

*Exploration and Conservation: Uniting Outdoor Recreation and Environmentalism Through  
Rock Climbing*

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**Summary:** My collection focuses on the broader topic of exploration, delving into the specific niches of rock climbing, endurance, and the important environmental ethics that underpin the topic. I began collecting many of these books as a child, staying up late reading tales of adventure on the tallest mountains, distant continents, and the ocean. I never comprehended that one-day I would go on my own expeditions into distant lands, collecting more books along the way.

**Essay:**

The American West has long held a place in our country's collective imagination. Tales of exploration, heroism, and adventure permeate every corner of the vast region, from the arid floor of the Grand Canyon to the snowcapped peaks of the Sierra Nevada. While stories of cowboys and pioneers have faded since their heyday, the rebel spirit of the West is still alive and well in the sport of rock climbing. Once a fringe sport, existing on the farthest periphery of society, rock climbing is currently marching towards the mainstream. Indoor gyms continue to spring up at an unprecedented rate across the country. Even in the flatlands of Midwest, one only has to travel to 40 minutes from Lawrence to Kansas City to find 5 different climbing gyms to choose from. As rock climbing gains popularity and notoriety, how will a sport born of the "rucksack revolution" described by Kerouac and his fellow beatniks assimilate into the suburbia it was created to reject?

While esoteric questions about the future of an obscure sport may seem frivolous to most, to an addicted outdoorsman and climber like myself, they are what keep me up at night. As rock climbing prepares for its debut at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and its recent evolution into a multimillion-dollar industry, my love for the mountains led me in search of the origins of the sport and the philosophies that brought it about. This pursuit of climbing untouched rock and its literary history has taken me across the country, yet I have barely scratched the surface of the near unlimited potential that just the US landscape has to offer the activity. Along the way I have amassed a collection of climbing and outdoor literature. As I read every climbing and exploration book I could get my hands on, I expanded my collection to include technical climbing guidebooks, films, maps, and more. I attended

national climbing festivals and competed in climbing competitions around the country. At many of these events I was able to acquire fantastic pieces of climbing memorabilia including trophies, posters, and vintage climbing gear. My assemblage of books quickly expanded into a full-blown collection.

As this passion developed, I realized that climbing and outdoor recreation do not exist in a vacuum. These activities are rooted in a legacy of passionate environmentalism that its founders adhered to. Such beliefs can be traced back largely to John Muir, a mountaineer himself, founder of the Sierra Club, and activist who helped to establish the National Park System. Muir's vision for preserving the nation's remaining untouched and immaculate landscapes helped to spur an entirely new paradigm of environmental thinking. This attitude still survives today, and thanks to Muir and the committed activists who have come since, many of the country's most unique and beautiful landscapes remain for our enjoyment today. Inspired by the legacy of John Muir, I expanded my collection to include writings from seminal authors in the American environmental movement, including Edward Abbey and Aldo Leopold. These writers were avid outdoorsmen themselves; participating in extended camping trips and mountaineering that shaped the environmental philosophies they developed. Clearly the bond between outdoor recreation and conservation is an inherent one, long established in the literary tradition.

My environmental commitment and interest is rooted in a childhood spent in to outdoors. I joined Cub Scouts in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and continued in the program, earning my Eagle Scout award in 2013. During my time in the scouts I camped on a desert island in the Atlantic, backpacked for weeks in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and spent hundreds of

nights sleeping under the stars. One could argue that my Boy Scout Handbook represents the very first item in this collection as it served to catalyze my passion for the outdoors.

In 2014 I received the incredible privilege and honor to represent the United States and Boy Scouts of America on an international expedition to Antarctica, accompanying world-renowned explorer and environmental activist Sir Robert Swan. I spent 2 weeks on the Antarctic Peninsula exploring the absolutely untouched and otherworldly landscape, testing renewable energy technology, writing educational blog posts, and resupplying the only base on the continent powered entirely by renewable energy. Antarctica has long stood as one of the final frontiers of adventure. Tales of explorers and endurance athletes venturing deep into the continent in search of the elusive pole captivated my imagination, and I simply could not believe I was able to stand on the same ice they once did. I sought out literature on the Antarctic continent and the adventures there, climbing or otherwise.

While my passion for the outdoors is largely occupied by rock climbing today, a survey of my literature collection helps one understand the holistic nature of this passion. Nothing beats the thrill of summiting a mountain, but such an event would be impossible if not for the legacy of environmental activism that made protecting public lands possible combined with my own personal history of interest in the outdoors. My collection has come to be a reflection of myself, rooted in a deep love and desire to protect nature, with a focus on embracing the world through the sport of rock climbing.

