



The Best of Outside: The First 20 Years

Outside Magazine (Editor)

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The man-eating proclivities of Komodo dragons. The complicated art of being a cowgirl. A picaresque ramble with a merry band of tree-cleaners. The big-wave crusaders of the world's best surfers. For the past twenty years, Outside magazine has set the standard for original and engaging reports on travel, adventure, sports, and the environment.

Along the way, many of America's best journalists and storytellers--including such writers as Jon Krakauer, Tim Cahill, E. Annie Proulx, Edward Abbey, Thomas McGuane, David Quammen, and Jane Smiley--have made the magazine a venue for some of their most compelling work. **The Best of Outside** represents the finest the award-winning magazine has to offer: thirty stories that range from high action to high comedy. Whether it's Jonathan Raban sailing the open sea, Susan Orlean celebrating Spain's first female bullfighter, or Jim Harrison taking the wheel on a cross-country road trip, each piece can be characterized in a word: unforgettable. Commemorating Outside magazine's twentieth anniversary, **The Best of Outside** is one of the most entertaining and provocative anthologies of the decade.

The Best of Outside: The First 20 Years Details

Date : Published September 1st 1998 by Vintage (first published November 4th 1997)

ISBN : 9780375703133

Author : Outside Magazine (Editor)

Format : Paperback 432 pages

Genre : Adventure, Nonfiction, Environment, Nature, Travel, Writing, Essays, Outdoors, Anthologies

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Patty says

These thirty essays took me awhile to read. I had to borrow the ebook at least twice. (Not that that is a hardship – it is easy to renew ebooks.) They were all well-written, but like most collections there were ones that I liked and some that I could have skipped.

I had read the essay by Susan Orlean before, but enjoyed it again. I always like Ian Frazier and Barry Lopez. I had forgotten what a good and interesting writer David Quammen is – I need to find some of his other works. With 30 different articles, there is something here for any reader that likes the outdoors. Even those like me who are armchair travelers.

Mads says

I don't know why the editors of Outside put up two similar compilations one almost on top of another: "Out of the Noosphere" and "The Best of Outside: The First 20 Years." Anyhow, while a few articles are found in two (like McGuane's "The Heart of the Game" and E. Jean Carroll's "Cowgirls All the Way"), I find that I enjoy each compilation for different reasons. I love "The Best of Outside" because of articles like "La Matadora Revisa Su Maquillaje" by Susan Orlean who wrote about a top Spanish bull-fighter. "Life Among the Swells" is also an excellent piece that tracks a sailing crew and their unit's growing disintegration, written in a light-hearted manner by William Finnegan. Edward Hoagland's "Everybody Comes to Belize" is another masterpiece.

Valerie says

I discovered the writing of Edward Abbey in this Outside magazine compilation, and I don't know how I missed his work before. His piece in this compilation was a great introduction to his acerbic wit, curmudgeonly style, and uncanny insight into human behavior while revealing the beauty and delicacy of the Alaskan wilderness. Little did I know that Abbey was an inspiration to the early radical environmental movement (via his novel The Monkey Wrench Gang), yet supported immigration reduction and the NRA. He also earned his Masters degree in Philosophy at my alma mater, the University of New Mexico, after moving to the Southwest from his native Pennsylvania. I'm eager to read more Edward Abbey, and more about him as I see so many of my own philosophies in his work.

So many other pieces in this compilation fascinated me: "La Matadora Revisa Su Maquillaje" by Susan Orlean, among others....

Michelle says

Mixed bag of essays, some fantastic, some not holding up. Good to flip through and choose a story that interests you.

Carolyn says

Most of these articles are incredibly well-written. The book is a constant surprise and mostly delightful. Some I found unreadably dull, others vivid and memorable. Women bullfighters, cannibal tribes so bored with their bland food that the taste of rice brings them to tears, a possessed environmentalist, Komodo dragons ripping goats apart, what champion triathletes do when they retire, men who stuff vicious ferrets down their pants for fun, smoke jumpers finding or not finding god in forest fires - this book has it all.

