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Northern Exposures: An Adventuring Career in Stories and Images

By Jonathan Waterman

Northern Exposures: An Adventuring Career in Stories and Images. Jonathan Waterman. University of Alaska Press, 2013. 240 pages. Paperback. \$30.

Growing up in the suburbs of Boston, Waterman strove to sate his thirst for wilder places by cutting class and hitchhiking to the peaceful mountains of New Hampshire or burying himself in Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* and Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. All the while, he indulged his wandering mind by concocting plans for expeditions to places far from Boston: Alaska, Mexico, and beyond. Eventually, Waterman left the East Coast, traveling West. Over his three-decade-long adventure career, his heart developed a strong magnetic compass that always pointed him north, to Alaska.

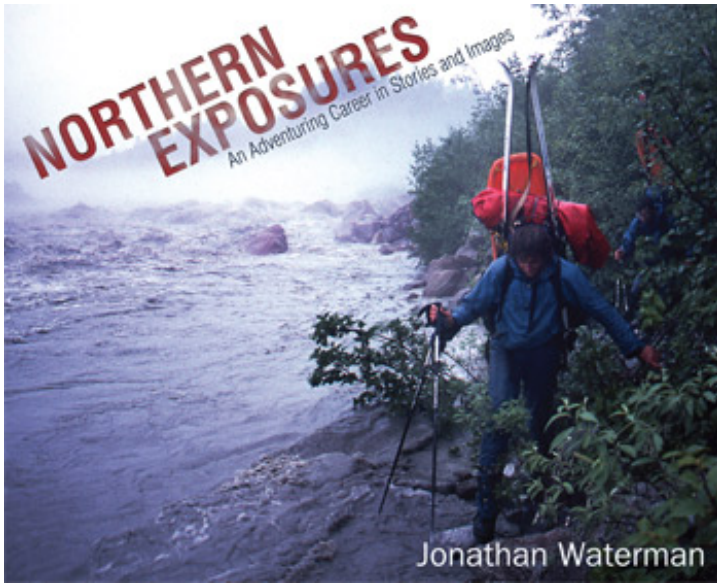
Waterman's 12th book, *Northern Exposures: An Adventuring Career in Stories and Images*, encapsulates a rich body of work from an explorer enamored with the northern regions. "[Alaska] is a nondenominational temple built for everyone," he posits. Arranged into 16 chapters, the 23 stories and 99 color photos will serve as point of reference for some, a motivational guide for others, and a how-to-guide for many. But for Waterman, they are an attempt to shake those of us still blind to our planet's changing face from our stupor. "It amazes me that most adventure writers...stick to their narratives of adventure mastery and leave the politics to the nature writers and environmentalists," Waterman laments.

The book is by no means an environmentalist's manuscript. Many of the pre-published stories simply capture Waterman's fascination with the North: An encounter with a curious polar bear, a tedious climb up Mt. Logan's west ridge, a quiet kayak across calm waters. But at the root of the work remains an urge to action. Waterman catalogs his many years in the North, from his 2,200-mile solo kayak through the Northwest Passage to his Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) grizzly bear research, with a common thread. Quietly, and with restless urgency, Waterman displays for his readers an ugly truth: Our lawmakers haven't the time (or interest) to discover the true gold of the North. It is not the billions of barrels of light, sweet crude buried beneath ANWR, but the plentiful wildlife and plant life that grace its surface.

Speaking of his book, Waterman says that it might "serve as a template for forging a career in the outdoors." As one such person attempting to do just that, I can attest that it most certainly can, and I will add that this template comes with an all too important caveat: to make a living in the outdoors is to fight for its preservation. One cannot simply walk through wild places, writing about and photographing their splendor, without choosing to speak for them. As we benefit from our natural world, we become its stewards. And whether or not you consider yourself a scientist or an environmentalist, we must take action. Waterman and our Earth demand it.

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