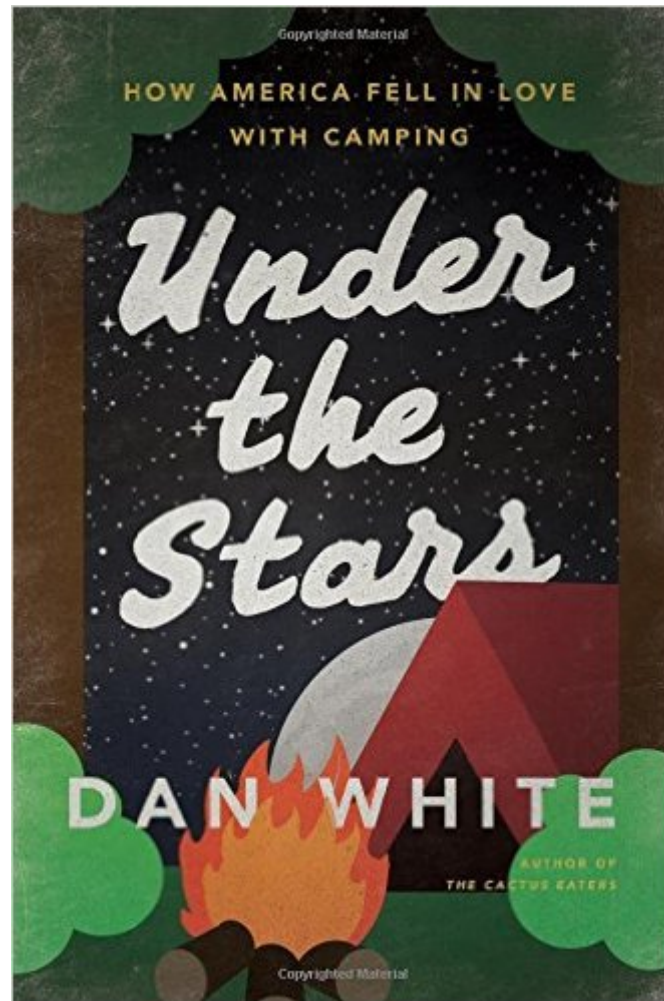


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# Under The Stars: How America Fell In Love With Camping



## Synopsis

“The definitive book on camping in America. . . . A passionate, witty, and deeply engaging examination of why humans venture into the wild.” —Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild*

From the Sierras to the Adirondacks and the Everglades, Dan White travels the nation to experience firsthand—and sometimes face first—how the American wilderness transformed from the devil’s playground into a source of adventure, relaxation, and renewal. Whether he’s camping nude in cougar country, being attacked by wildlife while “glamping,” or crashing a girls-only adventure for urban teens, Dan White seeks to animate the evolution of outdoor recreation. In the process, he demonstrates how the likes of Emerson, Thoreau, Roosevelt, and Muir—along with visionaries such as Adirondack Murray, Horace Kephart, and Juliette Gordon Low—helped blaze a trail from Transcendentalism to Leave No Trace. Wide-ranging in research, enthusiasm, and geography, *Under the Stars* reveals a vast population of nature seekers, a country still in love with its wild places.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: Henry Holt and Co. (June 14, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1627791957

ISBN-13: 978-1627791953

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.4 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (26 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #113,417 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #95 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Hiking & Camping > Camping #102 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural History #167 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > History of Sports

## Customer Reviews

Camping and the history of it in America are the subject of this intelligent, sensitive, and funny book. The author addresses the history of the earliest writers and lovers of the great outdoors, such as Thoreau and Emerson. He explains their effect upon him when he graduated from high school. He takes us further into the past, as well. He discusses Muir, Emerson, and Roosevelt as well. America has had a romance with camping for years. You really understand the wry humor and the memories you may recall of your own when you see a sketch of a giant black fly (full-life) from the

