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Trespassing Across America: One Man's Epic, Never-Done-Before (and Sort Of Illegal) Hike Across The Heartland



Synopsis

Now that President Donald Trump has revived the Keystone XL pipeline that was rejected by former President Obama, *Trespassing Across America* is the book to help us understand the kaleidoscopic significance of the project. Told with sincerity, humor, and wit, Ilgunas's story is both a fascinating account of one man's remarkable journey along the pipeline's potential path and a meditation on climate change, the beauty of the natural world, and the extremes to which we can push ourselves both physically and mentally. It started as a far-fetched idea to hike the entire length of the proposed route of the Keystone XL pipeline. But in the months that followed, it grew into something more for Ken Ilgunas. It became an irresistible adventure an opportunity not only to draw attention to global warming but also to explore his personal limits. So in September 2012, he strapped on his backpack, stuck out his thumb on the interstate just north of Denver, and hitchhiked 1,500 miles to the Alberta tar sands. Once there, he turned around and began his 1,700-mile trek to the XL's endpoint on the Gulf Coast of Texas, a journey he would complete entirely on foot, walking almost exclusively across private property. Both a travel memoir and a reflection on climate change, *Trespassing Across America* is filled with colorful characters, harrowing physical trials, and strange encounters with the weather, terrain, and animals of America's plains. A tribute to the Great Plains and the people who live there, Ilgunas's memoir grapples with difficult questions about our place in the world: What is our personal responsibility as stewards of the land? As members of a rapidly warming planet? As mere individuals up against something as powerful as the fossil fuel industry? Ultimately, *Trespassing Across America* is a call to embrace the belief that a life lived not half wild is a life only half lived.

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Customer Reviews

"A combination of Thoreau, John Steinbeck, and Ian Frazier . . . an unforgettable read." • "Men's Journal" • "A timely and riveting book . . . written by a courageous young man struggling with the chaos he is inheriting from his elders . . . The book mirrors its young author: impulsive, tenacious, reflective and, amazingly, cautious . . . a welcome message of resistance and hope." • "Evangelos Vallianatos, Huffington Post" • "[A] fascinating and breezy new effort . . . [Ilgunas] does a masterful job weaving the details of his daily travels into a work of prose that is difficult to put down . . . a very good book from a writer we should hope has many more waiting to come out." • "Bruce Andriatch, The Buffalo News" • "Ilgunas is something of an heir to Bill Bryson in his ability to find humor and irony in random encounters on the road. But he also brings to his work a John McPhee-like talent for placing big-picture environmental issues into an accessible narrative that's both entertaining and perceptive. Woven into this narrative are profound insights both about the beauty of the natural world and our alternately loving, twisted and exploitative relationship with it. Ilgunas's writing is funny, self-knowing and often moving." • "Joanna O'Sullivan, Asheville Citizen-Times" • "[A] compelling book . . . outlines a journey that started about a pipeline and became much more." • "Melanie Wilkinson, York News-Times" • "A rich, perceptive book, an amusing and interesting tale beautifully mixed with thoughtful insights into Ilgunas himself as well as the world that he was seeing more closely than most people ever do . . . at times funny, and at other times philosophical and even poetic." • "Linda C. Brinson, Greensboro News & Record" • "One of the great adventure stories of modern times." • "Vick Mickunas, Dayton Daily News" • "When Ken Ilgunas sets out to walk the proposed route of the Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta to Texas, he knows he is heading into the heartland of the debate about climate change. What he can't yet know is that, by confronting the challenges of this epic journey, he will emerge renewed, emboldened and filled with hope. An exhilarating adventure." • "Candace Savage, author of *Prairie: a Natural History* and *A Geography of Blood*" • "You could argue that a cross-country pipeline is itself a trespass" through watersheds, communities, lives" so moments when various authorities challenge Ilgunas's route work as tiny cosmic jokes. But this is not heavy book. *Trespassing Across America* is a delight. In the end, walking across the country turns out not to be about you, but about the country and all the land and people that make it one." • "Robert Sullivan, author of *Rats* and *The Thoreau You Don't*

KnowFrom the Hardcover edition.

Ken Ilgunas has worked as an elementary school tutor, an Alaskan tour guide, and a backcountry ranger at the Gates of the Arctic National Park. He has hitchhiked 10,000 miles across North America and paddled 1,000 miles across Ontario in a birch-bark canoe. Ilgunas has a B.A. from SUNY Buffalo in history and English, and an M.A. in liberal studies from Duke University. The author of the travel memoir *Walden on Wheels*, he is from Wheatfield, New York. From the Hardcover edition.

At age 29, Ken Ilgounas "a so-so student, career hitchhiker, Alaska tour guide and drifter" suddenly saw the XL pipeline as "the perfect symbol of the twenty-first century. It was a war zone where environmentalists were pitted against industry, where the hopes for our future clashed with the habits of our past. So he decided to hike the length of it" walk 1,195 miles from Hardisty, Alberta to Port Arthur, Texas. He has produced a truly brilliant kaleidoscopic portrait of America and our neighbor to the North. Here are unforgettable images, brushes with danger and death, and parade of motley characters. Many are salt of the earth. Others might be called Epsom salts. One of the many benefits you "gain" painlessly and pleasurably "from *TRESPASSING ACROSS AMERICA* is deep knowledge of energy, fossil fuels and climate change. When Ilgunas started out, he assumed he would be virulently disparaging of big oil. He writes: "Was I anti-oil? The tar sands and the Keystone XL struck me as a pretty terrible idea. But how could I be anti-oil when all of my gear, clothes and food were made with, made of, and transported by oil? I was wearing nylon pants and a polyester shirt, which were materials made from oil. Oil was in my pack, my shoes, my trekking poles. I "d originally wanted to travel the XL without using any oil. But where would I, for instance, get shoes that weren't shipped with oil. How could I get food without any trace of oil? I could bring a rifle and hunt rabbits and deer, but what oil-run machine had cut the wood for the stock? What fuel ran the furnace that shaped the barrel? Where did the lead come from? Oil was everywhere and in everything. Another gift Ken Ilgunas gives the reader is a slew of easy-to-understand quickie factoids that you can gleefully drop at dinner parties. For example: "I didn't know this at the time, but there are 150,000 miles of oil pipelines in the United States alone. Add gas pipelines, and we have more than 1.7 million miles of pipes. These are our veiled veins, silently moving fossil fuels beneath the ground like blood beneath skin. " Currently, there are 1.4 billion cows on Earth whose farts make up the world's largest source of methane, a

