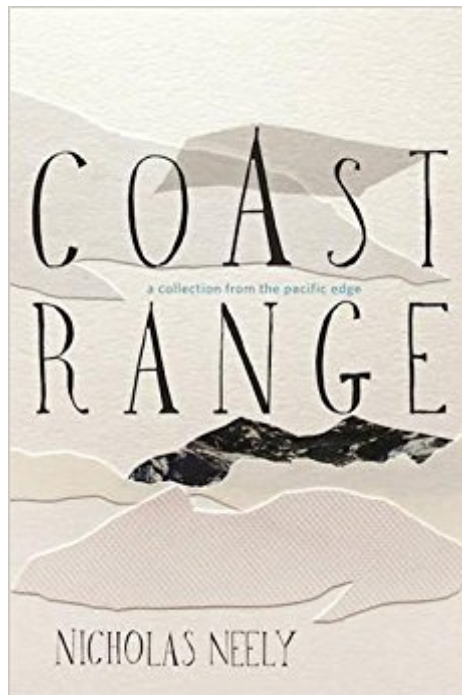




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Coast Range: A Collection From The Pacific Edge



Synopsis

Coast: the edge of land, or conversely the edge of sea. Range: a measure between limits, or the scope or territory of a thing. Coast Range, the debut collection of essays from writer Nick Neely, meticulously and thoughtfully dwells on these intersections and much more. The book's title refers to the region in which these essays are set: the California and Oregon coastal ranges. In deeply moving prose equal parts exhilarating and pensive, each essay explores an iconic organism (a few geologic), so that, on the whole, the collection becomes a curiosity cabinet that freshly embodies this Pacific Northwest landscape. But the book also employs a playful range of forms. Just as forest gives way to bluff and ocean, here narrative journalism adjoins memoir and lyric essay. These associative, sensuous, and sometimes saturnine pieces are further entwined by the theme of "collecting" itself—beginning with a meditation on the impulse to gather beach agates, a semiprecious stone. Another essay follows the journey of salmon from their "collection" at a hatchery through a casino kitchen to a tribal coming-of-age ceremony; a third is a flitting exploration of hummingbirds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Coast Range—“A well-timed debut that transports readers to the coastal ranges of California and Oregon and fully immerses them in the natural and cultural history of the Pacific Northwest—its cobbled beaches, ice-cold rivers, pine canopies, and layered forest floors . . . Neely’s skill with language is evident throughout. What makes Neely’s collection

so compelling is the detail, his artful engagement of our senses to feel the weight of the agate, taste the flake of the fish, trace the letters carved into the madrone trees, and then smell the sour decay of atonement and fall in love with this place. • Orion "Finely tuned essays that vary intriguingly in form and tone . . . Neely capably explores the complexity of his subjects with polish and finesse, looking carefully and thinking deeply." Kirkus, Starred Review "Neely's fascination with a huge swath of the Pacific Northwest coastal range is evident in this quiet essay collection that focuses on small details described in carefully studied prose . . . This is the sort of introspective writing that will appeal strongly to readers seeking to gain a deeper appreciation of their environment, and those with curiosity about or longing for the region he knows so well. Neely clearly spent a lot of time watching and listening, both to the people and animals that call the area home, and his observations have real staying power." Booklist "Fans of Joseph Wood Krutch, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir will enjoy these essays even if they are not familiar with the specific geographic area." Library Journal "Welcome a strong new voice for the silver beaches, pine forests, and shining rivers of the Pacific Northwest. Like the agates in his pockets, Nick Neely's essays are highly polished & translucent, but shot through with hard veins of natural science. Imagine Wallace Stegner in conversation with Ed Ricketts, when they are both young and still astonished. Then you can begin to understand the creativity, the power, the beauty, and the fun of Coast Range." Kathleen Dean Moore, author of *Great Tide Rising* "I don't know if "God is in the detail," as the saying goes, but I think much of nature is. Nick Neely's *Coast Range* is an erudite, eloquent demonstration of that, from the vividly evoked details of ancient mollusks scraping their way into rocks to those of even more ancient fungi lacing themselves into tree roots. And it deftly connects "the detail" in unexpected ways: our appetite for mushrooms and the origins of our languages; Anna's hummingbirds and modern history. Neely's vigilant, wry commentaries on his native patch of the west coast are not only in the tradition of Thoreau's *Walden* but in an older and wider one that he shares with Thoreau: what Thoreau calls "the great-dragon Tree" of mythic vision that is associated with Homer and Sophocles but also lives in Aristotle, Herodotus, Pliny, and other classical naturalists." David Wallace, author of *Mountains and Marshes* and *The Untamed Garden* "These are nature essays with a difference: the sureness and delicacy with which Nick Neely directs our attention from the miracles of the outer world to the gyroscopic peculiarities of his consciousness make for a very satisfying reading experience." Phillip Lopate, author of *To Show and Tell* and *The Art of the Personal Essay* "What a superb writer Nick Neely is and just the kind of natural history observer we need in a time of fierce change. He enlivens chiton, newt, hummingbird in the sapling outside the Safeway,

and more, with keen eyes and ears, quick veers of mind and syntax, and an abiding sense of the connection between the wild and the made worlds. Precise, gorgeous and imaginatively wed to both science and myth, his rendering of Coyote brings the creature smack-dab into twenty-first-century America, as soul-troubling as ever he was in myth and landscape. A fine collection to read and savor." —Alison Hawthorne Deming, author of *Zoologies* and *The Edges of the Civilized World*

