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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

To the Woods: Sinking Roots, Living Lightly, and Finding True Home
Hess, E.S. 2010. Corvallis (OR): Oregon State University

In 1992, Native Plant Society of Oregon member
Evelyn Hess and her architect husband David, both
in their mid-fifties and both formerly employed by the
University of Oregon, “…left the toys and noise of urban society for
the company of jumping mice, winter wrens, and dark
nights full of stars and cricket song …” to live
on 21 logged-off acres in the Coast Range foothills south of Eugene. They
would have “… no house, no electricity, (and) no indoor plumbing …” in this new habitat where they developed
a fledgling native plant nursery. To the Woods is Evelyn’s personal
account of their fifteen rewarding and challenging years in their
new chosen habitat.

On a special shelf in my bedroom, Evelyn’s book joins two
others of the same genre: We Took to the Woods (1942), by Louise
Dickinson Rich, and Driftwood Valley (1946) by Theodora
Stanwell Fletcher (reissued by Oregon State University Press in
1999). All three books were written by women who, with their
husbands, forsook the comforts of modern life to dwell close to
nature and to write accounts of the joys and challenges of their
relationship to the land. I strongly recommend all three to anyone
who, like me, has ever dreamed of doing the same.

Evelyn divides her book into five parts. The first, “The
Setting,” describes the couple’s work on their twenty-one acres
of cut-over Coast Range hillside seventeen miles south of Eugene
while still living in their home near the University of Oregon.
Following that introduction, like Driftwood Valley, the book
is arranged by seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter. As
Evelyn states in her Preface, “… each section records events and
musings occurring in the specified season from any of the fifteen
years 1992 to 2007.”

The reader of Evelyn’s account of their lives in the woods will
marvel at the tenacity of the couple as they developed a plant
nursery in the raw clear-cut environment. Living in a travel trailer
with two dogs and a cat but no electricity or indoor plumbing
proved a challenge even in summer, yet Evelyn clearly remained
enthusiastic and enchanted with their simple life. As the reader
will note, she even used an outdoor garbage can as a bathtub.

As Evelyn writes, she and her husband “… said good-bye
to telephones, television, and electrical appliances … We would
make do.” Early on they dug a pond for irrigation. The book’s
cover features Evelyn herself sitting beside the pond. After moving from Eugene to their acreage, their earliest plantings were twelve hundred blueberries of six varieties, followed by beds of lavender, rosemary, and various sages. At one point they spread “topsoil” and were rewarded with thousands of Canada thistles! Philosophically Evelyn writes, “We were frustrated by all our ignorance and missteps, but undaunted.”

I was delighted by Evelyn’s story of living, working and developing a viable native plant nursery on the cut-over Oregon land, and I recommend To the Woods to any reader with a sense of adventure and a love of nature, gardening, and good writing.

—Rhoda Love, Emerald Chapter

The Kalmiopsis Wilderness...

taking away only memories!


The Kalmiopsis Wilderness...taking away only memories! is a privately published hardcover book by Rene Casteran, who was a Wilderness Ranger for the Siskiyou National Forest from 1986 to 2008. Starting with a background in botany and ecology, Casteran gained an unparalleled knowledge of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness during the 23 years he served as its primary steward.

The 218-page book is a personal memoir presented as series of color photographs, line drawings and cartoons, interspersed with scanned images of his (mostly legible) field notes. Photos are digitized images, mostly from 35 mm color film.

The book is organized around a series of themes: Wilderness Rangers, Botany, Geology, Heritage Resources, the Navy Monument, Wildfire (including the Biscuit and Madstone fires), Plant Diseases, Water Monitoring, Encounters with Miners and Environmental Advocates, Trail Crews, Mining (historic and modern), Lou Gold on Bald Mountain, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Unusual Float Trips. The book ends with a section on The Endless Diary and a list of “tales not told.”

There is no Table of Contents, Index, List of Figures, or numbered pages. Reading it is a Wilderness adventure with a surprise at every turn (of the page, not trail). Finally, the reader must remember that Casteran never intended his book to be widely published or sold for profit. That said, his personal memoir is a great introduction to one of the Nation’s most rugged wild places, a must read if you have never been there, a must read if you have. —Frank Lang, Siskiyou Chapter

Where the Great River Bends: A Natural and Human History of the Columbia River at Wallula


This book explores a fascinating natural feature in our neighbor state to the north (Washington): a place called Wallula, where the Columbia River turns around to flow west. Shortly afterwards it forms the northern boundary of Oregon. With its relatively barren landscape, impounded water and paper mill, most of us probably zoom right by without a second thought when we happen to be traveling through this area. However, as Kareen pointed out in her article, the more we know, the more we see. If you plan to drive State Route 12 from Tri-cities to Walla Walla or Highway 730 north from Hermiston, Oregon, I highly recommend that you read this book first. Stop and see the Twin Sisters and marvel over the basalt flows, hike up Juniper Canyon, and follow the mile-by-mile interpretative route on Wallula Gap Road from Sand Station, Oregon, to Wallula Cemetery, Washington. The book features sections on geography, geology, biology, pre-history, 19th and 20th Century history, and lists of flora and fauna found in the area. Eat a picnic lunch at Madam Dorion Park, named for a Native American woman who, under incredibly difficult circumstances, traveled from Missouri to Wallula in 1811-12 with the Wilson Price Hunt Party of the Pacific Fur Company.

The book is amply illustrated with beautiful photographs of places you’ll want to see firsthand. If you get the book, you may go out of your way to visit Wallula, which means, among other things, “a small stream running into a larger one,” that is, where the Walla Walla River merges into the Columbia River.

—Cindy Roché, Siskiyou Chapter
The Kalmiopsis Wilderness is known for its challenging trails. By default of topography, the routes are steep, winding, loose and rocky. And by default of. The Kalmiopsis Wilderness is known for its challenging trails. By default of topography, the routes are steep, winding, loose and rocky. And by default of. Old Kalmiopsis Wilderness signs from mid 1980's: Homemade Blake's Bar sign on the Chetco River and a small water sign used to direct folks to hard to find springs, this one off the Chetco Divide Trail. Historic, yet neither sign complied to wilderness trail signing standards. Kalmiopsis Wilderness via Siskiyou Mountain Club. March 24, 2015 Â-. The Kalmiopsis Wilderness was named for Kalmiopsis leachiana, a slow-growing plant related to the rhododendron, which was discovered in the area in 1930. The Illinois River Canyon, the headwaters of the Chetco, North Fork Smith Rivers, elevations from 500 to 5000 feet, and interesting geology are trademarks of the area. Â There are 5 moderate trails in Kalmiopsis Wilderness ranging from 2.6 to 12.1 km and from 276 to 1,456 meters above sea level. Start checking them out and you'll be out on the trail in no time! Description. The Kalmiopsis Wilderness was named for Kalmiopsis leachiana, a slow-growing plant related to the rhododendron, which was discovered in the area in 1930. Only when we stop and my breath slows down enough that the sound of it leaves my ears and the sounds of my boots and waders and packrubbing on each other dissipate, that the sounds of the forest really begin to take my attention. It’s there in that moment that I start to feel the true freedom of wilderness. I can hear the wind through the leaves. It whispers and talks with words I’m not conditioned to hear. Â Soon they started making attempts to get into the red and rub up on the female. Each time the larger male would chase them away, sometimes biting them on the tail or flexing his mouth at them. We watched this dance continue for several minutes while I filmed the fish. After watching for a while we figured this might be our best shot.