

Great Books Discussion: John Muir's My First Summer in the Sierra. 4-29-23

1. Have you visited Yosemite, the area described? Before reading the book, what did you know of Muir?
2. If you knew nothing of Muir, what would you think of his philosophy after reading this book? What is his conception of G-d? How does he find G-d in Yosemite?
3. Is there a sense of escapism in Muir's reluctance to leave the mountains? Is he running from something?
4. How did Muir view social relationships? Would you go trekking with this guy? Why or why not? What questions would you ask him?
5. How did you feel about Muir's descriptions of indigenous people? (They had been recently expelled from Yosemite).
6. Why did Muir develop an aversion to the shepherd (and the sheep)? How would you reconcile livestock grazing with conserving the environment?
7. In his rambles and long hikes through forests, why didn't Muir ever get lost? How was he measuring tree height and feet above sea level?
8. Can you envision a vast landscape without plastic waste and air pollution? How much would you be willing to pay in taxes to conserve it?
9. Muir read books by starlight. Where would you have to go now to do this?
10. Did you zone out during Muir's descriptions of flora? Which ones did you google? Is there an advantage in the ability to recognize wild plants? Would recognizing edible larvae be a useful skill? Muir thought he could survive all winter on a bag of flour. Hyperbole? (Matt Damon survived on potatoes on Mars.)
11. Muir's observations of glaciation in Yosemite were not initially accepted by the scientific community. Why do you think his views were discounted?