"Nick Neely is a searcher and, lucky for us, a collector as well. Coast Range is his collection, his "open-air curiosity cabinet," full of newts, agates, madrones, mushrooms, coyote, salmon, paw prints, bones and beautiful sentences. He is a precise writer and his essays are brilliant in the shining sense. But as well as being an accurate observer of the natural world, he is an exuberant participant, and we are both pulled in and lifted up by his generous, buoyant and ever-curious spirit. An important book, and one full of life and joy." —David Gessner, Author of *All the Wild That Remains: Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner and the American West*

"In Nick Neely's new book, *Coast Range: A Collection From the Pacific Edge*, he aptly captures that childlike sense of wonder about the natural world...the essays are just as pleasant to read for his meticulously arranged prose and artfully crafted imagery as they are for their educational qualities."

—Idaho Mountain Express

Nick Neely grew up south of San Francisco, in the oak and chaparral on the bay side of the Santa Cruz Mountains. He holds an MA in Literature and the Environment from the University of Nevada, Reno, and MFAs in nonfiction and poetry from Hunter College and Columbia University. His nonfiction has appeared in magazines such as *Orion*, *Audubon*, *Mother Jones*, *High Country News*, *Kenyon Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and *Ecotone*. He is a recipient of PEN/Northwest's Margery Davis Boyden Wilderness Writing Residency, a UC Berkeley-11th Hour Food and Farming Journalism Fellowship, and the 2015 John Burroughs Nature Essay Award. He lives in Hailey, Idaho, with his wife, the painter Sarah Bird.

I have not read the entire book yet but plan to give it to a friend who hikes when I am finished, maybe even buy another one for a different friend. It has beautiful descriptions.

I hesitated slightly between 4 and 5 stars, and decided on 5 because the best essays in this collection are very good, although a couple are less good. The essays are primarily about Oregon and the Rogue River country. They're moderately autobiographical and mostly in first-person, rather like most science journalism--although he's a writer rather than a journalist, so these are more like

literary journalism. The collection opens with an essay on collecting agates, maybe the weakest essay but with some interesting info about them. Then comes an essay on the afterlife of salmon, in the context of the Cow Creek Indian band, for whom salmon are ritually important. It gets a bit complicated but this is an entertaining read. Then comes an essay on learning about Anna's Hummingbird, which is fascinating. Then is one on mining gold in the Rogue River by suction machine--small scale and not particularly environmentally disruptive; there's a section of the river that's open for mining. The next good essay, "The Carcass Toss," describes disposing of dead salmon from the hatchery (after mating, the fish die; the females are put back in the river for anglers and the males "tossed"). Most natural salmon runs have greatly shrunk or become extinct, and when once the dead salmon give a shot of nitrogen and other nutrients into the ecosystem, now the fish are tossed into streams to mimic that natural process--it really is important despite what it may sound like. There's an essay on chanterelle mushrooms, which doubles as an essay on etymology--word people will like it, other readers might want to skip it. Then there's a long essay titled "Homestead," in which he and his wife spend some months on an inholding in a protected area on the Rogue River, this being a sort of odd fellowship for a writer. This is by far the best essay overall, with excellent description of living there, managing chores (that's part of their duties), being careful of bears and snakes, delighting in the woods and birds and wildlife. I'd say Neely is a writer to watch.

This is the finest book of place-based nonfiction I've read in a long time. Although the collection has a regional focus in the Pacific Northwest, the appeal here is much more general. I'm a fan of nature writing, but I also find myself increasingly fatigued with how predictable--even sanctimonious--it can be. But the narrative voice here has all the attentiveness and respect for nature we expect in the genre, while being much fresher, more honest, more direct than what we've become used to. Neely manages to load the book with fascinating natural history information (the salmon sections are incredible!) without bogging down or making the information boring. He manages to be thoughtful, philosophical, meditative without becoming introverted or self-absorbed. And for me the greatest thing about this book is the incredible lyricism of the prose. Man, this guy can really write! Pure poetry. I also like that this is a book of essays that doesn't try to pretend it is something else. That said, the essays are beautifully linked together by style, regional focus, and the overarching theme of collecting (things, ideas, memories, experiences). This book has that rare combination of power and humility that we also feel in the face of nature. A terrific read!

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