Marty Greenwell says

People must think I give all 5 star reviews. I almost do. This was unusual as this book had 30+ vignettes of all great quality. Outside magazine would not have had them included if they weren't. Stories about almost first famous female bullfighter in Spain or the descriptions of Haiti in its worst (and best). Into Thin Air was was thirty pages so it was longer. The stories were so good it was expected.

Connie says

I found this book in the bookshelves of a vacation cottage on the coast of Maine, and since I've enjoyed reading pieces from Outside before, I am giving it a try.

This is superb writing, whether it is about great, hair-raising adventures or just observations on back-yard outings and tamer wanderings.

These authors are the best at being real and sharing their observations and experiences.

I am not a mountain-climbing, scuba diving, safari-taking person, but love to read about those who do these things. These writers intrigue me with their courage and their willingness to commit to and endure prolonged discomforts during their journeys, and then they also have my admiration for their skill in writing so engagingly about the adventures.

Terry says

The fun thing about this collection is that it inspires me to adventure. Each of the stories reminded me of something I saw or felt but there were plenty of new insights as well. Some of my favorite modern authors are here and of course many I hadn't read. Sometimes it seems like the Internet has gobbled up the last wild places but, happily, I'm reminded that it is largely a matter of keeping an adventurous perspective.

Stefan Martiyan says

As expected from a compilation of short essays, some caught and held my attention more than others. This

book does contain one of, if not the best article I've ever read titled, The Last Pork Chop, by Edward Abbey. If you're hesitant or not interested in buying the whole book, maybe just pick it up in the library or your local book store and read TLPC. Pretty fantastic stuff.

Sameer says

Wide variety of topics and quality of writing, with some articles bordering on stream of consciousness while others are signature Outside material e.g. "Into Thin Air".

Eric_W says

A mixed bag of essays from Outside magazine. As with most collections, the interest level and quality (purely subjective on my part) varies.

Some of the essays are just weird. I had previously read Katz's "King of the Ferret Leggers" about a sport(?) which involves seeing how long you can abide having a ferret run up your pants and chew on your testicles. "Call of the Hunt" by Jane Smiley discusses the culture of the fox hunt and her love of riding. But she questions the blood-lust of the riders.

"How is the field different from any other mob except the members are mounted? A significant portion of my subsequent education would invite and even force me to conclude that the pink coats and the high boots, the elaborate costume and ritual and language of fox hunting, the very expense of it is really the merest of respectability, designed to camouflage the mob and to allow it to reassure itself that it is far more civilized than other mobs when it is actually much worse--caught up in the irresponsible and destructive blood-lust, the object of which is not social justice or even retribution for felt wrongs, but the trivial pursuit of unworthy prey I could talk myself into class hatred here."

The essay by David Roberts, "Moments of Doubt" describes his career climbing rocks and mountains., He watched several friends die in mountaineering accidents, the most horrible of which involved Ed, a relatively novice climber who went with Roberts and several of his friends to climb in Alaska. They had successfully summited, and Ed had remarked on top that he wasn't sure the struggle was worth it. On the way down with Roberts, something happened, and Ed fell to his presumed death over a 4,000 foot drop. The body was never recovered. Now that, folks, sucks. Roberts has several periods of doubt, especially after marrying and having children, coming to the realization that his death would affect many people. Yet Roberts blithely goes on to describe the deaths of others and rather coldly, I thought, comes to the conclusion that it is all worth it. Bullshit. Nevertheless, you will keep reading his essay, wondering what horror awaits around the corner.

There's a marvelous essay, "Voyage of the Smithereens," about six friends who embark on a trip to some islands in the Caribbean on a forty-two foot sloop. Sounds marvelous, right? Except that quarters are very small and personalities undergo quite a sea-change, the best friend morphing into Captain Bligh. The bunks are tiny, and soon the roomier accommodations are being fought over. "I've even heard of expeditions hiring psychologists onto their trips to cool hot blood and bandage torn egos.[shades of Blind Descent] Still, it never occurred to me that such contentiousness would overtake this trip in this place. I felt as if I'd traveled to paradise, found a perfect conch, put the shell to my ear, and heard the sound of children arguing over a nickel." I'm sure you're all familiar with Samuel Johnson's comment about traveling at sea. "It's like being in

a prison except you can drown." You would never catch me on a cruise ship since they represent just a floating continuation of your current culture, but, except for a dreadful memory of being seasick on the original Queen Elizabeth in 1958 during a super storm (I do wish I had been able to enjoy the magnificence of the gale) I would book myself on a long trip by freighter so I could wile away the hours with books and watching the crew on the bridge. (Caveat: watch the inside of this large container ship being twisted during a storm: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE_ri8...)

