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Books and Media

The environment “is itself, for itself”:

An appreciation of Mardy Murie.

This is the second installment of essays on reading by Maia Rauschenberg, following her piece, “The Mom List” in the Summer Fall 2015 edition (LXVI, no. 2)

Two in the Far North

By Margaret E. Murie

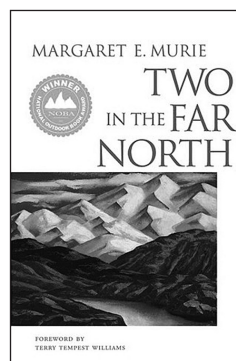
Alaska Northwest Books, 2003. 376 pages.

ISBN 978-0-88240-489-9. Price: \$39.99 (hardcover)

IF MARDY MURIE WERE AROUND TODAY, I'D BE the crazy one security was escorting out, waving my lighter during her speeches to Congress. Writing obsessive admiring letters. (Signed, Number One Fan.)

As a drifting traveler in Alaska in 2002, my world was already being cracked open with wonder, and then I read *Two in the Far North*. Murie's memoir is a ridiculously charming epic adventure voiced with astute observation, a cheeky optimism in adversity, honest humility, and imbued with the boldness and love of adventure of someone who's lived life passionately.

Biography? I will list the pertinent: born in 1902 in Seattle, moved to Fairbanks in 1907, first female graduate of the Alaska Agriculture College and School of Mines—now University of Alaska Fairbanks—in 1924, married biologist Olaus Murie that same year. She assisted Olaus in his field studies, and together they campaigned to create the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Wilderness Act (which passed the year after Olaus's death in 1964). Mardy continued her activism, and with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980, ANWR's acreage was doubled. Mardy Murie is



called the “grandmother of conservation” and is so decorated: she received the Audubon Medal, the John Muir Award, the Robert Marshall Conservation Award, and an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Alaska. In 1998, President Clinton awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And in 2002, the National Wildlife Federation awarded her the J.N. “Ding” Darling Conservationist of the Year Award, their highest honor. Mardy died the following year, at the age of 101.

But this is just a list. What intrigues me are the yawning years between the dates of note.

I’ve always been obsessed with farther. And with maps. I used to spend hours after school with my mom’s atlas, imagining what Battle Mountain, Nevada, was like, or Caribou, Maine. I especially love the middle of places and the ends. South Dakota. Cape Horn. Deadhorse. The names are evocative in their foreignness and banality. They are every place, every time, the intimate world I do not understand but wish to know.

I arrived in Alaska in March 2002 when the temperature measured somewhere around –30 degrees. The dust caps of my old Nissan pickup grew thousand-pointed icicle starfish as I drove. After a couple months in Talkeetna with nothing to do but avidly monitor the Susitna River’s breakup, I got a job driving tourist buses outside Denali National Park. I ate blueberries while lying on spongy tundra. Got wiggy with the endless daylight, thunderstruck by the dying salmon flopping out of creeks. Met nutcases and drunks and fortune seekers. I wanted to go more north. To the end, because I could.

In August that year, I headed 60 miles north of Fairbanks, to where Alaska 11—the Dalton Highway—begins. The rest of the 400-plus mile trip would be on the primarily dirt Dalton, also known as the Haul Road. It was created to build the Trans-Alaska Pipeline in the 1970s and parallels the pipeline all the way to the oilfields at Prudhoe Bay. Together, road and pipe cut across as large and bold a wilderness—and I do mean *wilderness*—as I can ever imagine accessing. Landmarks include three towns along the route (Coldfoot, Wiseman, and Deadhorse), crossings of the Yukon and Koyukuk rivers, and Atigun Pass, the continental divide of the Brooks Range. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge lies just to the east, and this is as close as I would come to what Murie, in her book, called “that one great representative unspoiled piece of arctic wilderness . . . kept as it is . . . inspiration for everyone who cares enough about untouched country to come and visit and leave it without the marks of man.”

A handful of photographs help me imagine Mardy's real life. Mardy sitting on the ground with a husky standing in her lap (her dear Ungiak?), a panorama of some unknown wilderness behind her. Mardy in a red flannel shirt, hair tied up in a handkerchief, leaning up against a rock in some austere alpine zone. Moments that eclipse that list of dates and accomplishments, suggestions of the person who inhabited them. Berry picking or watching a storm roll in. The humble ordinariness of each of our days, all of our days.

Two in the Far North evokes Mardy's voice and life; an epic adventure (really several) through the gentle lens of the insightful woman who lived it. Her landscape passages are panoramic and alive with light, foliage, and omnipresent birds, her "companionable spirits of the wilderness." From her initial journey into the Koyukuk River Valley that opened Mardy's "mind and heart to the little-known teeming, rich life going on in the trees and streams, in the mossy tundra, and in the grassy sloughs," to her later trips north, the book explores both objective and subjective value of wilderness.

