

Twelve Recommended Books on the Sierra Nevada

An annotated bibliography compiled by the Editors and Illustrator/Contributor of *The Illuminated Landscape: A Sierra Nevada Anthology* (Berkeley: Heyday, Santa Clara University and The Sierra College Press, 2010) – *A California Legacy Book*

- Gary Noy, Editor
- Rick Heide, Editor
- Joe Medeiros, Illustrator/Contributor

1. Austin, Mary. *The Land of Little Rain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1903.

A native of Illinois, Mary Austin (1868-1934) moved with her family to California in 1888 and later lived for several years in the Eastern Sierra high desert near Independence. Her "Little Brown House" in Independence is California Historic Landmark #229. While in California, Austin became a noted scholar and defender of Native American issues, authoring numerous works of fiction, poetry, drama, and criticism on those and other sociopolitical subjects, including early feminism and environmentalism. Many consider her *The Land of Little Rain*, an exploration of California's major deserts, a text on par with the works of John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. In 1999, *San Francisco Chronicle Book Review* readers voted it the best Western nonfiction book of the twentieth century.

2. Beesley, David. *Crow's Range: An Environmental History of the Sierra Nevada*. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2004.

David Beesley (b. 1938) is a professor of history, emeritus) at Sierra College. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Utah in 1968 and has published numerous articles on Sierra Nevada labor; ethnic and environmental history. He is considered an expert on Basque culture in the Sierra and on the environmental effects of hydraulic mining. In 1995 and 1996 he was an associate with the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project and supplied a portion of its report to the United States Congress.

In *Crow's Range: An Environmental History of the Sierra Nevada* (2004), Beesley considers the powerful natural forces at work in the range, including the impact of the most powerful and destructive force of all – human beings.

3. Bibby, Brian and Aguilar, Dugan. *Deeper Than Gold: A Guide to Indian Life in the Sierra Foothills*. Berkeley: Heyday, 2005.

The Native cultures of the Sierra Nevada Foothills present a fascinating and complex story. Scholar Brian Bibby and photographer Dugan Aguilar consider this remarkable chronicle through their book *Deeper than Gold: A Guide to Indian Life in the Sierra Foothills* (2004).

Deeper than Gold brings together the present and the past—both ancient and recent—in a captivating compilation of anecdote, myth, recollection, and reflection. Five years in the making and the result of almost thirty years of dedicated work among California's native communities, *Deeper Than Gold* is a tribute to the Native people of California's Gold Country.

Brian Bibby is an independent scholar and cultural activist. He has worked for over twenty-five years with elders of many of California's Native communities. A longtime scholar of the song, dance, language, and artistic traditions of Native California, he has taught at a number of institutions and has served as a consultant and guest curator

for many cultural and folk arts programs in California. He is also the author of *The Fine Art of California Indian Basketry (1996)* and *Precious Cargo: California Indian Cradle Baskets and Childbirth Traditions (2006)*.

Dugan Aguilar is a Pauite/Pit River/Maidu photographer whose work celebrates the perseverance of Native American culture. He has exhibited his work at the Institute for Indian Arts, the California State Indian Museum, and the C.N. Gorman Museum. He is the recipient of several awards from the Santa Fe Indian Market.

4. Egli, Ida Rae, editor. *No Rooms of their Own: Women Writers of Early California*. Berkeley: Heyday, 1992.

In the wild and often isolated 19th century Western frontier, it was a bold act for a woman to write and to seek publication. They wrote about California during the Gold Rush, but with a perspective all their own. Their writings, as well as the poetry, fiction, essays, memoirs, and diary entries of other women writers of their era, are collected in *No Rooms of Their Own*. First published by Heyday Books in 1992 and now reissued under Santa Clara University's California Legacy series (published in association with Heyday), *No Rooms of Their Own* remains one of the few anthologies in which the scope and range of authentic literary voices of the women of the gold rush era can be heard.

The editor, Ida Rae Egli, is a Californian whose great-grandparents immigrated during the gold rush period. She graduated from Sonoma State University and later earned her master's degree in American literature from San Francisco State University. Now relocated to coastal California, she continues to teach creative writing.

