



Roughing It

Mark Twain , Henry B. Wonham (Introduction)

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Though known throughout the world for his fictional novels *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain was also a skilled chronicler of his own life and experiences. In his youth, Twain traveled extensively throughout the untamed American West with his brother, working his way from town to town in a variety of jobs, including gold prospector, reporter, and lecturer. *Roughing It* is Twain's personal recollection of his wanderlust years. It is a wildly humorous adventure yarn that combines hard facts with a healthy dose of the author's unique perspective, one that helped define the course of American literature.

Roughing It Details

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Author : Mark Twain , Henry B. Wonham (Introduction)

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From Reader Review Roughing It for online ebook

Ram says

The book follows the travels of young Mark Twain through the Wild West during the years 1861–1867.

The book covers Twain's stagecoach trip with his brother Orion Clemens, the newly appointed secretary of the Nevada Territory, from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Carson City, Nevada (July to August, 1861); Twain's unsuccessful efforts to stake a timber claim and to prospect for silver (until August, 1862); his reporting and freelance writing for the Territorial Enterprise of Virginia City, Nevada (until May, 1864); his reporting for the San Francisco Morning Call (1864 to 1865); his trip to Hawaii (March to August, 1866); his work in San Francisco (until December, 1866); and—much more briefly—his return to the East Coast through the isthmus of Panama (December, 1866, to January, 1867).

I found some parts very amusing and informational and some parts a bit boring. It is interesting to hear about the life then and there and Mark Twain is an excellent story teller. However, the book didn't really pull me in, due, in some case to information that was possibly important to people of the time but did not impress me. I read the Kindle edition that includes the sketches from the original book, and that was nice

Jon Ingram says

This is by far one of the best books I have ever read. I am particularly prone to wanderlust and adventurous pursuits myself, and you cannot find a better book or a more kindred spirit in this regard. This book is also very funny, and I found myself laughing out loud on many occasions. It is true, as other reviewers have said, that the book lags a little bit around the ¾ mark due to including too much detailed information on various subjects. I think Twain himself recognized this, as he is found apologizing for the great amount of information contained in the book during his introduction. However, I still found Twain's long descriptions historically interesting, and the book definitely picks up again near the end. Other reviewers have noted that Twain appears racist or mean in sections of the book. In response I would say that many reviewers don't understand the subtleties of the social critique found in Twain's writing. He is often pointing out the flaws in several cultures at once, and to say that he is racist is going too far.

Therese says

This is not normally a book I would have chosen to read, but I “needed” to read a Western for one of my reading challenges, so I thought why not give this a shot. I liked the first part of it and pictured myself going across the country, not in a stagecoach like Mark Twain did, but in a train and thought this would make a great book for a road trip. He had only intended on being gone for three months but was gone for seven years, and he confessed that he was surprised that he was not off more than that in his initial guess. The book had a good start (quite humorous in some parts), but it would have been a lot better had the book been about

half the length because when he gets to the silver mines of Nevada, I found myself wishing that he would hurry on his journey, although my enjoyment was increased due to the fact that I found a free audio book on YouTube and the fellow who read to me (while I followed along in my book) made me feel like it was Mark Twain himself spinning his yarns. His description of the weather in California was interesting, along with his observations of earthquakes, and he even traveled to the Hawaiian Islands for six months before returning to San Francisco where he met a man named Sawyer. If you should choose to read this book, I would recommend reading bits and pieces of it instead of going straight through it like I did. Bite-size pieces might have worked better for me.

Julie Mickens says

Like the Nevada quartz described herein, *Roughing It* contains some really brilliant, valuable stuff but also a hefty load of overburden. Some of this wordy excess and at times hammy humor might bring down the average to a feeble 3 stars, but there's enough memorable Twainian cleverness and historical interest to forgive some skimming and a few skipped chapters.

