

# Appalachia

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## Books and Media

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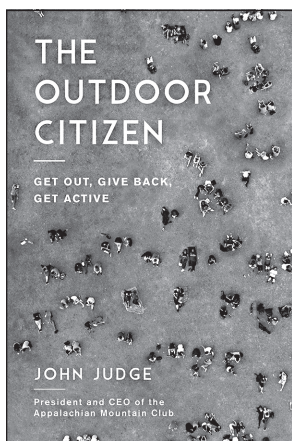
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# Books and Media



## **The Outdoor Citizen: Get Out, Give Back, Get Active**

*By John Judge*

*Apollo Publishers, 2019, 280 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-1-948062-18-3.*

*Price: \$24.99 (hardcover).*

THIS COMPELLING CALL TO ACTION BY THE president and CEO of the Appalachian Mountain Club is a well-researched, exceptionally detailed blueprint for saving the planet.

Adhering to its subtitle, John Judge calls for a comprehensive agenda that includes creating more urban green spaces, expanding alternative energy generation, eating locally sourced food, maintaining healthy, active lifestyles, supporting stricter environmental regulation, and promoting a more equitable economy that encourages increased philanthropy.

A former chief development officer for the city of Springfield, Massachusetts, Judge makes his case in a no-nonsense, orderly fashion that befits his upbringing as the son of a Marine Corps drill sergeant.

He writes,

When our small house began to feel too small, and my parents began to lose patience, we'd hear the command, "Get out!" It was a call for us kids to go outside and play, to give my parents space in order to preserve their sanity. . . . When he bellowed at us to get out we knew we had to follow orders. In retrospect I have great appreciation for this. My parents wanted us out of their hair and inadvertently inspired in us a lifelong appreciation of the outdoors.

Judge pulls no punches in his disdain for the Trump administration's environmental policies, taking particularly sharp aim at U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew R. Wheeler, whom he describes as "one of the politicians most dangerous to the outdoors."

Commenting on Wheeler's appointment following Scott Pruitt's resignation, Judge writes, "Wheeler has much the same goals as his predecessor in terms of rolling back environmental protections and promoting coal."

Conversely, Judge heaps praise on a number of philanthropists who have supported environmental causes, including Michael Bloomberg. The former New York City mayor "displays a commitment to climate-saving values and a resistance to political insouciance, a boldness that all Outdoor Citizens can emulate in their own lives and actions, even if their pockets aren't as deep," Judge writes.

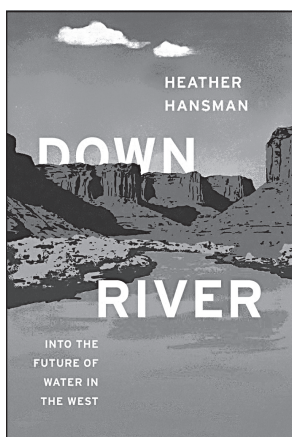
Each chapter highlights observations and specific recommendations. A sampling:

- "We need to get rid of coal as fast as we can. Natural gas, while a fossil fuel, is a step up because it releases half as much carbon dioxide when combusted, and far less sulfur, mercury and other particulates."
- "If the grocery store you frequent isn't selling locally sourced food, ask for it! If they refuse to carry it, move your business to one more eager to source locally."
- "Our ancestors used to walk everywhere in search of food, collecting plants and berries, hunting, and fishing. The exercise was built into their lifestyle and dwarfed the amount of exercise we might squeeze into a quick gym visit today. In today's developed nations, food is far more easily accessible, and we have other modes of transportation besides traveling on foot. But while the advances provide a cushy lifestyle, the resulting decrease in exercise has negatively affected our health."

Judge calls for a wider "outdoor global community," where people around the world work together "advancing sustainable development goals, combating climate change, and propagating the best Outdoor City leadership to support conservation in developed and developing nations."

These initiatives are big, even grandiose: His heart is in the right place. If even a tenth of what he recommends comes to fruition, the world would be a better place.

