

Book Review

Review of *Edward Abbey: A Life*, by James M. Cahalan. The University of Arizona Press, 2001. US\$27.95 (hardcover) xv + 357 pp.

Review by Jerome Stone.

This is a readable, thoughtful, and scholarly biography of a nature writer, environmental activist, theoretical anarchist, and inspirer of Earth First! and ecosabotage. Abbey, with *Desert Solitaire* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, was the only author to appear twice in the top fifteen names in Robert W. Merideth's 1993 *The Environmental Bookshelf*. Cahalan is Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches a course on national parks.

This book seeks to separate the man from his persona. For example, though he was not born in Home, Pennsylvania and never lived in Oracle, Arizona, he convinced many people that he was "born in Home" and "lived in Oracle." Yet this is not a study in debunking, but in appreciation without hagiography.

Abbey's life from the hills of Pennsylvania to his hidden grave site in Cabeza Prieta and his complicated friendships and relationships along the way, including David Foreman, Wendell Berry, Murray Bookchin, and Leslie Marmon Silko are explored in detail. The complex issues of Abbey's relation to women, feminism, *Ms. Magazine*, Latinos, and Native Americans are treated thoroughly. His career as a teacher, his relation to Hollywood, the symbolic sabotage of Glen Canyon dam, his stands on gun control, Mexican immigration, and the attacks on the cattle industry are analyzed. Especially worthy is Cahalan's point that reading Abbey without noting the humor leads to serious misunderstanding.

Included are 30 photographs, 37 pages of references, and a 22 page bibliography of writings by Abbey, interviews by the author and others, and major secondary sources.

None of us can copy the life of Thoreau, Muir, or Abbey, but Abbey's life challenges us to fashion our own niche in the struggle for Earth.