In my opinion, Twain was at his best when he wasn't trying too hard to be funny (or, in times of weakness, lazily leaning on ethnicity/woman jokes) but just honestly reacting to his circumstance. In *Roughing It*, it seems like Twain was growing as a writer by fits and starts, slowly mastering the courage to be sincere.

Melki says

Yes, take it all around, there is quite a good deal of information in the book. I regret this very much; but really it could not be helped . . .

Tag along on some travels with Twain as he heads way out west, commenting nonstop on all the new flora and fauna he sees along the way.

Chuckle as he beholds the exotic wholesomeness of Mormons:

Salt Lake City was healthy - an extremely healthy city. They declared there was only one physician in the place and he was arrested every week regularly and held to answer for having "no visible means of support."

Twain was not a big fan of California, bemoaning the lack of changing seasons. I have to agree with him on the last part, and I love this quote:

I think that to one in sympathy with nature, each season, in turn, seems the loveliest.

And though I got a kick out of Twain and his brother gleefully planning the dream houses they would build after striking it rich, there was just TOO MUCH DAMNED MINING in this book.

I *did* enjoy his visit to the Hawaiian islands, as did he, apparently:

At noon I observed a bevy of nude native young ladies bathing in the sea, and went and sat down on their clothes to keep them from being stolen.

Twain, you old horndog, you!

It had been a fine pleasure trip; we had fed fat on wonders every day . . .

Indeed!

Note to self - read more Twain.

Judi says

I read someone else's comment that this book is not his best... that it is disorganized and the beginning parts are based on his brother's diary entries and not his own. Regardless, I decided to read this after vacationing in Nevada and visiting Virginia City. As a followup to that vacation, it was a good read. In my opinion, the best part of this book is the beginning. I liked reading about life during that time. It seemed to me that it was better written, but that may have been because its style was still new to me... and after awhile the diversions became more annoying. I lost interest about halfway through when he started basically listing info about the gold mines.

Today I decided to read up to 80% of the book and then make a decision as to whether i would finish it or not. I didn't make it to 80%. I left him in Hawaii. As I found throughout the book, I'd be very interested in some sections and then I'd be wondering how long this "little story" would last it get back to descriptions of time and place.

I've decided that I've wasted enough time on this book and will not be finishing it. As much as goes against my nature. But, there are too many books on my "to-read" list to spend anymore time on this one.

Christopher says

Here we have Mr. Mark Twain's memoirs of his days in the American West, still barely civilized (the West, not Twain), scouring the hillsides for silver, encountering wild gunslingers and traveling by stagecoach, even visiting Hawaii. (Wanna read about Mark Twain trying to surf? This is the book for you.)

Twain revels in the type of story that lies somewhere between fact and fiction. His stories are stranger than both fact or fiction; they are of their own breed. They are all tinted with his own brand of wit, cynicism, and lust for life. Exaggeration is his forte. Verily, "...and that's barely an exaggeration" is an oft-used refrain in this book, meant to both caution the reader from whole-hearted belief and to shun for daring to disbelieve.

Truthfully, Twain's journalistic integrity is non-existent. He openly admits that during his tenure as a columnist at a Nevada newspaper, he copied articles straight from the encyclopedia when suffering from writer's block. But his express intent is to entertain, and that he does well. In a passage only Twain could have written, he discusses his reluctance to provide the reader with any experience more valuable than entertainment:

Yes, take it all around, there is quite a good deal of information in the book. I regret this very much; but really it could not be helped: information appears to stew out of me naturally, like

the precious ottar of roses out of the otter. Sometimes it has seemed to me that I would give worlds if I could retain my facts; but it cannot be. The more I calk up the sources, and the tighter I get, the more I leak wisdom. Therefore, I can only claim indulgence at the hands of the reader, not justification.

If you're a bit like Twain, retaining a love for tall tales and able to tolerate a bit of collateral wisdom, my bet is you'd take much delight in this book.

