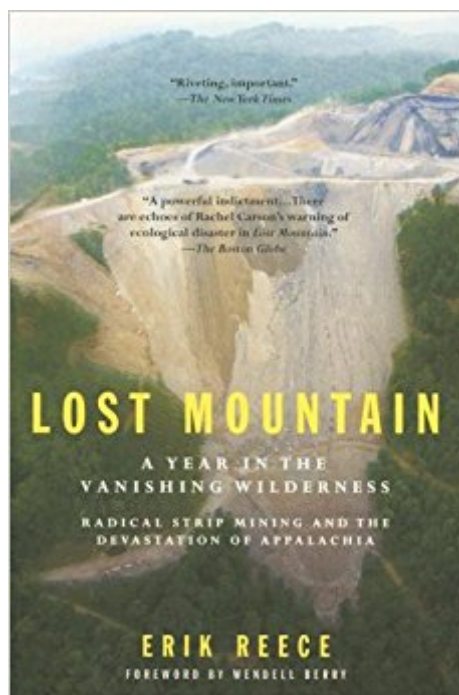




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Lost Mountain: A Year In The Vanishing Wilderness Radical Strip Mining And The Devastation Of Appalachia



Synopsis

A new form of strip mining has caused a state of emergency for the Appalachian wilderness and the communities that depend on it—a crisis compounded by issues of government neglect, corporate hubris, and class conflict. In this powerful call to arms, Erik Reece chronicles the year he spent witnessing the systematic decimation of a single mountain and offers a landmark defense of a national treasure threatened with extinction.

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Customer Reviews

Erik Reece was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and teaches English and writing at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. His work appears in *Harper's* and the *Oxford American*, among other places.

“Why are we as Americans so stubbornly immune to understanding the world as something miraculous, as something imbued with spirit, as something worth preserving?” (Reece 2006, p. 221). Erik Reece, the author of *Lost Mountain* *A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness: Radical Strip Mining and the Destruction of Appalachia*, chronicles a year that he spent witnessing the destruction of a single mountain in the Appalachian wilderness. Erik Reece teaches writing at the University of Kentucky. Reece delves into the consequences of strip mining on the environment and on the communities in the region. The book is written in a journal-like format that explores the role of culture in science and how that can have a profound effect on the way society views the natural world. Reece seeks to highlight the

value of the environment in a spiritual context and not in a scientific one. By doing that, Reece hopes to change the individuals' attitude and maybe then the attitude of society. While Reece includes an element of poetry in the book as well as first hand knowledge of Appalachian strip mining, the book is often hard to follow and Reece is very judgmental of U.S. culture and of opinions that don't align with his own. *Lost Mountain* was published in 2006, ten years ago, and a lot of has changed since. This may have been a fairly good representation of strip mining in Appalachia in 2006, however the passing of time should also be taken into account, as the subject is an ever-evolving industry. Reece spent a whole year, from September 2003 to September 2004, watching one mountain in Kentucky as it was destroyed for the purpose of extracting coal. He hiked to the summit many times and explored as he made his way up and down. As Reece accounts the events he witnessed over the year he also touches on the subjects of corruption in the coal industry as well as in the government. Reece explains that everyone has an agenda and very few people are interested in protecting the land, which is the richest ecosystem North America (Reece 2006, p. 4). The Appalachian Mountains are part of the temperate broadleaf and mixed forest biome, a point Reece uses to support that this region has high species richness. Biomes are largely categorized by vegetation and this region is home to nearly 80 different tree species and hosts a large selection of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Reece claims that coal mining companies that engage in radical strip mining like mountaintop removal are threatening this diversity. Mountaintop removal is the process of literally removing ridges and summits, usually with explosives, and then dumping the debris into stream streams and valleys in order to expose the coal underneath. The theory of Island Biogeography was also introduced in the book as a way of explaining the need to protect Appalachia. Island biogeography was the topic of a study aimed at establishing and explaining the factors that affect species diversity. The study found that an island that is more isolated will have a decrease in the number of species. The study also found that as the size of an island increases so does the number of species. What makes this so important is that this theory can be applied to more than just literal islands but to habitats in general, like the Appalachian Mountains. Radical strip mining creates small isolated habitats, which has very negative consequences for species richness. This theory is also a huge key to conservation biogeography and could have positive implications for the region. Essentially this book is meant to expose the ugly truth about coal mining and draw an emotional and personal response from the reader. While the book certainly does this it also has its flaws. *Lost Mountain* is written like a journal with each chapter being a different date. This allows Reece to give the book a more poetic style and achieve his goal of incorporating a spiritual element into it. The

