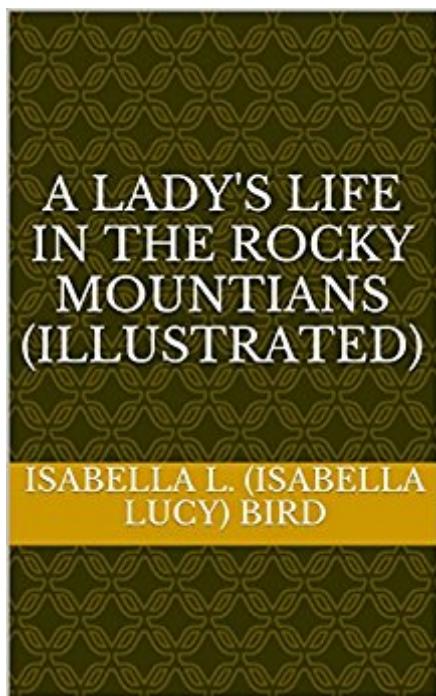


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# A Lady's Life In The Rocky Mountians (Illustrated)



## Synopsis

Isabella Lucy Bird (1831-1904) was a nineteenth-century English traveller, writer, and a natural historian. Bird finally left Britain in 1872, going first to Australia, which she disliked, and then to Hawaii (known in Europe as the Sandwich Islands), her love for which prompted her second book (published three years later). While there she climbed Mauna Loa and visited Queen Emma. She then moved on to Colorado, then the newest member of the United States, where she had heard the air was excellent for the infirm. Dressed practically and riding not sidesaddle but frontwards like a man (though she threatened to sue the Times for saying she dressed like one), she covered over 800 miles in the Rocky Mountains in 1873. Her letters to her sister, first printed in the magazine *Leisure Hour*, comprised her fourth and perhaps most famous book, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*. Bird's time in the Rockies was enlivened especially by her acquaintance with Jim Nugent, a textbook outlaw with one eye and an affinity for violence and poetry. "A man any woman might love but no sane woman would marry," Bird declared in a section excised from her letters prior to their publication. Nugent also seemed captivated by the independently-minded Bird, but she ultimately left the Rockies and her "dear desperado" Nugent was shot dead less than a year later. At home, Bird again found herself pursued, this time by John Bishop, an Edinburgh doctor in his thirties. Predictably ill, she went traveling again, this time to the far east: Japan, China, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is 1873. A 41 year old woman has enjoyed six months in Hawaii's summerland. On her way home to England, she decides to take in Colorado's celebrated mountain scenery. This being her habit, every night she writes the story of her day's adventures in a letter to her sister. "A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains" brings together these vivid, often touching, and almost always exciting letters of high adventure from way high---between 6,000 and 14,000 feet---in the Rockies. Isabella Lucy Bird could hardly have chosen a worse time for a visit. First, she arrived in September, staying only three months in Colorado's bitterly cold, deeply snowy weather. Second, the banks were in a financial crisis and she could not cash a letter of credit; at one time, she was down to less than 50 cents which had to last her more than three weeks. Her and her horse, Birdie, that is. Third, at the time travelers had to rely on the kindness of strangers, dropping in unannounced to houses perhaps 10 to 20 miles apart on the rough trails, often inhabited in winter by a few men paid to look after the cattle. Now-and-then, a settler's house could be found, though the desperately hard-scrabble life made for less-than-warmest welcomes. To the lonely men who were unfailingly chivalrous, Isabella may have looked mighty appealing. At any rate, Isabella knew how to make herself welcomed. She could cook, clean, sing, join prayers, and was particularly sought as a cowhand able to ride hard, fast, and wrangle cattle. Like a Shaharizade, she had hundreds of stories to tell of her travels & exploits. Even better, she was a sympathetic listener, including listening to the life story of one desperado, Mountain Jim, he of the buff physique, gentlemanly manners, literary aspirations, and long golden curls. She tells us with zest of her exploits (a favorite word) riding miles alone at night wolves howling around her, of falling into icy rivers when her exhausted horse stumbles, of purple mountains' majesty, and of people living hard lives indeed. She does not stint on adjectives: "Every tree was silvered and the fir-tufts of needles looked like white chrysanthemums. The snow lay a foot deep in the gulches... Ice bridges had formed across streams and I crossed them without knowing when. Gulches looked fathomless abysses, with clouds boiling out of them, and shaggy mountain summits, half seen for a moment through the eddies, as quickly vanished. Everything looked vast and indefinite..." In the end, again on her way, she writes of her last view of Colorado: "...I saw

