



The Height of Our Mountains: Nature Writing from Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley

Michael P. Branch, Daniel J. Philippon

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This is an anthology of nearly four centuries of nature writing about one of America's premier regions—the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Beginning with Captain John Smith's eager gaze westward in search of gold and ending with contemporary essayist John Daniel's transformative gaze inward in search of wilderness, *The Height of our Mountains* features the work of seventy of the nation's finest writers on nature, from 1607 to 1997.

Responding to Thomas Jefferson's claim in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that "the height of our mountains has not yet been estimated with any degree of exactness," Branch and Philippon have gathered a diverse collection of written perspectives on the region in an effort to "measure" the remarkable richness of this landscape through a variety of literary forms and styles.

The result is a wide-ranging survey that includes the colonial narratives of William Byrd and George Washington, as well as the natural histories of John Bartram and John James Audubon; the travel narratives of King Louis Philippe of France and the diaries and memoirs of Cornelia Peake McDonald, Walt Whitman, and John Burroughs; works of fiction by Edgar Allen Poe and Willa Cather; speeches by James Madison, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin Roosevelt; and contemporary writings by Donald Culcross Peattie, Edwin Way Teale, Roger Tory Peterson, Annie Dillard, Donald McCaig, Peter Svenson, and Jake Page.

The book contains a lengthy and detailed introduction on the character and form of nature writing, the concepts of place and bioregionalism, and the literary natural history of the Blue Ridge country itself. Ample notes, beautiful illustrations and maps, and a lengthy bibliography make this book a lasting treasure.

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