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Into the Carpathians: A Journey Through the Heart and History of Central and Eastern Europe (Part 1: The Eastern Mountains)

Alan E. Sparks
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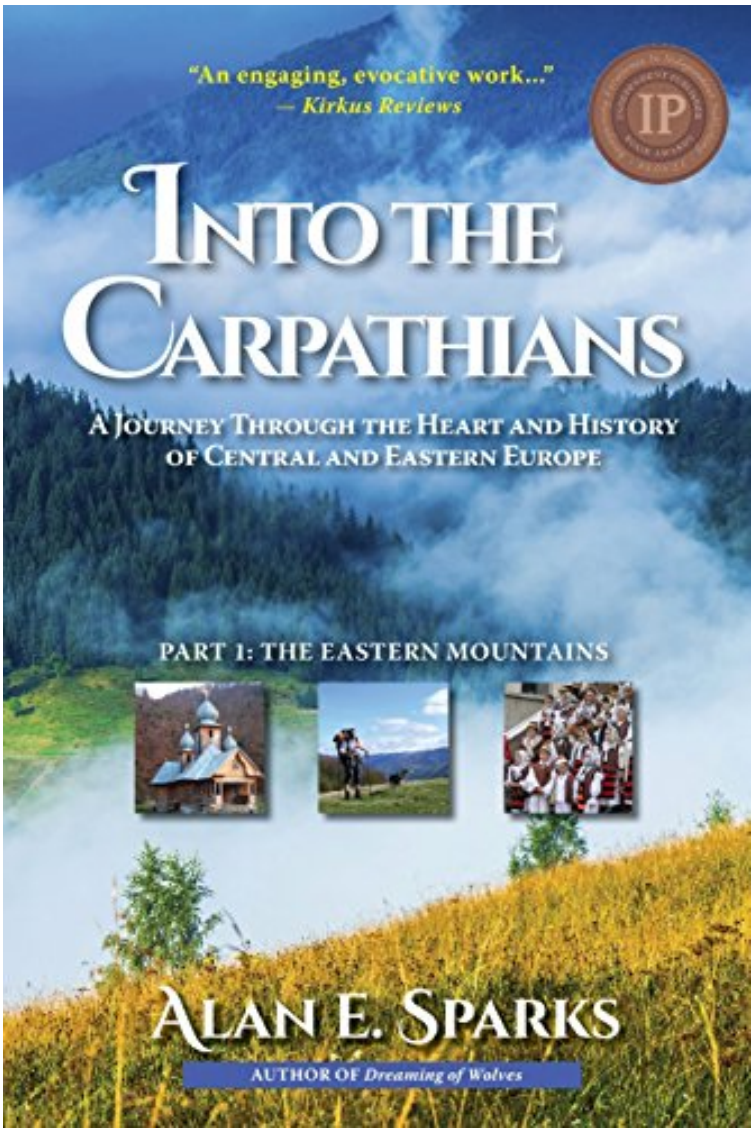

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Alan E. Sparks : Into the Carpathians: A Journey Through the Heart and History of Central and Eastern Europe (Part 1: The Eastern Mountains) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Into the Carpathians: A Journey Through the Heart and History of Central and Eastern Europe (Part 1: The Eastern Mountains):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The lure of Its never been done beforeBy John P. Jones IIIA new route to India, by going west; the South Pole; a Westerner crossing the Rub Al Khali; the Moon; Mars. That wonderful lure that has been the impetus for so many exploratory trips. Surely though, in Europe, the Old World as Rumsfeld once mocked, its all been done, at least in terms of geographic exploration. Not so, figured Alan E. Sparks, an ex-high tech worker, at age 49. Had anyone ever walked the entire length of the Carpathian Mountains, some 2000 km? It was most unlikely. Sure, for a millennium, or more, the passes in these mountains had served as conduits for migrants from Asia, impelled by varying intentions. But since actual walking had become a pastime, in the 20th century, there were the bitter wars, and sharp, antagonistic political entities that would have deterred even the most ardent modern-day explorer.Sparks, an American, who lives in Boulder, CO and Portland, ME, as well as Krakow, Poland, was no stranger to the Carpathians. He had worked on the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project (CLCP). His first book, "Dreaming of Wolves", written in 2010, depicts that work. In 2003, Peter Suth, a German, proposed the hike, provided funding could be arranged, and Sparks requested to come along. And so, on April 02, 2005, they and their team started from Zarnesti, Romania, with the objective of walking all the way to Reitschen, Germany (which is near the borders of Poland and the Czech Republic). They intended for the trip to take four months, by walking six days a week, some 20-25 km, as the crow flies, a day. It didnt work out that way. This is only volume one of the hike, which is dubbed The Way of the Wolves, and covers the four weeks in Romania and the three weeks in the Ukraine. Volume two, still not published, will cover the three weeks in Slovakia, the one week in the Czech Republic and the final five weeks in Poland.The authors work recalled the works of Patrick Leigh Fermor, who also took a long European hike. In the early 1930s, Fermor walked from Holland to Constantinople, let the tale ripen for more than four decades before publishing his account, commencing with A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople: From the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube (New York Review Books Classics) published in 1977. Sparks waited only a decade. In the interims, both appeared to have done much research on the history and ethnology of the people in the areas traversed. And that is the strongest aspect of the book. Who are the Ruthenians, for example? I learned that the term itself is an exonym, meaning that those who are called Ruthenians by others never use the term themselves. The author provides a reasonable history of Rus and its various transformations, from the original trading center at Kiev. Rusalki are female spirits in the waters that might lure you in, with adverse consequences. And, of course, there was much about Dracula, Vlad the Impaler in Transylvania. Sparks provides comments on the prevalence of the old customs. There are a number of good and inspiring pictures, including those of old wooden Ukrainian churches found along the way. All good stuff, about an area of the world that has been of interest, but of which I have a limited understanding.Despite much insightful knowledge of the area, I had a number of problems with the planning of the hike itself, as well as the account. Why, oh why would you commence a four month hike, in April, when one should know that most of the first month the hiking would be in snow? This necessitated abandoning the actual hike, and using support vehicles on a number of occasions. Much time and energy was spent trying to find each other: that is, the hikers and the support vehicles. Why? Sparks says: Thankfully, our expedition occurred before the affordability of GPS made the adventure-reducing gadgets ubiquitous p. 76. But affordable GPS were readily available at least a decade prior to 2005 I had an essential one. Its just no fun for two groups to keep missing each other detracting from the all-important time to smell the roses. Sparks himself bailed from most of the hiking, due to knee problems. There was far too much written about the food, and almost nothing about the issues related to the scientific portions of the expedition. The hike depended on eco-volunteers paying to accompany the hike, but there was no discussion about the interactions with them, nor the actual finances of the trip. There is an excellent topo map of the Carpathians range, but there is NO map of the actual hike itself! And there is the hint of romance along the hike with a translator; she has read Tolstoy, Kafka, Mann and Shakespeare, BUT she is only 18. Hum.For sure, Ill read volume II the lure of its never been done before is just too strong. For volume I, 4-stars.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An excellent contemporary travelogue about the Carpathians of Central EuropeBy Frequent ShopperAn excellent contemporary travelogue about the Carpathians of Central Europe, its history and the footprints of the varied cultures that inhabited it.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. It was fascinating and informative in that I knew nothing ...By Marvin-Joe MerckIt was fascinating and informative in that I knew nothing about these places and history until I read the review and then the book. Have passed it on to a friend who will return it to me.

