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Books and Media

*She explored the meaning of frontiers:
The amazing Canadian artist Emily Carr*

This is the third in a series of essays on reading. The author is a writer who works as a carpenter in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Her earlier pieces were an appreciation of Mardy Murie (Winter/Spring 2016, 67 no. 1) and “The Mom List” (Summer/Fall 2015, 66 no. 2).

The Art of Emily Carr

By Doris Shadbolt

Douglas & McIntyre, 1987. 224 pages.

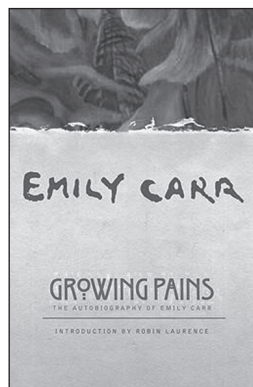
ISBN: 978-0-8889-4441-2. Price: \$35 (paperback).

Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr

By Emily Carr

Douglas & McIntyre, 2005. 400 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-5536-5083-6. Price: \$16.95 (paperback).



The Forest Lover: A Novel

By Susan Vreeland

Penguin Books, 2004. 464 pages.

ISBN: 978-0-1430-3430-8. Price: \$17 (paperback).

I DISCOVERED EMILY CARR AT AN UNEXPECTED MARTINI PARTY, ONE I attended in slippers and jeans at my landlady’s house across the porch. Two dogs and ten North Country women were in attendance, partaking of seven different kinds of martinis and enjoying martini-related activities, such as dancing and painting glasses. While I stuck to achievable stripes and dots, the woman painting next to me was covering her glasses with bold strikes of dark and light green, a tree. It moved in invisible wind, a part of an evocative

forest. She said she was mimicking Emily Carr. When I got home much later, I immediately looked up Carr.

It turns out Emily Carr is amazing—and inexplicably unknown outside the art community. 1871–1945, Canadian artist and writer. What a lady! Independent, obsessive, brave, visionary. Never married, she smoked, cursed, and distrusted religion. As for her life-at-work, she got by as an unconventional single lady in uptight Victoria, British Columbia, by selling pottery, teaching painting, and working as the owner and manager of a boarding house called The House of All Sorts. An intrepid traveler, she visited fancy cities to study painting but was happier riding, walking, or paddling into the British Columbia forests with just painting supplies. Inspired by French modernism and at home in the wild space of British Columbia, Carr’s signature style is bold, powerful, and haunting. Her depictions of the dense Pacific Northwest forests and of aboriginal culture challenge and explore the meaning of frontiers, of wilderness, and of the New World.

Skilled and motivated, Carr was always a painter and always a seeker. She studied at the Westminster School of Art in London, which she found, according to biographer Doris Shadbolt, “plodding,” “uninspired,” and “conservative.” After returning to Canada, Carr was making a living teaching painting. Shadbolt calls her watercolors from that era (1906–1910) “standard artistic fare”: “gentle scenery . . . gardens, figure studies, flower pieces.” Carr herself would later characterize them as “browsing cows . . . placid streams with an artistic wriggle meandering through pastoral landscape—that was the Old World idea of a picture.”

But by 1907, Carr found a different sort of expression. She’d always painted Indian subjects and towns, but now she began traveling as frequently and as far as possible into the wilderness, in an attempt to document devitalized aboriginal villages, subjects, art, and culture. Carr says in her memoir *Growing Pains* that “Indian art broadened my seeing, loosened the formal tightness I had learned in England’s schools.” By 1927, after studying “New Art” (postimpressionism) in Paris, she was stripping her depictions of details, rendering totems, canoes, and people with “sculptural strength and expressive energy,” as Shadbolt writes.

Despite working in isolation, Carr was a presence in the art world, and her work was shown at the National Gallery in Ottawa in 1927. There she met and became friends with the Group of Seven. Impressed by their “largeness of

vision and boldness,” Carr returned home feeling, at least fleetingly, accepted. With renewed vigor, she went postcubist, became inspired by Walt Whitman, and through an exchange of letters with theosophist Lawren Harris, began to evolve her religious and spiritual views to see the sacred in nature, and her act of painting as a practice that honored and depicted the infinite. In my admittedly totally novice opinion, this is when her work becomes most exciting. Carr begins shifting her focus to the forests, and it seems that something finally comes together for her, or maybe something comes together for me. It’s an unfettering. At nearly 60, Carr was still powerfully transforming, still learning, still striving.

Shadbolt attempts to describe this period: “The primeval woods had revealed to her a more comprehensive world: a nature vast and rich enough to provide her with pictorial metaphors for all experience she would wish to express. . . . Carr sometimes conceives of the forest as an impenetrable space-consuming wall, shutting out light and sky, or as a shadowed interior, and at times she ascribes to the forest the sense of terrible presence she had found in the totem.”

