

Nichols' dream of 'tribe' vanishes

Bob Anez

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VIRGINIA CITY (AP) — A Bozeman woman who was kidnapped in the mountains of southwest Montana last summer was meant to be a charter member of a wilderness “tribe,” Don Nichols says.

His plan to abduct a woman for companionship was part of a years-old dream, said Nichols, who faces charges of kidnapping Kari Swenson, 23, and with fatally shooting her would-be rescuer, Alan Goldstein.

In daylong testimony Wednesday, the 54-year-old Nichols said his’ dream was born of growing frustrations with society and its laws. He called it “this organized rat race handed-down from above.”

“I don’t like a totalitarian government coming down from above and telling people what to do,” he testified. “I don’t respect the values of the system. They stink.”

Nichols’ odyssey began in 1961 when he moved from West Virginia and homesteaded on 40 acres in the “beautiful and wild” Cabinet Mountains in north-western Montana. Within three years, encroaching civilization circled his land with-a copper mine, clearcuts and highways and “ruined it for the reasons I bought it.”

He moved to Jackson, Wyo., where he worked in a machine shop and his family re-joined him, but the call of the mountains tugged at him and his desire to return ultimately led to divorce in 1969.

In 1970, Nichols began spending longer and longer periods in the mountains. He annually took his son Dan, often for weeks or months at a time.

He wanted his son with him because he enjoyed the company. “All “ your dreams are about being with people, talking with people, laughing with people,” he said.

That led to his plan for a wilderness “tribe.” Nichols said he never envisioned a large single group because members would naturally branch off into smaller bands.

He and Dan moved permanently , to the mountains in August 1983. They planted gardens, built an isolated lean-to dwelling and had “lots of fun” living off the land.

But that fun began to end when they grabbed Swenson while she jogged along a mountain trail July 15.

Nichols had considered finding a woman companion since 1978. When Swenson came along, Nichols “stood there in disbelief,” surprised at apparently finding exactly the type of woman who seemed at home in the mountains.

Now, Nichols said he knows Swenson was the wrong choice and, facing 140 years in prison for his mistake, his plan for a wilderness tribe is gone.

“I don’t think that dream is valid anymore,” he said.

Appendix: Ted’s notes

Journal entry:

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By BOB ANEZ

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I am surprised by Nichols' apparent need for people. Not only do I adjust comfortably to solitude myself — I've read in books about lots of other people who've adjusted comfortably to prolonged wilderness solitude — in fact they seem to find it rewarding, as I do.¹

Letter to Brother:

I suppose you read in the paper about this guy Dan Nichols. Of course, he's an old buddy of mine. We used to go kidnappin' broads together all the time. No, seriously: He may be a man after my own heart, but it's hard to tell from the limited information in the newspapers. I read about the son's trial in the paper, but not yet about the old man's. Don't know if it's taken place yet.²

¹ Journal #1 from Series 7 (1984-1986)

² Ted Kaczynski's Correspondence with his Brother David

The Ted K Archive

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Great Falls Tribune, Thursday, July 11, 1985. Section 2-A.
<archive.org/details/ae.-teds-journals_202303/AEG1.%20Series%207%2C%20%231>

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