Adirondacks. I related to that one! That sketch and many more, some which will touch you personally, are going to make you love this book as much as I did. Whether you have ever been to the Adirondacks or to Walden Pond, or have ever tried that girl scout delicacy, "the s'more", invented in 1927, according to the author, you will relate to something in *Under the Stars*, learn from it, and love it. Note: the actual inventor of the graham cracker appears in this book too, and when I read about him my jaw dropped. *Under the Stars* by Dan White is a little bit of everything. It covers crackpot hikers such as Estwick Evans, The "Craziest Thru Hiker of the Early Nineteenth Century", who walked seven hundred forty four miles, from New Hampshire to the west, years before the book *Walden* was published, and a hundred and fifty years before the National Trails System Act of 1968. He was quite similar to modern campers who like to get back to the bare bones of camping. According to *Under the Stars*, Evans explained, "I wished to acquire the simplicity, native feelings, and virtues of savage life...and to become a citizen of the world....How great are the advantages of solitude!" This book is not just about extolling the greatness and beauty of nature, however. It can be sidesplittingly funny, such as when the author is bitten by a crane named "Korvu's brother" during an experience camping with a glamping group named Safari West. It can also be moving, such as in the epilogue, subtitled "a dose of enchantment". The author recalls the silence which is not silence: the silence of nature, which you can hear when you don't talk. He writes, "I took in a combination of sights, smells, and sensations that whirled together until I couldn't separate them anymore. I call it camping synesthesia...when the senses get so jumbled up". He received this love of camping from his father, and is presently passing it on to his daughter and to his readers as well. When you understand what Dan White is referring to when he ends his book by talking about a sense of "complete erasure" such as what he experienced originally with his father, and what he has been trying to get back to ever since, I expect that you will love this book and all it contains as much as I did. It is beauty.

In many ways, American love for the outdoors; camping, hiking and wondering about, is a history of we the people. For many, camping trips with the family, friends or organizations such as the Scouts are some of our fondest memories. I know I have been camping since a very young boy and my wife of 52 years and I have most certainly participated over the years. While we no longer take our epic journeys of the past, we still enjoy our memories and surprisingly talk about them a lot. This book is a history of camping and hiking in America. Now this is not a history of our past generations who settled out land and camped out of necessity. No this is a history of our people who went back to the wild for either recreation or in search of

^something. It is filled with stories; some of them quite humorous, sketches, diary entries and experiences by a wide range of people. I must say that I was hooked on this book from chapter one and for me it was a true page turner. I learned many new things and relearned a lot that I thought I knew. Now this is not a history of "how to camp or hike" but rather how it has changed over the years and the impact it has upon our society as a whole. The book is well written and was extremely informative. The information in it is quite current and I was extremely happy that the author gave a nod to Cheryl Strayed whose book I truly loved. If you have even the slightest interest in camping, hiking, trekking, wilderness and American social history, then this read is for you. It is a rather length book but filled with wonderful material and at the end you will wish the author had added a couple hundred more pages.

Under the stars is making me want to grab a cot and tent and take my aged self, bad knees and all, and go camp! First, let me say this is an unfinished advanced reader's copy (ARC) and even so, the sketches, black and white photos, are so interesting. I imagine they will be even better in a finished book. Of all the pictures, there is one of a woman, in a long dress, uncomfortable shoes, and a rifle, trying to climb rocks. It just captures a moment so well. In some ways this book is not what I expected. I expected discussions of camping history, a little drier, maybe a nod to "the long long trailer." instead I got everything from a camping trip with John Muir and "Teedie" Roosevelt and their divergent view on hunting and camping, to a fascinating story about taking kids from poorer sections of Miami to the everglades, and the lack of diversity among campers, something I never thought of. The author has a great sense of humor and fun, but there is a real depth here also. The last few chapters also cover camping in a RV. The sketches, quotes, and stories are spot on to move the book along and explain the culture, the fun, the scary, the challenges, and how America camped and camp now. I mostly bought this book because I thought it would be a fun romp through the history of camping, and it is, but it's much more. It's philosophy, history, eco-history, socialism, but all done incredibly well and never so heavy handed that I felt preached to, but more informed and enlightened. I hadn't really expected a book on the history of camping to make me think so much and consider so much, but please, don't think this makes it boring or preachy or like sitting in a classroom, far from it. This is fast paced, well written, and really interesting. Scouts, Victorian ladies, crazy campers, it's all here.

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