Continuing with the nautical, Jonathan Raban's essay is fun. He describes being on a freighter at the tail end of a hurricane, the deck moving through an arc of 75 degrees. "Bit of a windy day," remarks the captain, the junior officers trying to smile as they walk uphill to the door of the mess. It being a British ship, a stiff upper lip was de rigueur. He reflects on the case of the *Mignonette* (a case that Michael Sandel discusses in his course on justice) in which after the ship foundered, four sailors and a cabin boy resorted to cannibalism, the older sailors eating the cabin boy who lost the throw of the dice. The trial when they returned to England was a sensation: they were found guilty, sentenced to hang, but then pardoned. The defense had argued there was no law in an unflagged lifeboat 1000 miles in the middle of the ocean, but the guilty verdict was necessary to hammer home the long reach of British justice. He reflects on his own voyage from Seattle to Juneau in a thirty-foot boat: "Out on the open sea with a breaking swell and the wind a notch too high for comfort, you are the loneliest fool in the world."

You can pick and choose, but the number of fascinating topics and well-written essays is well worth the price.

Marcie says

I made the mistake of reading Jon Krakauer first in this book of essays from Outside Magazine. This essay was expanded into his bestseller *Into Thin Air*. Krakauer is an amazing writer. I read a few other essays in the book but nothing I happened upon really made a great impression and I'm about to return the book to the library.

Eric Bell says

This book was a very disjoint collection of stories.

Matt says

This book is what originally made me want to write for magazines. Even if you don't like *Outside*, the stories in it are great. Kate Wheeler goes in search of a crazed Peruvian utopian who married his daughter, Chip Brown learns to speak New Age in a trip to Tibet, Annie Proulx takes her acid wit in search of fun, and William Kittredge hangs out with the Young Roughneck, the Cornflower Bride and the Oilfield urchin in Wyoming. Plus Barry Lopez writes about snow geese.

Antonia says

This is a somewhat anachronistic read these days, since most of the stories were written in 80's and 90's...and it's interesting to have throwback moments about the past 2 decades: what ever happened to Killer Bees? (a question I had to Google when reading "The Big Buzz"). Did they ever find the Andrea Gail? (no, she went down...and never found...or rather just pieces were found of course), and the subsequent question I asked myself -- does anyone really eat swordfish anymore? I had heard it's full of heavy metals now. Or maybe that poor fish is almost extinct because of long lining, the technique that wipes clean the seas of this and many other species. Aside from stories about pressing environmental issues, (read Kittredge's "Overthrust Dreams" and realize the situation has gotten worse in the West; oh no...and Mr. Kittredge is 85 and certainly not happy now), this is also a book of nostalgic, first person experiences, written with poignance. Some stories hit you with truth and advice from long dead authors...one of my favorite...Jim Harrison gives advice on taking road trips: "avoid cynicism and irony", (this is good advice for Bill Bryson), on long road trips; and this one that is tragically untrue these days: "no one knows you and no one calls you" on a road trip, cell phones being not so ubiquitous in the 80s and ourselves not so distracted by them. Turn off the radio! Harrison cautions. -- if he only knew. Ahh. If only we could truly escape; if Harrison only knew how envious we are of those words and why now, some of us just turn the phone off or seek out places with no coverage. Some stories stand out and leave you thinking hard about all the accidents you escaped -- Dave Robert's "Moments of Doubt" --about his witnessing the deaths of many of his climbing partners, is like that; beautifully written and a sad testament of those who died doing what they loved best.. Me, I'd rather die doing my income taxes; being way outdoors and off the city streets is too precious a time and something I'd rather survive to enjoy the next time around.
