



Searching for Happy Valley: A Modern Quest for Shangri-La

Jane Marshall

Rocky Mountain Books (Apr 25, 2023)

Softcover \$25.00 (280pp)

978-1-77160-573-1

Jane Marshall's remarkable memoir *Searching for Happy Valley* unveils just what it is that makes a place "happy," showing why the answer is so important for humanity and the planet.

Marshall—feeling a gap within herself, longing to belong, and wanting the land to claim her ("the earth has the capacity to make us right again")—traveled to Happy Valleys in Ait Bougomez, Morocco; Alberta, Canada; and Kyimolung, Nepal. In each place she unearthed beauty, ugliness, joy, and suffering. She touched her own wildness too.

Marshall found common characteristics among the Happy Valleys she encountered: they were in isolated, but not "protected," locations; they were separated, usually by mountains, from the rest of the world and maintained their autonomy; they were inhabited by Indigenous populations in which women had real power; they were home to rare and endangered animals and plants; and they were all vulnerable. And in these places, "removed from the craziness and neuroticism of the materialistic world," Marshall felt deep peace, even when her accommodations consisted of caves or the simple, rough homes of local people.

But life in such places is not easy, Marshall writes; there, "life is naked and raw," and death is a constant companion. Such knowledge demands strength, courage, patience, wisdom, and community. In photographs, Marshall is depicted enjoying her time with old friends and being accepted with open arms by new ones, but also trekking along mountain cliffs with only inches between her and the abyss, where a momentary lapse in mindfulness could mean death.

Searching for Happy Valley covers a gripping personal quest with global ramifications, going into the deepest core of what it means to be a human being on this beautiful, tortured, sacred planet.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2023)

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