

Why Read Outdoor or Adventure Books?

Much like knowing how to build a campfire, the art of book reading is fast becoming an outdated activity. What with television, the Internet, and High Definition movie videos “on-demand,” the sedentary skill of sitting in one place and focusing one’s mind on the printed page oftentimes requires too much concentration for today’s immediate lifestyle.

As I look back to those things that have influenced my life the most, reading many exciting books stands out as being one of my most enjoyable and memorable experiences. One of the best books I’ve ever read was “*Kon-Tiki*”- the story of Thor Hyderdahl and his fellow Norwegians who set sail from Peru on balsa rafts to the Easter Islands. What a fascinating story. “*Endurance: The Shackleton Expedition to Antarctica*”, was for me a breath-taking experience and ranks right up there with “*White Fang*” and “*The Call of the Wild*” by Jack London. Rachel Carlson’s “*Silent Spring*” and “*The Sea Around Us*, though controversial, remains two of the most thought-provoking books on Nature. In “*The Silent World*,” and “*The Living Sea*,” Captain Jacques Cousteau, tell us of his delight in exploring the depths of the ocean. An intriguing book by Richard Halliburton called “*The Royal Road to Romance (1925)*,” which chronicles his travels in the Middle East and Asia, leaves me perplexed because he totally disappeared on an ill-fated Chinese sailing ship eastward across the Pacific Ocean. His ship, “*Sea Dragon*” radioed mid-way that it was laboring in a typhoon, and it and its crew were not heard from again. This is spine-tingling adventure! “*The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate*,” by Eliza Poor Donner Houghton, is perhaps one of the grimmest reads you will ever find. This is the story of 12 Families journeying west in 1846, trapped by a freak snowstorm in the High Sierra Mountains of Nevada, and was forced to cannibalism to stay alive.

The knowledgeable editors at National Geographic surveyed their Adventure members in 2004 for “Great Outdoor Books” and came up with a list of the top 100 Outdoor Books. Here are the top 12 All time “Great Outdoor Books,” from their list: 1) **The Worst Journey in the World, by Apsley Cherry-Garrard (1922)**, 2) **Arabian Sands, by Wilfred Thesiger (1959)**, 3) **Annapurna, by Maurice Herzog (1952)**, 4) **Desert Solitaire, by Edward Abbey (1968)**, 5) **West With the Night, by Beryl Markham (1942)**, 6) **Into Thin Air, by Jon Krakauer (1997)**, 7) **Travels, by Marco Polo (1298)**, 8) **Farthest**

North, by Fridtjof Nansen (1897), 9) The Snow Leopard, by Peter Matthiessen (1978), 10) Roughing It, by Mark Twain (1872), 11) Two Years Before the Mast, by Richard Henry Dana (1840) and 12) Travels in West Africa, by Mary Kingsley (1897). You can view the entire list of 100 Greatest Outdoor Books by going to: [Nat. Geo. Adventure-"Adventure Books."](#)

What do all of these books have in common? What can they teach us about life? By and large, these books are true stories of people who had a vision beyond the immediate. Discontent with the tedium of daily life, they struck out for the "unknown," whether it be under the sea, at the top of a mountain, venturing into uncharted land, or challenging "unconquerable" regions; these men and women became adventurers, explorers, distant travelers, and discoverers. So, in the last analysis, by reading these books perhaps we too can challenge ourselves. For beyond our daily survival and our striving to succeed in this life, there are new worlds of excitement and promising rewards.