



Almost Somewhere: Twenty-Eight Days on the John Muir Trail

Suzanne Roberts

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Day One, and already she was lying in her journal. It was 1993, Suzanne Roberts had just finished college, and when her friend suggested they hike California's John Muir Trail, the adventure sounded like the perfect distraction from a difficult home life and thoughts about the future. But she never imagined that the twenty-eight-day hike would change her life. Part memoir, part nature writing, part travelogue, *Almost Somewhere* is Roberts's account of that hike.

John Muir had written of the Sierra Nevada as a "vast range of light," and this was exactly what Roberts was looking for. But traveling with two girlfriends, one experienced and unflappable and the other inexperienced and bulimic, she quickly discovered that she needed a new frame of reference. Her story of a month in the backcountry—confronting bears, snowy passes, broken equipment, injuries, and strange men—is as much about finding a woman's way into outdoor experience as it is about the natural world she so eloquently describes. Candid and funny and, finally, wise, *Almost Somewhere* is not just the whimsical coming-of-age story of a young woman ill-prepared for a month in the mountains but also the reflection of a distinctly feminine view of nature.

Watch a book trailer.

Almost Somewhere: Twenty-Eight Days on the John Muir Trail Details

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Nicki says

Doing the JMT is totally a goal one day dor me- and if these three made it, I certainly can lol

Christy says

I read this a couple months ago. Others have noted, and I agree, that it could use a little professional polishing. It seemed to be filled with a lot of complaining about Roberts' hiking partners, and a lot of recounting stories about boys they met on the trail. In most of those places, Roberts laments about how they should've been enjoying the hike for the female empowerment and bonding instead of competing for boys. But the boy stories, and complaints about the others, keep rolling in. That being said, one of my favorite quotes about hiking is in this book: "The thing about being on the trail is that you have hours and hours to think, so at first you review the things you had been thinking about. Then you have the thoughts you were planning to have. But after that you still have thinking time and no planned thoughts, so you start to think about things you never expected to think about." This is why many of us hike, to unshackle ourselves physically and intellectually from routine and repetition.

Alexis says

This book is about hiking in the Sierras, so I'm automatically going to like it to a certain extent. Unfortunately, there was also a lot that bothered me. I was eager for descriptions of landscapes, but didn't feel particularly inspired by any of the characters or their interactions.

I never felt like the author underwent any personal growth over the course of the book. Her immaturity as a 20-something would have been fine if there was some sort of character evolution, or even a more balanced retrospective commentary, but the revelations were largely absent.

The whole thing was rather repetitive: worry about Dionne, get annoyed at Erika, it's hard being a girl hiking, yeah girl power. I appreciate the point that women often define themselves within a framework that men have set up, but I didn't really see the author bucking that framework, aside from a superficial nod to it towards the end of the journey.

My biggest issue with the book was probably the author's relationship with Erika. Though I appreciate her honest portrayal of her own pettiness, the constant passive-aggressive thoughts and dialogue were just not enjoyable to read.

On the plus side, my takeaway from this book is that, while my hiking journals are interesting to me personally, they would probably make a pretty poor memoir.

Mary Cook says

This summer, I journeyed into the hiking-memoir genre, first with Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, then with Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, and now with Suzanne Roberts' *Almost Somewhere*. I can firmly say I enjoyed Roberts' *Almost Somewhere* the most. While Cheryl Strayed goes solo on the PCT in *Wild*, a memoir about hiking and grief, Roberts hikes with two girlfriends on the JMT, making this memoir more about women and finding their voice/place in the wilderness. *Almost Somewhere* reads faster with the benefit of more external dialogue between Roberts and her two girlfriends, who make for very interesting characters. While one is competitive and end-goal oriented, nicknamed The Commander, the other is inexperienced and fragile, mainly because she struggles with anorexia and bulimia. These two characters mixed with the well-read, imaginative, analytical narrator of Roberts navigate their own way, a distinctly female way, along the JMT. This expedition is not about competition and conquest, as much as The Commander would like it to be. In Roberts' eyes, this trek is about community and connection. I love Roberts' candidness in *Almost Somewhere*; she does not shy away from the hard questions: How do men and women experience nature differently? And why? What's the relationship between women and the wilderness? And I love how rather than answering these questions outright, Roberts lets readers discover their own answers as they evolve, just as Roberts did on the John Muir Trail in 1993.

Jp511 says

I really love this book! I had to look up many of the locations online so I could get a great picture even though Suzanne's writing was extremely colorful! My only issue, and it is a small one, I wanted to know where everyone ended up. The final paragraph wasn't enough for me.

Kate says

Me: How did your experience on the trail affect the trajectory of the years that followed it?

Suzanne: It changed everything. I moved to Colorado and then Lake Tahoe. I knew that in order to be happy, I would need to spend as much time as possible outside in the natural world.

Check out the rest of our conversation here:

<http://beingandwriting.blogspot.com/2...>

Jessica says

I loved this book. I read it immediately after reading Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, and perhaps I was impacted by the fact that I plan on hiking the JMT (and NOT the PCT), but I felt more connected to *Almost Somewhere*. There are many overlaps in themes, but the two books have significant differences as well.

This is another personal journey story. The author, Suzanne, speaks about her experiences on the trail with her two girlfriends, Erika and Dionne. I think if one were to read the first couple chapters, skip the middle, and read the last couple chapters, one would think that there was some defining moment in the middle that

changed the dynamic among the three women. But there isn't; not really, anyway. The changes that occur are subtle and over the long course of the 211+ mile trail.

I would say this is a must-read for any woman interested in exploring the wilderness, whether she identifies with Suzanne's age (early 20s) at the time or purpose (to discover what comes next in her life) or not. The quotes from and biographical information about Muir that are woven throughout are beautiful, and the journey, absorbing.

