

Holy Rover: Journeys in Search of Mystery, Miracles, and God

Lori Erickson

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Travel writer Lori Erickson—once a Wiccan, now a deacon, whose spirit animal is ferocious—is on a lifelong quest for her spiritual truth. In *Holy Rover*, accounts of her inward journeying come alongside those of treks in the footsteps of pilgrims past, and the combination is engrossing.

From Walden Pond, where transcendentalist yearning still moves acolytes through the woods, to the site of the Temple of Artemis, where the goddess no longer lives: Erickson's travels encompass locales both familiar and idealized, finding meaning between spaces that are quiet and grand.

She follows Thomas Merton's memory through a Kentucky monastery, and gives herself over to contemplation in places sanctified by saints, pagans, and combinations of the two. She moves from Iona, to Lourdes, to Peru, casting breadcrumbs behind her: "simply gazing up at the clouds and feeling the wind on your face is often prayer enough," she promises.

Erickson's fusion of the personal with the ultimate holds wide appeal; even those who aren't able to travel to Iceland to climb Helgafell in silence and cast three wishes will be caught up in the lore of her trips, and the respect that she evinces both for the God of her chosen tradition, and for the gods that came before, is scintillating. "Those who think their way of worshipping will endure forever would do well to visit [a] place haunted by the ghosts of pilgrims," she says, and the humility and awe imparted by her observations is infectious.

Are the places that she visits holy because people imagined them to be so, or is there real power wrapped up in their histories? Of sites from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, to places where the Virgin Mary was once spotted, and up Machu Picchu's side, Erickson answers questions of validity bluntly: "I don't care." She finds meaning; others have before her; still more will come, and leave enlightened. That's truth enough. That is the true gift of a pilgrim's quest.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September/October 2017)

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