

Review: *Uncertain Path: A Search for the Future of National Parks*

By William C. Tweed

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Tweed, William C. *Uncertain Path: A Search for the Future of National Parks*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. ix, 236 pp. ISBN: 9780520265578. US\$55, hardbound. Recycled paper.

In *Uncertain Path*, William Tweed provides both an historical perspective of the National Park Service as well as a vivid description of his journey along the John Muir and High Sierra Trails in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Before retiring, Tweed was the Chief Park Naturalist at Sequoia and Kings National Parks which makes him an expert on these trails and the history of the National Park Service. *Uncertain Path* is best described as one part history and one part memoir. The book is broken down into four parts: "South from Yosemite," "Kings Canyon National Park," "Sequoia National Park," and "National Parks in the Twenty-first Century." Throughout these chapters, Tweed reflects on the original purpose of America's National Parks and their future in the twenty-first century. To better answer his query, Tweed decides to reconnect with nature in his old stomping ground, the Sierra Nevada. Tweed states, "My quest would be to see if I could make sense of traditional national parks and wilderness in a twenty-first-century context" (p. 4).

An avid outdoorsman, Tweed has been hiking the High Sierra Trails for years. His role in the National Park Service gives him an authoritative voice when he discusses the changes in American's use of national parks. Tweed reminisces about the popularity of the national parks during the seventies and the subsequent changes in the use of these parks. Later, Tweed laments our high-tech addicted youths' alienation from nature: "In my last years working . . . I began to see children watching television in the back of the car as their families toured the national parks. Apparently, neither parents nor children saw any reason why the young folk should even look out the window" (p. 175). With our changing American culture, Tweed ponders the future of the national parks being placed in ". . . the hands of generations who hold very different visions of what is important about wilderness" (p. 115).

Having been a visitor of the Sierra Nevada for years, Tweed vividly describes the vistas along the trails. Throughout his hike, Tweed notes the biological changes he has seen over the years. This ecological shift prompts Tweed to discuss the effects of climate change on the parks which emerges as one of the major themes of the book. Tweed states, "Sierra glaciers are melting; spring snowmelt occurs earlier than a generation ago; and the distributions of many plants and animals are shifting upward. A new era is beginning for all the organisms that live in the Sierra Nevada" (p. 139). The future of national parks is based not only on recreational use, but also the effects of climate change. Unfortunately, climate change is not something park managers can control. However, its effects are altering the forest's ecosystem. At the conclusion of his journey, Tweed concludes that the national parks need to change in order to stay relevant in the evolving world.

Recommendation: *Uncertain Path* is both an historical perspective of the National Park Service as well as a vivid exploration of the beauty of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. *Uncertain Path* would not only be an excellent library choice as a resource on the Sierra Nevada, but also it would be an exceptional resource on the National Park Service and its future. Recommended for libraries collecting resources on the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range or readers interested in the future of the national parks.

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