



Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail (Under the Sign of Nature)

Ian Marshall

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Many hikers on the Appalachian Trail take books as companions, in spite of the extra weight in their packs, but Ian Marshall carries the habit to new literary, ecological, and spiritual heights. In the more than twenty years he's been hiking the trail, Marshall, known on the AT as Evergreen, has practiced what he likes to call "an ecology of reading," exploring America's past, its landscape and national experience, through literature inspired by places in the Appalachian chain: "a literary heritage," he writes, "of interest to scholars and hikers alike, both seekers of a sort."

As he walks the trail from Georgia to Maine, Marshall brings together his own stories, heard and experienced along the trail, with the stories of those who, famous and otherwise, are part of the literary geography of each region? William Bartram, Annie Dillard, Thomas Jefferson, Whitman, Melville, Frost, Hawthorne, and Thoreau. Like notes left behind for other thru-hikers, their writings, seen through Marshall's eyes, plot a fresh "story line" of America's literary and ecological history. As he passes through the Great Smoky Mountains, the Blue Ridge, the Delaware Water Gap, Greylock, the Greens and the Whites, to Ktaadn, Marshall takes us on a vision quest into our national character, from Native American myths through colonial America's economic and theological preoccupations, the aesthetic of Manifest Destiny, to our contemporary ecological awareness. This is book talk taken out of the classroom and onto the trail.

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