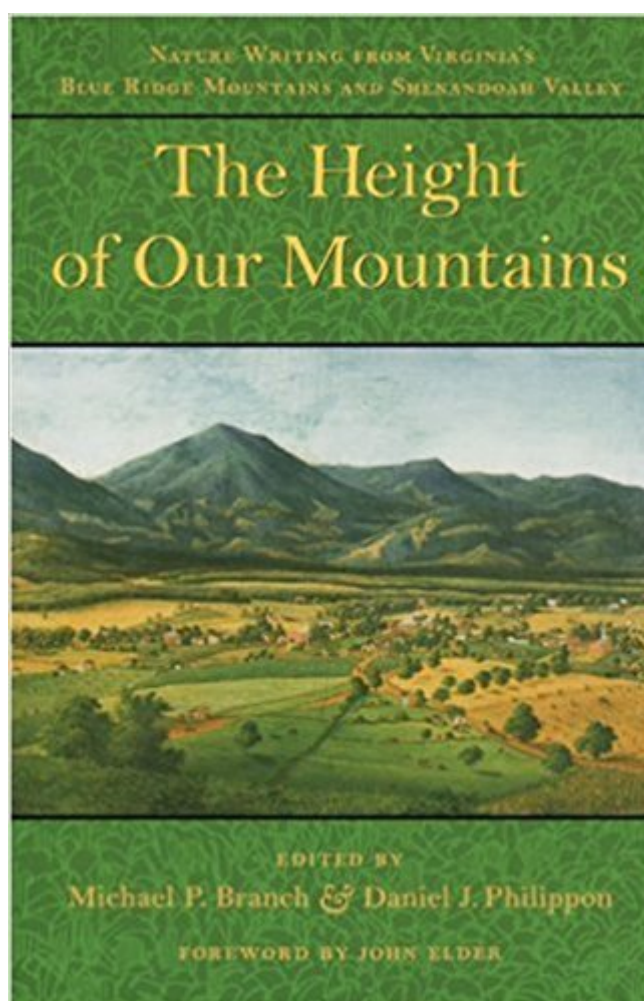


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# The Height Of Our Mountains: Nature Writing From Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains And Shenandoah Valley



## Synopsis

This is an anthology of nearly four centuries of nature writing about one of America's premier regions—the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Beginning with Captain John Smith's eager gaze westward in search of gold and ending with contemporary essayist John Daniel's transformative gaze inward in search of wilderness, *The Height of our Mountains* features the work of seventy of the nation's finest writers on nature, from 1607 to 1997. Responding to Thomas Jefferson's claim in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that "the height of our mountains has not yet been estimated with any degree of exactness," Branch and Philippon have gathered a diverse collection of written perspectives on the region in an effort to "measure" the remarkable richness of this landscape through a variety of literary forms and styles. The result is a wide-ranging survey that includes the colonial narratives of William Byrd and George Washington, as well as the natural histories of John Bartram and John James Audubon; the travel narratives of King Louis Philippe of France and the diaries and memoirs of Cornelia Peake McDonald, Walt Whitman, and John Burroughs; works of fiction by Edgar Allen Poe and Willa Cather; speeches by James Madison, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin Roosevelt; and contemporary writings by Donald Culcross Peattie, Edwin Way Teale, Roger Tory Peterson, Annie Dillard, Donald McCaig, Peter Svenson, and Jake Page. The book contains a lengthy and detailed introduction on the character and form of nature writing, the concepts of place and bioregionalism, and the literary natural history of the Blue Ridge country itself. Ample notes, beautiful illustrations and maps, and a lengthy bibliography make this book a lasting treasure.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A strong sense of place is evoked in this impressive anthology of nature writing from the Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley. Seventy selections drawn from four centuries of writing include excerpts from letters, travel journals, diaries, novels, speeches, government reports, and personal essays that explore the interaction between humans and the natural world." (Library Journal)"All Virginia outdoor enthusiasts have visited the Blue Ridge, and all of them with a taste for reading will want to own *The Height of Our Mountains*." (Old Dominion Sierran)"With its mixture of fiction, personal, and scientific writing, the book has something for everyone... From colonization to contemporary times, the list of writers represented (70 in all) is both impressive and surprising, including Jefferson's former slave Isaac, James Audobon, Walt Whitman, Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, and Annie Dillard." (Blue Ridge Outdoors)"The *Height of Our Mountains* will without a doubt be an extraordinary resource for the residents of the Blue Ridge and Shenandoah Valley, but because of its remarkable inclusiveness and the vividness of its selections, it will also be invaluable for the rest of us, who -- as teachers, writers, citizens, family members, and naturalists -- are striving to identify ourselves more knowingly, joyfully, and faithfully with our own homes in nature." (John Elder, from the foreword)"A convincing demonstration of the cultural richness and power of place over more than three centuries of time." (Lawrence Buell, Harvard University)"This wonderful book is as subtle, varied, and inspiring as the landscape it chronicles. Every page, unfolding the deep changes brought by four hundred years of destruction and rebirth, reveals a new perspective on the mountains and valleys of Virginia. Branch and Philippon weave these words and images together with just the right measure of expertise and passion; we could not ask for better guides." (Edward L. Ayers, University of Virginia)"An astute and critical collection of writings that shows clearly, across time, how a landscape, and the human perception of it, shares in the creation of a region's literature. This is a valuable book in service of a place." (Rick Bass)"This anthology is of real interest to both the naturalist and historian inside all of us... It is fascinating to see the variety of responses to the same region over nearly four centuries." (Stonecrop: A Natural History Book Catalog)"A model of regional nature-writing anthologies." (Virginia Quarterly Review)

"The *Height of Our Mountains* will without a doubt be an extraordinary resource for the residents of the Blue Ridge and Shenandoah Valley, but because of its remarkable inclusiveness and the vividness of its selections, it will also be invaluable for the rest of us, who -- as teachers, writers, citizens, family members, and naturalists -- are striving to identify ourselves more knowingly, joyfully, and faithfully with our own homes in nature." -- John Elder, from the foreword --This text

refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a great book for anyone who is interested in the natural and human history of the Blue Ridge and Shenandoah Valley region. It contains over 70 essays from authors such as John Smith, Thomas Jefferson, John James Audubon to Edwin Way Teale and Annie Dillard, spanning nearly 400 years. The book has a highly informative, if somewhat didactic, introduction (which itself can be read as a brief history of the nature, culture and literature of the region) and many fantastic maps and illustrations. Preceding each essay is a short description of the author and the source of the selection (which I like very much), and there is also a thoroughly researched and meticulously organized bibliographical essay. One can bring it along on a hiking trip in the Blue Ridge and read a few essays on a sunny meadow or a rocky summit, or use it as a portal to the rich literature about this region.

The book's title is a quote from Thomas Jefferson, "The height of our mountains has not yet been estimated . . .". Jefferson's essay is among the 70 reprinted here, from 1612 to 1948. This historical material is fun to read and is a great resource for children and others studying Virginia's history and geography.

A beautiful collection of writings about Virginia. A terrific read. There is something for everyone in this book.

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