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Books of Note

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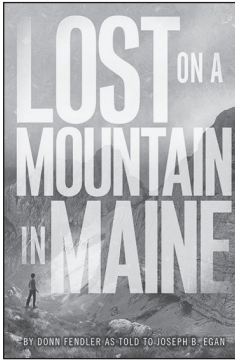
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Books of Note



Lost on a Mountain in Maine

By Donn Fendler, as told to Joseph B. Egan

New York: HarperCollins, 2013

128 pages. ISBN 978-0-688-11573-9

Price: \$5.99 (paperback)

SOME STORIES ARE SO FULL OF SALVATION THEY become essential. This story about a harrowing experience Donn Fendler suffered as a boy was recently reissued, 75 years after first publication. Memoirists, put down your pens: This is your chance

to relive someone else's true miracle.

On July 17, 1939, 12-year-old Fendler summited Katahdin in clouds, running ahead of his father and a small group of boys. He turned back to find them, and could not—for nine days and somewhere between 90 and 130 miles' worth of wandering.

He recalls the week and a half he wanders in the earnest, age-appropriate words of a young boy who lost first his father (Day 1), then his sneakers (Day 2), his dungarees (Day 3) and finally, a piece of his big toe (Day 8)—though never his purpose. It's a children's book, but any reader will recognize the efforts of habit we make against the dire facts of catastrophe. Donn washed each morning and prayed twice daily because "it never came into my head that a fellow could get so badly lost in the United States of America."

Shoeless, pants-less, he bushwhacked through wax myrtle and horsebrier vines, over rocks "like Indian arrowheads," past trees that "looked as though (they) were trying to get away from something," in the constant unrequested company of blackflies, moose flies, copperhead flies, and mosquitoes, and the occasional unrequested company of leeches. He probably traveled 10 to 14 miles a day; sometimes on his knees, sometimes up to his neck in water. By now, we sensible reading adults have given up hope for him. But he is 12, and so, he hasn't.

While hundreds of volunteers were searching in the wrong places, and the national news followed the manhunt, he tromped for hours only to find he had returned, "cold and shivery," to the same trail sign. He lived

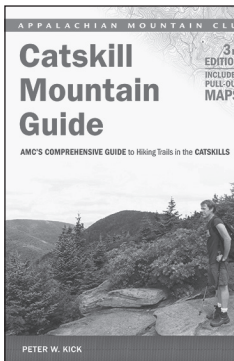
on strawberries and stream water, yearning for doughnuts, and at one point firmly decided that “anybody who doesn’t like milk is crazy.”

Eventually, using his Boy Scout logic, he followed the downward guide of flowing water. He slept in tree hollows, grew delirious (describing the physical sensations with textbook accuracy), reckoned with a Guardian Angel, and at last, 16 pounds thinner, he reasoned and crawled his way to civilization. “There must be people there,” the Scout thought triumphantly when he saw two canoes, “and they’d help a fellow any way they could. They’d give me something to eat, maybe some bacon and beans, or a doughnut.”

On a 2014 Internet site no one could have conceived of in 1939, one learns that the elderly Donn Fendler still speaks tirelessly to school children about his experience, and answers every letter he is written. We knew that this was the kind-spirited, calm, and responsible man he would become, for, in his memoir, he was already that man as a boy.

—*Elissa Ely*

Editor’s note: The original title was Donn Fendler, Lost on a Mountain in Maine: A brave boy’s true story of his nine-day adventure alone in the Mount Katahdin Wilderness, as told to Joseph B. Egan. Wellesley, Massachusetts: Welles Publishing Co., 1939.



Catskill Mountain Guide, 3rd Edition

By Peter W. Kick

Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 2014

288 pages. ISBN: 978-1-934028-94-0

Price: \$23.95 (paperback)

MENTION THE CATSKILLS AND SOME PEOPLE THINK OF old standup comics at Borscht Belt summer resorts, or the Woodstock Music Festival. But this 700,000-acre New York mountain range only 100 miles north of Manhattan has some of the finest hiking trails in the Northeast, as well as nearly 100 peaks that rise higher than 3,000 feet.

In his third edition of the *Catskill Mountain Guide*, Peter W. Kick outlines dozens of hikes on more than 300 miles of state-marked trails, adhering to the Appalachian Mountain Club’s gold-standard formula that includes accurate distances, easy-to-read, full-color topographic maps, and a treasure trove of geographic, geologic, and historical information.

