

Peter Matthiessen to give lecture

April 25, 1979

Peter Matthiessen, explorer, naturalist and author of the current bestseller, "The Snow Leopard," will give a free public lecture at 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 8, at the University of California, San Diego.

Matthiessen is scheduled to discuss "The American Indian and the Wilderness" in room 2722 of the Undergraduate Sciences Building on Revelle campus.

As the first recipient of the newly established David Marc Belkin Memorial Lectureship, Matthiessen will be a guest of John Muir College at UC San Diego from Sunday to Thursday, May 6-10. During his stay, he will meet with students of the "Wilderness and Human Values" course and give two classroom lectures.

Matthiessen also will be available to autograph copies of his books at the University Bookstore from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 9.

Henry Allen of The Washington Post once described Matthiessen as "everything the American writer is supposed to be: an educated (Yale), well-travelled (all continents) explorer of realities... (he) has made a career of escaping--he might say returning--to the wildest ends of the earth."

Matthiessen has been lauded for his writing prowess as well as for his skills as a naturalist. He has the ability to imbue his scientific portraits of nature and the wilderness with an intensely personal significance.

He does his writing from a studio at his home in Sagaponack, New York. Stones, maps, shells and bones collected on his world wanderings are kept there, and the upper floor of the studio is used as a meditation area. Matthiessen is a disciple of Eastern religions, a follower of Zen, and lately a student of American Indian lore.

Matthiessen founded The Paris Review during a period in the early 1950s when he lived in France, where "America's last generation of literary expatriates was scraping from the cultural bone whose meat had gone earlier to Hemingway, Joyce, Fitzgerald, et al" according to Henry Allen. In Paris, he wrote his first novel.

He returned to the United States in 1954 and he worked as a commercial fisherman, which he found to be an important stimulus for his writing. His second novel was published in 1955, and shortly thereafter he began the travels which led to the publication of his first three non-fiction books.

"Wildlife in America," written after extensive travels through the wilderness areas of North America, has been placed in the permanent U.S. Library at the White House. His expeditions have carried him to Alaska, the Canadian Northwest, Asia, Australia, the wilderness areas of South America, Africa and New Guinea.

Matthiessen's trip to New Guinea with the Harvard-Peabody expedition on which Nelson Rockefeller's son, Michael, died, resulted in the book "Under the Mountain Wall," published in 1962. In 1963, he received a Grant in Letters from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

From his Long Island home, Matthiessen has continued to write both fiction and non-fiction. His novel, "A Play in the Fields of the Lord," won for him an enthusiastic popular response and established him as a cult hero. That

novel, as well as "The Tree Where Man Was Born: The African Experience," was nominated for the National Book Award.

He wrote "Blue Meridian (Search for the Great White Shark)" after an ocean excursion off the coasts of Africa and Australia, and the novel "Far Tortuga" was researched in the Caribbean.

"The Snow Leopard," his latest book, is an account of an expedition to the Himalayas. Matthiessen described the journey as "a true pilgrimage, a journey of the heart," and the book is as much the story of a spiritual journey as it is the account of the 250-mile trek through the Tibetan mountains.

The David Marc Belkin Memorial Lectureship, which is making Matthiessen's visit possible, was established by the family and friends of David Marc Belkin, an honors graduate of John Muir College at UC San Diego. Belkin died in an accident while he was backpacking in the High Sierras in July 1978. His love for the wilderness prompted his family to establish the endowed memorial fund in his memory.

The classes that Matthiessen will address during his visit are part of the "Wilderness and Human Values" course offered through Muir College. The course is designed to give students an opportunity to explore the wilderness through a variety of disciplines, from literature to biology. Field trips and a week long backpacking trip are part of the class activities.

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