



Two Turns North Through Repeat Photography

Jill Douglas Hopper

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Repeat photography (the art of re-creating a photograph after a passage of time) has been used in scientific studies and as historical documentation. The repeat photography in this book is a family affair. Randolph Angus Douglas travelled alone from New Jersey to Alaska in 1935, in search of gold to lift his family out of the Great Depression. Sixty years later, his daughter, using his pictures and diaries, followed his gold-rushing trail and re-created both his adventure and his photographs, resulting in a work of personal, historical, and artistic significance.

The first repeat photo in the book duplicates Douglas's first picture, and was actually one of the last that Hopper shot. It presents an exhilarating view of Rockville Bridge, the largest stone arch bridge in the world, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Hopper notes that because she took this picture after the Twin Towers fell, it was important to her to include the American flag, thus evoking with a click of the shutter a monumental change in American history. Although the railroad tracks in the foreground are unchanged, the cityscape in the distance displays the construction of progress over the decades.

Hopper faithfully documents her journey, which she undertook in two separate turns, accompanied by her husband and daughter, and several fellow hikers. She describes their troubles with weather, mosquitoes, and bears, in unadorned prose, much like her prospector father did. He wrote on August 16, 1935, "I climbed up the mountain due north of town. I slipped crossing a rock slide and cut my head, but it was not serious." In 2000, his daughter writes, "Trail conditions worsened. Trains of mud became trails of water. Even the four-wheelers had a hard time riding through the mud and water without getting stuck."

The book shines when Hopper allows herself to wax poetic: "The hikers, just like the prospector, would later reflect in wonderment of those days back in the raw untamed land of the grizzlies—now, just a lingering memory of a place very far away."

The companions find direct connections to the prospector's journey, like ruins of the cabins he used, and even some of the people in his pictures, like two women he had photographed at Hatcher Pass six decades previously.

This charming little book, begun as a daughter's self-reflective attempt to understand her father, provides an intimate, detailed view of an important period in American history. The final entries of the book are rather mundane, describing an abandoned herring cannery in Sawmill Bay, but Hopper's true conclusion is found earlier, when she admits that her father never did find gold. She writes, "In spite of this, Douglas left behind a notable trail of intriguing photographs for all adventurous spirits to follow, a trail for the footsteps of tomorrow. This was *his* gold—left for all to mine."

KAREN MCCARTHY (November 9, 2010)

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