I must confess to having limited hiking experience in the Catskills, but after reading Kick's appealing descriptions of such footpaths as Kaaterskill High Peak Trail, Peekamoose-Table Trail, and a 94-mile section of the 347.4-mile Long Path from the George Washington Bridge to the Northern Helderbergs, I'm determined to follow in the footsteps of James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo and explore this celebrated region.

—Steve Fagin
Book Review Editor

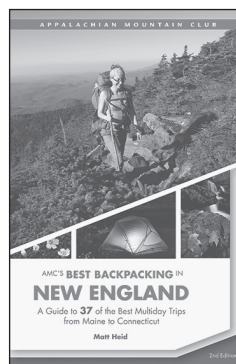
AMC's Best Backpacking in New England, 2nd Edition

By Matt Heid

Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 2014

336 pages. ISBN: 978-1-934028-90-2

Price: \$19.95 (paperback)



IN THIS SECOND EDITION OF THE APPALACHIAN Mountain Club's backpacking guide, Matt Heid tries to make a good case for calling 37 multiday trips, from Maine to Connecticut, "the best." Who could argue with most of his selections: the Great Gulf Wilderness in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the 100-Mile Wilderness in Maine, and Camel's Hump in Vermont's Green Mountains—to name three.

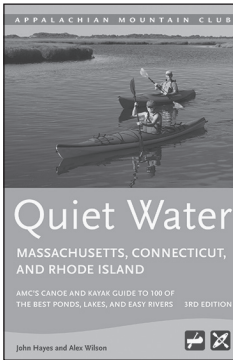
Still, ask 1,000 backpackers to pick their favorite hikes, and chances are you'll wind up with 1,000 different lists. This should not bother most hikers looking for ideas, though, because most of Heid's routes are excellent.

A word about the southern routes he chooses. I have lived in Connecticut all my life. I enjoy hiking in Connecticut and Rhode Island, but I want to caution anyone who has not hiked there that Rhode Island's stroll in the Arcadia Management Area, where the campsite is only a quarter-mile from the trailhead, is a much easier trip than most of the others in this book. The same is true for Mount Misery in Connecticut's Pachaug State Forest, which I've hiked dozens of times as a day hike. Someone traveling to the area would enjoy camping in that beautiful forest, which I've explored. But I would hesitate to put those trails in the same "best of" class as those in New Hampshire's Pemigewasset Wilderness or Maine's Baxter State Park.

That said, this book will help people new to backpacking with its detailed itineraries. This simplifies trip planning, which typically requires extensive study of numerous comprehensive guides and maps. Call me old-fashioned, but I enjoy that aspect of my trips. So I suggest that, after trying Heid's hikes and getting a feel for traveling with all your gear through the mountains, backpackers look into planning trips of their own—figuring out distances, choosing campsites, allowing for midroute changes of heart.

AMC's Best Backpacking in New England is a well-researched, easy-to-use guide that should appeal to novices and seasoned hikers, even those who might enjoy debating which of their own routes they'd include as "the best."

—Steve Fagin
Book Review Editor



Quiet Water Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, 3rd edition

By Alex Wilson and John Hayes

Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 2014

384 pages. ISBN: 978-1-628420-00-5

Price: \$19.95 (paperback)

ALEX WILSON AND JOHN HAYES TAKE US TO 100 of the "best ponds, lakes, and easy rivers" of the gentler terrain of southern New England, reporting in a folksy narrative that captures all the various sights and sounds. Good guidebooks should entertain as well as inform, and the authors accomplish both goals by making you feel as if you're paddling right alongside them. And it's clear that they know these routes.

For example, here is how they describe Green Falls Pond in Voluntown, Connecticut's Pachaug State Forest, one of my favorite close-to-home destinations for hiking as well as paddling:

The beautiful woods surrounding Green Falls Pond—with a tall canopy of red, chestnut, and white oaks; sugar maple; yellow birch; hemlock; sassafras; and shagbark hickory—shade a fairly open, leaf-carpeted understory of mountain laurel, flowering dogwood, and a wide variety of spring wildflowers. Blueberry, mountain laurel, and other shrubs line the rocky shoreline, with plenty of places to pull out for a rest, walk in the woods, or picnic.

Quiet Water contains useful maps, assorted photographs, and directions to put-ins and take-outs that include global positioning system settings.

