

LOCATIONS AND LANDMARKS

Emily Gilliland—Editor

I learned the term “triangulation” with a compass and a set of circa 1964 topographical maps from hippie guru David Holladay, of Boulder, Utah. We were camped in the official wilderness area of the Sonoran Desert, with the East Verde map laid flat over a long red rock with baby prickly pear and red-berried fishhook cactus growing out from cracks. The creek flowed briskly just down from where we stood, the water glittering in the bold August sun. We shaded our tanned faces with our hands to search out the distinctive peaks and prominent geographical features in the surrounding terrain.

For having slept and hiked in the same khaki pants and pearly snap shirt for several days, David looked clean and sharp. Waiting for the rest of us to pack up from the previous night’s camp, he had cut long sword blades of sotol yucca and roughed them into fibers which he braided into a thick headband for his forehead and tiny green bracelets for his wrists. David was an older man, with peppery hair and a long white beard that contrasted in such a way under those pale green decorations that I would have followed him into the very mouth of Mordor—his image and demeanor matched so strikingly with the iconic wilderness wise men of my childhood stories. Indeed, it was David Holladay whom the crew of *Cast Away* hired to inform Tom Hanks how one might survive on a desert island, and Holladay learned it in his day from Larry Olsen, author of *Wilderness Survival Skills* and whom the crew of *Jeremiah Johnson* hired to inform Robert Redford how one might skin a grizzly in the 1850s Utah badlands. Larry and David carry a calm confidence in building fires and foraging wild edibles, both having lived in the wilderness for long stretches practicing what they teach. Their kindly countenances suggest an honest devotion in helping people walk easily in the wilderness for the sake of both nature and man, a type of tenderness rarely seen in today’s Hollywood marketing of untamed, disorderly, shock-value, reality survival series. “No,” David and his scraggly bearded, fringed-jacketed friends often assured us, “it is *never* a good idea to drink your own urine, no matter *what* you heard on The Discovery Channel.” Little wonder then, that I felt secure under the mentorship of this weathered man in a location more than twenty miles from the nearest dirt road.

David told me that, in order to find out where exactly we stood in this wide, road-less valley, we needed to figure out where we stood in perspective to unique landmarks whose locations we could guess at from the contour lines on our topo map. He instructed me to calculate the azimuth to a tall pointed peak across the creek from us, and get two more

bearings, one from a low, flat mesa to the east of us and another from a gooseneck in the East Verde just up ahead. After making a few dots and lines with red dry-erase marker on the ragged map, we discerned our latitude and longitude from where all the lines intersected. Holladay stared his blue-sky eyes into my muddy, dark ones and inquired whether I could accomplish triangulation on my own next time; I nodded.

A few years younger, I achieved my undergraduate education at Ricks College during its transition to a university. I was one of the first students to graduate with a BA in English literature at BYU–Idaho. Perhaps these years were my actual first lessons in triangulation. Instead of David Holladay in a yucca headband, I had Scott Samuelson from the English Department helping us take bearings on our relationship with poetry as he read Whitman and Wordsworth to us in the nearby Idaho desert, drinking hot chocolate he prepared for us himself from the trunk of his car. I had Edmund Williams taking two vans of Geology 101 students into the Tetons to help us take bearings on fault lines and volcanic rocks, until none of us could keep up with him and he laughed at our weak legs, hopping on his own aged feet and teasing, “You’ve got to be athletic to be a geologist!” I had Sharon Morgan of the Writing Center showing us how to write honestly and listen wisely in weekly writing workshops, and how to celebrate friendship and community when she had all of her employees over to her home for marshmallow roasts and canoe rides. I am grateful that from the intersection of these different bearings, the faculty at BYU–Idaho helped me locate myself as a faithful, educated, self-aware Latter-day Saint. BYU–Idaho has always taken an active role in helping students find themselves on the wide and trackless maps of life’s wilderness.

In Kip Hartvigsen’s textbook for BYU–Idaho’s Foundations of English courses, *I-Think*, Jack Harrell writes an article that introduces triangulation in essay composition—that the more perspectives we include to give witness on our written subject, the nearer and clearer to truth our essay becomes. He describes how the different positions anchor our own orientation to the topic, securing us in credibility and confidence. Harrell then restates that through researching and writing about these different points of view, we come to develop empathy for humanity and locate our own position in relation to what we have come to know through the activity of finding, reading, pondering, and writing.¹

This edition of *Perspective* illustrates BYU–Idaho as a location for us and a landmark for others. The sections “Learning What” and “Teaching How” provide two bearings about the giving and receiving of education on this campus. From these essays we can locate our own positions on the wide map, charting our campus journey towards rethinking education. Such articles help us locate ourselves in an evolving university, where

we become better listeners, thinkers, learners, and teachers. Next, we recognize that from this humble university nestled in the Snake River Valley deserts, our voices have reached beyond the local community, past the Teton Mountain Range and into global dialogues through BYU–Idaho’s internationally focused teaching groups as well as the world-bound graduating university students who carry the Spirit of Ricks. Our “Teaching’s Farther Reach” section exemplifies BYU–Idaho as a landmark of learning that encompasses people and cultures beyond the boundaries of our desert school.

The importance of *Perspective* lies in the voices of the faculty who submit articles and highlight distinctive features of interest in our collective community as teachers of career-bound students as well as teachers of builders and leaders in the Kingdom of God. *Perspective* gives us as faculty the opportunity to “cultivate the larger sense of connectedness and community” that Jeffrey R. Holland pleads for in his article “A School in Zion,” that we also might “[grow] in precisely the same manner we expect students to grow—[including] significant scholarship.”² Many thanks to the supporters, submitters, and readers of *Perspective* for helping us keep the dialogue between members of BYU–Idaho faculty active, honest, and connected.

NOTES

- 1 Jack Harrell, “Thinking About the Other.” *I Think*. Ed. M. Kip Hartvigsen (Rexburg, ID: BYU–Idaho University Press, 2008), 144-9.
- 2 Jeffrey R. Holland, “A School in Zion.” *I Think*. Ed. M. Kip Hartvigsen (Rexburg, ID: BYU–Idaho University Press, 2008), 58-72.