an area to be designated as wilderness. These may be referred to as the entry criteria for an area to come into the wilderness system. These standards are found solely in section 2(c) of the act, the definition of "wilderness".*

*Second, there are the standards for the management of wilderness areas once designated. This is a wholly separate set*

*of standards, and is found in section 4(c) of the act, as supplemented by section 4(a) and (b), and in special cases, by section 4(d).*

*A great deal of confusion results from failure to carefully distinguish these two sets of criteria. The point is simply this: Under the practical, less-than-pure standards for designation of wilderness, certain evidence of past disturbance and existing nonconforming uses may be included within a new wilderness area. But once that area is designated and comes under the Wilderness Act, it is to be managed under the standards of Section 4(c), which proscribe new adverse uses or disturbances within wilderness areas...*

*What it boils down to is this: Certain past disturbances may be accepted under the entry criteria of the act, but similar disturbing actions may not be newly initiated within a designated wilderness under the management criteria.*

As Ernie eloquently demonstrated, the Wilderness Act has absolutely no requirement that candidate Wilderness Areas be completely free of roads or timber cutting, but, under the man-

agement directions in Section 4, after an area is in the Wilderness System, roads and timber cutting are then prohibited.

Ernie added the less-than-pure recovering wildlands of the eastern National Forests to the Wilderness System. He did not replace previous standards of wilderness, he built on them and refined them and, in doing so, strengthened our protection of Nature. Thanks to Ernie and to all the citizens who have since labored to protect wilderness in the East, The National Wilderness Preservation System is more diverse, more ecologically representative, and more glorious.

This is the legacy and genius of Ernie Dickerman; this is the true story of the wilderness movement and of the wilderness idea, whether the post-modern deconstructionists understand it or not.

Happy Trails.





SARAH P. FAULCONER

*former President of the Virginia Wilderness Committee*

Ernie and I met more than twenty years ago and over the years associating and working with this modest, courteous and well-informed individual has been one of the most pleasant and satisfying experiences of my life.

Ernie's advice was always to work hard but along with your work, to be happy. And I believe that Ernie was truly a happy individual. If he was ever discouraged about these endless wilderness Preservation battles we have fought and are fighting, it was never evident. Always cheerful, gracious and willing to listen to anyone's point of view - that was Ernie.

Whenever I had occasion to telephone Ernie, I knew that as soon as he

picked up the phone, I would hear "Dickerman". I shall miss talking with him.

He was truly "Mr. Wilderness" and the legacy he has left us is enormous. When I reflect on what Ernie would want us, the wilderness bunch, to do, the word comes loudly and clearly to "keep on keeping on." His motto was "endless pressure endlessly applied." Without a doubt, the world is a diminished place since he is no longer in it. But we must organize ourselves and continue the efforts he so grandly started. And remember - Ernie wants us to be happy!



ED CLARK

*reprinted from the VWC newsletter, August 1998*

*Former President of the Virginia Wilderness Committee. He is currently the President of the Wildlife Center of Virginia.*

Thoughts on my hero, my mentor, and my true friend, Ernie Dickerman: From time to time, in the course of one's life, you encounter rare individuals whose influence on your future cannot be foreseen, nor overstated. In my life, such a person was Ernie Dickerman.

In the summer of 1977, my friend Bob Belton asked if I was interested in helping with a little audio-visual project with which another of his friends was struggling. An avid photographer, I was happy to oblige. We set a time to meet and I thought no more about it. When the day came, Bob introduced me to a remarkable little man named Ernie Dickerman. His project was to produce a slide presentation on Virginia's wilderness areas. At the time, I had no way of knowing how significant that project was to be.

Ernie asked me to share "just a few hours of my time" for an important conservation initiative. The moment I agreed, the course of my life radically changed. It has been almost exactly twenty-one years since I offered up those few hours of my time, and I am

still working on that important conservation initiative. I had been chosen by Ernie Dickerman to be a soldier in the war to save the last of the Earth's wild places and wild things.

