

An Interview With Forest Anon

Garden

May 12, 2022

Brandon “Branwell” Manwell, known by many as “Forest Anon”, currently lives completely removed from civilization in a shack built of fallen Douglas Fir limbs in the Mojave Desert National Park, where he has lived alone since 2018. He maintains a strong but sporadic internet presence, giving his viewers the opportunity to share in his adventurous, off-grid lifestyle. He has been the subject of an FBI investigation, and makes his own Douglas Fir wine. He likes living in nature, is happy, and enjoys his life. What follows is an exclusive interview Mr. Manwell agreed to give Garden for this issue. He can be found on instagram @b.well and on YouTube as “Forest Anon”.

Garden: When did you know you wanted to live on your own in the wild? How did your journey begin?

Forest Anon: I’ve always loved the freedom and adventure that wilderness provides. I grew up in a busy suburb that was surrounded by grassy hills and sandstone peaks, and every day in order to escape the city I would go seek out hidden gullies with patches of woods in them where I could read or camp for a few nights. Those places took my mind away from the city and comforted me during rough times. They taught me a lot of what I know about wilderness and wildlife today.

But over time as the city kept expanding and developing new housing tracts I began seeing some of my most cherished places either becoming less secluded or entirely excavated and paved into cul-de-sacs. It was an overwhelmingly claustrophobic feeling and I wanted to go somewhere a man could breathe freely and roam around being himself.

At first I chose to hobo around the desert because my great grandfather was a prospector who had lived a life full of adventure out there. I had fallen in love with the deep solitude and mystery of the desert landscape. I tramped around living in abandoned mining cabins in those mountains for five months. But I soon realized those cabins were rich with history and it began to feel like I was intruding. I wanted to go somewhere I could build myself a little shack to create my own history in.

I didn’t want to destroy any wilderness by cutting down trees to do it, so I picked a forest that was predominantly douglas fir. The trees here shed their lower branches which make great timber for building. I camped for a week looking for the perfect spot and when I found one close to water, and with a view I thought perfect, I broke ground and began.

Garden: Is it true you live in a national park? How does that work? How do you avoid detection and harassment by law enforcement?

Forest Anon: I live in a national forest -illegally -on the side of a spur that juts out from the mountains and overlooks the forest and desert. As long as you establish your home deep enough in the forest where there are no trails or human traffic, and as long as it’s reasonably inaccessible to the novice hiker or hunter then you will most likely be safe from any human contact or authorities. But the good thing about living minimal like this is if I were ever discovered it would be easy to just pack up and start again on a new mountain.

Garden: Describe a typical day for you, from morning to night.

Forest Anon: My daily routine depends on the season, but the birds usually wake me up at 6:00am when they announce their arrival at the feeders. I put on clothes, stuff my sleeping bag in one of my backpacks to keep the mice out, and then I go outside to pour a bucket of water from one of my five gallon jugs. I rinse my face, brush my teeth, sweep the pathway, fill the bird feeders and mouse dish if needed, and then I walk four hundred yards down to the creek to take a bath if there is no snow.

I spend a lot of time at the creek seeing what kind of critters are around and inspecting the plant life to study how the forest is recovering from the recent fire. After that I hike back up here to the shack where I either read in the hammock or sit on my bench and watch the birds at the feeders. If I have wine brewing I'll check on it. If it's spring I'll tend to the gardens. The heatwaves of the south western United States make summers the hardest, and I spend most summer days pouring water on myself and praying for the sun to set.

At sunset I'll get a fire going to make supper. Once I finish eating I'll pour myself some wine and sit on the hillside while I watch the twilight fade over the desert. That is my favorite part of the day. When darkness has fully engulfed the mountains I'll walk back to the cabin, feed the fire, read and write, and watch the mice chase each other. Then I rinse myself in the bucket one last time, unroll the sleeping bag onto my cot and go to bed.

Garden: You were investigated and interviewed by the FBI. Do you mind discussing what that was like, and what led to it?

Forest Anon: The FBI opened an investigation on me because I had anti-tech literature visible on my shelves in a YouTube video, and I had once spoken critically of Israel's lobbying for conflict in the Middle East. This was enough to warrant a seven month long investigation that began on May 29th, 2020 and ended on January 14th, 2021 after I agreed to an interview.

They never found me. My mother emailed me saying they were harassing old family members for my whereabouts, and kept giving each of them a number for me to call. I called it and scheduled an interview with them in a random shopping plaza a few cities away.

I was interviewed by three Joint Terrorism Task Force agents, and after speaking for a couple of hours they determined I wasn't any kind of threat to society. They understood I was harmless. They even recommended me books and gave me tips on how to make cheap hummingbird food.

Using the Freedom of Information Act I filed a request for my dossier, and received forty six heavily redacted pages of the two hundred and seven that are my FBI file. Their profile analysis ends with, "He liked living in nature, was happy, and enjoyed his life."

Garden: You maintain an impressive internet presence and following, both on Instagram and YouTube. How do you get power, internet, etc.? Do you feel it's important to be available online because you are showing people there's another way to live? Or is there another reason?

Forest Anon: I have two handcranks I use to charge up a series of powerbanks, that way I only need to crank once a week. But during the cold months I'll have to do it two, sometimes even three times.

I like to stay connected for a few different reasons. Some are just simple ones like keeping in touch with friends from my old life. But one reason as of late is I saw the feedback I received, like people telling me my videos bring them joy and make them appreciate life, or help them through dark periods. This one person told me they are stuck inside due to medical issues and my videos make them feel free; it all makes me feel like there is a big reason for doing this. To be told I make someone feel free or desire to live means the whole world to me. Freedom and life are the two greatest gifts.

Garden: Do you ever get lonely?

Forest Anon: I do get lonely sometimes when the fire is on its last embers, and it's usually when I think of old memories. But once you shake it off and start a new day you're just too busy to be lonely.

It's also a big part of why I feed the mice and birds. They are great entertainment and even better company.

I've only ever had one visitor and that was my friend Penguin who recently passed away. He got snowed in for three days and swore he would never return. Since the whole FBI ordeal I've chosen to not have visitors in order to keep this place a secret. Although I sure would like one every now and then.

Garden: For those of us who long for a life closer to nature, can you say you recommend your path? Or, put another way, what are the pros and cons to the Forest Anon lifestyle? Are the sacrifices worth it?

Forest Anon: I strongly recommend this life to anybody who likes nature, freedom, solitude, and adventure. It's often very hard and you have to be okay with being extremely comfortable sometimes. But when you start to witness things you know nobody else does, like animals whimpering in thunderstorms, trees crashing through the canopy, beetles that take decades to emerge from their larval state, deer drinking unaware from the stream you're sitting in; you never want to go back to a regular life. The sacrifices are worth every minute. Even the rough ones. I wouldn't trade it for all of the mansions and money in the world.

The Ted K Archive

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<archive.org/details/garden-iss-2-v-2>

Sadly the founder of the zine series this interview was taken from is a child molester
& scammer: A text dump on Pierce Skinner.

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