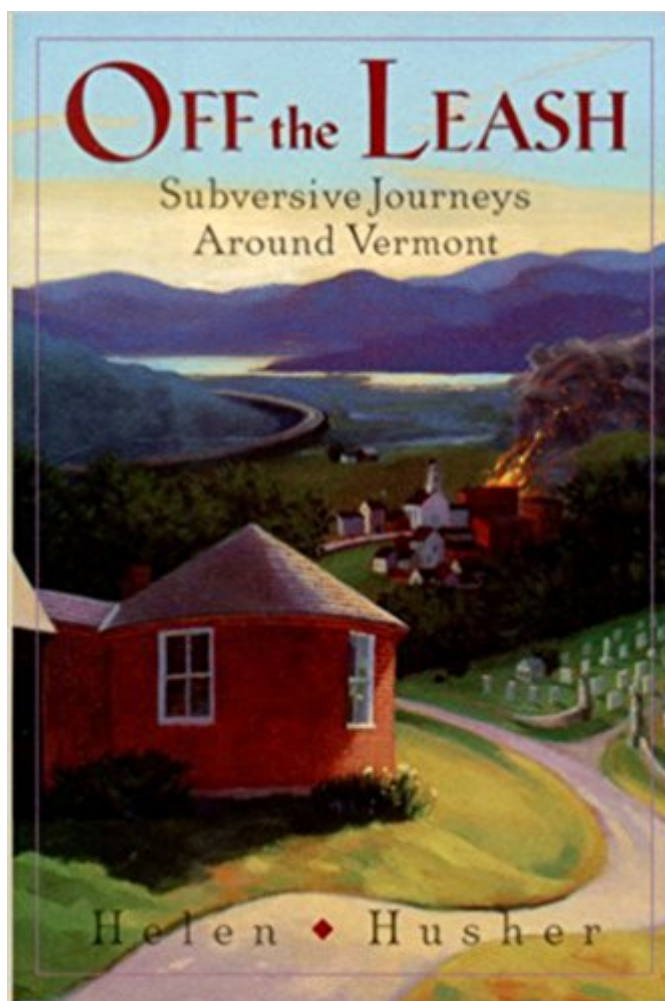


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Off The Leash: Subversive Journeys Around Vermont



Synopsis

A grand tour of some of Vermont's most interesting and undervalued places, this guide ranges from the Domestic Resurrection Circus performed by giant puppets in Glover, to the Dowser's Labyrinth in Danville, to the birthplace of Joseph Smith, one of the founders of the Mormon Church, in Sharon. Vermont is full of quirky places and colourful history, and "Off the Leash" goes beyond the world of tourism to explore "the richness of life and the treasures in it, and how we lose these things in a world that seems to be mostly about speed and cash". It is a guide that should interest anyone with a taste for eccentric stories, for small-town dramas, for the way our places make us who we are.

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Customer Reviews

Presuming that readers are sensible enough to figure out the cumbersome particulars of food and lodging for themselves, Husher applies her ferocious curiosity and opinions to other facets of Vermont travel. While she does offer basic directions and phone numbers, she's more interested in exploring and enjoying free and inexpensive pleasures. Each chapter focuses on a place that holds some mystery and fascination for Husher. She takes the reader to a cemetery in Barre, where graves are decorated with "a whimsicality you don't normally associate with burial," offering a unique history of those interred there. Another chapter describes the breakdown and rebuilding of her Vermont hometown, Randolph, after a number of fires gutted the downtown area. Husher visits a series of concrete sculptures along Interstate 89 and follows with a thoughtful essay on the intention and effectiveness of public art. Throughout, she includes little-known historical digressions, such as one about the Fenian Raids, which occurred between 1866 and 1870, when a group of Irish