A sense of air and of movement is unmistakable in Carr’s painting of this era. Shadbolt notes that at this time, another variant appears: “atmospheric shimmer,” a “radiance of centered, feathered light,” or a “grand sweep of space, she is working from a concept of energy that belongs to the elements in nature themselves: the power of wind, the intensity of sun, the thrust of growth.” If you want to know what that means, look up Emily Carr.

—Maia Rauschenberg

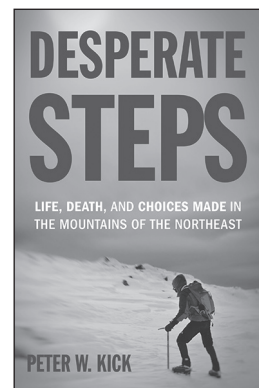
Desperate Steps: Life, Death, and Choices Made in the Mountains of the Northeast

By Peter W. Kick

Appalachian Mountain Club, 2015. 288 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-62842-09-8. Price: \$18.95 (paperback).

ALL OF US WHO VENTURE TO THE MOUNTAINS, either for a modest day hike up New Hampshire’s Mount Willard or a weeklong trek on the 100-Mile Wilderness section of the Appalachian Trail in



Maine, realize that a sudden storm, sprained ankle, or other mishap or misstep can quickly turn a joyous outing into a harrowing, even deadly, ordeal.

Thus we may set off in high spirits but must always prepare for the worst, heeding weather advisories, filling out hiker-registration cards, carrying first-aid kits, and packing extra food and clothing.

The latest addition to author Peter W. Kick's admirable outdoor oeuvre inspires this reality check. In the stories and analysis of twenty backcountry incidents and accidents over the past half-century, Kick outlines a common threat: most misadventure was the result of poor choices and either could have—or, in fact, did—end badly.

Kick organizes chapters into four main headings: “Unprepared,” “Know the Route,” “Taking Risks,” and “Unexpected.” Accounts range from the October 1963 deaths of Ralph W. Heath and Margaret Ivusic on the Knife Edge on Katahdin in Maine's Baxter State Park, to the July 2013 disappearance of Geraldine Largay on the Appalachian Trail in Maine. The Ivusic tragedy, a dramatic tale that made history because it inspired new search-and-rescue techniques, starts the book. (It was excerpted in the November–December 2015 issue of *AMC Outdoors*, the Appalachian Mountain Club's member magazine.)

Each chapter begins with gripping narrative, like this one on New Hampshire's Mount Washington: Norman Priebatsch, 67, a skier and marathon runner, led a group including his son and two friends up the mountain over spring snow and ice. The two friends had limited winter mountaineering experience. Though the early morning weather at the outset was favorable—18 degrees with clear skies and light winds—the climbers evidently discounted or disregarded the forecast for a ferocious storm known as an Alberta clipper; it brought high winds, plunging temperatures, and thick fog later in the afternoon.

By then, they already had abandoned their plan to reach the 6,288-foot summit and were on their way back down via the Tuckerman Ravine Trail. That trail can be particularly perilous in early spring because of the potential for sliding falls over ice, as a Mount Washington Avalanche Center advisory that morning had warned.

The resulting tragedy was swift and merciless: Priebatsch lost his footing and plunged into a crevasse; his body was recovered a month later.

In each chapter, Kick includes a postmortem that assigns blame where it belongs and attempts to incorporate teachable moments. Kick, a master storyteller, describes the failed attempt to rescue Ivusic from the boulders of

Katahdin in heartbreaking detail but offers some consolation for the lost lives: The tragedy inspired improved search-and-rescue training and procedures, which continue to benefit future generations of hikers at Maine's celebrated Baxter State Park.

As he has for his useful, well-organized hiking and cycling guides, Kick has performed extensive research in compiling material for *Desperate Steps*. It is a must-read for armchair as well as real-life adventurers.

—Steve Fagin
Book Review Editor

The Lost Art of Reading Nature's Signs

By Tristan Gooley

The Experiment, 2015. 416 pages.

ISBN 978-1-6151-9241-0. Price: \$16.95 (paperback).

SOME PEOPLE WHO LACE UP HIKING BOOTS AND strap on backpacks fancy themselves as naturalists, meteorologists, or wilderness experts.

"Leaves of three, let them be."

"Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in morning, sailors take warning."

"Moss grows only on the north side of the tree."

Those who repeat such hackneyed apothegms reveal a trait that should be evident to all within earshot: they know very little.

And then there is Tristan Gooley.

In his immensely entertaining and informative volume, *The Lost Art of Reading Nature's Signs*, Gooley has compiled more than 850 outdoor tips designed to teach wayward wanderers how to "find their way, predict the weather, locate water, track animals—and other forgotten skills."

