

A Thousand Trails Home: Living with Caribou

Seth Kantner

Mountaineers Books (Sep 1, 2021)

Hardcover \$28.95 (320pp)

978-1-59485-970-0

A Thousand Trails Home mixes lush nature writing, evocations of a lifetime of hunting and living off of the land, and a portrait of Alaska's unique culture and history. At the center of it all are caribou, the life-sustaining herds that mark the land in both literal and metaphorical ways with the tracery of their ancient trails.

Seth Kantner has seen huge changes in climate and technology during his lifetime; he switches from the past to the present well, developing portraits of his human and animal neighbors. Sharp, fond essays and landscape photographs move from his childhood in a sod igloo into present-day battles over wildlife management, Indigenous rights, and resource extraction. Cozy reminiscences contrast with descriptions of "Rambo hunting," as snowmobiles and semi-automatic weapons replace dog sleds and .22 rifles. Kantner worries about the future of the caribou populations, though he also shares his disgust with wildlife biologists and federal land managers that treat animals in insensitive ways.

The seasonal chapters flow from the harvest's hunting and rutting into intense "cold that pinches like pliers," lush vernal growth, and the counterintuitively harshest season: summer, with its relentless sun and mosquitoes. This is not a book for the squeamish: its lyrical descriptions of natural beauty are punctuated by scenes of field-butcherings, orphaned calves, and nauseating insect larva plaguing caribou innards. Alaska and its caribou are shown to be threatened by accelerated warming, as plants and wildlife become more out of sync with various environmental cycles. The caribou's predictable migration is in upheaval, and Kantner mourns the "feeling of safety and providence," as well as the traditional relationship to the land that caribou represent.

A Thousand Trails Home is a labor of love that advocates for more balanced ways of treating caribou and protecting the amazing Alaskan wilderness.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.