I learned so much from Ernie that I cannot begin to explain. However he taught five critical lessons that propel me forward toward my third decade of professional conservation activism. 1) Never believe that a single person cannot change the world. Indeed, Ernie changed the world. 2) Always take your cause and your work seriously, but never take *yourself* too seriously. Ernie loved to laugh and most importantly, he could laugh at himself. 3) Conservation is an endurance event. What we win today we must defend again tomorrow, because what we lose is gone forever. 4) The force of reason and persuasion will prevail over the influence of greed and hollow rhetoric. Ernie could tell someone to go to hell with such eloquence that he would look forward to the trip. And, Ernie was always a perfect gentleman. 5) Ernie showed me that through a life lovingly dedicated to the defense of the natural world and the majesty of wilderness, one could achieve true immortality and greatness. This was the greatest lesson of all.

It requires a mighty stride to walk in

the footsteps of Ernie Dickerman. I doubt that my mark on the world will ever match that of my hero, Ernie. Nevertheless, having been chosen by Ernie to join the ranks of the true believers, I get up every day and do what I can. Conservation, the way Ernie did it, is not simply a job--it is a

journey. I thank God for the privilege of having known and loved Ernie for twenty-one years. I thank Ernie for having shown me the path on which my life's journey will be traveled. I will miss him, terribly, but I know that he is still here in all that is wild and untamed.



BOB BELTON

*a Wilderness Legacy*

*Member, Virginia Wilderness Committee and Trout Unlimited, former Chairman of the Virginia Council of Trout Unlimited.*

In the late seventies I caught two beautiful native brook trout in a fine, strong stream northwest of Monterey, in Highland County. I was fishing on Laurel Fork in the George Washington National Forest. It was a sublime experience.

I was taken with the remoteness and beauty of the area, known as the Laurel Fork Special Management Area. Managed as de facto wilderness by the U.S. Forest Service, Laurel Fork indeed is special. It is a Canadian remnant forest, and it contains old growth hemlock and poplar trees, among other flora and fauna

one would expect to find north of the border.

To many, Laurel Fork is synonymous with Ramsey's Draft, the Rich Hole, St. Marys, James River Face, the Tazewell Beartown, Mountain Lake, and Peter's Mountain, all of which actually are officially designated wilderness areas. One man had more to do with these roadless areas being set aside, not at risk from logging, mining, drilling, or roadbuilding, than anyone else.

He was Ernie Dickerman, for 30 years the guiding light of the Virginia Wilderness Committee. Ernie died the night of July 31/August 1 but, as Jim Murray, President of the Committee, wrote in August, we "cannot feel sad for him. His life had a shape and

meaning that few of us will achieve, and he left it on his own terms. The sadness we feel is for ourselves. It is rather like losing one's guide or one's compass. In all one's dealings in environmental matters, the simple question was: What would be Ernie's direction in this case? We can never again ask the question in person, but it will still be the yardstick for measuring our conduct."

The existing wilderness areas, especially the more centrally-located ones, such as St. Marys, are used so much that they sometimes become "crowded", sort of an oxymoron for places where solitude and lack of signs of man's intrusiveness are valued highly. Some suggest, though, that we do not need the wilderness areas we have now. The immense popularity of the existing ones, however, tells the accurate story. We don't have nearly enough wilderness to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our people.

What is a fitting memorial to a man of such great stature as Ernie Dickerman? A moving memorial service was held in early October in the

western reaches of Laurel Fork, followed by a six mile walk to the stream itself. That was right and proper.

It has been suggested, though, that designation of Laurel Fork as wilderness in fact would be a fitting, permanent memorial. Others prefer additional wilderness designations in deserving areas throughout Virginia's national forests. Many factors would have to coalesce for this to happen.

One thing is certain. Ernie Dickerman's legacy lives.

Always a gentleman, always polite even when most folks' patience would be tried to the breaking point, always determined, Ernie enjoyed life tremendously and lived it to the fullest. The next step is to plot the correct course that will properly celebrate the life of this heroic man.

*Reprinted from Virginia Outdoor Weekly, volume 9, number 45, 6 November 1998.*



DICK AUSTIN

Dungannon, Virginia

President of the Devil's Fork Trail Club, and Environmental Theologian with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

When, in the mid-1970's, folks here first began to explore wilderness protection for Devil's Fork and other wild areas in far southwestern Virginia, Ernie came down to hike with us and to offer strategic advice and assistance. We didn't see each other often after that, but we maintained a correspondence on wilderness matters. After reading my book, Baptized into Wilderness, Ernie wrote...

