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Thoreau in the mountains

Henry David Thoreau, William Howarth



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On October 29, 1857, Henry Thoreau wrote in his Journal of a dream that had come to him for perhaps the twentieth time. He saw a mountain standing east of Concord, where the land is low and flat, and climbed to its summit: "And are there not such mountains, east or west, from which you may look down on Concord in your thought, and on all the world?" This dream was more real than imaginary, for during his brief, energetic life (1817-62) Thoreau climbed several mountains in New England and wrote fine accounts of his experiences. He went to Wachusett and Greylock in his native Massachusetts; to Manadnock and the White Mountains of New Hampshire; to Katahdin in northern Maine. Long before backpacking became popular. Thoreau was making trips to these remote wilderness areas, where only Indians - and a few pioneer botanists - had gone before. On early trips he traveled like an Indian, getting his food and shelter from the land; later he mounted full expeditions to survey each mountain as a ecological habitat. He published accounts of some early trips as essays; the later ones went into his Journal, where they have dwelt in relative obscurity until now. To prepare this volume, William Howarth, a scholar and outdoorsman, climbed Thoreau's trails. He has worked out the original itineraries, as well as provided information on equivalent routes that exist today. His commentary is an exploration of Thoreau's adventures, reconstructing both his actual journeys and the inner quest of his stories. Period woodcuts and contemporary maps accompany the texts, providing a visual complement to Thoreau, who is justly famous for his powers of observation. This unique volume is for travelers and outdoor enthusiasts of all varieties, whether they are heading for the slopes or climbing their mountains the safe way, sitting down.

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