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About the Editors .............................................................................................. 444
In my veins courses the blood of John Muir. The famous conservationist was my great-great-grandfather. In 1906 his daughter Wanda married Thomas Hanna, my great-grandfather.

Along with the blood of the Muir family, the Hanna family, and the blood of California, the spirit of the Sierra Nevada also exists in my heart. It is part of my legacy, our legacy, of the mighty mountain range about which my great-great-grandfather spoke and wrote with such eloquence that his words live on—now for more than one hundred years.

In my family’s possession is a crystal inkwell used by John Muir in his writing quarters. This is the inkwell he used when writing most of the words that helped shine light on his favorite place in the world—the magnificent Sierra Nevada. When I hold his inkwell in my hands and feel its glassy smoothness, its cold, inanimate contents, I can’t help but think of how Muir turned lifeless ink into multidimensional stories and palpable visions of experiences in his beloved mountains. These include an encounter with a Sierra bear, windstorms while riding atop a tall Douglas fir, and glacier hikes in Alaska with the wee dog Stickeen. His words released a flood of memories and brought to life the fondness and passion that so many of us have also experienced in wilderness yet find so hard to express.

My affiliations to John Muir were downplayed in my youth, but I came to know more about Mr. Muir later in my life. I’d thought that...
our family's cabin, nestled in a remote glacial gorge along the Sierra's steep eastern slope, was simply an expression of domestic frugality—no modern conveniences by design, no waste of resources, and no need for contemporary contrivances. But I learned that this old cabin was an extension of Muir himself. Purposely spartan, it was to be a refuge for the family, a method for getting away from the city. My Uncle Tim encouraged me to look around. He said that here on the mountaintop we would never be closer to God than at that very moment. My visits to nearby Yosemite were filled with visions of the awe and majesty of the mountains, but I remember only peaceful, calming feelings from these childhood outings. Such intimate experiences with nature connected me with the Muir in my blood, even though I didn’t know it then.

Through gatherings at various colleges and institutes, I have thoroughly enjoyed becoming reconnected to the passion that this man had for the Sierra—and for all wild things and wild places. I’ve attended scores of celebrations, anniversaries, and events recognizing the famous mountaineer, and over time I’ve endeavored to learn more about the man and his tireless efforts to promote wilderness preservation. I have begun to feel the passion and the purpose that he had for defending countless creatures and wild places that desperately needed protection and yet had no voice.

Not long ago I participated in a semester-long class at Sierra College in which Muir’s “Range of Light” was the center of attention. It was an interdisciplinary course on the Sierra Nevada, led by professors Joe Medeiros and Gary Noy, and they invited us to examine, from myriad perspectives, this massive bioregion and all that it represented to the millions who used it, lived in it, worked in it, and loved it. We discussed the Sierra’s natural history, its human history, how the range has been interpreted, and how it has been misused, as well as how to conserve it and keep it healthy for future generations. The Sierra College class helped me reawaken and nourish those stubborn Scottish blood cells flowing through my veins, and reconnect with a legacy that my great-great-grandfather started.

In the pages that follow are the stories and observations of writers who, like Muir, have been transfixed by the Sierra Nevada. The scope of the writings is as breathtaking as the range itself. From their voices we hear of the profound connection of customs and landscape. We consider the extraordinary transformation that occurs with the arrival of European culture and the overwhelming impact of the California Gold Rush. We read beautiful descriptions of the Sierra along with
concerns about its future. We experience heart-pounding adventure and tragedy. We see how this remarkable environment can influence our perspective, both physical and emotional. We encounter the power of the written word to enhance the splendor of a spectacular geography and of our understanding of ourselves.

This varied collection, so thoroughly exploring the history, culture, natural landscape, and issues confronting the Sierra Nevada, comes at a critical moment. My great-great-grandfather’s beloved Range of Light is threatened even more than in days gone by. Rapid population growth and unchecked development apply increased pressure on the limited resources. Our understanding (or, perhaps more accurately, our misunderstanding) of forests and forest health remain as contentious as ever. The specter of climate change looms large, fueling worrisome speculation for the future of the snowpack upon which many millions are dependent for our ever-growing thirst for water. It seems the very character of the Sierra Nevada is in danger. This collection reminds us of the remarkable appeal and value of the Sierra Nevada, and what can be lost if we do not act.