"I think you are doing a most valuable and sorely needed work in seeking to stir a conscious awareness of the natural world in Christians....Baptized into Wilderness has given me a richer insight into John Muir. You have done an excellent job of presenting the benefit of incorporating into daily Christian ways reverence for nature and all its life."

When a Presbyterian house-church in Harrisonburg turned to environmental action, Ernie met with them several times - the last session just a week before his death. In the months prior to his departure, Ernie made several gifts to projects he believed in, and it was his gift to this church that led

them to invite me to lead a workshop in November. "They need some sound Environmental Theology", he told me over the phone.

In his last letter to me, dated June 17, Ernie reminded me, "Concerning Devil's Fork, our real goal is designated wilderness under the Wilderness Act."

Ernie, I will not forget. We'll do it for Devil's Fork, and for you.

and some thoughts on suicide...

I admire Ernie's courage, but I feel disappointment that he did not stay around until we could get together in November in Harrisonburg.

Ernie's death encourages me to think of suicide as an option under similar circumstances, but this is also a troubling thought. On the one hand, in an age where society is frightened of death, where few are allowed to die at home, where predatory hospitals and doctors afflict false life on the dying while draining their savings, it may be necessary to take death into one's own hands in order to die with dignity.

On the other hand, social approval of suicide can quickly slip into social pressure upon troublesome, expensive-

to-maintain people to stop being a bother and take themselves out of the way of progress.

The Psalmist framed the dilemma this way: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalms 90:10)

The best policy I can recommend is this: Suicide should be morally and socially discouraged, especially among those younger than 70 years, and medical intervention to support life during that span should be available to all.

After seventy years, however, each person should have a greater right to

appraise their own life and strength and to prescribe their own destiny. No older person, regardless of the emergency, should be taken to a hospital when they would prefer to be taken to their home. (Those of us who want to be taken home to bed could wear a "dog-tag" with that information.) The rights of seniors to make their own life-decisions in the presence of their God should be rigorously respected, whether their decision is costly to society or disappointing to their family and friends.

What Ernie did was beautiful for Ernie. You and I, after we have completed the span of active life assigned by God, need to decide in God's presence what is right for us.



PETER KIRBY

former Southeast Regional Director, The Wilderness Society

Ernie had many friends and admirers at The Wilderness Society. Numbered among those he inspired at The Society over the years with his enthusiasm and dedication for wilderness are Bill Meadows, the current President; Rupert Cutler; Doug Scott; Chuck

Clusen; Peter Coppelman; Mike Nadel; Harvey Broome; Jerry Greenberg; myself and a host of others.

I had the immense good fortune to know Ernie for almost twenty years. Within months of when I started my



job in 1980 as The Society's national forest wilderness lobbyist in Washington, DC, Ernie enlisted my help to try to persuade former Congressman Wampler from Virginia's far southwest District (the so-called "Fighting Ninth") to introduce a wilderness bill for areas on the Jefferson National Forest. Wampler put us off, but was replaced the next term with the current Representative, Rick Boucher from Abingdon.

As history has shown, Ernie was able to work well with Mr. Boucher over the years in a cooperative effort with conservationists, the Forest Service, local leaders and others to establish wilderness areas in 1984 and again in 1988 on the Jefferson National Forest. This was Ernie's genius and great skill - to work patiently over the years to educate all sides about the benefits of wilderness, to bring out the glories of particular places and forge a consensus about the need to take action to protect beloved wild areas.

It was especially gratifying that near the end of Ernie's life he and I were able to work closely together on a report to identify and describe addi-

tional wildlands on the Jefferson National Forest that are to be reviewed for possible protection in an upcoming revision of the forest plan. During his last year, Ernie called me monthly, sent me useful items from his vast file about special areas and attended two major meetings at Newport and Radford about the coalition proposal. Here was a wilderness advocate - pressing ninety - still actively engaged in the details of an emerging campaign, one that would likely not result in legislation until the early years of the next century!

When thinking of ways to honor his legacy, both Shireen Parsons, the author of the report, and I immediately had the same thought. Hence, the upcoming publication, *Virginia's Mountain Treasures: The Unprotected Wildlands of the Jefferson National Forest*, will be dedicated as a living memorial to Ernie Dickerman. As we in the conservation community work to safeguard these treasured roadless areas and other wildlands, we will feel Ernie looking over our shoulders, cheering us on and walking with us in spirit as we explore these Appalachian forests he loved so much.