greenhouse gas 105 times more potent than carbon dioxide. A 2006 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report found that cows generate 18 percent of the world's greenhouse gases—more than worldwide transportation. Cows were a big part of Ilgunas's struggle with nature. He had to deal with thousands of cows in his footslog across the plains of two giant continents: "To me, cows were not docile bovine creatures that they were to most people, but, potentially a swarming herd of ill-tempered water buffalo that could fend off a pride of lions with their organ-rending horns and flank-to-flank formations. The very last thing I wanted was to end up on the news as the cultural spectacle of the latest person killed by an amiable animal in the once-every-few-years 'Man killed by goat' story. Etched in your memory will be mental images of Ilgunas's lurid descriptions of what oil exploration does to the ecosystem such as this \$200 sightseeing flight he splurged on for an overview of Fort McMurray, Alberta. "But the autumnal wonderland came to an abrupt end as we approached and then passed over an enormous tailings pond—a lifeless gray sea of sludge, the liquid residue of the bitumen-to-oil refining process. The ponds, which are more accurately described as lakes, bore no sign of bird, wind ripple, or fish. They were still, silent, dead. And they were everywhere. After the refining process, the oil industry creates these giant man-made lakes to store all the toxic fluids. As of 2010, the tailings ponds covered about seventy square miles of northern Alberta, with some ponds as big as 7,500 acres, or half the size of Manhattan. Migrating ducks are known to rest on the ponds, and because the ponds have killed thousands of them, the oil industry had placed scarecrows (dubbed 'bit-u-men' wearing orange HAZMAT suits in the middle of them. Beyond the pond was one of the pits, a breathtaking mud crater that was of such breadth it almost stretched to the edge of the viewable earth. Above all, you savor dozens of delicious cameo portraits of myriad characters—some wonderfully warm, others not so. One of my favorites: "When freezing, saturated, and exhausted, I got to Antlers, Oklahoma, (which boasts of being the Deer Capital of the World), I went straight to the local pizzeria and changed into my dry clothes in the bathroom before ordering myself a supreme pizza. A family with two little girls, who'd seen me come in, was curious what I was doing in Antlers. So they came over and asked. I told them tales of charging moose, stampeding cows, and crazy Nebraskan cops. I left out the dilapidated homes, crazy dogs, and strange men walking toward me at night, thinking that I had a good reason to remember the better side of Oklahoma. The girls posed for pictures with me, saying they were going to talk about my trip with their class, and the grandfather left ten dollars on the table, went to the register, and paid for my pizza. In short, you will adore TRESPASSING ACROSS AMERICA as will everyone you recommend it to. It is life changing. In my opinion, every

citizen of the world should read it. Denny Hatch dennyhatch@yahoo.com

Really enjoyed this gentleman's descriptions of his adventures. He gives the opinions of people from many walks of life regarding the pipeline without bias. The issues are complicated and the author takes into consideration just how the pipeline's existence or non-existence impacts lives. An entertaining author who makes you think.

I love books about long walks, à la Colin Fletcher, so I suspected I would like this book. I didn't like this book. I LOVED this book! It is a terrific book about Ken's adventures on his long walk, but so much more. The underlying theme is climate change and the XL Pipeline. It's not all heavy-duty scientific facts and doomsday predictions. Ken discusses climate change and the pipeline's pros and cons in a matter that is based around the people's lives who live near the pipeline or are going to make a lot of money working on the pipeline. So many times during the book I had to stop and think, "Wow, that was really meaningful." Ken's insights are really worth remembering and passing along. No matter how you feel about climate change, you might want to read this book. Really entertaining and enlightening. Now I'm off to get his first book, "Walden on Wheels."

Excellent documentation about a crucial topic for our world and of an incredible journey through a part of modern North America few understand. The account of people along the way, their differing points of view, and their affect on the traveler gives me hope that we can solve our differences. The author's internal physical and spiritual journey are revealing and demonstrate how important it is for all of us to get out of our daily routine to experience life. This is a book I could not put down.

Very interesting book and writing. Something I'd love to do, but would not have the nerves for. I'm thankful for the good writing that allows me to share in the adventures.

Ken has amazing insights into the minds of flyover country dwelling, Trumper supporting Americans, all before the 2016 election even got started. Reading this book now, one can't help but see that America has changed dramatically and the underpinnings of that change have been in the Midwest for many years.

Ken Ilgunas brings this story to life. He makes it interesting, suspenseful, and educational. Makes a compelling case for taking care of nature and preserving our land. Very brave young man. In an elite

group of young people we can be proud of.

loved this authors ability to pull me into his life. His experiences are those of a young man and envied by a middle aged mother/grandmother who cant just walk away from it all. So happy to see young people these days enjoying the moments not of my generations thinking having more is what it takes to enjoy life. Truly enjoyed his story of his journey. I read Walden on Wheels 1st which I feel helped me to get to know the author, and now I am reading his other work. Thanks for a great read Ken. Deb

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