Elke says

I listened to an interview with the author of this book, Suzanne Roberts, on our local NPR station and immediately purchased the book. I am planning a solo hike on the JMT next year, so reading about her experience was relevant and very interesting.

Upon finishing the book, I wish I could begin my trek tomorrow.

Maria says

20140808 ◇ Backpacking the John Muir Trail is on my bucket list, so I eagerly dug into this memoir. I found it to be vapid and uninspirational. The author's unflattering remembrances of her college-aged inner monologue while hiking the JMT with two friends was, I'm sure, meant to be gritty and real, but it just wound up sounding petty and painfully immature. I am starting to despair of ever finding a backpacking memoir that doesn't leave a sour taste in my mouth.

Cameron Braun says

Suzane does a nice job of vividly describing the JMT with words of her own and with quotes from other nature lovers like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. Her story is told from a young woman's, recent college graduate, perspective and gives the reader an insight to a woman's experience in the wilderness. She is accompanied by two friends, one who is using the trail as a way to cure her from her anorexia/bulimia and another who is using the trail as a proving ground to her strength/ a stepping stone for larger adventures in the future. The trio meets various characters along the way and Suzanne does a good job bringing their quarks and oddities to life.

Once I began reading I found myself wanting to pick this book up whenever I could and meet up with the trio somewhere along the John Muir Trail. The story was a nice mix of nature, female perspective, coming of age, humor, social commentary, and adventure. It opened my eyes more to what it's like to be a woman, especially in the woods, and also inspired me to take a long walk outside. I highly recommend to anyone interested in these topics.

Tara says

"Women don't enter the wilderness in the same way men do; we constantly return to our physical bodies and the ways in which they could be threatened, not by bears or bugs but by men. Our bodies become a filter

between us and the landscape, preventing us from enjoying both." I think Roberts hits on an important point here in her travelogue/memoir, which I wish every woman would read. It's an exploration of women, friendship, life on the John Muir trail. Even if you aren't into camping or hiking, her musings on such subjects as Charlie's Angels, flies being reincarnated, and the many characters they encounter along the way will entertain you.

And for nature lovers, there is plenty of flora and fauna, and her gradual settling into the landscape. And for readers who love characters and relationships, hers are complex and touching (one friend battles bulimia). Definitely a book that enriched my life by reading.

Terri Schneider says

I have read quite a few books on thru-hiking. I generally can connect in some way with the author and his or her journey—as thru-hiking is, at minimum, a deep look inward. If an author touches on that over arching theme in even a broad sweeping manner, I will enjoy the read on some level. Due to its shallow nature, I struggled to connect in most ways with this particular story.

I suspect that's because it was written from a very young and immature perspective. That perspective was the author's experience, it just didn't resonate with me and I struggled to keep forging ahead with it. That was partly because I listened to it on audio and the narrator had a childish, condescending manner about her. It was grating and quite annoying. The seemingly shallow and petty manner (my opinion) in which the author experienced her hike, left me with this feeling—'what a shame'.

I do think that someone in a similar mindset (or age) as the author when she experienced her hike, might readily enjoy this book.

Sara says

The narrative and story in this book are very good, and I loved reading about their girls-only adventure. However I was disappointed at all the cattiness and felt annoyed at the narrator throughout the book. I think the book would've been much better without all the rude comments about her hiking partners she somehow remembers 20 years later.

Patricia Murphy says

I met Suzanne on an airplane and purchased this book right away on my Kindle as we were talking about it. How is that for tech? We were coming home from a writer's conference where Suzanne was on a panel with Cheryl Strayed, Pam Houston, and some other women travel writers. So I was really interested to see how this book compared (not fair I know) to *Wild*, which I gobbled in one sitting.

What was missing for me in this book was reflection. I have read a lot of hiking narratives, especially as I prepared to hike Kilimanjaro, and they can be so relentless since they describe a short space of time and very limited setting and action. Strayed managed to break that monotony with very detailed reflection on her life before and after the hike. It has been about a year since I read *Wild* and I still have images in my mind about Strayed's life off the trail--the description was that intense and vivid.

Here, we get a bit of dipping into life off the trail, but with not enough detail to give relief from the aches and pains and heavy packs. And beyond that, we have the added monotony (hiking narratives don't need extra monotony) of several recurring themes: contempt for hiking partners, food obsessions, and female insecurities.

I do understand feeling those emotions, and I am a contemporary of Roberts so we went through those things at the same time in the same historical context. But I wonder why an editor didn't say to her, "We got it. You disliked some folks. You wanted men to like you. But what did you learn?"

I wanted the characters to be redeemed instead of ridiculed. I ended up feeling empathy for the characters I was supposed to dislike. I think about how DFW eviscerates people and manages to love them at the same time, whether on a cruise ship or at the county fair. I wanted the adult Roberts to behave like an adult. The book does such a good job of capturing the mentality of a 20-something, it skips a bit of the wisdom of a 40-something.

I'm glad I read the book and I liked it and I'm glad it exists. But it is one of those where I wish an editor had insisted on one more draft.

Karen says

Awhile back, I tried reading Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail and couldn't make it through it, even the audiobook version. Thankfully, Suzanne Roberts' book about her month-long hike along the John Muir Trail with two of her friends held my attention much better. While not my favorite travel book, I still enjoyed this one. At the time, the women were in their early twenties and struggling with their own, individual issues. Stepping into nature and away from the hustle and bustle of society can be healing (and jarring when you return). Though this adventure took place in the 1990s, I can't imagine it would be much different these days. We could all do with more time in nature.