—*Steve Fagin*



**Downriver:  
Into the Future of Water in the West**

*By Heather Hansman*

*University of Chicago Press, 2019, 248 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-0-226-43267-0.*

*Price: \$25 (hardcover).*

I WISH I COULD TELL YOU THAT I PADDLED 730 miles down the Green River in an inflatable boat with Heather Hansman. Rafting through Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado, we could have shared what she calls the “specific joy in reading water.”

The trip would have been an education, too: the two of us paddling through this remote tributary until it joined the Colorado River (though honestly, she’d be doing most of the work), while she described the current state of water usage. “It’s abstract and diffuse until you’re in it, and then it’s even more complex,” she writes. It’s also something most of us in the moist East rarely think about, but which she has researched down to its molecules.

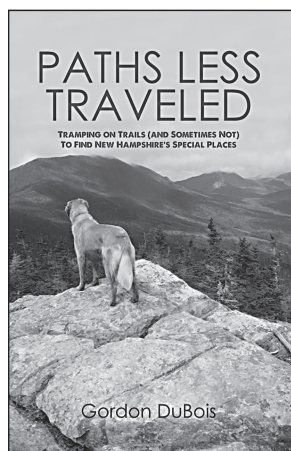
Almost a century ago, water allocation in the Colorado River system was rigidly divided—based on incorrect calculations—among seven adjoining Western states. Since then, use-it-or-lose-it rules have led to contentious relations between the upper basin ranchers and farmers in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico and the lower basin industrialists and urbanites in California, Arizona, and Nevada. Caught in the middle are environmentalists, recreationalists, and dam managers. “No one is really in the wrong,” Hansman muses. “There’s just not enough water for them all to be right.”

Tackling rapids together, I would have learned in person about water purification, fracking, fish hatcheries, trans-basin diversion, Indian reservation law, and the geologic effects of damming—dense stuff she tries hard to lighten. We would also have met an extraordinary collection of people: bowlegged ranchers, starchy hydraulic engineers, geomorphologists, fly shop owners, river runners, water board managers. Lurking along the shores, never in plain view, are developers who want to siphon billions of gallons over the Continental Divide (one proposal is called “the zombie pipeline,” because each time it’s killed, it rises again). “The history of the West is the history of the Colorado River,” Hansman would tell me while we portaged around a rough stretch (she’s carrying the raft, me the light oars), and “between evaporation, reduced flow and increased use, the West is sucking itself dry.”

There is enough partisan anger to power your appliances but also, sometimes, dialogue. “How does society settle on a hierarchy of uses?” she asks. Options do exist: We could reenvision the Colorado River basin as unified by purpose, instead of separated by state. Or, we could bank water as a currency, where agriculturalists lease their rights to urban areas without losing them. The most temperate and equitable strategy requires that everyone yield something: “Adaptive management” balances urban need and habitat preservation.

Hansman and I would have traveled together, “eye level to the riverbanks,” through these historical, political, scientific, and literal landscapes. Sadly, she took her Green River trip without me. But satisfyingly, it led to this treatise on water’s beautiful and endangered existence. We traveled together in spirit.

—*Elissa Ely*



## **Paths Less Traveled**

*By Gordon DuBois*

*Dorrance Publishing Company, 2020, 282 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-1-64530-677-1.*

*Price: \$20 (paperback).*

THIS QUIRKY AND APPEALING GUIDEBOOK STARTS out with a verse from the Grateful Dead tune, “Ripple,” and then moves on to quote Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* and Emily Brontë’s *Often Rebuked*. It immediately got my attention.

Indeed, in some ways Gordon DuBois’s autobiographic narrative of his ramblings through New Hampshire and beyond invokes the Dead’s lyrics: “And if you go no one may follow, that path is for your steps alone.”

