

The wild heart of Woodstock

Nixon, Perkins book explores the town at a walk

You've got to admire a walking column that generates controversy in the form of angry exchanges in the newspaper pages it has occupied. Just as one can't but love wailing columnists who take to the mall when winter's kept them away from the local rambles that center Michael Perkins' and Will Nixon's new collection *Walking Woodstock*.

Journeys into the Wild Heart of America's Most Famous Small Town, which officially launches with a "Foot Stomp-in" Book Party* 3 p.m.-5 p.m. next Sunday afternoon, December 6, at the Kleinert/James Arts Center.

Many of the pieces included in this 250 page collection of essays from Bushwhack Books, with correspondingly rustic illustrations by the irrepressible Carol Zaloom, originally appeared in these pages. But many will also be new to readers, although the terrain covered is more than familiar.

For those who don't know the authors, the localized joys of the book are centered on the lost roads, overgrown bluestone quarries, specially-protected Woodstock Land Conservancy properties, and more dramatic regional sites covered in the tradition of a host of earlier such times, from John Burroughs through Kenneth Wagners' *Catskill Rambles* to a seemingly endless flow of trail-specific hiking books.

The large cairns hidden deep in forests that have mystified many a previous hiker get covered, along with some of the region's fire towers, including that peering down on town from Overlook. We are offered a sighting of a Cooper Lake whale, and learn who owns Yankeetown Pond. We get up to Kaaterskill Falls and a host of easier-to-access walks right in town.

It's a perfect gift idea, thusly, for all of us who live or visit here. And want to get to know the wilder Woodstock around us...in a timeless fashion.

But this is also a work of deep literary merit, nestled comfortably in a sometimes-forgotten tree of collaborative and contemplative works that includes both a host of correspondences and memoirs that acknowledge the natural thoughts nature pulls from us, at all times, as well as the even better elements of questioning and ultimate understanding gained in friendly conversation.

Both men have come to this current work via circuitous rambles, the better to inform their easy-paced but deeply observant walks together.

Nixon first arrived on the Catskills scene in the mid-1990s, retreated to a cabin to rebuild his life as a writer, and not just a journalist. He finally settled into Woodstock, his man-made muse (versus the surrounding Catskills' natural leadership by example) in 2003, and has blessed his hometown-by-choice with the singular enthusiasm only converts have.

Perkins, known of late for his Woodstock Forum series at the town library, as well as his regular flow of poetry and historic pieces published here and elsewhere around town over the

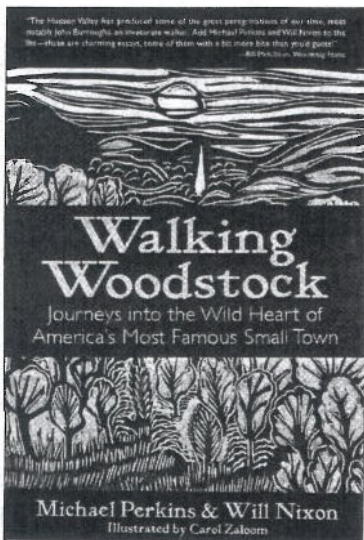


Illustration by Carol Zaloom of Michael Perkins and Will Nixon.

years, could be construed as our collective conscience, in many ways. He is gently reminding us all of where Woodstock has been before, and keeps wanting to go, as if always reminded of what has kept him here through the years.

The joy of both men's essays, in addition to the thoughtfulness inherent in each of their individual voices (always fueled by their mindful poet selves), comes from the way they are always acknowledging each other's presence in each piece. Consider these the unveiling of how it is we think while in dialogue...partly engaged and reactive, partly pushing forward, provocative.

The combination is a sweet, rustic alternative to the ADD image rushes of so much of our channel-flipping and driving-dominated thought patterns, and artistic tone, of the day.

The accolades from fellow writers, our local literary canon, attest to the nerve these two have hit in this adventure they've allowed us all to join them on.

Talk about finding innovation and simultaneous comfort in the simpler pleasures we sometimes have to remind ourselves we originally settled here for.

"We walked into the woods, looking for a path around the pond, but found only a road marked private, so we emerged and walked up Pond Road to its cul-de-sac dead end, and walked back to the car feeling somewhat frustrated," Perkins writes in a piece, seeming to sum up the greater within the specific, as all good art does. "Our only remaining strategy was serendipity."

"This is a hell of a hill."

said Michael, leaning into his walking stick. I concurred," Nixon notes in a piece about California Quarry, as if summing up his own *raison d'être* for not only being a Woodstocker, but for a life dedicated to walking and writing. "Here the crumbling pavement ends. The true drama begins."

"Foot Stompin' Book Party Celebratin' *Walking Woodstock*," to fete these two intrepid travelers, and homebodies, will feature not only readings by Perkins and Nixon, but music by Bruce Ackerman, Spider Barbour, Julie Parisi Kirby and Laurie Kirby. It runs 3 p.m.-5 p.m. Sunday, December 6th, at the Kleinert/James Arts Center, 34 Tinker Street in the heart of Woodstock.

See you there... or out walking. ++

Walking Woodstock is now available in local bookstores, as well as online at www.tbmbooks.com

Chronogram

ARTS. CULTURE. SPIRIT

SHORT TAKES

There is no finer gift than a well-chosen book. Here are a half-dozen eloquent shortcuts to somebody's heart, plus a few other chakras.

WALKING WOODSTOCK: JOURNEYS INTO THE WILD HEART OF AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS SMALL TOWN

MICHAEL PERKINS & WILL NIXON, ILLUSTRATIONS BY CAROL ZALOOM
BUSHWHACK PRESS, 2009, \$18.95

Two clear-eyed poets celebrate their local landscape and a friendship forged on foot in sprightly, remarkably varied essays that exalt the pedestrian in every sense. "Walking is subversive," writes Perkins; Nixon calls it "a radical act." *Foot Stompin' Book Party: 12/6 at 3pm, music by Bruce Ackerman, Spider Barbour, Julie Parisi Kirby & Laurie Kirby, Kleinert/James, 34 Tinker St., Woodstock.*