Mardy's insider's view of northern culture brings to life the spirit and humor of that frontier. It's a beautiful world she lived in, fearless, full of surprisingly good people. No matter how diverse their backgrounds, Mardy's indomitable Alaskans are "all happy, laughing at their failure" and lovers of the philosophy that "civilization, meaning many comforts, many people, speed, efficiency, [was] thought of as an enemy. Selfish, no doubt, and 'ornery,' we would stand and cheer so long as our spot of wilderness could repel the invasion. Why shouldn't one corner of the earth remain 'unconquered?'"

(In May 2015, the United States government gave Shell Royal Dutch authorization to drill six wells offshore in the Chukchi Sea, in waters known for extreme weather and gale-force winds, which are inhabited by polar bears, beluga and bowhead whales, walrus, and sea birds. Detecting and containing spills would be impossible. By late September, Shell announced its exit from the Chukchi, citing poor yield. Experts note that the current low oil prices are causing an industry-wide curtailing of ambitious operations. As the *New York Times* succinctly put it, "economic forces have scuttled what environmentalists had tried to do for years." This is not a victory of principles; and so may be a temporary stay.)

I'll be honest: the book starts slow. But persevere! It's worth it. And yes, this book was published in 1962 and covered the 1920s, so a modern reader could critique the representation of gender and race. But I just don't have the heart for that. Things were thought of differently back then. I find that the value in the rest of what Murie has to say is worth a little discomfort.

I struggle to describe my own experience of the arctic, the most vast wild country I've ever seen. The thread of civilization—of industry—that I traveled on and camped beside was my lifeline. A corridor of predictability that I stepped to the edge of, and felt the strange, exhilarating nothing-and-everything beyond. On the treeless North Slope, I could see for miles and miles—and usually saw no one. Just Musk Ox foraging below the pipeline's bend, Dall Sheep watchful on rocks above Atigun Pass, ground squirrel foraging. Caribou herds in the middle of nowhere. Sunshine fading to ominous clouds. Wind over the intricate, ancient tundra lichen. A snow squall blowing in over the miles.

"The environment is not tailored to man; it is itself, for itself. All its creatures fit in. They know how, from ages past. Man fits in or fights it. Fitting in, living in it, carries challenge, exhilaration, and peace." It occurs to me I am a stranger everywhere I go.

Deadhorse is an outpost. A town consisting entirely of ATCOs (modular buildings often used up there), trucks, and equipment strewn in a vague suggestion of blocks. The general store stocked an abundance of porn, snacks, and Arctic gear. There's a locked chain-link fence at the edge of Deadhorse that marks the beginning of the controlled-access Prudhoe Bay oil field. To get through you have to get on a tour bus, and they allow you to spend twenty supervised minutes at the Arctic Ocean, in the company of your driver and a handful of odd tourists. I was embarrassed by their presence. I dipped my fingers in, looked out at the gray waters full of whales and fish and unimaginable creatures, and saw the northern horizon's curvature that led only back south.

—Maia Rauschenberg

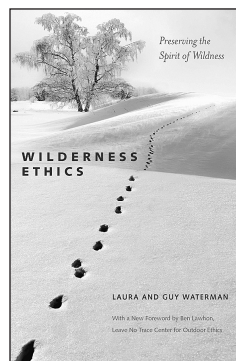
Wilderness Ethics: Preserving the Spirit of Wildness

By Laura and Guy Waterman

The Countryman Press, new edition, 2014. 240 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-58157-267-4. Price: \$16.95 (paperback)

THIS IS A NEW EDITION OF A SEMINAL VOLUME of the conservation movement, written by Laura Waterman and the late Guy Waterman. It was originally published in 1993. A new forward, by



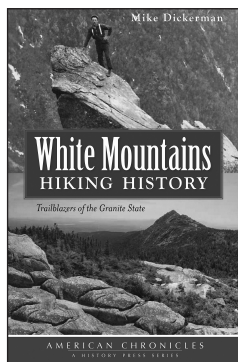
Ben Lawhon, executive director of the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, and an appreciation by Laura Waterman, first written a month after Guy Waterman's death, briefly address the difficulty of coming to terms with Guy Waterman's final decision to commit suicide, without dwelling on grim details. Laura Waterman also notes that her husband would have been surprised that his loyalty to the cause of protecting wilderness had touched many lives.

This book asks people to consider the impact of new development and technology and, "What are we trying to preserve?" They write, "Without some management, wildness cannot survive the number of people to enjoy it. But with too much management, or the wrong kind, we can destroy the spiritual component of wildness in our zeal to preserve its physical side."

