

The Hiking Book from Hell

Are Kalvø

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Comedian Are Kalvø's *The Hiking Book from Hell* is a smart, funny, and honest exposé of the cult of the outdoors, from the sublime to the ridiculous.

On the cusp of middle age, Kalvø is worried. His friends have all disappeared, and he's beginning to suspect kidnapping. Upon learning that they're actually all out hiking and skiing in the mountains, the nature-averse, pub-loving Kalvø feels abandoned. He decides to determine why he's the only one who's never posted a selfie from a mountaintop, arms raised toward heaven.

Confessing that he struggles to understand religion, hard drugs, and the outdoor life, Kalvø thinks of his absent friends and wonders if he got outdoor life, at least, wrong. After buying a lot of expensive gear, including the greenest jacket he's ever seen, he heads for the hills.

With its graphic descriptions of arduous zero-visibility hikes up mountainsides to see stunning vistas; communal suppers with everyone in their underwear; the torture endured when "The Happy Wanderer" becomes an earworm; and the "excitement" of listening to "white people talking about their blisters," the book dashes any and all romantic illusions around mountain activities. Kalvø writes that hiking to mountainside cabins with enticing names like "Styggemannshytta" or "Gnatland" is more a punishment than a vacation, consisting, for the most part, of "packing and transport." But nature has a fierce hold on its adherents: veer from the script and dare to ask them if they find it boring, and the whole room falls silent.

The Hiking Book from Hell strips mountain trekking down to its obsessive core, laughing at how ridiculous it can be. But through the laughter, awe for nature's beauty and wonder shines forth.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2022)

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