

A Hiker's Memories

"Walking Home: Trail Stories"

Celia Ryker. Rootstock Publishing, 2021

When Celia Ryker turned 59, she made a list of things she had hoped to accomplish but hadn't (yet). Foremost among these was hiking Vermont's Long Trail, which stretches 279 miles from the Vermont-Massachusetts border to Canada along the backbone of the Green Mountains. She resolved to do it, and she trained for the adventure in a series of shorter hikes in Michigan, where she and her husband Don lived during the winter. The following summer, she and her friend Sandy Evans set out on their trek, when Ryker was nearly 60. Evans, at that time 39, had a work schedule that didn't allow them to through-hike the trail, a trip which, if they were in good shape and determined, would have taken the better part of a month. Instead, they planned to hike it in consecutive sections of a week apiece. At that rate, they

Country Trails, and the Great Divide Trail. Ryker thus finds that her love of Vermont has led her to pose herself a tremendous challenge. Furthermore, as she tells us by the way as issues crop up during the hike's difficulties, she isn't starting from (pardon the expression) a level playing field. As a stable owner, riding teacher, and active hunter-jumper horseback competitor forced to retire due to injury, Ryker sports a right leg with six fractures, held together by a 7-inch metal rod and 11 screws. Due probably to a series of head injuries, she also has occasional episodes of vertigo that make it difficult for her to cross streams and muddy areas on stepping stones. And her balance issues are such that she has tremors when she looks up. Ryker shrugs off these difficulties, often with a laugh. Like all hikers, she has a trail



One-Minute Book Reviews

Laura Stevenson

felt they could hike the entire trail in two to three summers. For reasons that "Walking Home" gradually makes clear, the hike took them eight years.

Experienced hikers—like those who have hiked the entire Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine in six to seven months—will read of Ryker's and Evans' optimistic time frame with knowing smiles. But day hikers, weekend hikers, and even armchair hikers who just dream of connecting with nature in the woods, will find Ryker's book inspirational. To begin with, as Ryker and Evans learn from experienced hikers they met early in their trips, the Long Trail is one of the toughest hiking trails in North America. It's more difficult, some

ing trails in North America. It's more difficult, some hikers tell them, than the Appalachian Trail (which joins the Long Trail from the Massachusetts border to Route 4 before heading off to Maine), the Pacific Crest Trail, the North

name—and hers is Bent Bike, since any bicycle she rides feels as if its front and rear wheels are out of alignment.

Ryker's book chronicles her weeks of hiking in moods that vary from cautionary tales (always wrap your dry clothes in waterproof bags; always carry the instructions for adding iodine to your water supply with the tablets), through trailspeak (NOBO=northbound, SOBO=southbound, GORP=good old raisins and peanuts), to wonderful descriptions of listening to two barred owls call to each other one night, seeing a bull moose run by, or looking out upon Vermont from mountain tops. Interlaced with her main trail story, particu-

tops. Interlaced with her main trail story, particularly in its early sections, are memories of her childhood wanderings in the woods, her early morning trips with her intimidating grandmother, and a scary sledding experience with a long-forgotten friend. Later, as the memories grow fewer, they become attached to her aging border collie Ringer, whose lovely memorial picture appears at the end of the book. "Walking Home" reminds us that our present is interlocked with our past, and that it is important to do things that will linger in our memories for the rest of our lives.

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