Guy Waterman's death provokes conflicting emotions. His passion for unspoiled wilderness, particularly in his beloved White Mountains, has inspired generations of hikers, but he struggled with demons and ultimately decided to commit suicide on Mount Lafayette. I happened to be cross-country skiing in Franconia Notch on a brutally cold weekend in February 2000 when word filtered down to the valley that a body had been found atop nearby Mount Lafayette. Like many who had read Waterman's books, I was shocked and saddened to learn the circumstances of his death. How could anyone with such reverence for preservation take his own life, especially on a forlorn, icy, windswept summit? As all of us who spend time outdoors realize, though, nature isn't always pretty. It can be grim, dangerous, and unforgiving.

Fifteen years after his passing, we may continue to mourn Waterman, but we can also celebrate the beliefs he and his wife so eloquently expressed.

—Steve Fagin



White Mountains Hiking History: Trailblazers of the Granite State

By Mike Dickerman

The History Press, 2013. 144 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-62619-080-1. Price: \$19.99 (paperback)

HIKERS WHO ROAM ABOUT IN THE WHITE Mountains likely have ventured into Crawford Notch or along Lowe's Path but probably have taken for granted the origins of these landmarks.

In his entertaining and informative volume, *White Mountains Hiking History: Trailblazers of the Granite State*, Mike Dickerman tells the stories of such New Hampshire pioneers as Abel Crawford and his son, Ethan Allen Crawford, who in 1819 blazed an 8.2-mile path to the summit of Mount Washington that today ranks as the oldest continuously used and maintained hiking trail in the northeastern United States; and Charles E. Lowe, a legendary guide who built his namesake trail up Mount Adams 56 years later.

Hikers today still tramp up Lowe's Path and often leave their cars in a parking lot next to the small store in Randolph operated by his descendants.

The book tells the history of colorful trail guides and builders, as well as historic accounts of various areas including the Zealand River Valley, Lost River and Kinsman Notch, and the Waterville Valley.

Few writers are better qualified than Dickerman to tackle such a broad geographic area spanning such an extended period. For three decades, his popular hiking column, "The Beaten Path," has appeared regularly in newspapers across New Hampshire; he also has written several books about the White Mountains and served as coeditor of the 29th edition of the Appalachian Mountain Club's *White Mountain Guide*.

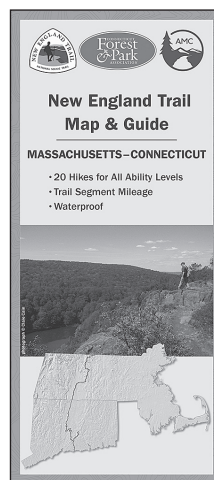
Dickerman's newest book, which includes excerpts from published columns, pays well-deserved homage to the visionary trailblazers who in past centuries helped make the White Mountains what they are today: a treasured natural and recreation resource.

—Steve Fagin

New England Trail Map & Guide
By the Appalachian Mountain Club and
Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Appalachian Mountain Club, 2015. 2-map set.
ISBN 978-1-628420-15-9.

Price: \$11.96 (AMC members) \$14.95 (nonmembers)

THE 215-MILE LONG NEW ENGLAND NATIONAL Scenic Trail traverses a series of ridges that extend from Long Island Sound through Massachusetts to the New Hampshire border, offering extraordinary vistas, natural splendor, and stretches of surprising solitude that belies its proximity to urban hubs.



Over the years, various guidebooks have included descriptions of the principal paths that make up the scenic trail, including portions of the Metacomet, Mattabesset and Monadnock trails, but now the two leading outdoor organizations charged with maintaining them, the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, have published a two-map set that for the first time offers a clear, detailed vision of the new network.

Divided into sections covering two states, the topographic maps describe ten suggested hikes for each, including Ragged Mountain Preserve, Bluff Head and Seven Falls in Connecticut, and Mount Tom, Royalston Falls, and Erving Ledges–Hermit Mountain in Massachusetts.

A few years ago, a friend and I walked/ran much of what is now the Connecticut section of the New England National Scenic Trail over a long Memorial Day weekend, and I was impressed not just by the challenging terrain but by how closely it resembled parts of New Hampshire and Vermont. As much as I enjoy the White and Green mountains, I'm reminded that we in the Nutmeg State need not venture too far afield to savor a superior hiking experience.

A few years later, another friend and I tackled much of the same route at a more leisurely pace, and I enjoyed it even more, particularly the Hanging Hills, Rattlesnake Mountain, Pinnacle Rock, the Ragged Mountain Preserve, Chauncey Peak, and Lamentation Mountain.

My hikes in Massachusetts have been more limited, so I'm looking forward to using the new maps to guide me through the Bay State section.

