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Walking the Big Wild: From Yellowstone to the Yukon on the Grizzly Bears' Trail
Karsten Heuer
The Mountaineers Book
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How can wildlife sustain itself in the Rocky Mountains as civilization encroaches on its turf?

Determined to find out, the author, an experienced wildlife biologist, began a 2,100-mile journey from Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming to Watson Lake in the Canadian Yukon. His traveled the brutal Y2Y (Yellowstone to the Yukon) corridor along the spine of the Rockies, to study the migratory patterns of animals along the nature corridors linking national parks and wilderness areas.

Working in support of the Y2Y Conservation Initiative, Heuer wanted to reinforce that group's belief that grizzly bears and other top-of-the-food chain animals need these wildlife corridors to prosper and that steps need to be taken to keep those migratory avenues open. This book is a journal of his observations along this band of wilderness.

The journey includes Webster, the faithful border collie who sticks with Heuer; a girlfriend and co-organizer of the trip who doesn't; a novice publicist drumming up press attention; and some ardent supporters, as the author hikes, skis, and canoes through some of the world's most breathtaking but unforgiving territory.

The journal depicts how Heuer grows during the trek: while learning to cope with the physical rigors of backwoods mountain hiking, he also discovers that sharing his adventures with the public is an effective way to gain support for the Y2Y Initiative. When he minimizes the difficulty of his journey to an eager journalist, the reporter folds up the notebook and leaves with no story—and the project gets no publicity.

The book also provides a window into humankind's positive and negative relationships with wildlife. When the Canadian Rockies were being pillaged for lumber in the 1980s, it was the hunters and hunting outfitters who successfully campaigned to protect the area. Where animals were reluctant to migrate due to the proliferation of major highways, road engineers designed wide underpasses so as not to disrupt their grazing and mating. But, the author points out, such solutions are the exception: a vast spider web of lumber roads still crisscrosses the terrain. "Metre for metre, roads are among the top ways in which humans damage natural

systems," he writes. "The quick and easy access they afford leads to an increase in legal hunting, poaching, collection of rare plants, and disturbances of wildlife."

While this book offers a deeply personal account, eliciting more comments and points of view from other members of this adventure would have added to the scope. The girlfriend is never sufficiently heard from, for example, although the author explains that the relationship had been breaking down due to a personality conflict and was endangering the project.

Still, this account sheds valuable light on the importance of preserving the last wilderness areas in North America and how it can be done.

Karl Kunkel