## THE HONORABLE JAMES RANDOLPH OLIN

*Former United States Congressman for the 6th District of Virginia, who worked closely with Ernie on the 1984 and 1988 Virginia Wilderness Bills.*

In 1979, the U.S. Forest Service completed a second Roadless Area Review study (Rare II) of the nation's forests, which include the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia. On the basis of its results, the USFS recommended twelve sites within the two forests be designated wilderness areas.

In April 1982, I decided to run for U.S. Representative from the 6th District of Virginia. I don't remember just when it was that Ernie Dickerman arranged to meet me so he could tell about his plan for wilderness areas in both national forests in Virginia. He had not been able to interest previous congressmen from the 6th District in wilderness and he was determined to see that I was different. So after I was elected Ernie was after me all the time to take hikes in areas that would be good for wilderness. This was a task because Ernie preferred to have the entire forest approved for wilderness.

We finally picked 15 areas, some in the George Washington and some in the Jefferson. We met strong objection from some of the County Supervisors, people who hunt, people who cut down trees for a living, and the managers of businesses that make paper. For this reason we only tried for a little more than half in 1984, the year I sought reelection for the first time.

We had help and encouragement from a great many people all through the 6th District, from Congressman Rick Boucher, whose district held some of the wilderness areas, and very effective help from Senator John Warner. Finally, our bill was signed by President Reagan.

We didn't try again until April 1987 when one of the top managers of Westvaco let us know that they had had a change of heart. We got our friends working and in June 1988, President Reagan signed to add the rest of the Wilderness areas we wanted in both forests.

I loved Ernie. I hate to lose him. I will never forget Ernie, his perseverance, his hiking and his plan of life.



## THE HONORABLE RICK BOUCHER

*U.S. Congressman for the 9th District of Virginia, who worked closely with Ernie on the 1984 and 1988 Virginia Wilderness Bills.*

While not a constituent, Ernie Dickerman presented to me the first item of Congressional business following my initial election to the House of Representatives in 1982. Literally the day following the election, he presented himself on my doorstep in Abingdon with a proposal to draft legislation declaring Virginia's first Congressionally designated wilderness areas.

Although the item had not been a part of my campaign for Congress, Ernie's presentation was so energetic and compelling that I opened the file on that Wednesday morning, and the passage of the Virginia Wilderness Act became a legislative priority of my office for the following Congress. In partnership with Congressman Jim Olin and with continued advice, coalition building and general cheerleading

from Ernie and the Virginia Wilderness Committee, we succeeded in overcoming very substantial opposition and enacted legislation protecting more than 100,000 acres of national forest land in Southwest Virginia.

In the following years, I grew to know Ernie Dickerman well and admire him even more. He was a constant participant in the "Wilderness Outings" which my office sponsored to acquaint travel writers with the many tourism assets of our region. He was always the most knowledgeable and most interesting participant, and even though he was in his seventies at the time, he was always the first person up the mountain. He frequently carried not only his own backpack but that of a less physically fit outing participant as well.

The wilderness areas we have in Virginia today are memorials to Ernie Dickerman and his dedicated efforts. Few will be so fortunate as to leave such a legacy.



## LYNN CAMERON

*reprinted from the Virginia Wilderness Committee newsletter, August 1998*

*Current secretary and former President of the Virginia Wilderness Committee.*

I met Ernie late in his life, but while he was still very much in his prime. The thing that drew us to each other was wilderness, of course. He quickly became my teacher and later my friend.

I have many wonderful stories about Ernie, but my favorite happened in 1989 when the Forest Service held a public meeting on Wilderness at Briery Branch. There were about 200 angry bear hunters packed into the community center and only seven wilderness advocates. Ernie spoke for wilderness - his usual speech for opponents about how you can hunt, fish, and in other ways enjoy national forest wilderness. Although Ernie was quite eloquent and persuasive, the bear hunters began to boo and heckle him, making statements like "Get that old man off the stage". Ernie continued bravely and with conviction, not seeming to hear the rude jeers. At the end of the meeting, I felt discouraged, but when we met for a few minutes to discuss what had happened, Ernie simply said that he thought the meeting was successful in that we made our points on the benefits of wilderness and gave those guys something to think about. When I noted that we didn't get the desired response, Ernie simply laughed and

shrugged it off. This was my first big lesson on perseverance. It was also a lesson on treating the opposition with respect. No matter how badly the other side behaved, Ernie kept his dignity. Consequently, forest service officials and loggers alike respected Ernie. Maybe even a few bear hunters did, too.