soldiers attempted to invade Canada from Vermont and establish an Irish republic. "It's fun to know a few things, however sloppily the knowledge is acquired," writes Husher, encouraging travelers to pick up bits of information along the way. And her tour is bound to stir up curiosity not only about Vermont but also about all the places lost in the daze of hotels and gift shops. Illus. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Husher, who has written stories and articles for the Boston Phoenix, the Randolph Herald, and other publications, provides an interesting sort of travel book: a cross between travel essays and tourist guide. Arranged by geographic area, each of 12 chapters includes a description of a location in Vermont (or near Vermont), Husher's personal memories and descriptions of the spot, and historical detail and directions. One chapter highlights the Randolph fireworks and then goes on to describe Randolph's business district by recounting the story of a series of fires and the community's reactions to them. Other chapters include descriptions of the Dowse Hall (and its labyrinth), the Bread and Puppet Museum, and the historic sites of the Fenian Raids. It is a very personal account of Vermont and will attract visitors to and residents of Vermont who have time to read before seeking adventure. Buy for public libraries. Alison Hopkins, Queens Borough P.L., Briarwood, NY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In and about my Vermont stomping grounds. What's not to like?! Delightful, charming, informative, fun. Excellent.

This book describes a number of fascinating ordinary places that are tucked around the state of Vermont. What makes the places fascinating is Husher's historical details- for each place, she tells the story of how the site came to be and what made it famous. Some of the sites, like the Donohue Sea Caves are eons old, while others like the Bread and Puppet Museum were developed only recently. Some are famous, like Champ, the monster of the deep, while others are virtually unknown, like the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870. Although Husher probably didn't intend to make a statement about art, I found the juxtaposition of the state highway rest area art and the Bread and Circus Museum quite telling. She describes how a group of artists, including some famous ones, in the 1970s created a series of sculptures to be displayed to ordinary people at rest stops. Since this was to be people's art, it was made in ordinary media such as concrete. Funny enough, even though people drive by these creations every day and walk right past them at the rest stops, nobody seems to notice them, and the concrete is rotting away in the elements. Is this a tragedy? For

whom? It seems to me that if the art is so unengaging that people don't notice it even when it's placed right in front of their faces, it's not art at all but a sad Emperor's new clothes kind of waste of space. In contrast, other art described in this book, such as the puppets at the Bread and Puppet Circus are so compelling and interesting, that they draw people in to see them in such a far-off corner of the state as Glover. Likewise, the sculpted granite headstones in the Hope Cemetery in Barre were created by artists who work in a medium that would last for generations. That's because they were doing their art on commission, responding to the wishes of their patrons and communicating through their art to their entire community. The abandoned highway art seems more like taunt the audience- -give them something incomprehensible and ugly, but since the audience won't appreciate it anyway, don't bother to make it last.

The creative insights in the book are wonderful and her wry comments about people, places and things are worth their weight in Vermont granite. I have been to several of the sites written about,(before reading this book)and have an extended appreciation of them now. Her style of writing makes her subject matter larger than the sum of it's parts. Enjoy !!

Have been to Vermont many times but now I'll have to return. The author did a very good job of showing the much lesser known history of this great state. Deserves a revisit!

Off the Leash is much more than a travel book. It is a set of brilliant essays on art and life that incidentally describes unusual landmarks in and near Vermont.Husher sees things that most people miss. She makes connections. She recognizes odd juxtapositions. She awaits surprises and is not disappointed.In this book the ordinary becomes utterly fascinating, and the eccentric becomes the norm.It's fun. It's beautifully written. It has a lot to say about art, and it is a work of art itself.

This book was given to me as a gift from a friend of mine who knows how fanatically in love with my home state I am. I was skeptical, expecting another quaintifying take on how picturesque Vermont supposedly is. Instead, I found a thoughtful, well-researched book, full of discoveries and anecdotes surprising even to a Vermonter whose family has lived in the state for generations. Husher captures what's truly amazing about the state, and any small place really - the accessibility and exhilarating simplicity of its beauty and its history.

Got this out of the lending library for free. Some of the descriptions were a bit too detailed- I guess I

was bored and had no use for a lot of the information in the book.

This is a well-written, relaxing read that takes pleasure in common things. Far from being a guidebook in the usual sense, it guides the reader into a state of mind that helps him view his own world with more interest, even if he never visits Husher's Vermont.

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