book is organized in chronological order, which sounds very effective, but each chapter has a different topic. This makes it difficult to connect the author's main argument to the body of the book. Throughout the chapters Reece introduces various theories to reader but it's difficult to understand them within the larger context of the book when they are only mentioned in passing. Reece is trying to show the spiritual side of the environment but the scientific evidence needed to make his point is lacking support and explanation, leading the reader to question his credibility. Not only is this book unorganized but, the author is very judgmental of U.S. culture and of opinions that don't align with his own. "Material gain, speed, and convenience are the most dominant forces within this country, and they have done much to crush the spiritual, ethical, and aesthetic elements of our nature" (Reece 2006, p. 232). Reece even goes so far as to say that Americans would rather spend their time in a shopping mall than outside in nature (Reece 2006, p. 220). While his point, that the values of the country are increasingly aligned with consumer culture, may be true not everyone values the things money can buy. Reece also fails to mention opinions or data that go against his argument. Including both sides of an argument increases credibility and exposes to the reader to all sides of an issue. The coal industry provides job and contributes to the economy but neither of these aspects were included in the book. The author, Erik Reece, has first hand experience with strip mining in Appalachia and his call to the individual is beautifully expressed: "Individualism is the right to passively consume in pursuit of happiness based on convenience; individuality is a more creative attempt to invent oneself and one's life based not on commercial influences but on a more direct, intuitive combination of knowledge, passion, and responsibility. To me, that is really the crux of our American dilemma" (Reece 2006, p. 231). Reece wants to change the way the individual views the environment and then change the way society views it with the hope that, that will help stop the destructive behavior that has no respect for nature. While Reece writes and describes portions quite eloquently the book is often hard to follow and very judgmental of U.S. culture and of opinions that don't align with his own. This book is a good read and would be excellent for individuals seeking further knowledge on the topic but *Lost Mountain* was published in 2006, ten years ago, and a lot of has changed since. The coal industry can change very quickly but this book still shows a very important view of Appalachia and the consequences of radical strip mining. Overall I would recommend this book because at the very least it makes one consider the greater world around them.

Reece puts you right there on a mountain before, during, and after it has been demolished for all

time. He lets you in on conversations with people on both sides of the issue of mountaintop removal coal mining. *Lost Mountain* is well written, and I think it would be fascinating to anyone who loves planet Earth, our beloved mountains, and all the plants and wildlife who live there. Another reviewer of this book, a professional in the industry, makes some good points, but just doesn't get it when it comes to "property rights". Read this book and decide for yourself how you feel about permanently trading our ancient Appalachian mountains for corporate profits and a few temporary jobs.

This book was articulate and well researched. It piqued my interest in issues relevant to the Appalachians where I have recently moved.

Erik Reece's "*Lost Mountain*" is a metaphor as well as the actual name of a mountain. This is his story for a year in eastern Kentucky as the mountain "is removed." This is not just another tale of woe about Big Coal, about coal mining or about mining in general. Reece knows that mining is here to stay, whether it is coal, copper, iron, nickel or bauxite. The focus here is on a special type of mining: mountaintop removal and valley fills. This type of mining came into being in the early 1990's when massive, powerful equipment and the technology to support it made this type of mining possible. This type of mining has the capability to destroy the topography of planet Earth. Our descendants, hundreds and thousands of years from now will still be living with the effects of mountain top removal and valley fills. The fact that the central and southern Appalachian Mountains are for now, the mountain range most affected by this type of mining holds a special irony. The Appalachians are one of the oldest mountain ranges on earth. The mix of flora and fauna has evolved over a long period of time. A rich mix of species includes more species of salamander, more species of bats, birds, butterflies, fish than any other place in the United States. Mountain top removal and valley fills destroy the land. Trees and vegetation get stripped and removed. The rich, layered soil gets dumped, along with broken-up rock into ravines and valleys where it blocks springs, intermittent streams, vernal pools and bogs. Watersheds and drainage patterns are destroyed. The complex ecological structure that took so long to evolve and which provides different ecological niches that support many different species can be destroyed after a day of mountain top removal. It will take centuries and millenia for land so damaged to emerge. Until then, only the very roughest species of flora and fauna can tolerate such poor conditions, a much-narrowed spectrum of life-forms. Read Erik Reece's book and get mad. And then do something about it. This type of mining needs to be stopped.

Perfect condition.

after reading this book, i can only assume that the corruption of the BUSH, the first one and the second one have not regard for human life, yet they fought so hard against abortion. devatation in this area is COMPLETED. poor people have no choices left, no where to go to fight CITY HALL. scary if you happen to be unlucky enough to live there. what was a beautiful place is a horror now. read the book and find out about it/.

excellent education about what is REALLY being done to our mountains nd the people who live there ! A Must read for anyone on the planet who cares about our future !

Read this for a business class - pretty sad really - does a good job to describe the destruction and ecological damage being perpetrated to extract coal in Appalachia.

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