Who knew, for instance, that although it's never a good idea to seek refuge under a tree during a lightning storm, some species are safer than others?

Gooley cites scientific studies that support the wisdom of the weather rhyme, "Beware of oak; it draws the stroke. Avoid an ash; it courts the flash. Creep under hawthorn; it will save you from harm"—though the principle likely is connected more to tree height than to other arboreal properties.

He explains how to navigate not only by using the sun, moon, and stars but also by examining tree roots, which grow thicker and longer at the base



in the direction of prevailing winds. In addition, more branches grow on the south side of trees than on the north and tend to extend horizontally, whereas those on the north reach vertically.

For Gooley, author of *The Natural Navigator* (The Experiment, reprint edition in 2012), who spent more than two decades in outdoor research, including among the Dayak people of Borneo and the Tuareg of the Sahara, even the simple act of walking by the sea reveals hidden information.

“The next time you walk on a sandy beach,” he writes, “take a second to consider the sand itself. If the sand is coarse and slightly uncomfortable under bare foot, that is a clue to granite nearby and therefore probably high ground too. If the sand is white, it will consist of millions of tiny broken shells (you can see them with the naked eye and clearly with any magnification), which means the waters are host to a rich marine life.”

This book is the U.S. edition of his British compendium, *The Walker’s Guide to Outdoor Clues & Signs* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2014). He has added references to American flowers, fauna, and landmarks, without losing any of his celebrated wit and wisdom.

This volume combines the genius and insight of E.O. Wilson with the poetry and passion of Henry David Thoreau and richly deserved the honor of being named Outdoor Book of the Year by the 2015 Great Outdoors Awards. This book belongs in every outdoor enthusiast’s library.

—Steve Fagin

The Airman’s Arctic Survival Guide

By Belmore Browne, edited by Isabel Browne

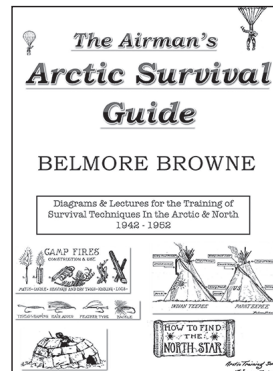
Driscoll and Peter Mason Driscoll

Browne Family Collection, LLC,

150 pages.

ISBN: 978-0-9897512-0-9. Price: \$62.50 (hardcover).

BELMORE BROWNE (1880–1954) WAS A WELL-regarded mountaineer, author, artist, and cold weather survival expert in the first half of the twentieth century. This foot-wide, 14-inch-tall book helps us to know this creative man who painted diorama backgrounds for the American Museum of Natural History in New York and like institutions; exhibited artwork at the Smithsonian, Vermont’s Shelburne



Museum, and other places; wrote six books, some for children; and went on three expeditions to Denali. In 1912, during his final assault on the nation's highest peak, a sudden storm forced him to turn back just shy of the summit.

Browne's granddaughter and her husband assembled this fascinating volume, which features 38 entertaining pen-and-ink drawings and twelve lectures about observing nature that Browne developed during World War II, when he was a civilian consultant for the U.S. Air Force.

Included among the topics are construction of snow shelters, fire building, emergency fishing tackle, fabricating a raft without nails or rope, crampon and snowshoe use, wilderness caches, and snares for small game. Newer methods and technology have superseded many of Browne's ways, but someone in an emergency situation could save a life by following his advice. His ideas on handling axes and using a canoe paddle are timeless. His survival advice can be fascinating. Imagine making dry flies for fishing out of thread from a parachute cord, pile from a cap, and feathers from a sleeping bag.

Browne's functional illustrations, like the one showing a porcupine and rabbit chewing on snowshoes someone forgot to hang up, are delightful.

In these days of compartmentalized thinking, here is a volume at the confluence of outdoor lore, art, woodcraft, history, and military tactics. It connects diverse disciplines. You need not be a pilot or an explorer of higher latitudes to enjoy adventuring through these pages.

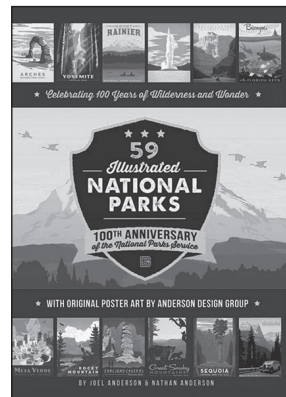
—David K. Leff

59 Illustrated National Parks: Celebrating 100 Years of Wilderness and Wonder

By Joel Anderson and Nathan Anderson
Nashville, TN: Anderson Design Group, 2015
160 pages.

ISBN 978-0-9967777-1-1. Price: \$49.95
(large paperback).