Bronze Medal Winner, 2016 Independent Publisher (IPPY) Book Awards: Europe - Best Regional Non-Fiction category.Finalist, 2016 Next Generation Indie Book Awards: Travel category.A compelling chronicle of a hiking and wildlife research expedition along the length of the Carpathian Mountains, from Romania to Poland, some 1,700 miles as the crow flies. (This volume, Part 1, covers the first half of the journey, through Romania and Ukraine.) On the trail of wolves, we are led deep into the dark forests, misty hills, and intriguing history of this fabled landscape, where encounters with wolves, bears, and lynx; werewolves, vampires, and witches; lumberjacks, shepherds, and recluses; poets, tyrants, and saints; deities, demons, and sirens; and historical figures such as Attila the Hun, Vlad the Impaler, and Volodymyr the Great provide broad insight into the natural, historical, and mythological forces that have shaped, and continue to shape, the cultures, nations, and psyches along the way. 63 beautiful color photographs also emblaze

this memorable trek. (We also offer a Black White edition at a list price of $17.95; see ISBN 978-1633932425.)

Bronze Medal Winner, 2016 Independent Publisher (IPPY) Book Awards: Europe - Best Regional Non-Fiction category.Finalist, 2016 Next Generation Indie Book Awards: Travel category.From the Back CoverThe Carpathian Mountains--legendary land of Gothic castles, eerie accents, and the depredations of vampires and werewolves. But what are the Carpathian Mountains really like? Do Western readers know what really lurks in the dense forests blanketing the steep mountain slopes? (The most significant populations of wild animals remaining in Europe west of Russia.) Do they know what survives in the scenic valleys and on the lofty meadows? (The "old life" of rural Europe.) Do they know what diverse forms the craggy ridges have given to the many cultures and nations of Central and Eastern Europe, and to human imaginations the world over? (Too varied to summarize on a cover.) Do they know how it feels to explore the landscape's challenging contours? (Invigorating, rewarding, exasperating, enlightening...) Enter Into the Carpathians to discover a beautiful and enchanting world of adventure, history, mystery, and more!About the AuthorAlan E. Sparks is the award-winning author of Dreaming of Wolves and Into the Carpathians, and has written articles about wolves for International Wolf Magazine and other publications. He has bachelor and master's degrees in physics andengineering from the University of Maine and Stanford University, and workedfor over twenty years developing advance technologies for one of the world'sleading research and development organizations, Bell Telephone Laboratories. Avoracious reader and student of the natural and cultural histories of theplaces he visits, he has supplemented his indoor studies with training inmountaineering from the Colorado Mountain Club, mountain ski touring/expeditionleadership from the National Outdoor Leadership School, and winterecology/animal tracking from renowned animal tracker Dr. James Halfpenny of ANaturalist's World. As a teacher of English as a second language, commercialactor, and web designer--and as an avid walker, hiker, backcountry skier, and animaltracker--he has lived, worked, and trekked extensively in the CarpathianMountain region of Central and Eastern Europe.