## Bibliography

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. Ballantine Books, 1968.

One of Edward Abbey's most influential and renowned books, *Desert Solitaire* helped to spark the modern environmental movement. His years spent residing deep within the desert, a landscape I have since traversed and come to love instantly connected me to this great piece of literature. Abbey weaves anecdotal tales of adventure with deeper ecological and social musings to create a book that has stood the test of time.

Andreas, Robert, and Robert Sullivan, editors. *The Greatest Adventures of All Time*. LIFE Books/Time Inc., 2000.

A book that stands out from my childhood in playing a significant role in solidifying my love for adventure and exploration. I remember turning the pages reading about explorers like Amundsen and Scott, never conceiving that I some day would visit the same continent they ventured into. Reading of Hillary and Messner's triumphs on the world's tallest mountains ingited a spark within me to one day venture on expeditions of my own into the mountains.

Barcott, Bruce. *The Measure of a Mountain: Beauty and Terror on Mount Rainier*. Sasquatch Books, 2007.

Bartlett, Steve "Crusher". *Desert Towers: Fat Cat Summits and Kitty Litter Rock*. Sharp End Pub, 2010.

*Desert Towers* represents the comprehensive photographic and literary history of first ascents of desert rock on the Colorado Plateau. My copy, signed by Steve "Crusher" Bartlett himself brings the history of the sport to life, with captivating accounts of the visionary climbers that conquered these rock spires, accompanied with incredible photography.

Bell, Steve. *Seven Summits: The Quest to Reach the Highest Point on Every Continent*. Bulfinch Press, 2000.

*Seven Summits* served as an early introduction into mountain climbing and my fascination with the vertical world. As a child I scoured the contents of the book, memorizing statistics about the world's tallest mountains and the explorers who first summited them. Accompanied with first hand accounts and photography from climbing expeditions, this book is a cornerstone element of any climbing collection.

Bjørnstad, Eric. *Desert Rock*. Chockstone Press, 1988.

Bjørnstad's *Desert Rock* is the complete climbing guide for those wishing to venture into the remote and inhospitable desert to ascend a desert tower. A pioneering climber himself, Bjørnstad tackles the monumental goal of cataloging and describing the hundreds of unique routes scattered across the Colorado Plateau. This guide has accompanied me on several desert excursions on my quest for summits of classic tower climbs.

Caldwell, Tommy. *The Push: A Climbers Journey of Endurance, Risk, and Going Beyond Limits*. Penguin Books, 2017.

Perhaps the best book to introduce a non-climber to the sport, Caldwell's *The Push* is a memoir that resonates with the reader on a human level. His story is one of obsession, loss, anguish, and eventually victory, weaving incredible prose with heroic tales of some of climbing's most important achievements, accomplished by Caldwell himself.

Chappell, Richard Lee. *Antarctic Scout*. 1st ed., Dodd, Mead & Company, 1959.

An old-school tale of adventure, *Antarctic Scout* documents Richard Lee Chappell's journey to the Antarctic continent on behalf of the Boy Scouts of America. This book is of particular importance to me, as my journey paralleled Chappell's, when 56 years later I was selected by the BSA to return to Antarctica and continue the legacy of adventure and conservation on the Southern Continent.

Davies, Hunter. *A Walk Around the Lakes*. Arrow, 1987.

Dell'Amore, Christine. *South Pole*. Assouline, 2013.

DeJardins, Joseph R. *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. 5th ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013.

While the historical and informative accounts of exploration represent the theme of this collection, all of these items are underpinned by an understanding of environmental philosophy and ethics provided in part by this book. Examining the many and often-competing paradigms for conceptualizing the environment, DeJardins' book proved to be influential in shaping my own personal philosophical viewpoint.

Ellington, Ray, and Blake Bowling. *Red River Gorge South: A Rock Climbing Guidebook to Kentucky's Red River Gorge*. 5th ed., 2: Southern Regions, Wolverine Publishing, 2017.

Acquired on my journeys to the backwoods of Kentucky to climb at the Red River Gorge, the Eastern United State's premier climbing destinations. The book catalogs and organizes the many thousands of routes that make the Red.

*Exploration*. Boy Scouts of America, 2016.

