

Speaker's Corner



A Speaker's Corner, made famous by the northeast corner of Hyde Park in London, is a place of open debate and discussion. Members of AWA are welcome to use this space to comment on environmental issues they are concerned about. The opinions you will see here should not be interpreted as AWA policy statements. If you would like to submit a comment for Speaker's Corner, please email your submission to me at iurquhart@abwild.ca. Submissions should be no more than approximately 500 words, be connected to environmental/wilderness issues in Alberta, and are subject to editorial approval.

The well without a handle

This water well has been in the Alberta badlands for at least 49 years. Probably a lot longer. Probably for longer than most of our politicians have been alive, it's served at the Bleriot Ferry provincial campground, in a grove of cottonwoods on the Red Deer River near Drumheller, Alberta. For decades, it has topped up water jugs; slaked the thirst of weary paddlers; cooled kids off on hot days; washed sandy feet; filled coffee pots on brisk September mornings. It ran for decades on simple human muscle power.

I first used it in 1971, as a young boy, when my parents took my brothers and I camping to the badlands. Since then I've been back to this magical place more times than I can count, on family camping weekends, field trips, and canoeing adventures. That simple hand pump has always been there, serving up cold water to thirsty travellers.

Until this year. Last fall, the Kenney government decided it could save about \$1.14 per citizen if it shut down this campground and 183 other parks and protected spaces around the province. The campground closes for good today, at the end of this September long weekend, but they've already decommissioned the well by taking off the handle. They did the same thing a couple of days' paddle upstream at Tolman Bridge campground, where we started our pad-



dling journey that brought me here today.

It takes a special kind of vindictive, short-sighted brainlessness to destroy a source of drinking water in these parched badlands (hundreds of cattle forage freely along the river, so it isn't safe for people to drink from). Even if the campground had to be closed, and the outhouses boarded up for want of maintenance, why on earth would you take the pump handle off? Would you also pour salt in the garden and burn down the house when you move off the farm? That's not just petty; it's evil.

This old water well with no handle now stands as a monument to the small minded vindictiveness of our current government leaders. A simple, effective machine that served Albertans for so many years, rendered useless by a misguided bureaucratic decision. I pity the future traveller arriving thirsty at Tolman or Bleriot. The First Nations ancestors, voyageurs, and early homesteaders would be ashamed of what Alberta has become in 2020.

- Greg Pohl, Bleriot Ferry campground,
September 2020.