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Review: Satellites in the High Country: Searching for the Wild in the Age of Man

By Jason Mark

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

New York, NY, USA

Mark, Jason. *Satellites in the High Country: Searching for the Wild in the Age of Man*. Washington, DC: Island Press. 2015. 320 pp., illus. ISBN: 97811610915809. US\$ 28.00, hardback. Printed on recycled, acid free paper.

Jason Mark, environmental journalist, editor of the *Earth Island Journal*, and gardener, searches for wilderness and its meaning in *Satellites in the High Country*, an exploration of the Anthropocene Age. In this "Age of Man," we have lost track of what wilderness and nature are, leaving us puzzled when we try to articulate their continued importance to us. The debates about their meaning also make them somewhat harder to protect. Mark searches the West, his insides, and the past for contemporary and useful meanings. This book has some very beguiling nature writing and some great tributes to those who have explored this terrain before. It is a reaction to those who have said that there is an end to our idea of nature and that there is no wilderness left. Mark takes the readers to different locales for experiences in the wild and the questions he seeks to answer. Some of the places visited include Point Reyes National Seashore, Alaska, the Cascades, Yosemite, the Gila Wilderness, and Colorado. As we read, we become accustomed to thinking differently about wolves, Native Americans, national park land, and back packing experiences.

There are wonderful nature writing and profound arguments in this book, but not everybody will agree with the idea that we should treat the earth as a garden. Wilderness, as areas left fallow, seems a bit of a stretch. The idea that nothing is really pristine anymore and thus, there is no wilderness left, goes unchallenged. Things may no longer be pristine due to climate change, but it is also a question of degree and that does not necessarily mean they are fully under our control. We also can leave things wild, out of our control, or semi-wild if we choose. Many times, we do not have a choice. The new dire effects of climate change, those that affect us directly, may be the results of a new, angrier and annoyed Mother Nature who is trying to teach us a lesson. Using some meanings of the word, it is clear that we have evolved out of nature and the wild.

Mark seeks to address the end of nature and the loss of wilderness arguments in a contemporary debate, but in so doing, some of the achievements of the past are lost. Nature and the wild are in direct contrast to the technological culture that sometimes helped preserve it and keep it safe for endangered species. Some of these arguments have since been lost in this treatment which seeks to reach a modern consensus with conservationists who could use the word "preservation" more frequently. Preservation stalwarts are likely to dislike the direction the Environmental Movement has gone, but Mark is also an explorer and defender here.

Satellites in the High Country does a great job of giving readers a sense of where some of these questions have gone. It is also written by and about those who are concerned about how we impact wild places. One might like for Mark to have asked more directly what endangered species think about our “ending” of nature and the alteration of wild places.

The book is accessible and profound, but there are no easy or free answers. There is also room here to hold different perspectives and ask unanswered questions. As such, the book will be useful for students and general readers who want to know what is transpiring in this Age of Man. Mark is not a wilderness warrior as attested here, but he does have a perspective that most modern readers will understand. He confirms that the future generation will make the decisions about what direction we should take, but hopefully they will have heard from environmentalists and environmental educators first.

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