

## Outdoors in the Southwest: An Adventure Anthology

**Andrew Gulliford, Editor**

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*Collectively, these essays work to reignite love for the nation's wilds while also reminding readers of their awesome and terrible power.*

*Outdoors in the Southwest*, a collection of essays and interviews from historian and professor Andrew Gulliford, seeks to attract attention to the remaining Western wilds, where revelations still await the brave. Dwelling on the edge of the Colorado wilderness, Gulliford himself laments diminishing appreciation for the nation's parks and wildlife preserves, and he presents the Southwest as an ideal place to revive those interests.

Sections focus on natural landscape features, including mountains, canyons, and rivers, or upon aspects of human interaction with them—how to approach relics, how to engage the wilderness, how to thank nature for its gifts. Each section begins with an introduction from Gulliford, who draws upon his personal interactions with the wild to illuminate areas worth consideration.

Such passages have a reverent quality, at times poetic in their appreciation of the landscape. Gulliford also offers concrete proposals for readers regarding focal topics, such as ecologically aware political engagement and adventure preparedness.

Each subsection is then turned over to other writers, including Barbara Kingsolver, whose solitary time spent on a centuries-old Native American homestead led her to a moment of perfect clarity. “I treasure my memory of the day I lingered near water and covered no ground,” she writes. “I’ve [never] had such a clear fix on what it means to be human.” Pagan folk heroine Katie Lee writes of her confidence when interacting with the natural world and how she was humbled by a near-death experience in a deep natural pool.

Humor and beauty work in neat concert with stories of accidental death or near death; the writers are as likely to laud high skies and ancient artifacts as they are to reflect upon the pitfalls of trying to return to a busy world from the wide wilderness. A section on depression amongst river guides proves a particularly disquieting reminder of human fragility.

Even in their most terrifying and ephemeral moments, the essays of *Outdoors in the Southwest* are infused with a sense that the wilderness is both holy and elusive, worth pursuing even as it evades capture. “If I seek out new places only for the sake of accumulating sights and experiences,” writes one contributor, “I might as well stop now. My persistence ... attempt[s] a minor miracle. I harbor a noble but futile hope that the next climb ... will change me for the better.” Gulliford’s collection, in its diversity and vivacity, is likely to awaken the same hope in an adventurous readership.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2014)

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