5. Johnston, Verna R. *Sierra Nevada, the Naturalist's Companion, Revised Edition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Sierra Nevada, The Naturalist's Companion is Verna Johnston's new and completely updated edition of her classic, *Sierra Nevada*, originally published in 1970. A professional biologist, veteran ornithologist, and well-known wildlife photographer,

Johnston's book covers the entire range and examines not only scientific material but also the impact of natural history on history and culture. Among the book's best known passages are her descriptions of rarely encountered phenomenon such as the courtship of the Sierra Nevada salamander, a wolverine attacking two bears, and a fight to the death between a skink and a scorpion.

Sierra Nevada, The Naturalist's Companion also considers the many changes in the ranges since its first publication, including acid snow, tensions involving human and cougar habitats, and an ominous drop in amphibian populations.

Verna R. Johnston taught biology at San Joaquin Delta College for thirty-seven year and is a natural-history writer and photographer. Her photography has appeared in numerous exhibitions, and more than 100 of her articles have been printed in such prominent publications as *Audubon*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and the *New York Times*.

6. Killion, Tom and Snyder, Gary. *The High Sierra of California*. Berkeley: Heyday and The Yosemite Association, 2002.

Tom Killion was born and raised in Marin County, California, where the rugged scenery inspired him from an early age to create landscape prints using linoleum and wood. He studied History at UC Santa Cruz, where he was introduced to fine book printing by renowned poet William Everson. In 1977, Killion founded Quail Press, where he has printed four handmade art books depicting landscapes from California to Europe and Africa, working with poets such as Gary Snyder. Killion also holds a PhD. in African History from Stanford University, and has taught at Bowdoin College, Stanford,

San Francisco State, and as a Fulbright professor at Asmara University in Eritrea. His studio is near Point Reyes, on the Marin coast. Killion was recently featured on the national PBS series *Craft in America*. Mr. Killion is also the author of *Tamalpais Walking* (2011), also in collaboration with Gary Snyder.

Born in San Francisco, raised in the Pacific Northwest, a frequent visitor to the Sierra Nevada, and now one of its longtime residents, Gary Snyder (b. 1930) has let his experiences in the natural world animate his work and his worldview. An early pioneer in the Beat movement of the 1950s, in the 1960s, Snyder lived and studied in a Zen monastery in Japan, and Zen Buddhism remains a powerful current flowing through all his writing. His poetry and prose have helped introduce the concepts of environmental stewardship into public and literary discourse, and this characteristic melding of literature, ecology, and policy has earned Snyder many awards and honors, including a Pulitzer Prize in 1975, as well as a Bollingen Prize for Poetry and a John Hay Award for Nature Writing, both in 1997. Snyder resides on a mountain farm in the Yuba River watershed of the Sierra Nevada.

In *The High Sierra of California*, Killion's extraordinary artwork is seamlessly melded with Snyder's thoughtful meditations on the Sierra.

7. Kingston, Maxine Hong. *China Men*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

Maxine Hong Kingston (b. 1940) was born in Stockton, California, and attended college at the University of California, Berkeley, where she majored in engineering before switching to English. The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Kingston's writings frequently examines her cultural heritage and blend fictional elements into nonfiction narratives. Kingston has received numerous honors for her work, including a National Book Critics Circle Award, a National Book Award (for *China Men*), and a National Humanities Medal. Kingston currently lives in Oakland and is a professor emeritus at U. C. Berkeley.

Chinese labor was of crucial importance to the construction of the trans-continental railroad; an estimated 90 percent of all workers on the Central Pacific Railroad were Chinese. Kingston's *China Men* (1980) examines this extraordinary task as it chronicles the experiences of her fictionalized "railroad grandfather" Ah Goong, in building the route through the Sierra.

8. Lankford, Scott. *Tahoe Beneath the Surface*. Berkeley: Heyday and Sierra College Press, 2010.

Lake Tahoe transformed America, and not just once but many times over—from the earliest Ice Age civilizations to the mysterious death of Marilyn Monroe. It even played a hidden role in the American conquest of California, the launch of the Republican Party, and the birth of John Steinbeck's first novel. Along the way, Lake Tahoe found the time to invent the ski industry, spark the sexual revolution, and win countless Academy Awards.