'Mountain Jim,' his golden hair yellow in the sunshine slowly leading the beautiful mare over the snowy plains to Estes Park, equipped with the saddle on which I had ridden 800 miles."This is a fine read for the armchair traveler, the time traveler, the admirer of intrepid women, those intrigued by pioneering days, and devotees of the practice of chutzpah. (As a reader alert, Isabella despises Native Americans among other people, admiring what most closely resembles a fine English lady or gentleman---attitudes not unique to her or her time. Her outrage at the devastation of the land, however, is eloquent, consistent, and insightful.)"A Lady's Life" is a most excellent value new and even better used at one cent a copy. This well-presented edition comes with an introductory essay by historian Daniel Boostin, an outstanding map of Isabella's tour, and a usable index, etchings of glorious scenery and on the cover, a painting of the Glacier Point view with half-dome in Yosemite. This is probably the go-to edition. The book would be a fine gift to a friend about to visit Colorado or as a treat for oneself. Well-done, Isabella Lucy. Readers for over 150 years have been enjoying your tales of winter in the Rockies---me too! And I really liked the excellent features of this edition, particularly the essay and the map.

I read this book after returning from a trip to Estes Park and wanted to extend my memories of this beautiful place. This woman was unbelievable and so gutsy for her time. I not only read absolutely beautiful descriptions of the places I had seen but also got a glimpse of life during the 1870s in the old West along with some real characters. To think that this woman rode some 700 miles mostly alone in the Rocky Mountains through all kinds of weather conditions and often in the dark just leaves me in awe. I only gave 4 stars instead of 5 because toward the end it did seem to get long. I would highly recommend to anyone familiar with Estes Park.

Why did this truly remarkable woman ride 800 miles in 1873 through the Rocky Mountains in the dead of winter alone? She like many in England suffering from a damp climate came for the "camp cure" of the thin dry air of Colorado. But, beyond that she was mesmerized by the sublimity and ethereal beauty of the place. She stayed with families leading hard lives of subsistence, living in un-chinked log cabins where snow settled on her bed over the night. She lent a hand in all endeavors; herding cattle, baking bread, washing dishes and clothes. Observations made to her sister in a series of letters are telling. A hard working lack luster lifestyle spiced with tales of adventure from hunters, trappers around the fire in the evening become her routine. A desperado named Mountain Jim became her guide and companion on many of her rides through country she describes with the passion of the devout. In her lifetime Ms. Bird traveled extensively writing letters

from the Sandwich Islands, China, India and other exotic realms before she passed at 73. I truly admire this plucky lady's zest for life and true Brit grit.

Interesting letters of a 19th century woman's wanderlust. Written, I suspect, with a bit of Romantic flourish, Isabella Bird's letters give an interesting account of an "exploration" of the Rocky Mountains when there were no roads or lodges or reliable guides for hire. Some of her bravado seems downright foolhardy, and one could wish for more honest accounting of her affairs with men, but an enjoyable read, nonetheless.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to ride horseback through the Rocky Mountains all alone in the middle of winter. How beautiful that must have been, as she so vividly described. I loved reading the book and will look for other books by this author.

The title says it all. She lived in the second half of the 1800s and was a true feminist. Wonderful lady and fun to read how things used to be.

I love San Juan history

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