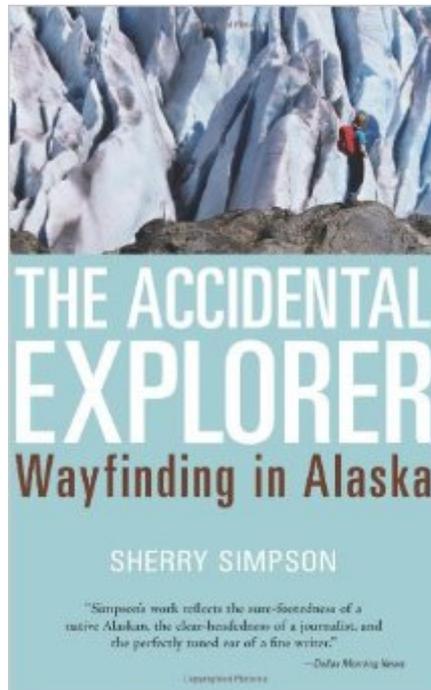


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The Accidental Explorer: Wayfinding In Alaska



Synopsis

Alaska is a place of great adventure and exploration. After having lived in the Great Land for nearly all of her life, Sherry Simpson realized that she had not scaled mountains, trekked across wild tundra, or blazed trails through virgin forests. Did that fact make her less of an Alaskan? In the series of essays that comprise *The Accidental Explorer*, Sherry Simpson recounts the experiences of an ordinary woman confronting the great expanses of water and untracked land in Alaska, as she makes her best efforts to map her sense of place and her sense of self in a land that seems to require exploration of its inhabitants. While undertaking arduous treks into the backcountry, she falls into a glacial river and nearly drowns. On an archetypal epic solo hike, she ruminates constantly on when and whether she should abandon that folly. She writes with both humor and humility, harnessing great powers of observation of the natural world. In a downright scary encounter with a mildly aggressive bear, Simpson shrinks from any supposed Alaskan larger-than-life persona to assume her place on the food chain: an urbanized human who is appropriately afraid of big bears. Simpson also offers up the (less reverent) Alaskan view of Chris McCandles, the wanderer who perished in an abandoned bus near Denali, subject of *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer. Can an ordinary, not especially heroic, person be an adventurer? If she sets out, in a wild place like Alaska, what will she find out there, and what will she learn about the place back home? Throughout this compelling and probing book, Sherry Simpson illuminates the act of exploration as both a feat of extraordinary effort and as an everyday experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The more I read her work, the more convinced I become that Sherry Simpson is not only Alaska's most accomplished essayist, but that she ranks among the best in the nation. The latest proof is *The Accidental Explorer: Wayfinding in Alaska*. At one level, this collection of 10 personal essays recounts memorable trips into Alaska's wild places (most, but not all, emphasizing her own travels), written by a person who thinks hard about things, is willing to take risks, and has a wonderful talent for self-deprecating humor and story telling. The remote areas she writes about range from Glacier Bay to Denali National Park, the vast flatlands of the Yukon River basin, and an imposingly wild stretch of the Alaska coast that remains unnamed. But the specific places aren't as important as her experiences, lessons learned, questions raised, and the ideas that Simpson mulls in that restless, roving, worrisome mind of hers. Early on she admits to being a fretter. The reader gains as much, if not more, from her fretful and inquisitive mind as from the adventures themselves. As with the best of essays, these are multi-layered gems. Besides sharing her sometimes funny, other times sad or disconcerting, occasionally frightening, and always humbling passages through Alaska's wilds, Simpson writes movingly and unflinchingly about home and family. One of the strongest essays, I think, is "Fidelity," which in large part reflects upon about a troubled time in her marriage and the importance of what endures. In fact home and wilderness - and various notions of each - are juxtaposed against each other throughout the book and that juxtaposition creates one of the book's delicious tensions.

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