Tahoe beneath the Surface brings this hidden history of America's largest mountain lake to life through the stories of its most celebrated residents and visitors over the last ten thousand years. It mixes local Washoe Indian legends with tales of murderous Mafia dons, and Rat Pack tunes with Steinbeck novels. It establishes Tahoe as one of America's literary hot spots by tracing the steps of more than a dozen authors including Bertrand Russell, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Michael Ondaatje. *Tahoe beneath the Surface* reveals how the lake transformed the lives of conservationists like John Muir, humorists like Mark Twain, and Hollywood icons like Frank Sinatra. It even touches upon some of the darker aspects of American history, including anti-Chinese racism and the Kennedy assassination.

Raised in Colorado, Scott Lankford got lost en route to Stanford University and spent much of the next ten years as a maintenance man, musician, and mountaineering guide at Lake Tahoe. After joining the 1985 American Everest West Ridge Expedition, he completed a Ph.D. in modern thought and literature with a dissertation on John Muir. Currently a professor of English at Foothill College, in California's Silicon Valley, he has also served as Foothill's Dean of Language Arts and Co-Director of the Foothill College Cultural Diversity Center. Scott is the Founder and Co-director of the Foothill College Center for a Sustainable Future.

9. Laws, John Muir. *Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada*. Berkeley: Heyday, 2007.

John Muir Laws is a naturalist, educator, and artist. *The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada* is his lavishly illustrated natural history guide for the range. Laws, who has served as an Associate in the Research Division of the California Academy of Sciences, created this illustrated field guide to more than 1,200 species of plants and animals of the Sierra. It includes birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, trees, shrubs, wildflowers, fungi, and insects.

John "Jack" Muir Laws has been an environmental educator for more than 25 years in California, Wyoming and Alaska. He has written and illustrated numerous field guides, including *Sierra Birds: a Hiker's Guide*. He lectures and teaches throughout the west and spends countless hours researching, sketching, and painting species for inclusion in his upcoming book on drawing birds sponsored by the Audubon Society. .

10. Muir, John. *The Mountains of California*. New York: The Century Co., 1894.

Born in Scotland, John Muir (1838-1914) immigrated to the United States in 1849 and had made his way from Wisconsin to California by 1868. Enthralled by the natural beauty of the Sierra Nevada, Muir hiked throughout the range and left his indelible mark on the region, in part by founding the Sierra Club and fighting to make Yosemite a national park. He also battled (although unsuccessfully) against the damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley, located within the park's boundaries.

Muir's writings are unique among the journals of the nineteenth-century American West because, unlike narratives that emphasized "getting there" and triumphing over physical hardship, his works celebrate what he called the "spiritual affinities" of the natural experience. Mountains were not obstacles to overcome but cathedrals. Storms were not terrifying occurrences but delightful evidence of a supernatural plan. Among the most famous of the passages in *The Mountains of California* (1894), is the description of an evening Muir spent high in a Douglas fir tree (what he called a Douglas spruce) during an intense Sierra windstorm.

11. Palmer, Tim. *The Sierra Nevada, a Mountain Journey*. Washington, D.C. Island Press, 1988.

Tim Palmer has written seventeen books about the American landscape, conservation, adventure travel, and rivers. *California Wild*, a text and photographic book, won the Benjamin Franklin Award for the best book on nature and the environment in 2004. Palmer wrote the text for the Yosemite Association's *Yosemite: The Promise of Wildness*, which received the Director's Award from the National Park Service as the best book of the year in 1997. His books include *Rivers of America*, which features 200 color photos of rivers nationwide, and *Luminous Mountains*, published by Heyday in collaboration with the Yosemite Association. Palmer has traveled extensively through the Sierra by foot and on skis, with his canoe and whitewater raft, and in his well-equipped van.

The Sierra Nevada, a Mountain Journey is Palmer's chronicle of his travels on the trails, rivers, back roads, and highways of the Sierra Nevada for the purpose of probing the changes and choices being made for the Sierra Nevada today.

12. Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*. Originally published in 1872, Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company. Reprinted in 1906, New York: Harper and Brothers.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), better known by his penname Mark Twain, was an esteemed American humorist, writer, and lecturer. A gifted social satirist, at the peak of his career he was probably the most well-known American around the world. His iconic characters Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer are still among the most beloved in literature.

Mark Twain's second major work, *Roughing It* (1872), records the author's travels through the West in the 1860s. Among its most famous passages are his descriptions of Twain's Sierra Nevada adventures at Lake Tahoe and in the mines of Nevada, most notably in Virginia City.