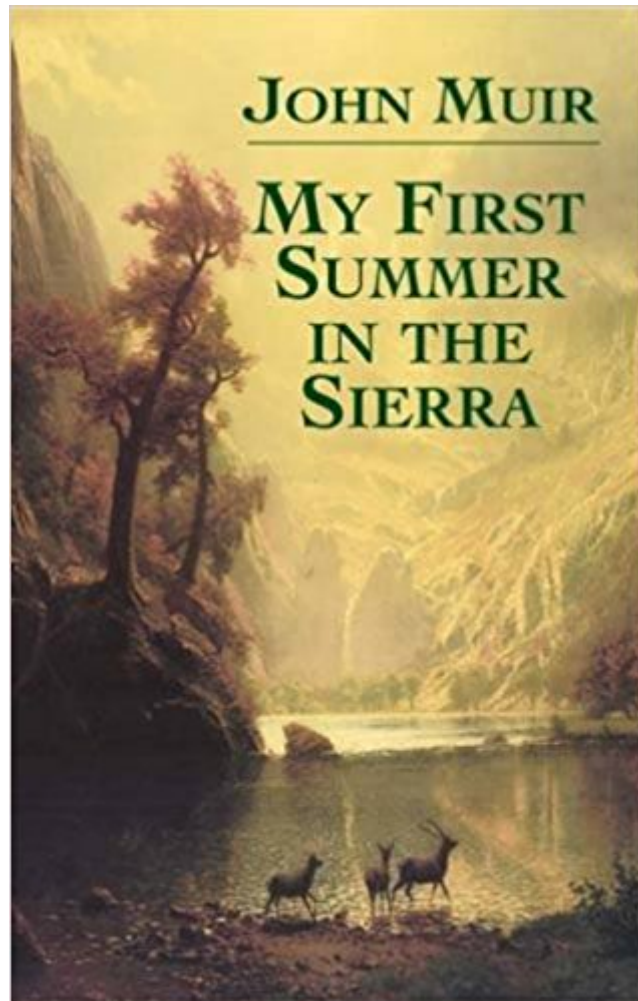


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My First Summer In The Sierra (Dover Books On Americana)



Synopsis

In the summer of 1869, John Muir, a young Scottish immigrant, joined a crew of shepherds in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. The diary he kept while tending sheep formed the heart of this book and eventually lured thousands of Americans to visit Yosemite country. First published in 1911, *My First Summer in the Sierra* incorporates the lyrical accounts and sketches he produced during his four-month stay in the Yosemite River Valley and the High Sierra. His record tracks that memorable experience, describing in picturesque terms the majestic vistas, flora and fauna, and other breathtaking natural wonders of the area. Today Muir is recognized as one of the most important and influential naturalists and nature writers in America. This book, the most popular of the author's works, will delight environmentalists and nature lovers with its exuberant observations.

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Customer Reviews

John Muir was born in 1838 and at a young age emigrated from Scotland with his family to a Wisconsin farm. He escaped the hard labor of the farm and his father's backward Biblical obsessions by displaying great powers of visualization. From principles learned from books, he whittled and fashioned barometers, thermometers, clocks and other marvels from the barest of materials. But he repudiated his inventive genius, which could have made him rich, after an industrial accident left him temporarily blinded; and he took off for the wilderness to discover plants

and the natural world. This book is a journal account of Muir's finding a place for himself in Yosemite after some dangerous wandering through the hazards of reconstruction in the South after the Civil War. It's a book of discovery. Although flocks of sheep like Muir's employer's were allowed to overrun backcountry meadows, and gold miners had ripped apart the lower river beds, the Sierras then were still a place that had many aspects that had not yet been explored or understood. The backcountry was much more vulnerable to exploitation (though in many ways less endangered) than today, but there was freer and unfettered access for one who sought out its mysteries and wanted to learn. This book shows Muir's powers of visualization ("the eye within the eye") in his beginning to formulate the role that glaciers play in the formation of the landscape. No one at that time had come to a solid understanding of what had made Yosemite Valley. And, although it might seem quite clear in retrospect, it took a strong mind of one who up until that time had been adrift in the world, a wanderer who studied plants, to visualize his theories and make them known to the world. Anyone who has not experienced the Sierra first hand cannot really appreciate this book. There are lengthy and numerous descriptions of plants and animals, loving descriptions in Muir's fashion, that can only be understood by one who has reveled in the same places and likewise wants to examine all the details. It's not a purely intellectual appreciation. It's something felt with the whole body, with all the senses alive. Muir always writes of being drawn into Nature, of never turning back, as in the case of his foolhardy venture to the brink of Yosemite Falls, "I therefore concluded not to venture farther, but did nevertheless". There's also this kind of breathless anticipation of tomorrow- if only I will be given a chance to explore its fountains...