The AMC and CFPA literally have “written the book”—books and maps—that guide hikers, and this new addition to the newest National Scenic Trail more than lives up to their high standards, with easy-to-read directions, depictions, and descriptions. It should be a must-have for those of us who savor hiking in our backyards as well as in points north.

—*Steve Fagin*

Trail Running Western Massachusetts

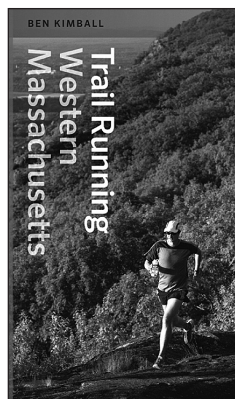
By Ben Kimball

University Press of New England, 2015.

224 pages.

ISBN 978-1-61168-786-6. Price: \$19.95 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-61168-787-3. Price: \$15.99 (e-book)



FOR SIXTEEN YEARS, MY WIFE DEBBIE LIVINGSTON and I have been running on trails all over New England. Many trail running pioneers hail from Connecticut, where we live, but the real epicenter of trail running in our region during the past 25 years is the region this book covers, western Massachusetts.

The long-running New England Grand Tree Trail Running Series predates the recent trail-running boom by many years. These races launched by the Western Massachusetts Athletic Club (WMAC) spurred growth in the sport. The forests, parks, and trail systems of western Massachusetts make it an ideal place to run.

I have in past years felt skeptical about the idea of a trail-running guide, but Kimball's book changed my mind. He proves that it does make sense to have a reference book to help runners learn about the best trails. It is a wonderful resource for runners of all ability levels, and it creates a model for future trail-running guides. I'm already imagining a series of these guides built around a standard, just as the Appalachian Mountain Club has done with its many hiking guides.

Debbie and I own lots of guides that were written for hikers, and we have adapted them for trail running. We use the AMC's *White Mountain Guide* and *Maine Mountain Guide*, the Green Mountain Club's *Long Trail Guide*, and Connecticut Forest & Park Association's *Connecticut Walk Book*, for examples. Even in a digital world, we would be at a loss without these books. We use them extensively when running and fast-packing, covering distances in less than half the average hiking times.

Hiking guides sometimes are too bulky to carry on the trail. *Trail Running Western Massachusetts* is a compact 6.9 x 4.3 x 0.6 inches. It weighs only 12.6 ounces and easily fits into a hydration backpack or small butt pack designed for running. All of the maps are contained within the pages of the book. Kimball did the writing, photography, and cartography for this book. In New England, there is no precedent for a trail-running guide. A handful of

guides from other parts of the country exist, but they don't appear to establish a standard. I don't know if Kimball used the AMC's guides as a model, but I see influences.

The nine-page introduction is an important section in which Kimball discusses conservation, etiquette, safety, trail access, and then discusses "How to Use This Book." As an experienced runner, I appreciate Kimball's brevity. However, if I put myself in the shoes of a neophyte trail runner, I realize that he manages to cover all of the necessary ground. He introduces the reader to trail running, how it differs from road running, and how hiking and trail running coexist. Early in his introduction, he stresses conservation and the environmental impacts of trail use. He gives tips on how to interact with other trail users. I read the safety section through the eyes of a beginner trail runner; and it is a good primer on hydration, insects, wildlife, and common injuries/illnesses.

He explains in his introduction that he offers options for extending or shortening each of the routes he'll describe. Each route offers "quick referenced data" (distance, difficulty rating, trail style, trail type, and town) followed by a brief description of the route, directions to the trailhead, "turn-by-turn" trail descriptions, and a section dubbed "nearby" that references additional trail-running opportunities in the vicinity.

Kimball reminds readers that running routes go over public and private lands as he previews the 51 "site locations" that are the heart of the guide. Each site profile is a chapter that covers a designated trail-running route.

The description for each route is like an advertisement for your run. Kimball often identifies the overall condition of the trail (e.g., "rocky and rooty"), the best time of the week or year to run, notable views, and other fun facts. If you are skimming through the various sites, the quick-referenced data and these opening paragraphs are all you need to decide where to go.

The print maps for each site are detailed enough with the route clearly identified. Trailhead parking, nearby roads, landmarks, and other trails are noted. A mileage scale and key on every map are handy for reference. The maps include contour lines, but with no elevation figures noted. I enjoy the simplicity, but I also like data. With trail running, elevation gained and lost is important information and good for bragging about your adventures. Including elevation data on the print maps and in the descriptions would be a welcome update.

Though each route has Kimball's subjective difficulty rating of "easy, moderate, challenging, or a combination," I would like to know more about the author's criteria. Does he have a formula? Difficulty in trail running is usually dictated by a combination of terrain and elevation. (*UltraRunning* magazine, for example, rates trail races on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most difficult.) Obviously, distance is a factor too, but the 51 site locations are all short- to middle-distance routes. Elevation and surface keys adaptable for New England trails would enhance the guide. On a map at the beginning of the book, the sites for the various routes are marked. It could be expanded to include distance, difficulty rating, and trail type. At a glance, I would like to see all 51 routes the book covers marked specifically on the map. I like tables and think that expanding this section to include one with the extra information would be a welcome addition.