Michael Clemens says

Very obviously an early work, and a patchwork of Twain's experiences as he opted to mostly miss the Civil War by traveling into the then-territorial west of North America. This is very much a patchwork, and a long one at that: personal recollections are interwoven with tall tales, and occasionally peppered with some political incorrectness that's uncomfortable to read in these supposedly more enlightened days. The Mormon church and native Hawaiians bear the brunt of this, and Twain was not yet a refined enough writer (or person?) to let it move into parody: it just feels mean.

Still, Twain's embellishing touch is evident, and you can see the celebrated writer through the awkward passages. His travels by stagecoach are particularly enjoyable, and since I live in the area, I was personally pleased to read his impressions and recollections life in of Lake Tahoe and a young San Francisco, including experiencing a destructive earthquake. Like his silver-mining adventures, there are many worthy, entertaining parts to this book, but you must chip through some lesser material to get to it. The edition I read from Project Gutenberg appears to be a full one, including a number of appendices.

Robert Case says

"Roughing It" is a memoir covering a six year span of Mark Twain's years as a young journalist and occasional miner. It might also be classified as his coming of age story. He just happened to come of age during the tumult of the War Between the States, a time when slavery was still the law of half of the land. From his descriptions of Native Americans, African Americans, and Chinese, there can be little doubt that at this stage of his career, he wrote to an exclusively Caucasian audience.

It was also instructive for this reader to read his free flowing blend of hyperbole and irony to engage, entertain, and tell a good story. Sometimes it was funny or educational. Other times it was overstated and redundant. The first half of the book is the best part. His descriptions about what it was like to travel across the western US by stagecoach were fascinating. During his trip he actually stopped and visited Salt Lake City at a time when the state we now call Utah, was an independent country...and by Twain's account...ruled by a not so benevolent dictator.

Most of the book is a travelogue of his journey to Nevada and the years spent there during the silver rush. These chapters form the heart of the book and frankly, author Mark Twain could have ended it there. Instead, he extends the journey to include subsequent travels in the California goldfields, his days as a journalist in San Francisco, and then a travelogue of Hawaii, at a time when they were still called the Sandwich Islands. These later chapters read like extra baggage. This reader was tempted more than once to just put the book away, unfinished. But, I kept coming back.

I recommend this book to students of Mark Twain, readers of western US history, or lovers of memoir.

R K says

DNF

Grover Gardner has an interesting voice but the book itself was boring.

Jason says

This is another reading-while-working book, so I wasn't able to give it my completely undivided attention, but luckily it didn't require it. (I can't imagine trying Hugo, Hardy, or Dickens, *Oh my!* in that situation). This is an autobiographical account of Twain's adventures in his late 20s with a lot, and I do mean **a lot** of color thrown in, but the added seasoning is what makes his work so enjoyable. I'm pretty sure most of the core facts are true, but much of it has been embellished beyond recognition of the original incidents. It's probably 20% truth. It even makes reference to some historical events. Some of them are completely true (such as the Gridley Flour Sack incident), though most are greatly exaggerated (such as Slade's shenanigans). And I'm afraid some are possibly completely fictitious. I have my doubts about the Captain Ned Blakely and Bill Noakes affair. I know the names are changed, but I'm not certain such a thing ever happened at all since I couldn't find any source material for it. (Granted I didn't spend too much time looking).

The stories of his interactions with others are the best part, and they account for most of the book. Also included are his descriptions of the places he visited, and those were the weakest parts for me, but I'm not a fan of travel guides. This was written at a time when photography was in its infancy, and Twain had to resort to the thousand words because he had no other sufficient recourse available to him. Those parts dragged on a bit for me, and was most noticeable for his bits on Hawaii in the last few chapters. But I recognize that that's more due to me being a product of the late 20th/early 21st century, and I've seen pictures of Hawaii all my life, and not necessarily a shortcoming on Twain's part. Readers in the mid-late 19th century didn't have the advantage of just looking at this:

So, a thousand words had to do. And while I say it's not a shortcoming of Twain's, I must admit I think other authors do scenic descriptions better. I plowed through those parts, though I'm glad I didn't skip them since there was an occasional witticism thrown in the mix.