Just as Muir’s impassioned writings inspired early efforts to use the land wisely, so too are new generations of writers inspiring, energizing, and challenging us with their words. Each of these authors has unique talents, but they share the same essence. Everyone has a voice. Everyone can make a difference. Any individual has the power to become a John Muir. The spirit is within each of us, waiting to be set free. It is a special place, as he said, where one can “climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.”
Everything has a beginning. For the Sierra Nevada, the genesis is found in the place itself—a 25,000-square-mile wondrous construction with granite cliffs as walls, wildflowers as carpet, and a star-studded sky as the ceiling.

From the largest tree to the tiniest insect, the mountain range exhibits the vast spectrum of life and the processes that influence existence. Sculpted granite, roaring cascades, towering forests, wildflower-draped meadows, thunderous storms, thousands of windswept crystalline lakes and streams, all of this inhabits the region and haunts our dreams. It is a land browsed by mule deer and bighorn sheep, roamed by the mountain lion, guarded by the golden eagle, and enchanted by the flash of a rainbow trout. Yet we can only appreciate this beauty, this complexity, this interdependence with the aid of the range’s extraordinary quality of light.

This special light is unique to the Sierra Nevada. It is a light that envelops the trees, the peaks, and the creatures, bathing each subtle texture with a warm glow and creating a splendid illuminated landscape. As John Muir rhapsodized in his classic 1912 book The Yosemite, “It seemed to me that the Sierra should be called, not the Nevada or Snowy Range, but the Range of Light. And after ten years of wandering and wondering in the heart of it, rejoicing in its glorious floods of light, the white beams of the morning streaming through the passes, the noonday radiance on the crystal rocks, the flush of the alpenglow, and the irised spray of countless waterfalls, it still seems above all others the Range of Light.” These words still ring true today, as anyone who has encountered this phenomenon can attest.
From the beginning, the Sierra Nevada has inspired artists. Whether one’s discovery was eons ago or just yesterday, the remarkable diversity and breathtaking majesty of the range captivates the imagination and stirs the soul. The powerful conjunction of the ageless splendor of its landforms, the continual metamorphosis of its human agents of change, and the startling variety of the Sierra Nevada natural world are endless creative resources for the camera, the brush, and the pen. The vitality and grandeur of the Sierra Nevada offers no greater palette for the muse.

The narrative of the Sierra Nevada is a study in contrasts. Equal parts heroic effort and tragic consequence, it is a legacy of golden dreams and shattered hopes, feverish exploitation and hard-won preservation. It is an account of constant commemoration and the promise of a clean slate. It is a heritage of celebrated racial diversity and shameful discrimination.

A major theme of Sierra Nevada history is invention and re-invention in a land apart. In short, it is a story as old as the sunset and as new as the dawn—the eternal human drama enacted on a monumental stage.

In this anthology we present accounts of the remarkable Sierra Nevada experience. From the origin myths and social rituals of the first inhabitants, to the first impressions and dreams of those who would later dominate, to the breathless and frequently moving descriptions of both visitors and settlers, to the often sad transitions that mark cultural change, the Sierra Nevada story unfolds. And it is with this origin that we realize an immutable truth: the Sierra Nevada illuminates our existence. It shines a light on majestic stretches of unmatched beauty, but also on an understanding of our place in the world.

The readings collected here show remarkable range as well. Reports requiring copious scientific detail stand beside gentle poetic lyricism, and the voices of men, women, the young, the old, the outsider, the native, the victim, and the victimizer are all heard. We are honored that three authors—Joe Medeiros, Maria Melendez, and Jordan Fisher Smith—have written works especially for this anthology. There are words of inner turmoil and grandiose claims, of personal doubt and cultural exultation, of heartfelt rejoicing and bewildered resignation, of the struggle to survive and the will to understand, and of wonderment and worry. These are the thoughts of people grappling with a new reality and struggling to make sense of the situation. These are bulletins from
the heart and mind, sometimes bracketed with wrenching uneasiness in the gut.

The geography presented in *The Illuminated Landscape* encompasses the entire Sierra Nevada region. The Sierra Nevada is one mountain range, 430 miles long and 40 to 80 miles wide. The anthology embraces not only the majestic granite spine of the range but its western foothills and eastern escarpment as well. California’s Gold Country or Mother Lode, as part of this same bioregion, is another important part of the book. We also include neighboring areas, such as the high desert stretches of eastern California and western Nevada.

