

Cougars on the Cliff: One Man's Pioneering Quest to Understand the Mythical Mountain Lion

Maurice Hornocker

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Maurice Hornocker's exciting memoir covers his long quest to understand and protect Idaho's apex predator—the elusive cougar.

Based on his years of groundbreaking field studies and research for his doctoral dissertation, this book comes at a time when cougars are making a near miraculous recovery due to greater understanding of the animal's essential role in the ecosystem. Hornocker's own history with cougars goes back to the 1960s, when, to complete his research, he had to slog up and down mountainsides and through forests, facing avalanches, landslides, and changing weather. Indeed, when asked about the dangers involved in tracking cougars through central Idaho's rugged wilderness, Hornocker replied "it's not the animals but the country that's more likely to eat you."

Conversational and often humorous, the book is filled with rousing descriptions of what field research used to be like. Hornocker, admitting that technology has made studying elusive species much easier, nonetheless declares that no technology will ever be able to match the primal thrill of locking eyes with a cougar, armed only with a dart gun and tranquilizer. And Hornocker was also challenged by ranchers' beliefs that cougars engaged in savage killing sprees, leaving countless carcasses of livestock and trophy game behind.

Hornocker's studies revealed that cougars were efficient, methodical hunters who took only what they needed to survive, balancing the ecosystem in the process. And his memoir details his political work to protect cougars. It celebrates the fact that, after ten years of study, science prevailed over fear and exaggeration, and cougars were included in a law that protected them from indiscriminate killing.

Cougars on the Cliff is a gripping memoir about a scientist's work to end a state's war on cougars and bring the species back from the brink of extinction.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2023)

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