Stories and wit are truly Twain's forte, and they shouldn't be missed. This book has some great ones in it. Be forewarned though, they can get rather crude, and some are hilariously racist. (Yeah, that's right. I said it. I'm well aware that that adverb should never be applied to that adjective in polite company in today's world, but there it is anyway. Instead of rehashing my views on racism and hate here, please see my review of [Huckleberry Finn](#) on here if you're interested).

And scope this out while you're at it:

Avenue Q, "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist"

Black people don't suffer much in this, but the Injuns, Chinamen, and Kanakas (Native Hawaiians) get it pretty rough, though there's no animosity behind most of it. One notable exception is a particular Indian tribe, the Goshutes. Here's a sample quote: "The Bushmen and our Goshoots are manifestly descended from

the selfsame gorilla, or kangaroo, or Norway rat, whichever animal-Adam the Darwinians trace them to." And it just gets worse from there, though I won't deny I laughed at it. Mostly because I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and I try to imagine someone trying to get such things published today. Anyone who believes that times haven't changed in the last 150 years ought to look at this book, and reconsider their premise. I hear such statements, though that's something I can't believe I'm hearing rather than seeing, and I typically don't become decisively engaged since the statement is usually coupled with what I recognize as "invincible ignorance," and there is never any point in arguing with that. The only guaranteed result is continued disbelief on my part at what I'm witnessing. (I understand I sometimes have that affect on other people as well, and I base that on the way people sometimes stare at me when I'm talking as though I have 3 heads with genitals for facial features, but I guess that's just the way it goes).

And even though they aren't a "race," the Mormons can be lumped in with the others who don't come out looking very good in this book. And yes, the section on them is just as tear-inducing riotous as the other parts.

If it weren't for the big travel guide section on Hawaii at the end, I'd probably give this book 4 stars, but I can't say I "really liked it." I suggest this book for people who like Mark Twain's style, can handle his unPCishness without cringing, enjoy humorous anecdotes, descriptions of the marvels of the western half of the USA, a bit of history, and some good easy reading.

Vicki says

This book is a great read. Being a Nevadan, I could truly appreciate many of the stories Twain related in his book. I especially liked his description of a "Washoe zephyr". And it was a treasure to read his description of Lake Tahoe, before it was "developed", and became the congested mess that it is today. What a gem it must have been to be able to see it before there were roads, and casinos, and houses built right by the lake shore. As I was reading that segment of the book, I thought if I closed my eyes, I could really see the true, pristine Lake Tahoe that Twain was describing. I appreciated his stories of the Comstock, and it gave me a new appreciation of what the miners went through. I have been to Virginia City many times, but I will look at it with a better understanding of its' history the next time I am there.

Ken says

Take a young Sam Clemens and put him in the Wild West with a bunch of Yahoo gold prospectors and this is what you get. I especially like the Lake Tahoe scene where they're playing an innocent game of euchre when all Hellfire breaks loose.

Lyn says

Mark Twain's semi-autobiographical work about the American west in the 1860's.

I know that most every student in most every American Lit 301 class is instructed that Melville's Moby-Dick; or, The Whale is the great American novel, but Twain's works must be high on the list of great American literature. This was like Forrest Gump a hundred years early.

Twain meets Brigham Young, works as a silver miner, explores the Nevada territory, visits San Francisco during the earthquake, and then goes off to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Twain also tried out the local "surf bathing" - he went surfing. Finally, in the last pages, he meets a drunken man on the streets of San Francisco named Mr. Sawyer.

A fun read.

Carol Storm says

"Turn out, boys! The tarantulas is loose!"