More than 20 years have passed since Wilson published his first *Quiet Water* guide, and the more recent editions have not just added new paddling destinations but, sadly, removed some of the old ones because of development or, in some cases, invasive weed growth. I hope by the time the next edition comes out that trend will be reversed so kayakers and canoeists can enjoy more pristine paddling, free from the roar of engines and cottage-packed shorelines.

—Steve Fagin
Book Review Editor

Inscriptions

By *Cammy Thomas*

New York: *Four Way Books*, 2014

72 pages. ISBN: 978-1-935536-46-8

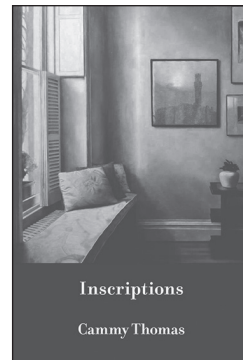
Price: \$15.95 (paperback)

POET CAMMY THOMAS HAS TITLED HER SECOND collection of more than 50 poems with care. These remembrances of parents, a beloved aunt, and a cherished sister-in-law all act like inscriptions on tombstones, though rarely as flattering eulogies to the fair dead. The danger in writing about family members lies in sentimentality: excessive tenderness, sadness, or nostalgia, as the dictionary says. Tributes to the dead also have a habit of turning into homage to our deaths, and self-pity or self-celebration graces no one's art.

"Honestly, love / is a battlefield," Thomas announces in her first poem, "In the Ruins." It's not that love, parental or filial, has been banished from the book, but it has been more than balanced with honest assessment, as in this appraisal of a father: "the terrible days he didn't come back, / and the terrible days he did."

"In her kitchen of beautiful burns" (in the poem "She Had a Lack"), a mother struggles with her husband, her children, and with her own demons. Most of the major pitfalls of raising children in the suburbs of the 1950s and 1960s make their entrances here.

An eight-poem elegiac sequence for a favorite aunt begins with dispersing her husband's ashes in the waters off the Hebrides, and ends with her ring,

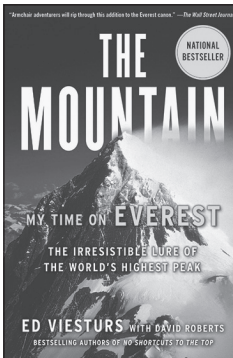


passed on to the speaker's finger after her death, becoming a "weight vibrating down my spine" ("Knell"). The collection's third sequence chronicles the death by cancer of a beloved sister-in-law: the last visits to the beach, the hospital scenes with doctors and medications, thoughts of the dying, last words; then the purging of the deceased's belongings.

This is stern stuff. The vision is clear, the lines sharp and shapely like the images, the gaze brave and unblinking. Nevertheless, two poems near the end, both published first in *Appalachia*, bring relief and blessing to the tombstone visions of *Inscriptions*. Both deal with swimming in Walden Pond. In the first, the speaker intones, "brush me with honey, / feed me grilled figs, / and we'll swim / in the snapping turtle perfect / water of Walden Pond, / so deep and silky" ("Brush Me with Honey").

The second, "Refraction," recounts a dinnertime swim at Walden: "No giant creature opens its jaws on my back. I'm in the water, every cell cooling, my mind on fire with beauty." This final poem floats, as it were, on top of the collection that lies behind and beneath it, dark with shadows and depth. "Cradled by water," the speaker tells us, "I feel the beast retreat." "No, that show of light and color is not for me," she insists a last time. But after an ascent from Erebus, sunlight dazzles everyone blind for a time. Light and color might not exist exclusively for the poet; still, they inhere with the language of the living.

—Parkman Howe



The Mountain: My Time on Everest

By Ed Viesturs with David Roberts

New York: Touchstone (Simon and Schuster), 2013

330 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4516-9473-4

Price: \$27.99 (hardcover)

DO WE NEED A FOURTH BOOK ABOUT 8,000-METER mountains BY THE successful Viesturs/Roberts team? And what new can they say? The authors appear to be conscious of these questions and sometimes refer the reader to an earlier book, particularly their *No Shortcuts to the Top* (Crown, 2006). I discussed *Shortcuts* in a lengthy article in *Appalachia* (Winter/Spring 2008, LIV no. 1, pages 86–95), and, similarly, I refer any interested readers there.

The Mountain is handsomely bound and printed and includes a good index and a very short bibliography. Forty photographs, mostly in color, and most fairly recent, illustrate the text. The voice of the text is mostly that of Viesturs, but he generously credits the contributions, factual and editorial, of his respected mountaineering historian co-author Roberts.

