
Corey Lee Lewis. *Reading the Trail: Exploring the Literature and Natural History of the California Crest*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005. 241p.

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Throughout her life and writing career, Mary Hunter Austin sought to redefine beauty and assist her reader in seeing beauty in the Southern Californian desert. Her efforts were instrumental in ushering in a whole new perception of the natural environment and how to make meaning of the American landscape. Continuing the critical project started at the beginning of the 20th century, Corey Lee Lewis' *Reading the Trail* seeks to connect conversation with place to illustrate how environmental literature can impact both experiential education and environmental education curricula.

Stemming from his doctoral dissertation at University of Nevada, Reno, in the Literature and Environment program, Lewis' work reads like a walk with a wise friend. His take-the-reader-by-the-hand prose is not only academic, but is accessible to those of non-literary backgrounds. *Reading the Trail* is intended to draw attention to the intersections between literature, culture, and the environment with place-based explorations in the construction of literary-based environmental studies courses.

Lewis articulates the lack of ecocritical discourse in both the academy and politics, and suggests that Americans are largely ignorant of ecological issues and values due in part to the absence of environmental explorations and values in both the educational curricula and political controversy. Seeking to reverse this trend, he suggests that positioning schools and universities as the leveraging point for social change by incorporating environmental values into the educational curriculum in effect will cause a greater level of awareness among academics and the public. He contends that the humanities must be drawn into environmental studies to assist in the recognition of a meaningful change in attitudes and perceptions of the natural environment.

Connecting his personal experiences constructing and hiking California's section of the Pacific Crest Trail to the environmentally conscious writings of Mary Hunter Austin, John Muir, and Gary Snyder, Lewis suggests that environmental literature should be read in relation or proximity to the place that is being represented or rendered. His observations provide insight into field methods and how literature can assist in developing an environmentally conscious individual. Lewis looks closely at each writer as individual case studies of how environmental education can function with literature included as a vital component. Through his study, he furthers

the notion that the relationship between humans and the environment may be renegotiated through a complex examination and reexamination of the meaning of aesthetics and beauty.

Like a hiker with pack setting out on the trail, Lewis shoulders much of the responsibility of redefining the way Americans look at and make meaning of the natural world. But also filling the boots of the writer, teacher, and ecocritic, he invites others to join in along the way. ✱