There are many ways to use the guide. As mentioned, it is small enough to carry, though that would not be my approach. If you carry the guide, seal it in a waterproof freezer bag to keep it dry. Rain, sweat, or a hydration pack leak would make a mess of the paper version. Because you are typically doing one route at a time, and each description and map is no more than four pages, I would photocopy the route and carry a couple of pages.

If you are digitally inclined and carry a mobile device on your runs, then you can easily scan or photograph the information in the guide. In the corner of each map is a QR code. I tested this with my iPhone after downloading a free reader. The code gives you access to a PDF version of each map and additional photos of the trail. There is an e-book for Kindle that can also be read on an iPad, but if you own the print version, the only way to access the site descriptions is to have the book. The maps are also available at trailrunningsites.com. But remember that you have to have enough battery life to last through your run and that you should be self-sufficient on your run, not relying on a phone signal for access to the Internet or the outside world. Debbie suggested that you bookmark the page of your run and leave that on your car dashboard so others know where you went should you not return on time.

One of the great benefits of this guide is that it will spur runners to leave the roads, seek the trails, and explore new routes. It will encourage healthy exercise, inform you, and increase your love of the outdoors.

—*Scott Livingston*

The Precipice

By Paul Doiron

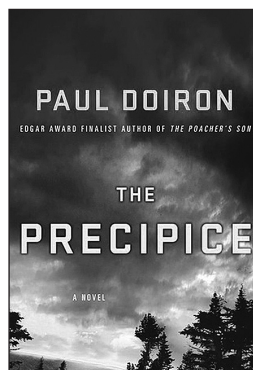
Minotaur Books, 2015. 322 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-250-06369-4. Price \$25.99 (hardcover)

MYSTERY SERIES THAT COMBINE AN EVOCATIVE sense of place with an engaging central character are my kind of eye candy, and Paul Doiron's Maine-based novels make for deliciously entertaining reads. *The Precipice*, his latest, is the sixth in a series of absorbing crime novels featuring the young game warden Mike Bowditch. A native Mainer who attended Colby College, Mike has chosen an unglamorous profession that he loves. The grueling hours, messy roadkills, surly townsfolk, and—oh yes—those pesky murderers make it hard for his loved ones to embrace that choice. Mike is a smart, kind-hearted guy who's just bad-boy enough to join the ranks of rogue detectives who spice up popular whodunits by flouting the rules, getting themselves into frequent trouble with "the brass," and regularly risking serious injury or dismissal from their jobs. If you're a crime novel fan, you'll recognize the type.

But this and other familiar tropes find new life in Doiron's able hands, partly because he is a fluid writer with a gift for peopling his stories with quirky, interesting characters and for making Maine's wildest landscapes come alive. The former editor of *Down East* magazine, Doiron knows his territory and its people well. He's especially adept at bringing readers into the lesser-known regions where tourists rarely go and residents struggle to make ends meet. Although he mixes fictional places, such as Bowditch's home base of Sennebec, with real towns and locations, such as Monson and Baxter State Park, every landscape he depicts will feel real to those who know Maine's interior reaches and remote Down East coastline. Warden Bowditch does get around, however, so less Maine-savvy readers can enjoy visits to Portland, Freeport, Brunswick, and Popham Beach, among other well-known destinations.

Appalachian Mountain Club aficionados might enjoy starting with *The Precipice* as a great entry into Doiron's series. This story—seemingly inspired by a headline-making 1996 murder along the Appalachian Trail—takes place on the section of the AT within the 100-Mile Wilderness, where the AMC owns 70,000 acres of land. As you make your way through the



plot twists, you'll travel to Little Lyford Lodge and Cabins, Gulf Hagas, and Chairback Mountain, and enjoy Doiron's appreciative nods to the AMC's stewardship and search-and-rescue services.

Once you've turned the final page, you might find yourself, like me, going back and starting with the first of the series, *The Poacher's Son*, and moving along through the rest. They are all addictive page-turners that center you in remote, unforgiving landscapes you will nonetheless want to return to again and again. The recurring characters evolve in ways that keep you engaged, but the rugged land remains steadfastly itself. The sometimes-grisly series may not be the ideal advertisement for a state that likes to be viewed as "The Way Life Should Be," but it will certainly introduce many readers to the Maine they should know better but almost never see.

