

## Let's Leave John Brown's Body Alone

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John Brown's body may be a-turnin' rather than a-molderin' in his grave as the Lake Placid Olympic ski jumps rear their aggressive concrete towers in clear view of the quiet Adirondack farm where he and a dozen followers lie buried. As if that visual damage were not bad enough, the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation plans to "improve" this pastoral site with \$650,000 worth of paved parking lots, picnic grounds, sewers and a visitor-orientation center. All that is required is the Adirondack Park Agency's permission to reclassify the bucolic setting from "wild forest" to "intensive use" and the busywork can begin.

An orientation center seems like overkill for a few Civil War heroes who deserve to rest in peace. "Interpretation" of graves, grass, fields and a farmhouse may seem extraneous, even to history buffs. Canned accounts of the Civil War, refreshments and restrooms are intrusions upon a site that, by its very nature, should be left undisturbed. This kind of thing not only violates taste and logic; it is indicative of a spreading foolishness in the preservation movement — only parking lots seem to prove history has concrete value.

These historic-site circuses are getting out of hand. The point of preserving places that have a fragile but enduring relationship to the past is the simple fact of their continued existence — and that is not helped by their transformation into lecture halls and comfort stations. History, here, is the silent communion of the single visitor with the spirit of a man and a place.

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