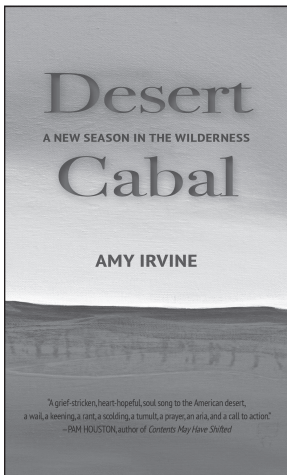
The book compiles hiking columns he has been writing for New Hampshire’s *Laconia Daily Sun* since 2015. They cover a range as broad as the White Mountains. Chapters cover a mysterious Cog Railway car from Mount Washington that wound up on Mount Oscar, an old mine shaft, whacky bush-whacks, and adventurous treks throughout New Hampshire’s Lakes Region.

DuBois always walks with his faithful dog, Reuben. The afterword, incidentally, is told through Reuben’s eyes: “So many dogs are cooped up at home, never given the opportunity to run free through the woods and find their own path. But when I hike with you and our friends I can be myself.”

DuBois is an engaging storyteller who also possesses some serious hiking creds. He has hiked the Appalachian, International Appalachian, Long, Cohos, and John Muir Trails, as well as summited New England's Hundred Highest peaks in all seasons and in winter only, the Northeast III Club peaks, the Trailwrights 72 Summits, and the Adirondack Forty-Sixers.

Those who thumb through *Paths Less Traveled* might be tempted to recite the chorus from "Truckin'," another classic Grateful Dead tune: "What a long strange trip it's been."

—Steve Fagin



**Desert Cabal:  
A New Season in the Wilderness**

*By Amy Irvine*

*First Torrey House Press and Back of Beyond Books, 2018, 98 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-1-937226-97-8.*

*Price: \$11.95 (paperback).*

EDWARD ABBEY WAS LAID TO REST CLANDESTINELY in the Cabeza Prieta Wilderness 30 years ago. His death did not put to rest debates about his controversial life and literary legacy. Abbey courted controversy in both his personal life and his art. Allegations of racism and sexism trailed him throughout his life and have continued. Nevertheless, his place in the canon of American environmental literature seemed unassailable largely as a result of his masterpiece *Desert Solitaire* (Simon & Schuster, 1968). In *Desert Cabal*, Amy Irvine stages a heartfelt intervention with the late author at his burial site that admonishes him for his personal shortcomings and undercuts the reputation of his most well-known work.

Irvine is an unlikely critic of Abbey. Raised in the arid lands of Utah that Abbey loved so much, Irvine was steeped in his writings. Her adventurous experiences as a river guide and rock climber were in no small part mediated by Abbey's observations. Her love for Abbey's distinctive voice and curmudgeonly personality is palpable. She is quick to praise Abbey's prescience in laying out the dangers posed to America's public lands by industrial tourism and alerts him to the pernicious new threat to Utah's canyon country that

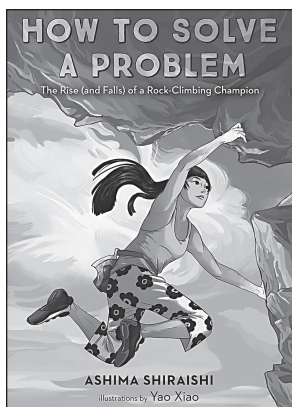
comes from the over-caffinated hordes of mountain bikers that have loosed themselves on the fragile desert landscape.

Irvine gives a nod to Abbey for his criticisms of America's two major political parties. Abbey threw his verbal darts across the political spectrum, heedless of whom he offended. Irvine shows herself to be an heir of Abbey in this regard, castigating President Trump for his relentless assault on public lands and environmental regulations. And like Abbey she has a keen eye for the hypocrisy of the left, relating the story of a dinner party held at a McMansion in Utah at which the guests ridiculed "rednecks" for their unsustainable lifestyles.

Yet Irvine sharply criticizes Abbey's predatory behavior toward women. Although eco-feminism has been an important strain in environmental thought since the 1970s, *Desert Cabal* is one of the first works in this genre that has been shaped by the #MeToo movement. Irvine challenges readers who continue to look past Abbey's overt sexism and lecherous male gaze. She claims further that Abbey's sexist attitudes contributed to his narrow, gendered celebration of the solitary wilderness experience that ignores that fact that for many women wild lands are seen more as potential ambush sites where they could be sexually assaulted than as pristine places to relax and recreate.