As with any anthology, the selection process was a difficult one. There are so many possibilities, and making the ultimate decision as to what should be included was daunting. As a result, one of your favorite excerpts may be missing; the good news is that it can always be added to another edition of this compilation.

It is our wish that this collection will serve as a record of the awe that this magnificent range has inspired. But we also hope that it will serve as a reminder that the Sierra Nevada is a living organism that is constantly beset by environmental and social challenges. A goal of this anthology is to raise awareness of this spectacular setting and to create an appreciation of what is at risk in the Sierra Nevada today. Since the dawn of history, the Range of Light has provided important resources and an invaluable refuge for our spirits. As the sanctuary comes under attack—whether from population pressures, climate change, or some other danger—we have a responsibility to protect this breathtaking mountain cathedral. The stakes are high and the road will require thoughtful planning and complete dedication, but if we succeed, the reward will be profound: the Sierra Nevada will remain the extraordinary illuminated landscape for generations to come.

Let’s head on up the trail.

Gary Noy
Rick Heide
The Illuminated Landscape: A Sierra Nevada Anthology

“This anthology of Sierra writings stands tall.” -- Sam McManis, Sacramento Bee

“The Illuminated Landscape: A Sierra Nevada Anthology brings together the best literature about our own back yard....As a primer, reference or call to preservation, depending on the reader’s perspective, The Illuminated Landscape delivers up history with a look ahead to a future Sierra.” -- Pamela Biery, Sacramento News and Review

Perhaps because California holds so many fascinating stories and natural wonders, the physical and cultural landscapes of our Sierra Nevada rarely receive the focused attention they deserve. But thanks to this inspired collection of readings, readers can rediscover the wonders of these mountains as well as the very human stories embedded in them. Historians Noy and Heide undertook this project with characteristic care, intelligence, and enthusiasm, and they don’t disappoint. Gathered here are not only some familiar Sierra chroniclers—James Hutchings, Dame Shirley, Bret Harte, John Muir, Ansel Adams, Gary Snyder—but also voices that illuminate the breadth of human experiences with the “range of light”—Jack Stewart, Ramon Gil Navarro, Maxine Hong Kingston. Reading this collection is to be reminded that the landscapes of the Sierra have awed, nurtured, terrified, enriched, beguiled, and inspired millions, denizens and visitors alike. Care must be taken that they will continue to do so for future generations. Thanks to the editors and Heyday Books, the Sierra Nevada is newly illuminated for all.

-- Dr. Patrick Ettinger,
Associate Professor, Department of History, California State University, Sacramento

This is a remarkable anthology, taking the reader chronologically from the dawn of time when Yokuts, Washo and the Maidu’s passed on their first memories of their respective worlds to environmental issues of today. The most celebrated writing about California’s Sierra Nevada by scientists, journalists, diarists, artists, poets, and popular writers is compressed into this neat tome. Familiar authors such as Sarah Royce, Bret Harte, Louise Clappe (Dame Shirley), and John Muir are paired with other less well known voices by romantics and realists who have gone to the mountains and returned, putting their stories and impressions into print. Carefully chosen by the editors, the entries will serve the serious student of history, literature and the environment, as well as the general public interested in an overview of this most unique geographical region within the state. Truly interdisciplinary, this book belongs on every bookshelf of the best-of-the-best of Californiana.

-- Dr. William R. Swagerty,
Director, John Muir Center, University of the Pacific
California is a composite of several distinct locales, none more remarkable than the Sierra Nevada, the state’s spine. On the sublime peaks or in the secret canyons of the Sierra, in the luminosity its alpine afternoons or in the star-fogged clarity of its nights, people are moved to not only examine what great nature has created, but also to gaze inward at their own natures. The writers in this excellent collection move in both directions and capture not only the beauty but also the wisdom offered by these mountains, what they evoke in us. The traditional Yokuts chant acknowledged, "My words are tied in one with the great mountains/ With the great rocks/ With the great trees...." The selections in this fine collection demonstrate the universality of that ancient prayer.

-- Gerald Haslam,
best-selling author of Coming of Age in California and Workin’ Man Blues

Brilliantly assembled and introduced, this first anthology of Sierra Nevada writings stands as a landmark publication. Native Americans, explorers, missionaries, gold seekers, governors, mountain climbers, naturalists, environmentalists, essayists, and poets are all represented with their powerful descriptions and compelling insights into California’s grand and glorious mountain range.