The Exploration Merit Badge booklet published by the scouts in 2016 features several images from expedition to Antarctica on behalf of the organization.

Fennel, Cole. *Rock climbing Arkansas*. 2nd ed., Fixed Pin Publishing, 2015.

Perhaps the most used (and worn) book in my collection, accompanying me on over 50 weekend trips to the crags scattered across Arkansas. Fennel's detailed route and area descriptions makes this one of the most helpful and aesthetic guidebooks in my collection. This guide served as an invaluable tool used to inform my strategy for the 2017 Horseshoe Hell Climbing Competition, where my partner and I earned 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Advanced Division.

*Fieldbook*. Boy Scouts of America, 2004.

Green Mountain Club. *Long Trail End-to-Enders Guide: Helpful Hints and Information for Long Hikes on the Long Trail*. 21st ed., Green Mountain Club, 2017.

The Green Mountain Club is responsible for maintaining the Long Trail, America's oldest long-distance backpacking trail. Their published trail guide helped me to plan my unassisted thru-hike in the summer of 2017.

Green Mountain Club. *Vermont's Long Trail: A Footpath in the Wilderness*, 5th ed., Green Mountain Club, 2015.

A detailed topographic map of all 273 miles of Vermont's Long Trail. I carried this map on my 3 week backpacking trip from Massachusetts to Canada along the ridge of the Green Mountains.

Grosvenor, Gilbert. "The Hawaiian Islands." *The National Geographic Magazine*, Feb. 1924.

King, Clarence. *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*. Penguin Books, 1989.

Written in 1872, Clarence King's collection of stories was one of the first and finest pieces of adventure literature focused on the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. King's tales of expeditions into the mountains opened the door for the oncoming climbing and mountaineering revolution that would shake California and the world.

Kull, Robert. *Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes: A Year Alone in the Patagonia Wilderness*. New World Library, 2009.

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. Anchor Books, 2007.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River*. 1st ed., Ballantine Books, 1966.

Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* is one of modern environmentalism's cornerstone pieces of literature. Still assigned in environmental studies classes today, the book details Leopold's observations of local environments in ways previously unnoticed or described. His call to "Think like a mountain" epitomized the systems based approach to conservation that has become the norm in the years since.

Long, John, and John Middendorf. *Big Walls*. Chockstone Press, 1994.

Written by 2 of America's most prolific and accomplished big wall rock climbers, this book tackles the many technical terms, techniques, and gear necessary to embark on a big wall climb. Long and Middendorf know what they are talking about and it shows as the two provide details in a way only an accomplished climber can. Inspired by the daunting sheer rock faces that a big wall climb presents, I used this book as a guide for my first big wall climb on "The Diamond" located on the East Face of Long's Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park.

McKibben, Bill. *Deep Economy: the Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*. Holt Books, 2007.

McKibben, Bill. *Radio free Vermont: a Fable of Resistance*. Blue Rider Press, 2017.

Written by one of contemporary environmentalism's most acclaimed authors, *Radio Free Vermont* diverges from McKibben's background in nonfiction. This novel reads like a modern version of Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*, inspiring a new era of environmental and social activism. A fantastic and quick read that I would recommend to anyone interested in politics, the environment, and activism.

Mortenson, Greg, and David Oliver. Relin. *Three Cups of Tea: One Mans Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time*: Penguin Books, 2010.

An extremely controversial book. When I first read the book and learned of Mortenson's story I was inspired by the work of a mountaineer turned activist who sought to do good in an unstable region. However, as notable news organizations and authors challenged the claims made by Mortenson in his book and his use of charitable funds, the story evolved into one that illustrates the shortcomings of a man who set out with good intentions but lost his way.



National Geographic. *Trails Illustrated John Muir Trail Topographic Map Guide*, Trails Illustrated, 2014. pp. 1-48.

Comprehensive map of the John Muir Trail, one of the premier backpacking trails in the world. Traversing the spine of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, this map will accompany me on my 3 week thru-hike of the trail in summer 2018.

National Geographic. *Yosemite National Park, California: Trails Illustrated topo maps*, Trails Illustrated, 2005.

Another fantastic Trails Illustrated map published by National Geographic, this one detailing the climbing Mecca of Yosemite National Park.

Nelson, Edward, and Louis Agassiz Fuertes. "Map of the Western Theatre of War." *The National Geographic Magazine*, May 1918.

Nelson, Edward, and Louis Agassiz Fuertes. "The Larger North American Mammals." *The National Geographic Magazine*, Nov. 1916.