Ernie always said, "We will keep fighting for wilderness until we draw our last breath", and he did. In May he went to a Mentoring Conference in Arizona where effective senior conservationists shared their wisdom with the younger generation. Accounts were that Ernie was the star of the show. In June he attended the VWC annual meeting at the Murrays' and the Valley Conservation Council fundraiser at Buffalo Herb Farm. Ernie was in full form at the fundraiser. He had on coat and tie, looking particularly dapper. He charmed the ladies, drank wine, indulged in plate after plate of cookies, and appeared to be having a great time. Late in June, he gave a talk on wilderness and how to be an effective grassroots activist at a local church meeting.

Ernie said, " 'Quit while you're ahead' is sound philosophy both in poker and in life", and he did, but his huge legacy of protected wildlands and inspired activists lives on!



*Communications Co-ordinator for the Southern Environmental Law Center, and a former reporter, who was a good friend of Ernie Dickerman for eight years.*

In the days before he died, Ernie Dickerman composed on his 1945 Royal portable typewriter the announcement of his death. "On (date) Ernest M. "Ernie" Dickerman, a lifelong bachelor, died at the age of 87 by his own hand as he had long planned, on the little old farm in the Alleghany Mountains where he had lived since retiring in 1976. 'Quit while you are ahead' is sound philosophy, both in poker and in life. For over sixty years, as an amateur or as a professional, he was an active conservationist, especially in wilderness preservation."

It was classic Ernie. Not sentimental, but eloquent and wry. To the point. And exceedingly modest, for this man was much more than an "active conservationist." Anyone, now or in the future, who roams through an eastern wilderness has Ernie Dickerman to thank.

For more than half a century, Ernie worked tirelessly to prevent roads, logging, and other development from desecrating the untamed reaches of our

public lands. He helped pioneer a nationwide movement that resulted in the Wilderness Act of 1964, led the charge to pass the Eastern Wilderness Act in 1975, and, in his retirement, was the guiding force behind the designation of 15 wilderness areas in Virginia. All told, some 104.5 million acres are now in the wilderness preserve system.

But Ernie's legacy extends far beyond preserving a piece of forest here, a mountain range there, for his greatest gift was inspiring others. He was a mentor and hero to generations of conservationists who to this day, from Alaska to Florida, are still fighting to protect America's public lands. Among his proteges are leaders from The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Earth First!, and dozens of other organizations.

Lobbying and grassroots organizing came naturally to Ernie, who began his crusade in the 30's during time off work from a Knoxville plastics company and in between treks to his beloved Smoky Mountains. He trod the halls of the Capitol and the back roads of the South like a circuit conservationist, talking to anyone who would listen, and even those who wouldn't, about the need to keep wild places

wild. "When you log a place, you change its character," he once told a reporter. "You need to build roads, then you get vehicles coming in, streams dammed and what is fine and natural you lose."

Since Ernie's death on July 31, family and friends have shared their fondest and funniest stories of "the granddad of Eastern wilderness." He would sit and spread his papers on the floor outside Congressional offices, organizing himself for his next meeting, then listen patiently to some verbose politician before saying, "Frankly, I think that's a crock. I can't see how any rational person can fail to see the merit . . ."

For the D.C. crowd he donned coat and tie, which he bore like a suit of armor, but out in the field, he often wore mixed plaids and his signature felt "crusher" hat, knowing full-well the disarming power a dash of eccentricity had over his audience.

His hiking exploits are legendary, as he dispensed with trails and maps and

often carried the packs of the less hardy. Even in his 80's, he invited Congressmen and reporters on hikes and would soon be crashing through the laurel thickets and scaling steep slopes, leaving them in their "citified shoes" to scramble after.

For some time, Ernie had confided in his family and closest friends that he would leave this world of his own accord when the time came. He was known to argue that "old folks should get out of the way, stop using up resources, and let the young have the place." His final act reflects the personal passion he instilled in the words, written now in our national law, that define Congressionally designated wilderness as a place "...where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

In a way, though, Ernie will always remain, in the hundreds of people he inspired and who continue to defend our public lands, and in the wild places he cherished and protected for all time.