"OUR POSTERS LOOK OLD, AS IF THEY WERE produced generations ago and then recently discovered in an estate sale," writes designer and co-author Joel Anderson of the blocks of color and shading that make this big book's groovy posters. They do. The art evokes that of the 1930s. The posters are designed very closely after the Great Depression-era



posters of national parks made by Works Project Administration artists. Anderson first thought of this project when he saw the original WPA poster of Yellowstone National Park while in that park's visitor center with his son, Nathan (who wrote the book's text). No full set of posters was ever produced during the WPA years (and only eleven of the original fourteen survived), so the Andersons set out to create posters of all 59 of the parks. Joel Anderson worked with a six-person team that included another son, David Anderson, on the more than 70 designs. This book might inspire you to remove pages and hang them up, right before heading out to one of the parks.

—Christine Woodside

Art of Katahdin

By David Little,

edited by Carl Little

Down East Books, 2013.

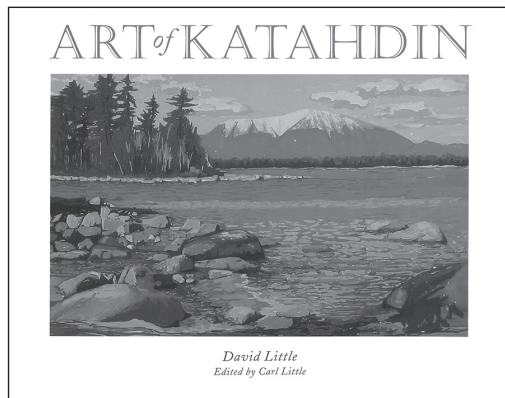
200 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-608930-05-0.

Price: \$50 (hardcover).

DAVID LITTLE'S VISUAL celebration of Maine's highest peak includes not only a variety of artistic mediums, but also genres beyond what the phrase *mountain art* conjures. This is no overview of every fair-weather oil-on-canvas portrait ever made of Katahdin (though the book includes a number of beautiful examples). This portfolio ranges from figurative to still life, scenic to comedic, textile to sculptural, realistic to the wildly abstract, and personal sketches and notations to published etchings and illustrations.

With much ground to cover, the author leads with chapters on the first artists to visit the Katahdin region by way of survey teams and later Hudson River School painters, Frederic Church being the most prominent character. In my own art history education, American landscape painting tended to start and end with classic mid- to late-nineteenth-century romanticism, and it never strayed quite so far north as Katahdin. Therefore, the book introduces what the author rightly considers an unrecognized part of Maine's artistic heritage.



Many of the works, unpublished until now, depict the mountain as a dark, brooding monolith or a sunny, snow-dusted peak. Some images depict sporting camp life, logging, and the area's uncountable lakes and rivers. Perhaps a few works warrant better prominence in the book.

The final chapter on contemporary work seems rushed, although it covers a new and more populous generation of Katahdin painters, and its gallery format is attractive.

All of the earlier artists given space in the book, be they native Mainer or from away, walked a fascinating path to Katahdin. Each could be the subject of an extended essay or book. Although the text is necessarily succinct to make way for the art itself, endnotes are used liberally. Consider those notes because they hold some of the best gems of information. Here we learn, for example, that James Fitzgerald, for whom a viewing tower was built on Katahdin Lake, used it only once. Turns out he was afraid of heights.

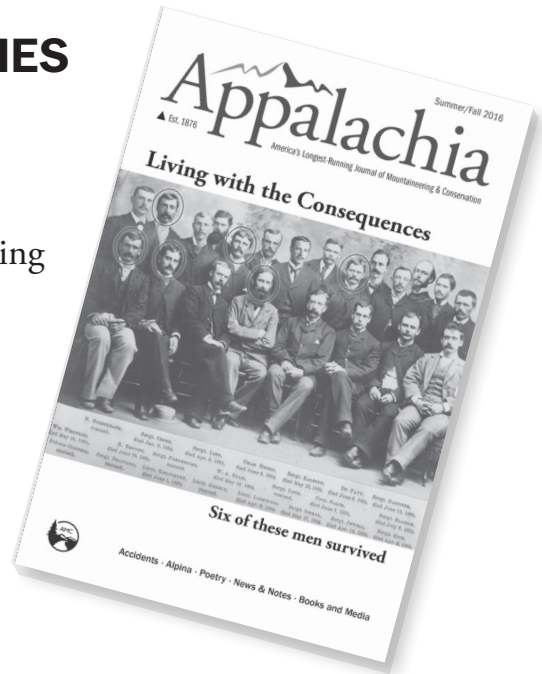
—*Rebecca Fullerton*

"I started reading Appalachia for the accident reports, but I kept reading for the great features."—Mohamed Ellozy, subscriber

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