—Lucille Stott

The Tower: A Chronicle of Climbing and Controversy on Cerro Torre

By Kelly Cordes

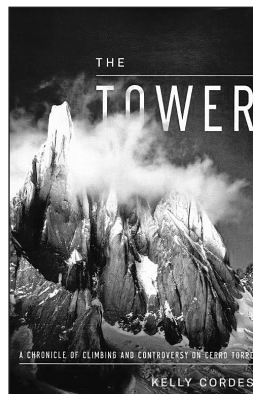
Patagonia Books, 2014. 400 pages.

ISBN 978-1-938340-33-8. Price: 27.95 (hardcover)

Also available as an e-book

YOU HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY SEEN PHOTOGRAPHS of Cerro Torre. It's unmistakable: a narrow but very high granite tower topped by an ice formation resembling an enormous ice cream cone.

When it was first climbed depends on whom you believe. In 1959, the strong Italian climber Cesare Maestri staggered off the peak, claiming that he had reached the top. His partner, the equally strong Toni Egger, perished in an avalanche on the way down. Maestri's account was questioned from the start. Could they have managed this extraordinarily difficult ascent in just a week, and a week of bad weather at that? There were no photographs—Egger had carried the only camera. Skepticism grew. Nobody reached the top by Maestri's route or any other. Then, in one of the most bizarre episodes in recent climbing history, he returned to the Tower in 1970, accompanied by a 150-pound gas-powered air compressor. He and the compressor succeeded on another part of the mountain. With compressor-supplied power, Maestri drilled some 400 expansion bolts, many of them clearly unnecessary. Even



then, he didn't reach the true summit, asserting that the final ice mushroom wasn't really part of the mountain and would some day blow away.

In 1974, an Italian party indisputably reached the summit. A number of (very difficult) new routes were subsequently established, but the favorite remained Maestri's Compressor Route. With all those bolts in place, it really wasn't that hard. But in 2012, two young climbers made it without the aid of any of the bolts. On the way down, they removed a good many of them. The route became difficult again. The local reaction was hostile, and the two found themselves briefly in jail.

The turbulent Cerro Torre story is far from over, but who better to present it now than Kelly Cordes? He helped edit the *American Alpine Journal* for many years, and he has climbed Cerro Torre. Now he has written a splendid book. *The Tower* is a complete history of the peak. The writing is clear and compelling. Among the book's attractions are its photographs: many are full-page in color. An opening section of these shows the routes in all their implausible clarity. Published appropriately by Patagonia Books, this is one for your library.

It is a historical account and a detective story. Cordes has to confront the question: Did Maestri really climb Cerro Torre in 1959? The author is untiring in his pursuit of the answer. He says no: Maestri's description of the route and account of the accident had a disquieting flexibility. But the most damning evidence was a lack of evidence. In 1976, a three-man party reached the summit of Torre Egger (named for Toni Egger). The first 2,000 feet duplicated the route claimed by Maestri, up to the Maestri-named Col of Conquest. No one had been there since 1959. On the first thousand feet, they found abundant signs of precedence, culminating in an equipment dump near a prominent snowfield. Above that, nothing: not a piton, not a bolt, no ropes, no rappel points. Maestri's description of the difficulties below the col was utterly inaccurate. It was very hard to believe that he had really been there. And when the section above the col was eventually climbed, no sign of an earlier ascent was found there either.

The falsity of Maestri's account was sufficiently established for David Roberts to include it in *Great Exploration Hoaxes* (Sierra Club Books, 1982). And Maestri poisoned his case in interviews, with vague route descriptions and a lot of anger. In a 2006 interview, he reeled off a string of obscenities. "But I don't give a [expletive] about all this. It has already been covered, goddamn it to hell! You can't understand." After *The Tower* was published, there came another revelation: a photo in a Maestri book that claimed to

show Egger on Cerro Torre was taken on an entirely different peak. The evident fakery prompts uncomfortable questions: When did Maestri decide to lie? Would he have done so had Egger survived? Even his description of his partner's death has contradictions. Perhaps, as Maestri's more charitable critics have suggested, he was so stunned by his own difficult descent, which included a long fall, that he really believed what he was saying. And possibly still does.

There is a resemblance to the disappearance of Mallory and Irvine on Everest in 1924. Unlike Maestri, they did not survive to tell us whether they reached the top. Maestri, though in his 80s and unwell, does know about Cerro Torre. But we readers will have to make our impartial guess. Cordes concludes in regretful condemnation: "They [Maestri and Cesarino Fava, who had been with him part of the way in 1959] failed themselves, they failed those who believed in them, and they betrayed the code of trust that is essential to climbing mountains."

