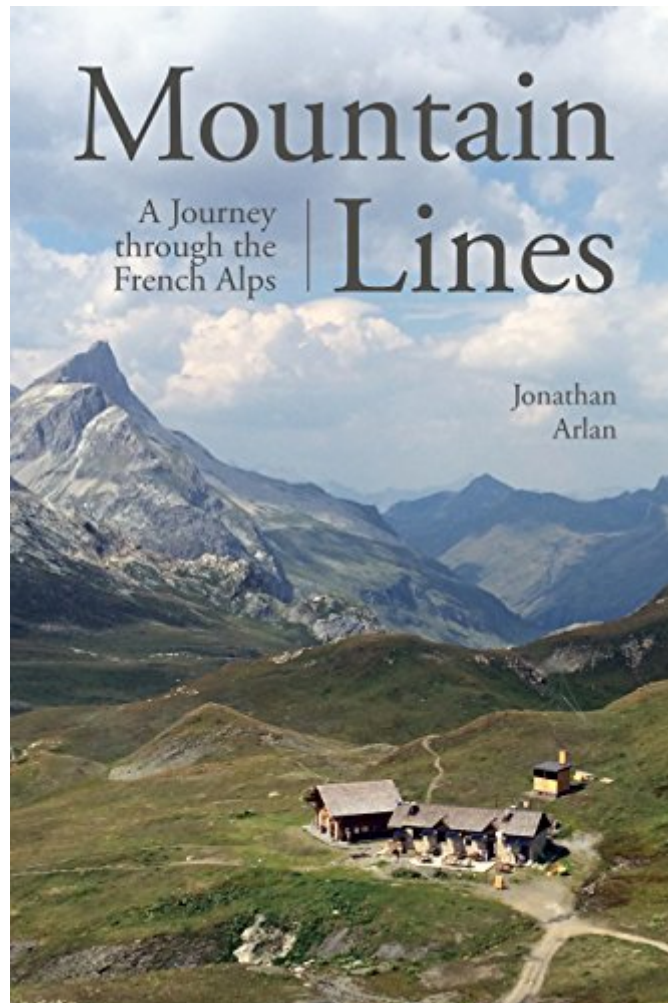




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Mountain Lines: A Journey Through The French Alps



Synopsis

A New York Times best summer travel book recommendation
A nonfiction debut about an American's solo, month-long, 400-mile walk from Lake Geneva to Nice. In the summer of 2015, Jonathan Arlan was nearing thirty. Restless, bored, and daydreaming of adventure, he comes across an image on the Internet one day: a map of the southeast corner of France with a single red line snaking south from Lake Geneva, through the jagged brown and white peaks of the Alps to the Mediterranean sea; a route more than four hundred miles long. He decides then and there to walk the whole trail solo. Lacking any outdoor experience, completely ignorant of mountains, sorely out of shape, and fighting last-minute nerves and bad weather, things get off to a rocky start. But Arlan eventually finds his mountain legs; along with a staggering variety of aches and pains; as he tramps a narrow thread of grass, dirt, and rock between cloud-collared, ice-capped peaks in the High Alps, through ancient hamlets built into hillsides, across sheep-dotted mountain pastures, and over countless cols on his way to the sea. In time, this simple, repetitive act of walking for hours each day in the remote beauty of the mountains becomes as exhilarating as it is exhausting. *Mountain Lines* is the stirring account of a month-long journey on foot through the French Alps and a passionate and intimate book laced with humor, wonder, and curiosity. In the tradition of trekking classics like *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, *The Snow Leopard*, and *Tracks*, the book is a meditation on movement, solitude, adventure, and the magnetic power of the natural world.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a quick but enjoyable read about a young man's trek through the French Alps. Mr. Arlan has a way of writing that keeps you involved and interested in knowing what is going to happen next. His wonderful adventure lets us all experience the interesting people and gorgeous scenery he encountered along the way. He never takes himself too seriously, never less so than when he lets us know how ill-prepared he was for an undertaking such as this. It is all done with humor and good grace.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I thought it was funny and inspiring at the same time. The writing is so descriptive it feels like you are actually on the journey with him.

A deeply honest and inspiring look into one man's personal journey. Arlan's unhurried yet hilarious prose place us walking right next to him.

Written in a style that pleasantly wanders more than it marches towards its conclusion, *Mountain Lines*, not quite a travel memoir, is nevertheless a thought-provoking book, and a testament to the kind of exploration many people dream about but never follow through on. It was easy to relate with Arlan, an amateur hiker undertaking a significant journey, as he is tested both physically and mentally, often struggling to reconcile his idealized plans with the actual reality of a nearly 500 mile trek. *Mountain Lines* resists being bogged down with pseudo-philosophy, focusing instead on the immediate sensations of the walk. Recalling a simple meal at the end of a long day's hike was enough for me to understand both the author's motivation and the appeal of his trip. Arlan is skilled at recalling small but evocative details; fog-filled mornings on the mountains drift by as if completely disconnected from the real world, every step forward a small victory in itself. "It's impossible to read stories of other people's adventures and not want an adventure for yourself," Arlan

the author writes early on. Mountain Lines reads like armchair travel written by an armchair traveler, and I finished the book wanting to join him wherever he decides to travel next.