Irvine's most significant criticism of Abbey is that the rugged individualism that pervades his work is a fiction and that his promotion of it is both naive and dangerous. She notes that the self-reliant, reclusive persona that Abbey constructed for himself in *Desert Solitaire* is at odds with the fact that in the original manuscript of the book he foregrounds the importance of his wife and children to his experience. The omission of this detail in the final draft of *Desert Solitaire* is perhaps unimportant in and of itself, but it helps perpetuate a cultural mythology of radical individualism. In Irvine's estimation, the survival of the American democracy and human species cannot be trusted to the lone rebels celebrated throughout Abbey's writings. *Desert Cabal* is a powerful rejoinder to Abbey's vision and a timely reminder that the solutions to our vexing political and environmental problems require a vast network of citizens working purposefully together in solidarity rather than in solitude.

—David M. Chamberlain



## **How to Solve a Problem: The Rise (and Falls) of a Rock-Climbing Champion**

*By Ashima Shiraishi (author) and  
Yao Xiao (illustrator)*

*Make Me a World / Penguin Random House,  
2020, 40 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-1-5247-7327-4.*

*Price \$17.99 (hardcover).*

THE BOOK STARTS WITH A YOUNG WOMAN, IN polka-dotted capris and a purple T-shirt, finger-crimping off a trailer-sized boulder in Central Park, in the shadow of Manhattan's skyscrapers. She is the teenage phenom Ashima Shiraishi, one of the best climbers in the world and unquestionably the best to emerge from a city where "climbing" is traditionally in reference to a corporate ladder.

A product of Central Park's famous bouldering scene at Rat Rock as well as of New York City's modern wave of big climbing gyms, Shiraishi is expected to be the top-ranked U.S. female competitor in the rescheduled Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021, where climbing will make its debut as a medal event. She will be only 20 years old. Given her superhuman climbing ability, it is befitting that *How to Solve a Problem: The Rise (and Falls) of a Rock-Climbing Champion* is illustrated in an anime style that portrays Shiraishi as an unlikely superhero.

Geared toward young readers, the book offers a glimpse into how a high-caliber climber such as Shiraishi deconstructs a seemingly unscalable rock wall into a series of body movements that look like an exquisitely choreographed dance routine. Shiraishi specializes in bouldering, a type of climbing that focuses on scrambling up, around, and underneath boulders and low rock cliffs. A boulderer does not use a harness or ropes, only crash pads, because there's a lot of crashing. "Each fall is a message, a hint, an idea," she writes. "A new way to move from over there to over here."

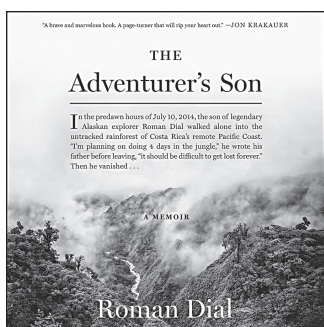
I've been following Shiraishi's career since 2013, when I started climbing at her gym. She was then 11, a pixieish girl with long black hair, blunt bangs, and colorful elastic pants sewn by her mother. (Her father cuts her hair.) "There's Ashima," a friend whispered as we passed her at Brooklyn Boulders. She was already climbing at an elite level. In a 2016 profile, the *New Yorker* called her "perhaps the first female climber whose accomplishments



may transcend gender, and the first rock climber who could become a household name.”

*How to Solve a Problem* centers on Shiraishi’s feat, in 2014 at age 13, of climbing the V14 boulder problem Golden Shadow in Rocklands, South Africa. (She was the second woman to ever climb V14.) “And so I started. And so I fell. And so I climbed again, listening to what the fall had told me.” That’s a good lesson for climbers and non-climbers alike, and one reason why I’ll be giving this book to my niece this holiday season.