—Steven Jervis

Barren Grounds: The Story of the Tragic Moffatt Canoe Trip

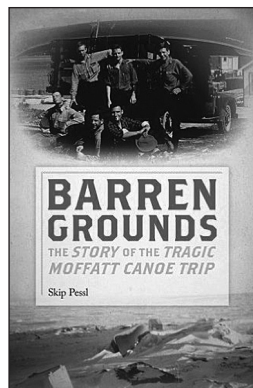
By Skip Pessl

Dartmouth College Press, 2014. 212 pages.

ISBN 978-1-61168-533-6. Price: \$30 (hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1-61168-591-6. Price: \$29.99 (e-book)

ARTHUR MOFFATT DIED FROM THE SHOCK OF cold water at the age of 34. In the summer of 1955 he led a group of five young men, college students and recent graduates, some 800 miles into the Northwest Territories (as they were then called), following the Dubawnt River and its chain of huge lakes toward their destination at the remote Hudson's Bay Company outpost of Baker Lake. Despite the shock of Moffatt's unexpected death, the remaining five men had to forge on for two more weeks to gain safety as winter closed in. The Moffatt expedition has been notorious in canoeing circles. A fair amount of sanctimony has rippled from it for decades, notwithstanding the astonishing achievement of one of the first and longest recreational canoe trips as we know them now.



Fred “Skip” Pessl gives a clear account of the accident, but his book is much more. Pessl was the next-most-experienced canoeist of the group, Moffatt’s lieutenant. He builds his book around the diary he kept and that of Peter Franck, a Harvard student at the time. Pessl is at pains to explain that this was no haphazardly joined experience, but a meticulously planned trip, with the additional ambition of filming the whole thing. Therein lies the problem, which had fatal consequences. He wrote in the preface,

Art and I remained tragically stubborn in our commitment to film the journey. . . . Indeed, images of storm-bound campsites with wind-driven snow piled against ragged tents and darkly huddled figures around a smoldering fire pit became a precious part of the story. [Art] was, however, fully aware of the conflict between travelling efficiently and filming the journey. He wrote in his journal on July 31, “need to get moving to get out of here before food runs out and storms beset us, and the dilemma of how to make a film of the operation; the two are incompatible.”

That incompatibility of purpose was at the core of the delays that ultimately led to haste. Haste, very humanly, led to taking a chance in an unscouted rapid, two overturned canoes, the loss of supplies, and the death of one man.

By any standard, this was and is a tough trip; 900 miles by canoe is a long way in a short season. Each 18-foot wood-and-canvas canoe weighed 90 pounds. Several immense wooden boxes carried stores (including a case of twelve glass jars of peanut butter!). Packsacks were crammed above the flap. Luckily, the group had Canadian government permission to carry two rifles (though not a radio). Not one of the young men had hunted anything bigger than a squirrel, but they killed, butchered, smoked, and ate three caribou, even tanning the skins. Huge lake trout contributed a significant part of their diet. Had these not been men at the peak of their physical powers, the amount they carried and the cold they endured would have been impossible.

Offsetting the tragedy long before it happened, Pessl records moments of keen appreciation. “When the sun does shine, as it did last evening, the sunsets and evening hours are magnificent. The sun becomes a hub of shimmering light, centering in orange and then flowing outward into soft reds and yellows against the pastel blue-green background of Arctic sky.”

Or, “Here I was, standing on a spot few, if any, white men had ever been. How many would ever experience the cascading beauty of this scene; the

rocky barrens as the background, with scattered caribou roaming slowly southward; dark shadows of large trout disturb the crystal clear reflections of still waters and the boiling surges of the roar beyond.”

He writes of the sense of perspective one gets in the wilderness:

From the ridges, this immense country stretches on seemingly into the infinite. The grazing animals, endless plains and misty unbroken horizon create an overwhelming surge of insignificance for this lone man Mankind seems to find its proper place again as merely one of the kingdom, and the false values of a hurried, blinded society easily fall away. The furious race for wealth and position seem ridiculous here and the contentment of simplicity certainly worth the sacrifice of an extra station wagon.

It would be unfair and inaccurate to confine the memory of the Moffatt expedition to his death and terrible hardship. Skip Pessl’s eloquent and wise book fills out the picture.

—*Malcolm Meldahl*

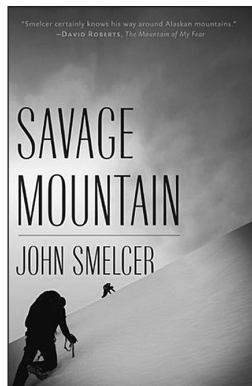
Savage Mountain

By John Smelcer

Leapfrog Press, 2015. 174 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-935248-65-1. Price: \$12 (paperback)