I enjoyed this book.

This absorbing book by young American Jonathan Arlan, 29, from Kansas City, who after spending time working in New York, decides to have a go at the Grand Traverse of the Alps, in SE France. Although he had been to Europe several times and even spent some time in Japan, he had not had much experience mountain walking or climbing. The historic walking route in the French Alps is from the southern end of Lake Geneva, to the city of Nice, on the Mediterranean. He asked several friends and family members to accompany him on this adventure, but they all declined. Although it was summer time, it was too cold to sleep outdoors at night because of the altitudes, but all along the route are refuges, specially built for travellers. But you had to book in advance. It was a surprise to learn that walking downhill is more dangerous and precarious than going uphill and that even a young and fit person needs two walking sticks ! He suffered sore legs and feet and at times asked himself 'what am I doing here !' But he eventually made it and was able to go for a swim in the warm Mediterranean. The book would have been enhanced with a map of the route and perhaps a few pictures of the magnificent scenery.

GR 5 is one of the European "autoroutes" of hiking. It stretches from the coast of Holland at Hoek to the Mediterranean, some 2,500 km. A good hiker might make the entire GR 5 in three months. Jonathan Arlan, with limited hiking experience, undertook the lower third of the trail, from Lake Geneva (Lac Lemman) to the Med, some 800 km, a portion of the trail that is also called "La Grande Traversée des Alpes". He spoke no French when he commenced, but would pick up some of the language in his 30 some days on the trail. One word that he does not mention learning is: "dénivellation". But he knows its meaning: "change in elevation". For the lower third of GR 5 is one of the most severe, in terms of the ups and downs from the top of the "cols" to the valley bottoms, of any of the GRs. Brutal, in terms of the impact on the knees, calves, and most of the rest of the body, and Arlan relates the agony, over, and over, and over again. Having recently read the accounts of two Frenchmen, concerning their hikes across all of France, Sylvain Tesson and Jacques

Lacarrière's *À Chemin faisant*, I figured reading the account of a fellow American was overdue. I found this work an immense disappointment. "Winging it," very largely unprepared, accepting the kindness of strangers (and bless them for that). The book seemed to be written in the same manner. Arlan was living in NYC, decides he is missing a life passing him by, outside the "cubicle," and in the first 20 pages relates his travels to Tokyo, where he and a girlfriend part trails of their own, then he is in Greece, and on to a monastery in Serbia, all related in the fashion of the "Brownian motion" of particles. A rather random internet search on hiking turns up GR 5, and without much further research, he thinks it is a "must do." I assumed that he went from Serbia to Geneva to commence the hike. No, a couple chapters into the hike, he relates how he flew there from NYC. Later, in the same hike, he pops up in Belgrade, with the early frosts, where he is writing this book. No map in the book! One of the many omissions. There was no sense of the money involved. Nor an accounting of the items backpacked. He does say that he took a one-person tent, but apparently never slept in it. How did he carry his water? He does relate to an imprudent water resupply at an apparently non-potable water fountain, since he could not read the sign that must have said that. Much of the hike is in the month of August, and he notes that there is "some" holiday, but never determined what that might be. Thanks to my (beloved) Kindle, I have four colors in which to mark passages, and red denotes an error, or at least a point of strong disagreement. The "reds" range from: "You wish that Alaska and Russian would touch because then it would at least be possible to walk around the world." to "I hadn't made any sleeping arrangements along the way. Doing so would have required far too much research." to "The tiger crawling across the desert looking for water, on the verge of death. But The tiger I was not." And we are assured that: "The late-nineteenth century was not the most stable time for France." He did it though! And bravo for that. And at 29, with some luck, "winging it," even without a GPS for the fog on the cols, might work. And I was with him 100% when he walked into the "Mother Sea," at the end of his hike, and went to minus elevation, which I hope to do as well, though the overall walk there will be much shorter. And as for the GR 5, I have my eye on certain select portions in the Vosges, with the beech trees, and the ghosts of ancient Druids, dancing. I suspect, once bitten by the hiking "bug," he will do it again, with much better preparations,

and write a much better book about it, like one of his inspirations, Patrick Leigh Fermor. 2-stars, for this rough draft.

What a lovely & inspiring read! Arlan writes with a very welcoming style, I almost felt as though I was sitting across from him at a coffee shop hearing his travel adventures! As an admitted "scaredy cat," he answers all of your "what if" questions with his thoughtful style! Looking forward to more of his work!

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