—Stephen Kurczy



## The Adventurer’s Son

By Roman Dial

William Morrow, 2020. 368 pages.

ISBN: 978-0-06-287660-7.

Price: \$28.99 (hardcover).

AT ITS BEST, *THE ADVENTURER’S SON* LOOKS inward with a deep lens that reveals wisdom born from tragedy.

“Parents aren’t supposed to pass out pills, smoke dope, or drink booze with their kids, and we never did,” Roman Dial writes in a more reflective moment. “Instead, we bought them airplane tickets to exotic lands. Travel itself can be an addiction. Adventure is. Here I was, searching for [my son] missing on a trip that traced directly back to me.”

This memoir centers on Dial’s search for his son, Cody Roman Dial, who went missing in 2014 in the Costa Rican jungle. It would be a nightmarish tragedy for any parent, and it’s a story worth hearing, falling in the vein of Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*.

Part of my difficulty with this book, however, was how Dial seemed to search for his son with the sense of adventure he might devote to climbing a mountain or kayaking a rapid. Unraveling the mystery came across, too often, as a way to talk about himself and remark on his own skills as an outdoorsman and biologist.

Dial is well known in the outdoors community, perhaps most of all for founding the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic, a multiday race described by *Outside* as the “toughest wilderness challenge in the world.” For that and other escapades, Dial literally claims a chapter in the world of extreme

backcountry adventure. In the 1997 book *Escape Routes*, David Roberts described Dial as a “pivotal figure” for combining mountaineering, backcountry navigation, and mountain biking to “blitz” his way across glaciers and tundra, sometimes in defiance of federal regulations and park rangers. In a more egregious example of such an “adventure,” Dial biked illegally into the Grand Canyon and rafted without a permit down the Colorado River. His renegade attitude would inspire his son to take similar risks.

In 2014, Dial’s son embarked on an illegal solo jungle trek through Costa Rica’s Corcovado National Park. Cody, then 27, had no permit, partly because he did not want to hire a guide as the park required. Before setting off, he emailed his parents a basic itinerary. Dial initially drafted a cautionary response that said, “I don’t think you should go the way you’ve planned. It seems too dangerous.” Rethinking his message as too negative and parental, Dial deleted the draft and instead wrote a lighter message that concluded, “Off-trail jungle walking can get pretty disorienting.” The nonchalance of those words may have egged Cody to live up to his father’s expectations of what it meant to be an adventurer.

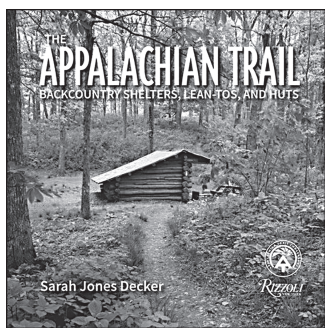
When Cody failed to emerge from the jungle after several weeks, Dial and his wife started a multiyear search that involved the Costa Rican government, the U.S. Defense Department, and several psychics. It sparked a *National Geographic* whodunnit series called *Missing Dial*. I watched the first of four episodes, finding it overwrought and silly, begging the question of why Dial OK’d its production. He was setting himself up to relive the tragedy in real time.

The book’s closing chapters deal with *National Geographic*’s hasty conclusion that Cody was murdered. Just as that TV series aired, park authorities found Cody’s remains—nearly two years after he went missing—ruling that he was killed by a falling tree, not foul play.

At its heart, this is a story about a father’s reckoning with the idea that cultivating a sense of adventure in his son could be as deadly as teaching a child to drink or do drugs. As a new father, I was challenged to think about how parents might responsibly nurture a child’s appreciation for the outdoors in a way that doesn’t lead to a premature end.

In a review for the *New York Times*, Blair Braverman—a contributor to *Appalachia*—suggested a more appropriate title for this book could have been *The Adventurer’s Father*: “This is what it means to raise a child, to introduce that child to the world, and to bet his life—and his joy—on the odds.”