The authors' choice of significant Mount Everest ascents to highlight is largely conventional: The British (really commonwealth) first ascent in 1953, the American first traverse, the ascents by the Kangshung Face, by the South West Face, and so forth. The authors' descriptions of lesser-known ascents are more interesting. The little-remembered 1990 American/Soviet/Chinese (mostly Tibetan) "Peace" Expedition on the usual route from the north is understandably prominent; it incorporated Viesturs' first successful climb of the mountain, made without supplemental oxygen. Also, it was the most expensive and put the most climbers on top (twenty) of any expedition to that time. The book covers two other under-publicized ascents: the first calendar winter ascent by the Poles Krzysztof Wielicki and Leszek Cichy in February 1980, and Jean Troillet and Erhard Loretan's August 1986 fast up-and-down to the top by the North Face in 43 hours, with the sitting glissade descent called by an envious Polish climber, "the world's greatest arse slide."

The most vexing questions on possible Everest ascents are these: Did Sandy Irvine and/or George Mallory get to the top in 1924, and did the Chinese in 1960? Both questioned ascents would have been made along what is now the usual route from the north, which Viesturs climbed with the Peace Expedition in 1990. On Mallory and Irvine, Viesturs firmly refuses to draw any conclusion, because, "It doesn't matter whether Mallory and Irvine got to the summit. . . . They didn't make it back down." This view is not unique to Viesturs; Sir Edmund Hillary said something similar earlier. Roberts (with Conrad Anker) wrote *The Lost Explorer: Finding Mallory* on Mount Everest, one of the defining accounts of the 1999 discovery of Mallory's body. In a convoluted analysis, that book concludes that Mallory and Irvine could not have climbed above the Second Step and returned to a point compatible with the location where Mallory's body was found. In my view, all objective evidence available after years of search on and below the route—Irvine's ice ax, Mallory's body, Wang Hangbao's possible location of Irvine's body, and the 1924 oxygen bottle discovery—demonstrate no higher point reached in 1924 than somewhere between the First and Second Steps. Only Noel Odell's sighting, on a day much obscured by snow and brume, of two small dots

climbing quickly up a step somewhere on the ridge justifies the romantics' theory that the pair reached much higher or to the top.

On the debated Chinese 1960 ascent, the authors differ. According to Viesturs, "[Roberts] told me that he doesn't believe there's a chance in hell that the Chinese accomplished what they claimed in 1960." Viesturs himself would like to give the Chinese "the benefit of the doubt." He, however, questions why Walt Unsworth states, "There seems little doubt now that the Chinese did climb Everest in 1960." It should be recalled that the Chinese eventually published a photo supposedly taken above the Second Step on the descent from the summit. The English mountaineering pundits critically reviewed the photo in a series of *Alpine Journal* articles and eventually concluded that it was indeed taken from higher than the top of the Second Step. At that time (1963), no Westerners had climbed the route above the Second Step, and it was falsely thought to be easy to reach the summit once the step was climbed.

Particularly when discussing the earlier Everest expeditions, the authors provide potted histories that, despite Roberts's deservedly high reputation as a mountaineering historian, are sometimes debatable or difficult to justify. Most egregious is the description of General Charles Bruce, the leader of the 1922 expedition: "[He] had spent much of his long career as an army officer in India, but he was 56 years old and in mountaineering terms a virtual novice." In fact, Bruce had several Swiss Alpine courses with distinguished guides and substantial experience with good guides and amateur climbers in the Himalaya. He rated for the time and place as a competent climber (perhaps a bit injury prone). More important was his extensive experience as transport officer and native contact for several British Himalayan expeditions and in training and pleasure trips throughout the Himalaya. His experience of Himalayan expedition travel and snow conditions was probably unmatched by any other Briton, and his qualification to lead the 1922 expedition was unquestioned. True, he was 56 and, like several other British members of the Everest expeditions of the 1920s, still suffered the effects of physical and perhaps mental wounds acquired in the Great War.

