



## AAC Publications

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### **A Place in Which to Search: Summers in the Wind Rivers**

By Joe Kelsey

**A Place in Which to Search: Summers in the Wind Rivers. Joe Kelsey. Black Canyon Books, 2016. Paperback, 269 pages, \$18.**

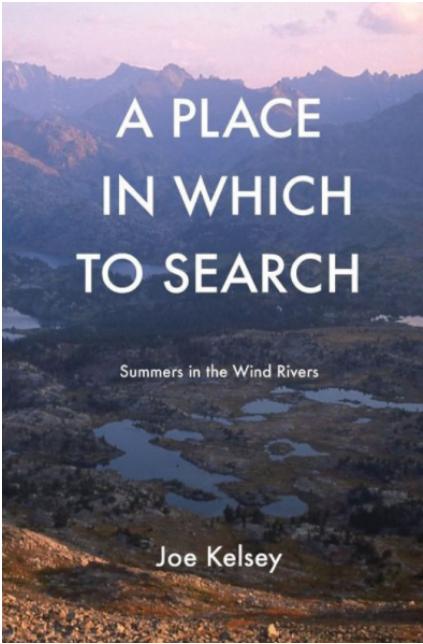
In August 1969, Joe Kelsey set out alone to hike eight dusty miles into the mountains from Big Sandy Opening. In this inaugural trip to the Wind River Range, Kelsey missed a switchback at Jackass Pass and wandered into a meadow of tumbled granite, not knowing he was lost. He soon regained the trail to Lonesome Lake, and next morning, he writes, "I woke up...knowing I had come home." Kelsey has spent every summer since then in the Wind Rivers, where he first encountered "a place in which to search." The title hearkens back to the records of a 16th-century Spanish expedition across the West: "They did not find the riches of which they had been told, they found a place in which to search for them.... Now when it is too late they enjoy telling about what they saw, and even of what they realize they lost."

During a hundred trips, Joe Kelsey established several first ascents in the Winds and published numerous articles about the range, as well as the beloved guidebook *Climbing and Hiking in the Wind River Mountains*. But there's little in the way of the blow-by-blow accounts of adventuresome first ascents in Kelsey's memoir. Rather, *A Place in Which to Search* offers the reader a series of vignettes, rife with historical detail, poetic fragments, and philosophical notes about life and the quest to find meaning in the mountains. And yet the reader is left with the impression that Kelsey conceals as much as he reveals. Characters emerge and disappear, naked of context outside of their actions or role in a particular story. Tales of Vulgarian charades, a skittish golden retriever, an arrowhead on a fourth-class summit, and Bonneville's 1833 journey through the vague geography of a mythical West emerge from a collection of Wind River portraits, with plenty of silence still hanging in the margins.

Don Mellor, in his history of climbing, *American Rock* (2001), notes that adventure is an essential element to any Wind River experience. "The Wind Rivers," he writes, is still "a range cherished for its secrets." Through various stories, Kelsey examines the fragile paradox of modern exploration: the desire for both mystery and understanding, and that the journey into the unknown eventually blots mystery out. In order to continue, the explorer must always seek new questions; the mountaineer, new heights. While Kelsey continues to find "meaning and pleasure...in the questing," at the same time he manages to avoid over-mythologizing his personal experience. At one point, while he and his partner navigate a precarious gully of ice, meltwater, and rock, Kelsey notes, "This is a classic mountaineering predicament but is not magical." To spend time in *A Place in Which to Search* is to meander through moments of lakeside musings and backcountry scrambling—to encounter the rough, bright fragments of a life spent searching in the wild.

– Paula Wright

**Images**



## Article Details

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