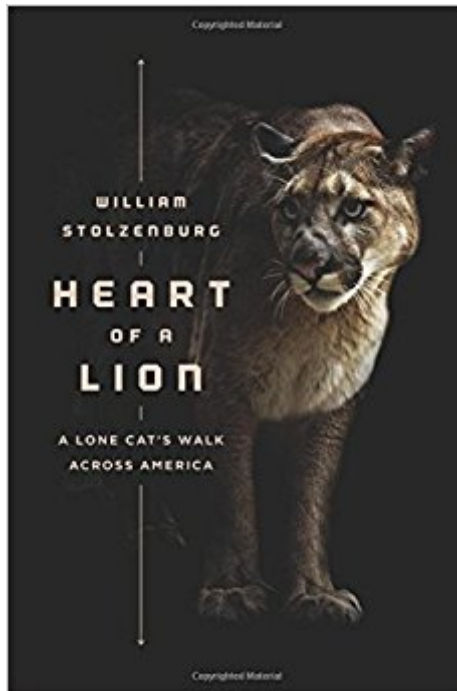




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# Heart Of A Lion: A Lone Cat's Walk Across America



## Synopsis

Late one June night in 2011, a large animal collided with an SUV cruising down a Connecticut parkway. The creature appeared as something out of New England's forgotten past. Beside the road lay a 140-pound mountain lion. Speculations ran wild, the wildest of which figured him a ghostly survivor from a bygone century when lions last roamed the eastern United States. But a more fantastic scenario of facts soon unfolded. The lion was three years old, with a DNA trail embarking from the Black Hills of South Dakota on a cross-country odyssey eventually passing within thirty miles of New York City. It was the farthest landbound trek ever recorded for a wild animal in America, by a barely weaned teenager venturing solo through hostile terrain. William Stolzenburg retraces his two-year journey--from his embattled birthplace in the Black Hills, across the Great Plains and the Mississippi River, through Midwest metropolises and remote northern forests, to his tragic finale upon Connecticut's Gold Coast. Along the way, the lion traverses lands with people gunning for his kind, as well as those championing his cause. *Heart of a Lion* is a story of one heroic creature pitting instinct against towering odds, coming home to a society deeply divided over his return. It is a testament to the resilience of nature, and a test of humanity's willingness to live again beside the ultimate symbol of wildness.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The journey quest -- a hero's voyage toward a remote and significant goal -- is a core plot device in much of the world's best folklore and literature. Think of Jason and the Golden Fleece, Odysseus and his homeland, and, more recently, Sal Paradise in *On the Road* or W.P.

Inman in Cold Mountain. The journey quest at the heart of William Stolzenburg's new book features an unconventional hero to be sure, a three-year-old mountain lion who remains unnamed throughout. Yet readers will find it both compelling and insightful, a worthy addition to the narratives of young adventurers in search of riches, love, and meaning . . . Stolzenburg's thoughtful and gripping narrative, in the end, is less about the sad heart of a lion on a fruitless quest, and more about the hearts and minds of the humans whose territory it traversed." *Natural History Magazine*"Stolzenburg does not minimize the importance of removing these wild animals from populated areas, but he argues persuasively that an extermination policy is unnecessary and repugnant on moral grounds . . . A serious, engrossing look at issues influencing state and federal conservation policy." *Kirkus Reviews*"Heart of a Lion is a tale of extraordinary achievement and resilience that reads both like an adventure novel and a detective story. But the beauty of this book is that its hero is not a human, but North America's largest resident wild cat, the mountain lion. And the journey so vividly and painstakingly documented by William Stolzenburg, working with a few dedicated mountain lion experts and other scientists, is one for the biological record books. This is a story of survival, a tale of how a big cat uses stealth, cunning, and physical prowess to travel thousands of miles seeking others of its kind to settle new lands and seed future generations. I loved this book." *Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, Chief Executive Officer of Panthera*"This is one stirring account of one stirring journey: the trek of a fellow creature through a hostile, man-made world -- and through our imaginations." *Bill McKibben, author of EAARTH: MAKING A LIFE ON A TOUGH NEW PLANET*"One of the most persuasive and enthralling natural history books I've ever read. A powerful voice for learning to live with our wild neighbors." *John Davis, cofounder of the Wildlands Network*"What a great book. In Heart of a Lion, Will Stolzenburg follows the long and unimaginable journey of a lone male mountain lion from the Black Hills of South Dakota to his unfortunate death near Greenwich, Connecticut. We learn just how awesome these prototype predators really are -- predators who need to survive in a human-dominated world. I hope this book will rewild the hearts of people and generate further admiration and protection for this most amazing cat." *Mark Bekoff, author of REWILDING OUR HEARTS and board member of the Cougar Fund*

William Stolzenburg has written hundreds of magazine articles about the science and spirit of saving wild creatures. A 2010 Alicia Patterson Journalism Fellow, he is the author of the books *Where the Wild Things Were* and *Rat Island*. He is also the screenwriter of the documentaries *Lords of Nature: Life in a Land of Great Predators*, and *Ocean Frontiers: The Dawn of a New Era in Ocean*

