TEACHING THE BORDERLAND

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Fieldwork is a much-heralded element of geographical tradition. For some of us on the landscape side of the tradition, fieldwork is even a primary inspiration. But, as with the sister discipline of anthropology, fieldwork has evolved through the recent convolutions of cultural studies. When I began as a geographer nearly a quarter-century ago, the so-called muddy-boots variant of fieldwork was all but sacrosanct. Although that practice is still popular among certain cultural types who count themselves ecologists or environmentalists, others of us have gravitated to a kind of ethnography-cum-landscape reading, more likely involving exploration of cities and towns than scrutiny of fences and fields. This we might term the "scuffed-shoe" tradition, practiced more readily on urban streets than in rural settings or, for that matter, as often in athletic shoes as in boots. Happily, the new practice continues to require pedestrian mobility coupled with a curiosity about exploring the world around us.

I dwell here less on fieldwork in the abstract than on field teaching. Much of the mission of cultural geographers demands field expertise. My research has a field dimension, but a good part of my teaching philosophy embraces field exploration and values imparting a field orientation to students. Furthermore, understanding place and landscape and explaining it to others are distinctive actions and abilities that set us apart from our kin in neighboring social sciences and the humanities.

The Mexican-American borderland is a region and place I have frequented for much of my professional life, and it is uniquely apt as a field area. It affords observation and inspection of diverse habitats and multicultural habits. Born and raised in this trinational region, I have also lived across, traveled throughout, and written about the borderland. For the past decade I have accompanied students into this field as part of a regular course offering at Arizona State University.

In 1968, the year I launched myself toward an undergraduate major in geography but unbeknown to me at the time, the Association of American Geographers issued *Field Training in Geography* as part of the technical series of the Commission on College Geography (Corey and others 1968). In that slim volume of sixty-nine pages, five now-distinguished geographers—including two past presidents of the association—discourse briefly but effectively on the role of field experience in geographical training. "The Undergraduate Field Course," by John Fraser Hart, and "On Field Trips in Geography," by Peirce Lewis, are especially thoughtful explorations, relevant to geographers still, better than thirty years later, for the wisdom they offer on the wonders and pitfalls of field geography (Hart 1968; Lewis 1968).

When I discovered geography as an undergraduate at the University of California, Los Angeles (1968–1972), I was pleased to learn that many if not most faculty

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