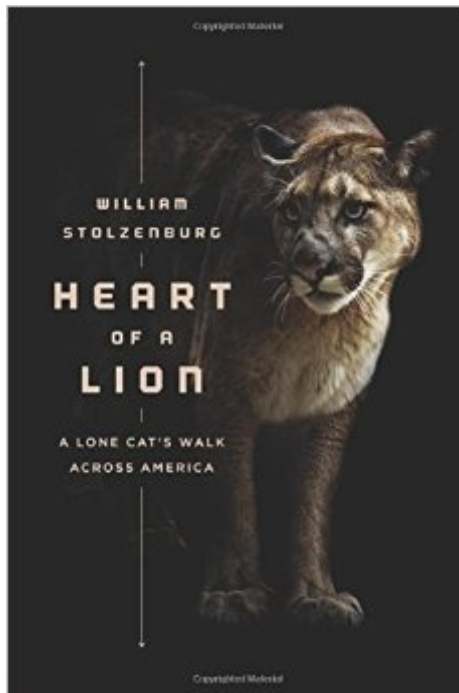


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Heart Of A Lion: A Lone Cat's Walk Across America



Synopsis

Late one June night in 2011, a large animal collided with an SUV cruising down a Connecticut parkway. The creature appeared as something out of New England's forgotten past. Beside the road lay a 140-pound mountain lion. Speculations ran wild, the wildest of which figured him a ghostly survivor from a bygone century when lions last roamed the eastern United States. But a more fantastic scenario of facts soon unfolded. The lion was three years old, with a DNA trail embarking from the Black Hills of South Dakota on a cross-country odyssey eventually passing within thirty miles of New York City. It was the farthest landbound trek ever recorded for a wild animal in America, by a barely weaned teenager venturing solo through hostile terrain. William Stolzenburg retraces his two-year journey--from his embattled birthplace in the Black Hills, across the Great Plains and the Mississippi River, through Midwest metropolises and remote northern forests, to his tragic finale upon Connecticut's Gold Coast. Along the way, the lion traverses lands with people gunning for his kind, as well as those championing his cause. *Heart of a Lion* is a story of one heroic creature pitting instinct against towering odds, coming home to a society deeply divided over his return. It is a testament to the resilience of nature, and a test of humanity's willingness to live again beside the ultimate symbol of wildness.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When I first read the review of this in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, my eyes got big -- it was him, the cat I had cheered on, held hopes for and kept tabs on as much as I was able. Then he went off my news radar until his untimely death along that highway so far away. Such is the state of our

world, that I ended up thinking something along the lines of, "well at least he didn't get shot." And I kept saying to all who would listen before that grim news, that I hoped he'd mated along the way -- this cat was so brave, so savvy, so smart he surely deserved to have his genes passed along for the good of the species. Now with Stolzenburg's book I can say this remarkable cat did not die in vain because in this excellent recounting of that journey Stolzenburg deftly brings in pieces of larger, interrelated issues regarding wildlife in America, particularly large predators. The quote of John Muir's in this book is worth the price of it: "None of our fellow mortals is safe who eats what we eat." But do I detect some slight but significant shift in the current of thought about such animals? Might we be saying to the various agencies who make policies regarding the future of mountain lions, wolves and all, "You are deciding for all of us, not just the minority who hunt them for sport." If this change is happening it can't happen fast enough. The short sighted view is the one which does not seem to see the future, or maybe it does and really doesn't want these iconic species to be part of the world we all share. This minority speaks with the voice of power but they truly don't possess it.

HEART is a review of the possibility that pumas will recolonize Midwestern and eastern North America, skillfully intertwined with the tragic story of a young male puma who left the Black Hills of South Dakota in the late summer or fall of 2009 and traveled more than 2000 miles eastward in search of a mate, dying on a highway in eastern Connecticut in June 2011. It was probably the longest recorded distance traveled by a land mammal. I have been involved in The Search for evidence of pumas, and later advocating for their return, for more than 40 years, so I can appreciate Stolzenburg's ability to organize masses of information around the central account of the young puma we call the Walker. The author earlier demonstrated that skill in his book WHERE THE WILD THINGS WERE, turning masses of technical information into a very readable and understandable account. The Black Hills are the source of most of the dispersing young male pumas which have left their birthplace in search of a territory of their own and access to females. A dispute continues over the South Dakota Department of Game Fish & Parks's program to significantly reduce the Black Hills population and thus Midwestern and eastern recolonization. Other young male long-distance dispersers which preceded the Walker have--as far as we know--all died as a result of human actions. One made some wrong turns on its journey and was tragically shot down by police in Chicago in 2008. The central character in the book, besides the Walker, is Chris Spatz, President of the Cougar Rewilding Foundation, formerly an obsessed rock climber of the Shawangunks in SE New York State. He has devoted the several years of his life to the cause of puma restoration.

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