

Boot-tested tales from the Pacific Crest Trail

Hikers tell stories of nature, tradition, change

More than a decade ago, Mountaineers Books published “The Pacific Crest Trailside Reader” in two volumes. One focused on the southern half of the trail in California, the other as it traversed the spine of the Cascade mountains through Oregon and Washington. Each offered a collection of adventures as experienced by dozens of different hikers.

Now the Seattle publisher is back with “Crossing Paths,” a new anthology containing the reflections of folks who have hiked the trail within the past decade. While many things endure (the plethora of rattlesnakes in the California desert, the kindness of strangers), some things have changed significantly in the past decade.

Since Portland author Cheryl Strayed’s memoir about walking the trail, “Wild,” was published in 2012 and became a bestseller, the popularity of the trail has exploded. Even some folks who are not seasoned hikers are now attempting this trek. Contributor Gail Storey confesses as much in her piece about tagging along with her avid outdoorsman husband, “I never much cared for nature, or rather, thought it okay as long as it stayed outside,” she writes.

The combination of increased numbers on the trail, and the folks who are unaware of the “Leave No Trace” ethic, have resulted in degradation of the trail and impacts on flora and fauna in some places.

Climate change also is changing the physical landscape that the trail threads through. Droughts have ravaged once-healthy forests, leading to disease, insect infestations, and longer and stronger climate fire seasons.

Another recent phenomenon is the proliferation of electronic devices that hikers now carry routinely, smartphone apps, navigational systems, emergency beacons and the like. Do these technological interventions enhance or interfere with

hikers’ engagement with their surroundings?

Some of the writings selected for this anthology contemplate those issues directly, while others involve more personal experiences, as each hiker figures out how to be true to the adage to “hike your own hike.”

Pulitzer Prize recipient and Willamette Valley farm owner Nicholas Kristof writes about hiking the entirety of the trail in sections over seven years in the company of his teenage daughter, Caroline, with generational differences of opinion.

This week’s book

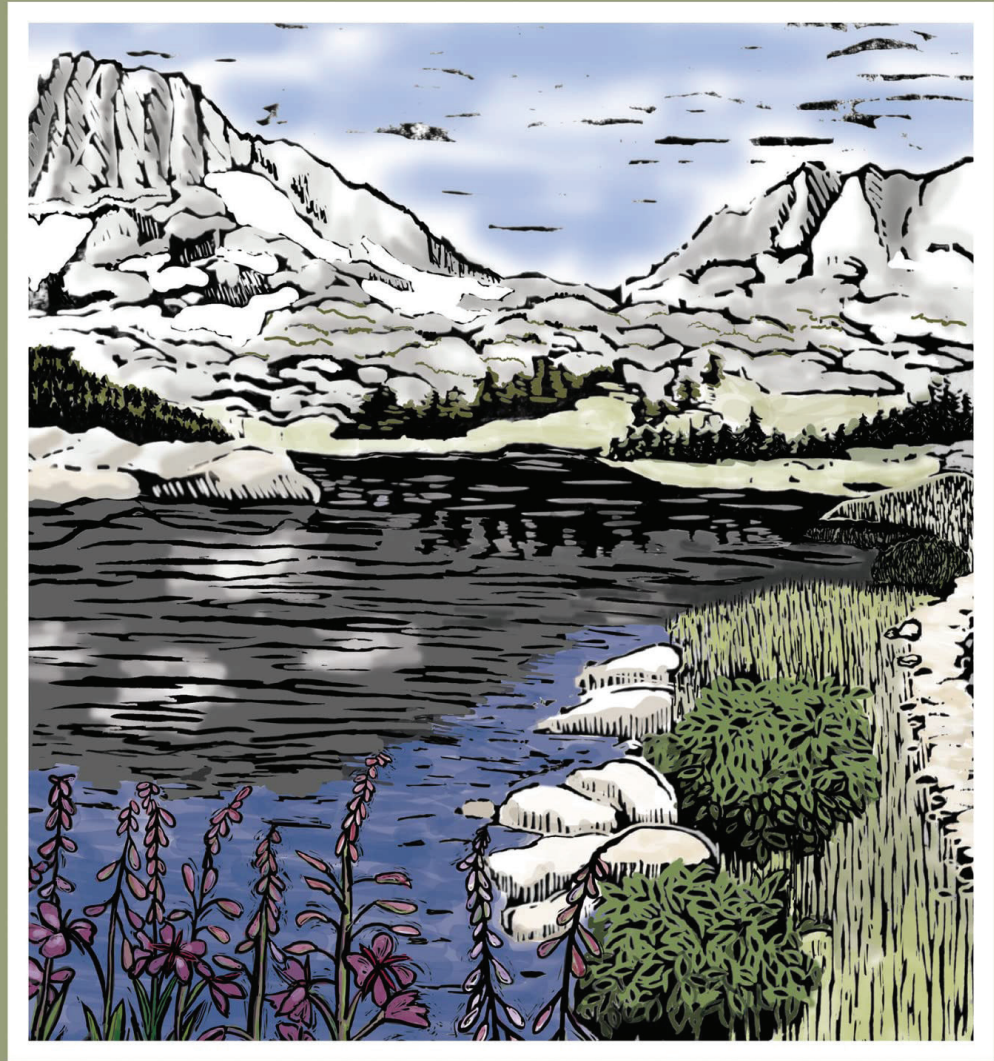
‘Crossing Paths,’ by Rees Hughes and Howard Shapiro

Mountaineers Books – 304 pp – \$21.95

In another essay, with family connections, Chloe S. LaLonde undertakes a through hike with her college roommate, at the same time retracing the journey that her mom, Rosemary L. Broome, made on horseback 42 years earlier. Both mother and daughter contribute to this illuminating compare and contrast exercise. The most poignant story in this collection is the tribute a father pays to his son, who died in a fall while attempting a hike two years ago.

This book covers the gamut of events that can happen along 2,650 miles of wilderness trail. There are mishaps with mice, and encounters with snakes, bears and cougars. There are moments of solitude and episodes of fellowship. There’s an impromptu wedding between hikers who meet on the trail and become soulmates. In sum, “Crossing Paths” will leave you wanting s’ more.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at barbaralmcm@gmail.com.



CROSSING A Pacific Crest Trailside Reader PATHS

Edited by Rees Hughes and Howard Shapiro

Illustrations by Amy Uyeki