

42. Death Valley

By Edward Abbey (1927-1989)

Edward Abbey was an American author and essayist best known for his work focusing on the ecology and management of American west, particularly its deserts.

Death Valley is a desert valley located in Eastern California. It is the hottest and driest area in North America. It has a subtropical desert climate, with extremely hot summers, mild winters and little rainfall. Lower altitude tends to have higher temperature where the sun heats the ground that heat is then radiated upward.

Abbey visited various parts of Death Valley four times: June, September, October and November. He describes its landscape: the mountains and plains- the highest point is Telescope peak and the lowest point is Badwater. The highest recorded temperature is 134F (56.6c) and the lowest is 15 (-9.4 c). Various species of plants, birds and animals exist there struggling with the dry and hot climate. Human inhabitants temporarily migrate to other safer regions during the summer and come back in September. The mammals endure the summer heat by burrowing deep into the earth.

This essay is written in the style of journal writing. Language is polished. Abbey has used metaphorical language to give the readers the impression that the life is very hard there. Abbey's feelings about the place are obvious in such words as; Death Valley, Hell's Gate ,an ugly place, bitter as alkali and rough, harsh, unyielding as iron. The wind is as hot and fierce as a dragon's breath and the light is boiling.

43. Kenya on Horseback

Ann Jones

This text is an account of Ann Jones' account of her journey to various parts of Kenya on horseback. She finds horse riding an exciting adventure.

Women in general have passionate attachment to horses. Jones' attachment to horse has practical significance. She highlights the advantages of horse riding. Horses can take us far beyond the reach of roads. A horse is also a cooperative friend. Jones has a vast experience of visiting many parts of Australia, Asia and Africa on horseback. In this text she shares her experience of visiting Kenya, a country in East Africa with geographical diversity and biodiversity. A party of nine members and their guide met at a hotel in Nairobi and set off for Masai country in two Land Rovers. From Masai they started horse riding and reached their camp in the Loita Hills in the evening.

They stayed in their tents that night and cooked their food in the open fire the next morning. Jones beautifully describes the grassy land, plants, animals and birds. A woman rider fell off her horse and got her ankle broken and was flown to Nairobi for treatment. This incident made the rest of the team members uneasy. She also describes the settlement of the Masai population; their way of life and cattle farming. She describes the Mara River; fish and crocodiles, the climate, the wildlife, bushes etc. Conservationists worry about the human interference into the habitat of wildlife. She says that once there were islands of people in a sea of animals, but now there are islands of animals in the sea of people. Jones shows her concern about environmental degradation.

41. When every minute would Matter

by Jon Krakauer

Jon Krakauer climbed Mt. Everest in 1996. This text is part of his book 'Into Thin Air'. Thin air refers to low amount of oxygen in the air. Krakauer shares very exciting and adventurous experience of mountaineering expedition. He expresses full joy of being on the summit of Everest (29,028 feet). He spent only about five minutes on the peak. He had not eaten and slept well for the last three or four days at the same time he was getting low oxygen supply. He was feeling weak cold and tired.

Krakauer was climbing Everest under the guidance of Andy Harris of the New Zealand based team. During the descent a terrible storm hit the peak of Everest and the mountaineers were in a death trap. Six fellow climbers lost their lives and one had to have his hand amputated (cut).

Krakauer was more anxious about his oxygen tank getting emptied than the deteriorating weather condition. He describes the horrible descending of a crowd of climbers of various teams hurriedly together creating a traffic jam. Descending is as hard as ascending. His oxygen in the tank was finishing and he was feeling uncomfortable but could come down in the fresh oxygen and survived. It is a story of survival from a death trap.