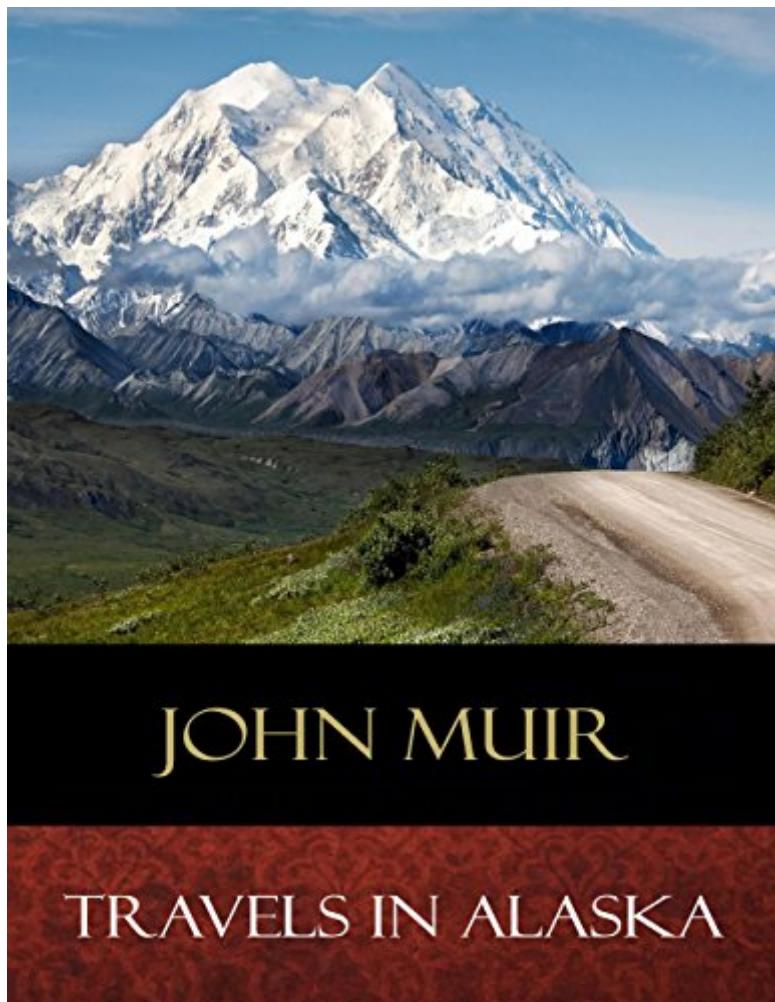


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Travels In Alaska: Illustrated



Synopsis

In the late 1800s, John Muir made several trips to the pristine, relatively unexplored territory of Alaska, irresistibly drawn to its awe-inspiring glaciers and its wild menagerie of bears, bald eagles, wolves, and whales. Half-poet and half-geologist, he recorded his experiences and reflections in *Travels in Alaska*, a work he was in the process of completing at the time of his death in 1914. Edward Hoagland wrote, "Muir is at our elbow, nudging us along, prompting us to understand that heaven is on earth • is the Earth • and rapture is the sensible response wherever a clear line of sight remains." In 1879 John Muir went to Alaska for the first time. Its stupendous living glaciers aroused his unbounded interest, for they enabled him to verify his theories of glacial action. Again and again he returned to this continental laboratory of landscapes. The greatest of the tide-water glaciers appropriately commemorates his name. Upon this book of Alaska travels, all but finished before his unforeseen departure, John Muir expended the last months of his life. John Muir (1838–1914) also known as "John of the Mountains", was a Scottish-American naturalist, author, environmental philosopher and early advocate of preservation of wilderness in the United States.

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Customer Reviews

Descriptions of the stunning scenery of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, and John Muir's reaction of it, are revealed in these newly published pages from his journals. This book is for anyone who loves nature and the descriptive writings of John Muir. Muir's travel to this area came toward the end of a life spent in the presence of natural beauty, yet he was still able to appreciate what he saw. This book adds even more to his stature as America's premier naturalist.

