



Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics

Sarah Mittlefehldt , William Cronon (Foreword)

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The Appalachian Trail, a thin ribbon of wilderness running through the densely populated eastern United States, offers a refuge from modern society and a place apart from human ideas and institutions. But as environmental historian--and thru-hiker--Sarah Mittlefehldt argues, the trail is also a conduit for community engagement and a model for public-private cooperation and environmental stewardship.

In *Tangled Roots*, Mittlefehldt tells the story of the trail's creation. The project was one of the first in which the National Park Service attempted to create public wilderness space within heavily populated, privately owned lands. Originally a regional grassroots endeavor, under federal leadership the trail project retained unprecedented levels of community involvement. As citizen volunteers came together and entered into conversation with the National Parks Service, boundaries between "local" and "nonlocal," "public" and "private," "amateur" and "expert" frequently broke down. Today, as Mittlefehldt tells us, the Appalachian Trail remains an unusual hybrid of public and private efforts and an inspiring success story of environmental protection.

Watch the trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFyhuGqbCGc>

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From Reader Review *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* for online ebook

Will Holland says

A bit of a slog at times, but I think this should be required reading for any Appalachian Trail thru-hiker. Some great history of the work that went into creating the impressive trail.

amy says

Great case study for thinking through how national, state, and local policy interact, in part through relationships between individuals, informal and formal organizations, and government agencies. Also a way to trouble the current discursive alignment of liberal/Democrat and conservative/Republican.

Brad says

One of the nice aspects of being a writer is that you have the opportunity to immerse yourself in a subject matter. For me that means reading a good number of books about Appalachia as I'm finishing up the first draft of my own book.

This week's read was Sarah Mittlefehldt's *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics*, a narrative history of how the Appalachian Trail was formed and what it says about our country and environmentalism. What caught my attention was the way in which Mittlefehldt framed her story. She's part of a new crop of Appalachian writers who are reframing the narrative of the region as central to the American experience instead of as alien to it.

The story, though, was aimed more broadly at environmentally-minded people. Her central argument (and it's a good one) is that the modern environmental movement should take its cues from the history of the Appalachian Trail conservation movement, which brought together citizens, non-profit organizations, private trusts, and the government in a sometimes messy but ultimately effective partnership that has both created green spaces and encouraged commerce and development. Those relationships, she argues, should be at the heart of the twenty-first century environmental movement.

At its best, the book's narrative is a pleasant mix of well-reported histories of the Trail's development that include short biographies of the main players, descriptions of the major roadblocks, and clear exposition explaining how those events led to creative solutions. It was weighty without feeling so, and I breezed through the first half without problem.

The narrative turned a bit as I reached the halfway point. The book suffers from overreach. Mittlefehldt seems reluctant to rely on her main environmental message, and instead pulls in side-narratives such as those relating to southern Appalachian stereotypes. When that happens, the book suffers a bit from the weight of her reporting because those side-steps require her to return to the main narrative by constantly reminding the reader that this story is really a roadmap for New Environmentalism.

Still, the narrative issue weren't enough to derail the book. It slowed a bit in the second half, but I never wanted to set it aside. I finished it in three reads (mainly because the book is broadly broken up into three historical periods).

It's probably best for people who are interested in conservation or who love the outdoors, but whoever reads it will come away smarter for having done so.

Pat Roberts says

Having done parts of the trail, short but rough parts, I appreciated what it took and still takes to care for this wonderful trail. I hadn't known all of the politics involved in the development and maintenance of the trail, but I'm not surprised. Want a fun experience? Try the rollercoaster section!

Bryan Blackburn says

A quick history of how the AT was put together. The trail is almost completely protected now in terms of land and therefore the issues it faces are evolving beyond building the trail. This book is a great way to learn the history of how the Appalachian Trail came to be and appreciate what an amazing feat so many volunteers accomplished on the crowded east coast of the US.

Austin Whitehead says

This book should be required reading for anybody who loves and/or enjoys the Appalachian Trail. I thru-hiked the trail in 2011, worked at a hiker hostel on the trail in 2012, went to trail days, and continue to do trail maintenance and I learned more about the trail from this book than I ever knew.

Mittlefehldt gives the AT context. I know that next time I step foot into the green tunnel that I will look at it differently because of this book. She tells the history of the trail from Mackaye's conception of it to its popular status today and puts trail history into the larger context of american environmental politics.

The book is approachable and easy to read, but has a wealth of information. If you have hiked the AT, want to hike the AT, volunteer on the AT, or have ever set foot on the AT before, you should read this book.

Danika says

BOOK HAS STILL NOT ARRIVED; REVIEW ON HOLD