The authors correctly note the inadequate protection against the cold of Everest for the climbers of the 1920s, and excuse it partly by saying, "There were, of course, no down jackets or sleeping bags in those days. . . ." But there were. Eiderdown bags were supplied to the 1921 expedition, even to some of the high altitude porters, and are praised by Charles Howard-Bury in *Mount Everest: The Reconnaissance, 1921* (Arnold, 1922). In a "lessons learned" article

written for the *Alpine Journal* following the 1922 expedition, T.G. Longstaff recommended, “Irrespective of the size of the party each climber should have at least four eiderdown sleeping bags—one for each of the four highest camps . . .,” a generous supply even by the standards of much later expeditions.

G.I. Finch, about 30 years ahead of his time on clothing as well as the use and technology of supplementary oxygen, devised for the 1922 expedition a down coat with a broad fur-lined collar that could be drawn into a hood. The frontispiece of Bruce’s *The Assault on Mount Everest, 1922* (Arnold, 1923) shows Finch wearing the coat as he descends from the record-high climb of that year. Inadequate protection of the climbers of the 1920s was more a matter of their own conservatism and, possibly, fits of parsimony in the Everest Committee than of lack of better technology.

To return to the questions that open this review—did we need this fourth book? As the authors concede, the vitally important philosophy that has led (at least partly) to Viesturs’s amazing success on the 8,000ers is well expressed in the three earlier books. For the general reader interested in the mountaineering history of Everest, *The Mountain* is not a particularly comprehensive or scholarly work. The Everest mountaineering history buff will find things to disagree with, as he or she probably will with any new Everest book, but the wide range of ideas advanced by the two authors deserve the buffs’ attention and careful consideration. To them I say, by all means, buy the book, study it critically, and enjoy it.

—Jeffery Parrette
Alpina Editor

Logging Railroads of New Hampshire’s North Country

By Bill Gove

Littleton, New Hampshire: Bondcliff Books, 2010

160 pages. ISBN: 978-1-931271-25-7

Price: \$27.95 (paperback)

“THE FORESTS REMAIN AS HEALTHY AS EVER. THE RAILROAD LOGGERS have steamed off into oblivion; the whistle is heard no more.” On the surface, retired forester Bill Gove’s *Logging Railroads of New Hampshire’s North Country* is a straightforward account of six railroad lines that have, in most cases, received little attention from historians. But Gove, who has previously

authored four books on logging railroads in the Northeast, deviates from his understated style in the introduction and epilogue to meditate on the meaning of the era. The working days of the logging railroads only barely exist in living human memory now, and he writes, in part, to capture impressions that will soon cease to exist.

Gove obviously toiled like a yeoman on the background. He meticulously details the workings of the lines, from engine type to the layout of the logging villages. He also displays a forester's eye in noting the number of board feet of lumber extracted along each line. Given the dearth of written material from the period, individuals from the era do not come alive in their own words. But Gove does sprinkle in intriguing stories of accidents and eccentric characters. I wish he had included citations in the text so that future historians could more easily build on his findings.

The book includes many photographs, allowing the reader to keenly sense the texture of life along the logging railroads. Maps accompany each chapter, hand-drawn to scale and accurate in their demarcation of elevation and drainage. They are full of character and depth; I could spend hours in my mind walking the lines Gove lovingly sketches. We're lucky to have so conscientious a chronicler of railroad history, and I hope we have more to look forward to from him.

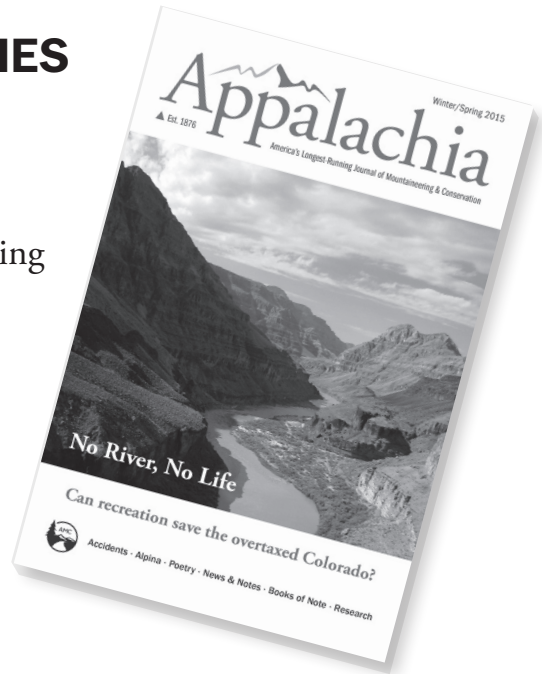
—*Andrew Rieley*

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

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