Travelling Alaska with John is to see, hear, feel, taste, smell, experience the response of a God-intoxicated man to almost unearthly splendor. Muir's passions were elemental: apprehending the Divine through an understanding of nature, and hence, the protection and preservation of this voice of the sublime. He travelled to Alaska five times over a 30 year period. This book, only completed a few years before his death, polishes the field notes of his earlier trips and offers almost unedited, his journals from the last journey. Muir's interests begin with geology, specifically how the U-shaped valleys of both Yosemite and the Alaskan fjord-land resulted from glacial actions. Beginning with ice, they include the land, the trees, the waters, the fish, the First Americans living in the harsh beautiful world, the scientists, the missionaries, transportation, food, and in a chapter that cries to be read aloud, Muir's experience of a sunrise like the eighth day of Creation and of the Northern Lights. One remembers vignettes of one's own travels. So vivid, so immediate are these stories that they become part of your own memories. Raining is it? Experience laying your already soggy sleeping bag down in a bog so wet you strip off and shiver your way through the night, then arise---not like new-made bread---but to wring the water from your clothes and bag and slog on. Thinking of what it would be like to walk across that glacier? Start out early, accompanied by a dog who had more loyalty than brains and got over jagged ice frise-de-cheval points, across crevasses, up treacherous slopes---to get to the other side, and then come back at night, having to encourage the now-alarmed dog to leap those widening chasms, risking your own neck to get the crittur home. Those going to Alaska could hardly have a better companion. The book is portable and a bargain. And those who travel widely through the frigates of books, like Emily, will find their world enlarged and ennobled in the company of this good and brave man who did so much to preserve our wild, beautiful places.

The beauty of this wonderful reprinting is how it shows John Muir as a person, how it helps us to

understand the dynamic and overwhelming beauty of Alaska, and the changes in the people of Alaska. Muir's complete, tireless, and joyful commitment to nature comes through on every page. The book unintentionally provides an excellent portrait of the kind of inexhaustible devotion it takes to change the world as did Muir. The book also provides a stunning portrait of Alaska in the latter part of the 19th Century and allows one to compare the Alaska of those days with Alaska of earlier times and of today. The biggest changes are in the glaciers and in the people. The glaciers have receded dramatically as a natural part of their centuries' long retreat. It is interesting to compare what Muir saw with the experience of Vancouver almost exactly 100 years earlier (ca. 1793). Vancouver could hardly enter Glacier Bay. Muir could enter quite some distance, but the glaciers were still the dominant features. Today, the glaciers have largely receded into deep valleys. Muir encountered people in Alaska living largely as they had for centuries. They were hunters and fishermen and lived in small groups along the shore line. As Jonathan Raban points out in the intricately woven fabric of his sublime book "Passage to Juneau," the people of southeast Alaska considered the sea to be the real environment of their lives while the land was considered dangerous and unknowable. They lived along the shore and knew how to live off and with the sea year round. The lives of the Alaskan people are very different today but greatly influenced by the past. Raban often characterizes Muir's writing as overblown and florid. However, it is a portrait of a man, a maritime land and a people. To do justice to those three, the book had to be what it is - an astonishingly colorful and detailed portrait in words.

This is John Muir's account, compiled at the end of his life from earlier diary entries, of three separate trips to the fjords and glaciers of SE Alaska. John Muir's exuberant prose, and excitement at each new vista keep the pages turning. I was aware he originally argued for glacial origins of many geologic features; what I didn't know was that he was a trained botanist. Expect to hear all about the flowers and trees at each camp. I would've like to hear about Muir's travels to Unalaska, but these three accounts are excellent.

I had read the book before, but needed another copy. John Muir, the saint of environmentalists, gives some wonderful views of the Indians of Alaska in this and also of his tremendous fire for exploration, matched by none, I believe. Also he goes into detail of the examinations of plant life, a part that may be a little thick for some. His story of crossing a crevasse [by chipping at ice] to escape a frozen death with a little dog [Stickeen] is remarkable.

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