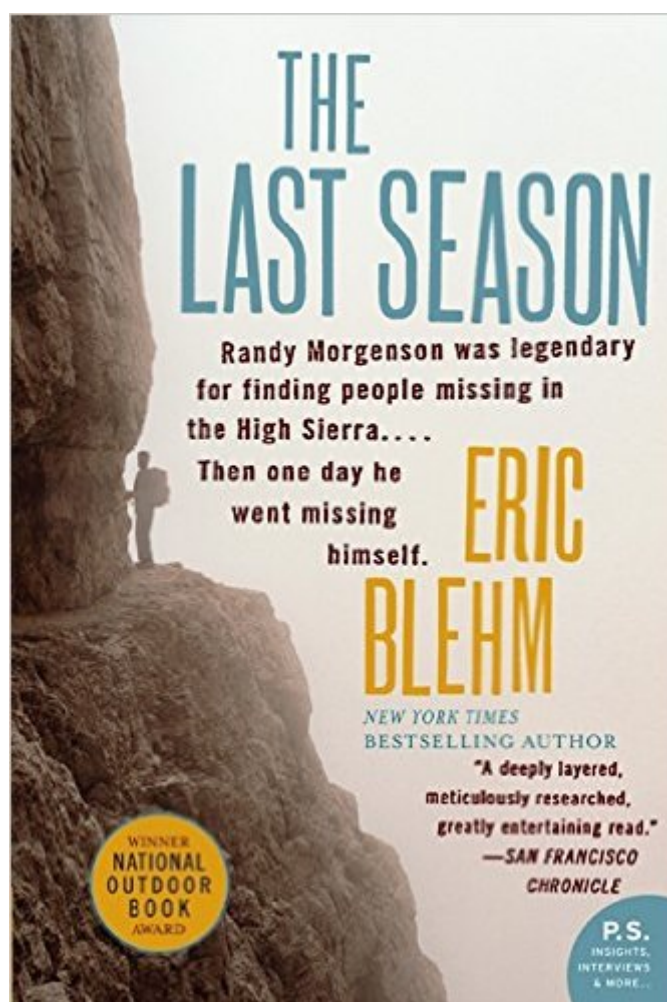


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The Last Season (P.S.)



Synopsis

Destined to become a classic of adventure literature, *The Last Season* examines the extraordinary life of legendary backcountry ranger Randy Morgenson and his mysterious disappearance in California's unforgiving Sierra Nevada—mountains as perilous as they are beautiful. Eric Blehm's masterful work is a gripping detective story interwoven with the riveting biography of a complicated, original, and wholly fascinating man.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

OK. Total Disclosure: I worked with and was a friend of Randy Morgenson -- the subject of this book -- for over 25 years; I was also interviewed for the book (endlessly, it seemed). For all that, when I read this (a manuscript copy), I found it compelling. I mean, I lived the whole thing pretty intimately, but kept wondering "hmm, I wonder what happens next?" A number of the reviews emphasize Randy's apparently troubled life. That's kind of true, but I notice one of the reviewers calls it a love story -- a love for the land. And I think that's closer to it. It's also one of the few honest descriptions of the exciting, glamorous life of a backcountry ranger (the fast cars, alluring women, investment strategies...) I've run across (Jordan Fischer-Smith's "Nature Noir", though not about backcountry rangers, is the other excellent account of rangers). Anyway, if you're a hiker or one of those folks who always wanted to be a backcountry ranger, this is the book to read. Maybe a cautionary tale but, really, it's all about not being happy anywhere else. George

I was a backcountry ranger in the High Sierra and Rocky Mountains for many years with both the Natl Park Service and USDA-Forest Service. This is a compelling book because it captures the culture, values, accomplishments and limitations of living a backcountry life. "Wilderness teaches a person the answers to questions that we have not yet learned how to ask" (photographer Nancy Newhall). To paraphrase Isaac Walton's "The Compleate Angler" (1650), "time spent in mountains will not be counted against the rest of your life." Randy was well known and admired because he lived a backcountry life and lived it well. He modeled first-hand knowledge and care and respect for wild ecosystems. Being a backcountry ranger immerses you in rarified air and light, extends the useable light of every day, winter and summer and in many ways is living a religious experience, a special calling. This sets you apart from the every day world and makes it hard on relationships, personal and professional. Each day is a wealth of learning opportunities that teaches you to not take life and people for granted. Randy lived with the understanding of Sierra Nevada mountaineer Norman Clyde, "the mountains will always be there tomorrow, make sure you can say the same." Randy relished every day with Clyde's thought in mind. We are all envious of Randy, he lived a full life (including the ups and downs) doing what he loved and doing it well. As with Alsup's (2001) "Missing in the Minarets" the search for Walter A. Starr, Jr., in 1933, "The Last Season," immerses you in the culture, shortcomings, accomplishments and day-to-day activities of Sequoia-Kings Canyon Natl Park backcountry. Everyone involved is passionate. A large, long-term investment of physical and emotional energy and effort commands a high price. The rewards are outside of ordinary life and difficult to put into words. Those who look in from the "outside" do not always understand when a life is cut short. The rewards are not monetary and "University of the Wilderness" curricula is not always valued or recognized in an urban culture. Rewards are ephemeral and are often taken away just as quickly as they are offered. We are privileged to have known Randy Morgenson.

This is a book I staggered through in a few days: here is an emotionally significant, compelling biography of a contemporary man, Randy Morgenson, and the people about him that contributed to and helped define his humanness. Eric Blehm's spyglass peek into Randy's life is both tense and tender and - while a major search and rescue effort to find Randy after he is reported missing in the Sierra backcountry is woven throughout the book - it is about our relationships and community with others and nature. We are all without purity; Randy Morgenson models his humanity cloaked in honesty, deceit, heroics, compassion, anger, frustration, and love. He has become a backcountry

Ranger in the Sierra Nevada, both lifeline and escape from and for reality. He's a conflicted man in the end, but still a person I would have cherished knowing and appreciating firsthand. Like Randy Morgenson, I was fortunate to grow up in a family that spent summers in the Sierra. My father was a pioneering desert rat and Sierra maven; he refused to let his boys swim in fresh water sources, training us instead to look for dead ponds, without inlet or outlet. As young children, we learned it was noble (or so we thought then) to carry out someone's carelessly or purposefully discarded trash. By the time of my first extended backpack trip some 45 years ago, the Sierra had captured my soul and given me in return a sense of strength, confidence, quiet, and purpose. Unlike Randy, my life spun away from the Sierra except for as many backpack and camping trips I could manage. But, a piece of me always is fixed to the smell of these mountains, for it is my lifeline as well. This book is not just about Randy Morgenson. Like each of us, our stories involve a community of people. Randy's community is his fellow backcountry Rangers, his parents, his wife Judi, and the solitude of the Sierra. Like each of us, he had opportunities, he had choices. While Randy is thematic, the book acknowledges - with both descriptive and caring narrative - the individuals who together give us a wilderness experience mostly free from city trauma, exploitation, and ourselves. "The Last Season" will certainly appeal to those who have experienced the Sierra, whether Yosemite, a piece of the John Muir, or simply Rock Creek. The text is detailed, nicely balanced, and presents Randy Morgenson as a man who lived a life that I care about when it is finished. Those who have not been to the Sierra, or met or talked with the many dedicated men and women who help define and protect our diminishing wilderness areas, will also gain with a reading of this book: Eric Blehm has skillfully captured the intensity, drama, and emotional storm not only of a major Sierra search and rescue operation, but also the man who triggered it.

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