THIS NOVEL FOR YOUNG ADULT READERS (age 12 and older) tells the adventure of two brothers who escape the tyranny of a broken father to climb a snowcapped peak in Alaska. The boys have to cross a river, encounter a bear, scale a glacier, and survive a mountain snowstorm and avalanche—all before they attempt the 8,000-foot crag whose scaling seems to offer the solution to all their problems. Smelcer clearly knows the vivid and captivating Alaskan landscape well, as well as the suddenness of action—a bear’s unexpected appearance, a storm’s rapid entrance, a stream’s swift rise into a roaring river after the storm. Nature remains a raw, pure, powerful force, just like family quarrels, siblings, and silences. Smelcer likewise knows the art of hiding and disclosing action; adult readers will take pleasure in his way of telling the





bare bones of a good action tale. This is valuable tale for younger readers because Smelcer tells the truth about adventure: the world's challenges provide gateways to inner challenges. When the boys return home, not much has changed with their lives or with their father. The physical world remains the same. But the boys' inner landscapes have altered. They have inevitably moved along their own personal tracks toward adulthood.

—Parkman Howe

Southbounders: A Journey on the Appalachian Trail

An independent dramatic film

Directed and written by Ben Wagner

Tenth-anniversary edition, 2015

THE JOURNAL HAS NEVER REVIEWED A FILM BEFORE (WE DON'T THINK), but *Southbounders* has nosed its way into our tent. In 1999, Ben Wagner backpacked the Appalachian Trail going southbound from Maine to Georgia (the direction still much rarer than going northbound). Six years later, he released his first feature film starring two classmates from Northwestern University. The movie debuted at the Los Angeles Film Festival, and its DVD version developed a cult following, especially after Wagner held screenings in fourteen towns along the Appalachian Trail in 2007. Last year, Wagner, now an established indie filmmaker in Los Angeles, decided to improve the editing between scenes and make some other technical improvements. The movie

(for sale through most major book and media distributors) is three minutes shorter than the original (not seen by this reviewer).

Amy Cale Peterson stars as Olivia, a burned-out medical student and a woman of few words, who sets out in Maine hiking solo. A non-athletic goof-ball who calls himself “Slackpack” (Chris McCutchen) chats his way into her constant orbit; she rolls her eyes when he isn’t looking. This all rings very true to the AT experience. And Olivia slowly falls in love with the adorable but brooding “Rollin” (Scott Speiser), first by reading his philosophical musings in the trail registers. With perhaps a few hundred miles left to Georgia, our practical heroine, under some pressure from her extremely perfect-appearing parents, decides to leave the trail and return to school.

Seasoned mountain explorers probably expect little at first when this plot begins unfolding. How, they might ask, could a movie show the transformation that for many AT hikers goes on inside their minds? But *Southbounders* very sweetly and unpretentiously does this. Without spoiling the end, let’s just say that Olivia goes back to medical school but also does not leave the trail. She learns that great lesson that wilderness journeys involve giving in to uncertainty.

The film succeeds, perhaps, because the stars aren’t seasoned outdoorspeople. Like so many AT thru-hikers, they took too much and the wrong gear and too little know-how. They threw tantrums, hunched miserably over bowls of oatmeal, exulted in beauty. Wagner filmed the whole thing on the trail, in natural light, with spare dialogue and long silences. The scenes avoid treacle but maintain enough drama that you begin to care about Olivia and Rollin.

Wagner said in an interview that his goal was to show three people at crossroads in their lives who—as Wagner himself found on the trail—“intend to get one thing out of [the trail] and you end up getting another thing entirely . . . you finally let go and forget.”

Olivia and Rollin’s clothes and boots look a little too clean for the reality I’ve seen. Other than that, this film tells a realistic story. You might find yourself wondering what these people are doing now before realizing that they were actors in a fiction: *that’s* a good story.

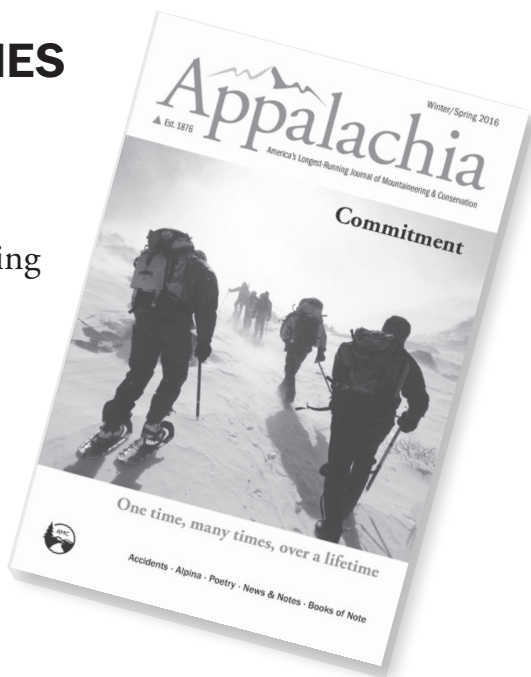
—Christine Woodside

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