O'Leary, Shannon, and Simon Dalby. *Reframing Climate Change: Constructing Ecological Geopolitics*. Routledge, 2016.

The outdoor recreation theme of this collection cannot be viewed in isolation. The political and environmental context that sport and exploration are embedded in is critical to maintaining the status quo. O'Leary's book explains the way climate change is understood and framed in modern society and how that could possibly change in the near future.

O'Leary, Shannon. *Environmental Politics: Scale and Power*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Another environmental politics book by O'Leary, this one tackling the issue of scale and power in relation to the natural world. In order to best defend our public lands and natural spaces, it is important to first understand the political forces and agendas working to benefit and harm the system that so many have come to treasure.

Orenczak, Zach. *Fat Crack Country: Rock Climbing in Vedauwoo*. Extremeangles.com, 2003.

Detailed guide of the many infamous crack and offwidth rock climbs that characterize the climbing area known as Vedauwoo.

Pullan, Brandon. *The Bold and Cold: a History of 25 Classic Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*. 1st ed., Rocky Mountain Books, 2016.

Pullan uses this book to accomplish a long-held goal of elite Canadian Mountaineers to catalog the history of some of the most famous and difficult climbs in the Canadian Rockies. Filled with historical accounts, route information, and breathtaking photography, this book appeals to both the avid climber and the layperson.

Rossiter, Richard. *Rocky Mountain National Park: a Comprehensive Guide to Scrambles, Rock Routes, and Ice/Mixed Climbs on the High Peaks*. Fixed Pin Publishing, 2015.

The comprehensive guide to rock climbing in Rocky Mountain National Park. In an area known for having nearly endless climbable rock, the author does a fantastic job of combining route descriptions, photographs, essays, and even art into one cohesive book. This guide proved to be a valuable tool in planning my attempt on the Diamond Wall on Long's Peak.

Strayed, Cheryl. *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*. First Vintage Books Edition, 2013.

Popularized by the movie of the same name, *Wild* served as an inspirational book in sparking my interest in long-distance backpacking. Strayed's eloquent tale of her trials and successes hiking the Pacific Crest Trail motivated me to go on backpacking treks of my own. This summer I will embark on a 285 mile expedition to hike the John Muir Trail in the Sierra's which makes up part of the greater Pacific Crest Trail.

Swain, Todd. *The Gunks Guide*. 3rd ed., Chockstone Press, 1995.

Directory for the many rock climbs in the Shawmagunk Mountains of upstate New York. The only guide I possess of a climbing area I have yet to visit. I hope to make the journey in the near future.

Swain, Todd. *Rock Climbing Red Rocks*. Falcon Publishing, 2000.

Swain's guide for Red Rock Conservation Area located just outside Las Vegas Nevada is one of my most used books in the collection. All 4 of my spring breaks while at KU have been spent on rock climbing trips in Utah and Nevada, ending the trip at Red Rock. This guide will once again join me for spring break 2018 as I lead my final trip as President of the KU Rock Climbing Club.

Thompson, Rick. *Shelf Road Rock*. Sharp End Publishing, 2017.

Not just another rock climbing guide in my compilation. *Shelf Road Rock* is the only book in my collection I have contributed to. In September 2015 on a trip to Shelf I joined a party of climbers that established a first-ascent route in the canyon that is now featured with attribution in the book. Even more exciting is the full page

photograph of my climbing “Suspender Man” on of Shelf’s most famous routes featured on table of contents for the Dark Side area. A fantastic guide and one I am eager to share thanks to my own personal investment in the project.

Vogel, Randy. *Joshua Tree climbs*. K. Daniels Publishing, 2015.

Joshua Tree is one of the most historically important areas in the progression of American rock climbing. Vogel’s guide provides history and route descriptions of the crag and its thousands of domed rocks.

Wilson, Jenny, et al., directors. *The Grand Rescue: A True Story of the 1967 Jenny Lake Rangers*. We Aspired Productions, 2014.

*The Grand Rescue* recounts the Jenny Lake Rangers, who in 1967 took on one of the most daring and extraordinary rescue efforts in the history of American mountaineering. Spanning 3 days, the rescue on the face of the Grand Teton proved ultimately successful yet controversial. The film explores the story and perspectives of the survivors and rangers.

Wilson, Patricia J., and Roger Leslie. *Eagle on ice: Eagle Scout Paul Siples Antarctic Adventures with Commander Byrd*. Vantage Press, 2008.