-- Gary F. Kurutz,
Author, Bibliographer and Curator of Special Collections,
California State Library.

It is indeed challenging to tell the story of the Sierra Nevada through the written word. However, The Illuminated Landscape does so with a remarkable diversity of perspective, nearly equal to the biological diversity of the place itself.

This mountain range is a magnificent place. Whether you discovered it through a firsthand visit, the words of Muir or the lens of Adams, for most us this place leaves an indelible mark. Its beauty, its majesty, its remarkable terrain inspires awe.

Beyond its beauty, the Sierra Nevada provides nearly two-thirds of the state’s water. It is home to hundreds of plant and animal species, not to mention more than 600,000 human residents. It is one our state’s most prized areas to recreate, vacation and to find solace.

For those of us with an “official” responsibility to protect and steward this place, the duty is both sobering and inspiring. Today, the region deals with its latest set of challenges – catastrophic fire, climate change, economic sustainability and population growth to name a few. Underlying these challenges is the clear urban/rural divide that exists in California and affects public policy and investment. Most Californians have not had the chance to visit the Sierra and witness the “light” for themselves. Despite the fact that millions of our residents rely on the Sierra for their water, most have no connection to the source of their lifeblood.
The Illuminated Landscape provides us an important opportunity to take the time to reflect on this magnificent place and why it matters so much to us. It carries an important message to Sierra Nevadans and all Californians – this range is very special and we dare not fail to act to protect and sustain into the future. Enjoy.

-- Jim Branham,
Chief Executive Officer, Sierra Nevada Conservancy

This anthology looms large on the horizon for those who want to learn about, enjoy and experience the Sierra Nevada. A truly terrific collection.

-- David Guy,
Chief Executive Officer, Yosemite Association

Editors Gary Noy and Rick Heide invite us to head on up the trail, into the vastness of the Sierra Nevada, illuminated by the words of generations who have found resource and refuge in this magnificent mountain range. Beginning with tales of the first inhabitants The Illuminated Landscape guides us through the continuing story of how we humans are grappling with the environmental, economic, geographic and cultural forces that shape the Sierra. We join in the hope that generations to come will be able to hike along a high Sierra ridge and lean on an old juniper tree to feel its power.

---jesikah maria ross and Catherine Stifter, co-directors of the regional media project Saving the Sierra: Voices of Conservation in Action, found at SavingTheSierra.org.

jesikah maria ross is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and Director of The Art of Regional Change, a program of the UC Davis Humanities Institute. Catherine Stifter is a two-time Peabody Award recipient.

The Illuminated Landscape is a connection with elders, explorers, stewards, historians, artists, residents and travelers, all of whom have been transformed by the Sierra Nevada. The selection of writings cut across generations, cultures, and economic groups and stimulates appreciation of how these mountains have changed our own lives. Our relationship to the Sierra changes with time and culture but threads of all the past experiences still resonate inside us. This book records and explicates those experiences. By exploring the depth and richness of this work we are both inspired and informed to face the conservation or preservation challenges of today and to more deeply appreciate our own connection to the Range of Light.

-- John Muir Laws,
author of The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada and Sierra Birds
The essays, poetry, and stories presented in The Illuminated Landscape encompass the entire Sierra Nevada experience: an ancient Yokuts Indian creation myth, vignettes of life in mining camps, a curious deer taking a stroll through Beetle Rock, the impact of a simple camping trip, the solace found by a family held in an internment camp, and an attempt to climb Matterhorn Peak.

Excerpts from well-known writers as well as original works from local authors combine to reveal the beauty of the Sierra and how important the “Range of Light” has become to our cultural psyche as an irreplaceable refuge for our spirits.

Authors

Ansel Adams
Isabel Allende
Mary Austin
T. Coraghessan Boyle
David Brower
Dame Shirley
John C. Frémont
Horace Greeley
Bret Harte
James D. Houston
Jack Kerouac
Maxine Hong Kingston

Tom Knudson
Jack London
John Muir
Chiura Obata
Ishmael Reed
Gary Snyder
Wallace Stegner
Robert Louis Stevenson
Henry David Thoreau
Mark Twain
Walt Whitman
and more...

“This is a remarkable anthology, taking the reader chronologically from the dawn of time to environmental issues of today. This book belongs on every bookshelf of the best-of-the-best of Californiana.”

— W. R. Swagerty, Director, John Muir Center, University of the Pacific

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