This is probably the funniest work of classic literature I have ever read. Page for page, it has more laugh out loud moments than anything I've ever seen. It even leaves *THE PICKWICK PAPERS* by Charles Dickens and *TOM JONES* by Henry Fielding in the dust. It really makes you wonder what it must have been like to listen to Mark Twain on the lecture circuit in his prime from 1875 to 1895. It must have been like seeing Richard Pryor or Lenny Bruce, and then some.

The only problem is, when you read this book a second time, a lot of what Mark Twain actually has to say about the west is really creepy. He hates Native Americans. I mean, he really hates them. And I don't just mean compared to politically correct authors today. Even James Fenimore Cooper (whom Twain ridiculed throughout his career) was capable of more nuance and compassion when writing about his doomed Indian warriors in *LAST OF THE MOHICANS*. Twain literally laughs at the idea that anyone could imagine Indians as being fully human. It's beyond offensive. It's creepy. (On the other hand, I suspect that Twain's critique of the murderous Mormon elders and their church is still timely, and right on the money. Those old time Mormons had binders full of women, too!)

In spite of the disturbing themes, I give this book five stars, because I can't remember any book that ever made me laugh as much. And it deserves five stars just for the ruffian they call Arkansas.

Bully old Arkansas!

Steve says

At 31 years old and in the employ of the Sacramento Union, Mark Twain took his first trip away from the North American continent onboard the steamer *Ajax* bound for a four month tour of the Sandwich Islands. On Sunday, March 18, 1866, he arrived in Honolulu and fell in love with the islands that were to form his image of paradise.

Of course, one man's paradise is another's hell and Twain doesn't hold back. He sides with the H'awaiians (referred to as Kanakas) against the influences of the Europeans, Americans, and missionaries, especially the missionaries, for all the usual reasons: temperance, stuffy clothing, and crazy ideas about what makes a good life in a land that is so good to be in. He also rails against the local mosquito population and the fruits that are so sour that they can remove the enamel from your teeth.

At this time, the Sandwich Islands were an independent monarchy under King Kamehameha V pushing towards some kind of modernity. They had a legislature, of sorts, and a navy that consisted of two ships. And here, Twain begins to note the unintended consequences of the arrival of the white man in the need for cheap labor and the population decimation caused by disease.

He also notes the exported version of royalty that resides in a two-story wooden frame house a.k.a. the Royal Place, the excessive titles of the members of the legislature, and that the European idea of a noble being above the people is meaningless here when the King can walk around and be treated like a regular respectful guy and not be flanked by a fleet of hanger-ons.

Twain spends his time checking out the sites, notes the ubiquitous cat population, calls the Kanakas the most savvy horse negotiators in the world, and admires the sport of surfing, especially since most of the H'awaiians spend their time naked both in and out of the water.

Twain is pro-America in where the islands should lean and recommends that they become part of the US at some point. What is interesting is how many of the themes introduced here, such as a clash of civilizations and how little is needed to wow the locals, come full force in "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" which was written after this working vacation. In fact, it has been said that "Connecticut Yankee" was supposed to be about the state of the Sandwich Islands until Twain got a hold of the legends of King Arthur and changed the setting accordingly.

Overall, it's not his best book (it is a collection of articles published about his time there) but it is an interesting read. You get a rather unvarnished glimpse of H'awii in the 1860's and, short of going to Bishop's Museum or the Court Museum or the I'olani Palace in H'awii, this is a great introduction into the history of the H'awaiian islands.

Harrison says

Who would have thought Mark Twain could actually be funny! It's a shame most students' first exposure to him is through Huck Finn, which I found to be much less accessible than this book, which was entertaining and interesting and to me a much more palatable introduction to his style. This book is delightful and episodic, and some encounters (the "Bemis and the Buffalo" tale and the encounter with Slade in particular) are standalone masterpieces of comedy; even just dipping into this book is a rewarding and entertaining experience. His work ranges from clever wordplay, to absurdity verging on the post-Modern. As a fan of the Western genre, this book is a milestone in the origins of Western fiction. What a joy!