—Stephen Kurczy



## **The Appalachian Trail: Backcountry Shelters, Lean-Tos, and Huts**

*By Sarah Jones Decker*

*Appalachian Trail Conservancy/Rizzoli*

*International Publications, 2020, 304 pages.*

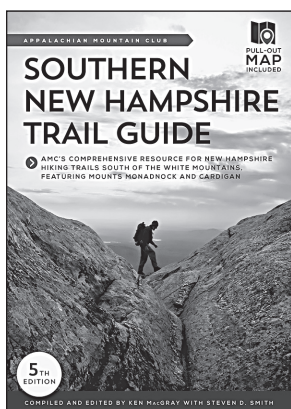
*ISBN: 978-0-8478-6772-1.*

*Price: \$27.50 (trade paperback).*

THIS ENGAGING BOOK OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND text by a 2008 Appalachian Trail thru-hiker includes appealing pictures, descriptions, and histories of more than 275 shelters along or near the trail. Sarah Jones Decker includes useful statistics such as elevation, distance from the trail, size, names of maintaining trail clubs, distance to water sources and privies, and more. There is a nicely done overview of the AT and the creation and evolution of its shelter system and, at the end of each state section, an essay on a topic such as privies, caretakers, dealing with bears, and my favorite, “The Shelter Graveyard,” about preserved former shelters.

As a small coffee table book, it is too heavy to carry when hiking, but those planning AT hikes or remembering one will enjoy it and find its data useful.

—Nat Eddy



## **Southern New Hampshire Trail Guide: Fifth Edition**

*Compiled and edited by Ken MacGray with Steven D. Smith*

*Appalachian Mountain Club, 2021, 368 pages.*

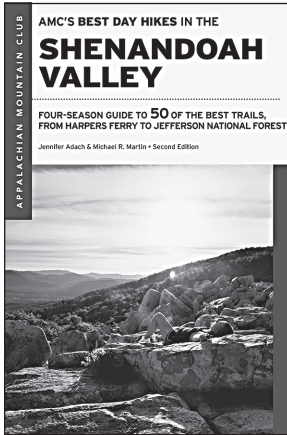
*ISBN: 978-1-62842-115-6.*

*Price: \$23.95 (trade paperback with pull-out map).*

KEN MACGRAY IS A HIKER, WRITER, AND photographer living in the area this book covers, south of the White Mountains. Steven D. Smith, a hiking enthusiast and search-and-rescue volunteer, is a veteran editor of AMC’s *White Mountain Guide* and *Southern New Hampshire Trail Guide*. This useful guide allows safe and enjoyable hikes on the many trails on Mount Monadnock, Pack Monadnock and North Pack

Monadnock, Mount Sunapee, Mount Cardigan, Mount Kearsarge, and many more. These mountains once were covered in AMC's *White Mountain Guide* until they outgrew their extra section in that book.

—Christine Woodside



**AMC's Best Day Hikes in the Shenandoah Valley: Four-Season Guide to 50 of the Best Trails, from Harpers Ferry to Jefferson National Forest**

*By Jennifer Adach and Michael R. Martin  
Appalachian Mountain Club, 2020, 230 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-1-62842-107-1.*

*Price: \$18.95 (trade paperback).*

HIKERS OF ALL LEVELS AND INTERESTS WILL FIND great day trips from the Blue Ridge Mountains in southwestern Virginia north to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. More than half of the hikes explore gorgeous Shenandoah National Park. Other walks visit historic sites, state parks, and George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Trips range from quick rambles with views, like Raven Rocks and Compton Gap on the Appalachian Trail, to longer hikes, like the alpine meadow-topped Cold Mountain and Riprap Hollow with its swimming holes, views, and waterfalls. The authors have covered thousands of trail miles and regularly lead trips. This guide includes detailed directions and trail descriptions, easy-to-follow hiking maps, and photos. The handy trip planner lists difficulty levels, elevation gains, whether to expect fees, which hikes have waterfalls (fifteen of them), whether dogs are allowed (most of the 50 hikes are dog-friendly), and estimated hike times.

—Christine Woodside