Stewardship. He lives in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

When I first read the review of this in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, my eyes got big -- it was him, the cat I had cheered on, held hopes for and kept tabs on as much as I was able. Then he went off my news radar until his untimely death along that highway so far away. Such is the state of our world, that I ended up thinking something along the lines of, "well at least he didn't get shot." And I kept saying to all who would listen before that grim news, that I hoped he'd mated along the way -- this cat was so brave, so savvy, so smart he surely deserved to have his genes passed along for the good of the species. Now with Stolzenburg's book I can say this remarkable cat did not die in vain because in this excellent recounting of that journey Stolzenburg deftly brings in pieces of larger, interrelated issues regarding wildlife in America, particularly large predators. The quote of John Muir's in this book is worth the price of it: "None of our fellow mortals is safe who eats what we eat." But do I detect some slight but significant shift in the current of thought about such animals? Might we be saying to the various agencies who make policies regarding the future of mountain lions, wolves and all, "You are deciding for all of us, not just the minority who hunt them for sport." If this change is happening it can't happen fast enough. The short sighted view is the one which does not seem to see the future, or maybe it does and really doesn't want these iconic species to be part of the world we all share. This minority speaks with the voice of power but they truly don't possess it. Once the people who are ready to be educated, to allow, to try tolerance step forward to influence legislation for these species, we and the wildlife can begin to live a fuller life, Which, it goes without saying, we all deserve. William Stolzenburg deserves great credit for the remarkable job he has done with this book. Every time I open it and see the picture from that wintery night in December, 2009, my breath catches a little, just as the first time I ever saw it. For the life of him, the nonplussed surety, the confidence he exuded going about his journey, wild and unencumbered by any regulating guidance but his own. Long life to his kind, and thank you William Stolzenburg for moving that process along in a beautiful and timely way.

This is a finely written book. The prose is clear, accessible, smooth, and yet lively. The author recounts the remarkable story of a mountain lion's journey across the United States in a manner that makes the book a page-turner (what is going to happens next?) without a hint of artifice or invention. Along the way, Stolzenburg manages weave in history, reportage, and reflection in a way that makes the book at once soulful, informative, and engaging.

HEART is a review of the possibility that pumas will recolonize Midwestern and eastern North America, skillfully intertwined with the tragic story of a young male puma who left the Black Hills of South Dakota in the late summer or fall of 2009 and traveled more than 2000 miles eastward in search of a mate, dying on a highway in eastern Connecticut in June 2011. It was probably the longest recorded distance traveled by a land mammal. I have been involved in The Search for evidence of pumas, and later advocating for their return, for more than 40 years, so I can appreciate Stolzenburg's ability to organize masses of information around the central account of the young puma we call the Walker. The author earlier demonstrated that skill in his book WHERE THE WILD THINGS WERE, turning masses of technical information into a very readable and understandable account. The Black Hills are the source of most of the dispersing young male pumas which have left their birthplace in search of a territory of their own and access to females. A dispute continues over the South Dakota Department of Game Fish & Parks' program to significantly reduce the Black Hills population and thus Midwestern and eastern recolonization. Other young male long-distance dispersers which preceded the Walker have--as far as we know--all died as a result of human actions. One made some wrong turns on its journey and was tragically shot down by police in Chicago in 2008. The central character in the book, besides the Walker, is Chris Spatz, President of the Cougar Rewilding Foundation, formerly an obsessed rock climber of the Shawangunks in SE New York State. He has devoted the several years of his life to the cause of puma restoration. Like several others of us former "searchers," Spatz originally believed credible reports of sightings in the East. When his remote cameras failed to document any big cats, and when the evidence he saw always pertained to other species--bobcats, house cats, dog tracks, bear tracks, mostly--he re-evaluated his goals and decided to become an advocate for puma restoration. Others continue to insist native pumas survive in the East and continue The Search. A large section of the book is devoted to discussing the fear of being attacked by a puma, all out of proportion to actual statistics. Stolzenburg dismisses the Habituation Theory, the idea that once pumas get used to being around people, they sooner or later will start attacking on them. He and Spatz look hopefully at California, where most people welcome pumas as neighbors and aren't overly concerned about being prey to a puma. The role of pumas as "deer shepherds" is the topic of another chapter, focusing on John Laundre's "landscape of fear" concept. Clearly the forests in the East, overbrowsed to the point that entire ecosystem are being altered and degraded, need the services of these shepherds.

I had the good fortune to read an advance copy of this book. Fascinating story of a South Dakota lion that makes it to the East Coast. The author has woven in a treasure trove of information about lions in and around the theme. It's not only a compelling read. It's also a good reference/resource book for information about lions but written by a story teller....so readable.

Beautifully written. Brings you right into the story! I became invested in this cougar. Learn about big cat history in America. What a contribution to the ecology of top predators and in particular big cats and their contributions to the ecosystem in which they exist (and in which they could exist.) Loved it!

Outstanding narrative on the important role the mountain lion plays in the ecological health of the land and sadly of the blind, uninformed hate and desire to remove and deplete populations of this important predator. Hunts based upon fear, not science. The author knows his material and writes beautifully.

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