John Nelson says

When Mark Twain was a young man and not yet a published novelist, he spent seven years rousting about Nevada and California, with a six-month side trip to Hawai'i (then known as the Sandwich Islands) mixed in. What I would give for a chance to see the West when it still largely was an empty landscape, and Hawai'i with no tourists, fou-fou drinks, or fake Hula shows. Unfortunately, I was born about 125 years too late *Roughing It* contains much of Twain's signature humor and exaggeration, but describes a society and landscape that is recognizable from history, and maintains his fidelity, for the most part, to the truth. Politically-correct types will applaud Twain's description of nineteenth century American society as mainly attached to grasping the main chance, and hiss his depiction of the Indians as degraded savages lacking all

culture and refinement, but that misses the point. Twain, as a humorist, chose to emphasize those traits that were most subject to being lampooned, and did so with even-handed glee.

Bobparr says

Leggere Mark Twain, piu' di un secolo e mezzo dopo il momento in cui è stato pubblicato, è un regalo che il progresso ci fa. E' vero: Socrate è molto antecedente, Dante è molto piu' profondo, Goethe è inarrivabile. Pero' se dovessi attraversare le Alpi a piedi preferirei decisamente farlo con la compagnia di Samuel. Questo viaggio, tra Nevada e Isole Sandwich, è allietato dalla affabulazione squisita e mai invadente di un uomo di cui leggerei anche gli appunti per la spesa del giorno. Prima o poi mi dovro' decidere ad accogliere nel pantheon anche Tom Sawyer, ma ho preferito prenderlo alla lontana e divertirmi con i racconti della sua piu' immediata quotidianità. E' forse l'unica persona che mi sovvenga nei confronti del quale provo una innocente, ma ampia e curiosa invidia.

Supineny says

The first quarter of Roughing It is really great -- the description of his stage coach trip with to Nevada is great travel writing, laced with irony and sly humor. That it is describing a lost world makes it that much more entertaining. Exquisite.

There's just one 'humorous' episode concerning a bull that interjects during this part of the book and it seems disconcertingly false -- kind of corny and cartoonish in a not terribly clever way. Perhaps the sort of thing he could bring life to in his famous lectures with his drawl and deadpan. But I remembering thinking...'uh oh'.

And 'uh oh' was right. The book continues to have some marvelous episodes as Twain continues his western adventure, but they are stretched out with a prodigious quantity of flimsy material. Comic set pieces with caricature-like characters get stale before they've begun, and he spins them out as if he was being paid by the word. A certain kind of broad, formulaic humor obtains - probably what he needed to write for newspapers at the time, but it seems out of place amidst his more mature writing.

Whereas the parts where he is achingly funny tend to have a certain realness about them - Clemens is making observations about things trivial and profound that he actually sees or concepts he is grappling with in life. There's a certain kind of sincerity beneath the irony and stretching of facts.

Flawed though they are, the middle chapters of Roughing It do, in fits and starts, present a compelling picture of various societies in the wild west and San Francisco, and a shadowy autobiography of Clemens. (Those familiar with Clemens later financial troubles get a glimpse of some of his worst financial impulses early on in his life.)

However, the book finally takes an abysmal dive when he takes a trip to Hawaii. It seems like a tacked-on bonus that doesn't relate to the rest of the book. Where the wild west actually sucked Twain in and conferred some of its insanity on him, Hawaii remains just another location to file travel writing from. He presents a lengthy history of the Hawaiian people, which seems cribbed from a textbook. And then, suddenly, unceremoniously, he ends the book with a dull thought or two about travelling.

One has the impression that he was inspired it when he started the book, but that by the end, he was just

trying to get through it.

In short, read the first third, and then feel free to skip chapters after that. There's a bunch of really classic Twain here, but it gets pretty patchy after awhile.