In the summer of 1869, John Muir was invited to help herd sheep in summer pasture near Yosemite, California. This book is Muir's diary of his first summer in the Sierra Nevada. In the spirit of an ascetic mystic, Muir recorded his feelings of wonder as he discovered the awesome beauty of the Sierra Nevada. I held my breath and chuckled as Muir described his encounters with the denizens of the woods. "Having heard that a black bear will run from his bad brother man and deciding I would like to see his gait in running, I rushed and shouted at a large cinnamon colored fellow. To my dismay, he did not run. On the contrary, he stood his ground, ready to fight. Then, I suddenly began to fear upon me would fall the work of running." For the reader or nature lover who would like to become more familiar with the father of the conservation movement, this is the book to read.

This is the third of Muir's books that I have read, the first in several years. Gretel Ehrlich writes in her introduction: "[Muir] wrote: 'I should like to live here always. It is so calm and withdrawn while

open to the universe in full communion with everything good.' And in so speaking of the place he loved best, described himself. "In the inimitable way of John Muir, the book is essentially a journal, in this case of his thoughts and travels in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the summer of 1869. On one day (July 15) he tells of his great desire to look directly down the thousands of vertical feet of Yosemite Falls leading him into a death-defying pilgrimage onto shear rock: "If I was to get down to the brink at all that rough edge, which might offer slight finger-holds, was the only way. But the slope . . . looked dangerously smooth and steep, and the swift roaring flood beneath, overhead, and beside me was very nerve-trying. I therefore concluded not to venture farther, but did nevertheless." I'll guess that Muir is the only person to have ever positioned himself on the lip of this great waterfall. Having earlier read of his mountaineering and storm-reveling experiences, even this is not quite surprising. On another day he writes of encountering a brown bear, a housefly, and a grasshopper, and treats them all as being equally fascinating. In a later entry, Muir contemplates raindrops with these words: "How far they have to go, how many cups to fill, great and small, cells too small to be seen, cups holding half a drop as well as lake basins between the hills, each replenished with equal care, every drop in all the blessed throng a silvery newborn star with lake and river, garden and grove, valley and mountain, all that the landscape holds reflected in its crystal depths, God's messenger, angel of love sent on its way with majesty and pomp and display of power that make man's greatest shows ridiculous. Now the storm is over, the sky is clear, the last rolling thunder-wave is spent on the peaks, and where are the raindrops now -- what has become of all the shining throng? In winged vapor rising some are already hastening back to the sky, some have gone into the plants, creeping through invisible doors into the round rooms of cells, some are locked in crystals of ice, some in rock crystals, some in porous moraines to keep their small springs flowing, some have gone journeying on in the rivers to join the larger raindrop of the ocean. From form to form, beauty to beauty, ever changing, never resting, all are speeded on with love's enthusiasm, singing with the stars the eternal song of creation." For Muir, the mostly self-educated botanist and geologist, nothing Nature does is anything less than miraculous. Only in our finest moments of insight, revelation if you will, do we see the world as Muir saw it always. [July 12, 1869] "We saw another party of Yosemite tourists to-day. Somehow most of these travelers seem to care but little for the glorious objects about them, though enough to spend time and money and endure long rides to see the famous valley. And when they are fairly within the mighty walls of the temple and hear the psalms of the falls, they will forget themselves and become devout. Blessed, indeed, should be every pilgrim in these holy mountains!"

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