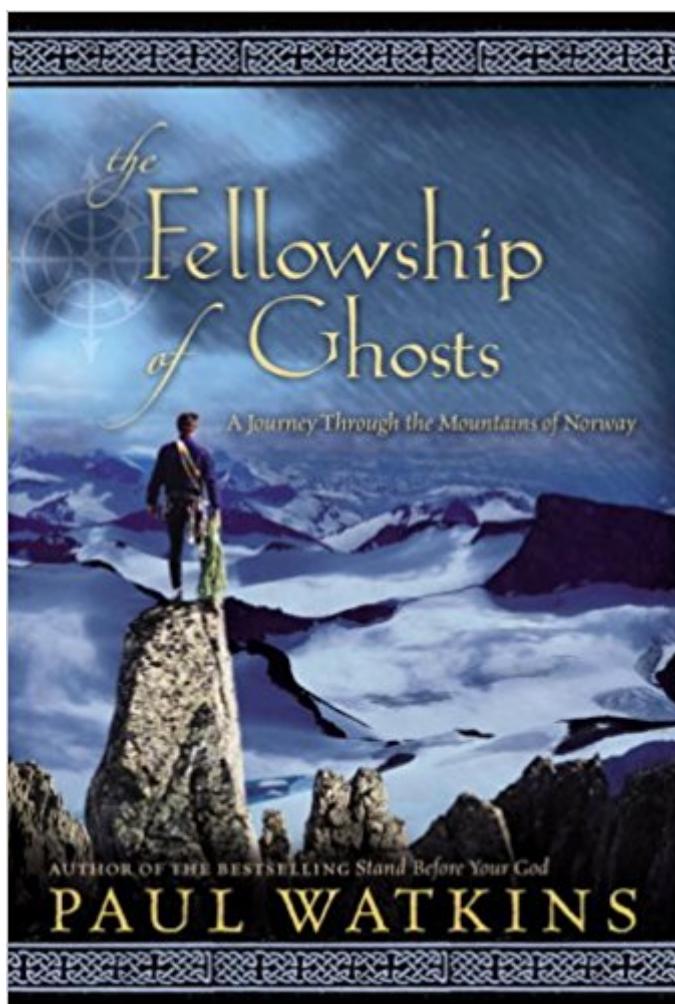


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Fellowship Of Ghosts: A Journey Through The Mountains Of Norway



Synopsis

Acclaimed writer Paul Watkins describes his spellbinding solo trek through the wilds of Norway's Rondane and Jutunheimen mountains—grand but harsh landscapes where myth and reality meet. His adventure takes him through valleys bordered by thousand-foot cliffs, roaring waterfalls wreathed in rainbows, blinding glaciers, and shimmering blue snowfields. Yet this is also some of the harshest, most challenging terrain in the world. Watkins's route follows razor-thin ridges, hair-raising paths, and vertigo-inducing drops. An engaging and reflective memoir, *The Fellowship of Ghosts* captures the profound connection between the Norwegian landscape and the myths, peoples, and dreams that it inspires.

Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: National Geographic; 1st edition (July 1, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0792267990

ISBN-13: 978-0792267997

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.3 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #641,510 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #33 in Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia > Sweden #41 in Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia > Norway #44 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Scandinavian

Customer Reviews

Paul Watkins' "The Fellowship of Ghosts" is equal parts highly readable travelogue and introspective musings as the author hikes and travels through the mountains of Central Norway. The ghosts of the title are earlier, mostly English, authors who wrote about their travels in the mountains of Norway: Watkins travels much of the same ground and notes what has and has not changed. As an American graduate of an English boarding school, the author is in a position to critique his predecessors. Watkins' interest in Norway is stirred when, as a college student working on a fishing boat, he is injured in an accident. During his convalescence, a shipmate entertains him with stories of his Norwegian homeland. Watkins is enthralled by the stories and visits as soon as he is well. The experience never quite leaves him, and the present book is oriented around Watkins' second visit many years later. The area of Watkins's travel is Central Norway, specifically the Rondane,

Jotunheimen, and Dovrefjell ranges, beautiful and still largely underdeveloped country. Watkins' observant eye captures a series of vignettes of the fickle weather, the austere tourist facilities, the magnificent terrain, and of his sense of mysticism inspired by the experience of being there. In these mountains, man is not the center of the universe and defines himself against an epic natural landscape. Watkins finds both the outer beauty of the mountains and a measure of inner peace. Part of Watkins's commentary is a comparison of the marauding Viking stereotype against the kind and honest, if stoic, Norwegians with whom he has contact. Watkins touches on the long history and extensive mythology of Norway in a manner that provides context to his travels and to the Norwegian customs he encounters. Watkins' prose is wry and entertaining, often at his own expense as an American who speaks virtually no Norwegian. It is unfortunate that the book has only one map and a single photograph of the author in the mountains. This reviewer was able to follow Watkins' adventures with a medium scale map of central Norway. This book is highly recommended to those who have visited central Norway or plan to do so. It is not meant to be a travel guide but will provide some perspective to enhance the experience of those who cover the same ground.

This author is a master wordsmith. Through Paul Watkins' perspective, I took every step of the journey right along with him. And what a journey it was! I've visited several of the places he mentioned, which was my reason for buying the book. Though I'm generally a fiction reader and writer, I found Watkins' sensitivity to his surroundings and his appreciation for the land and its people as good as, if not better than, any fiction book about the area. I still return to certain passages because they were so well written that they speak from the page. Beautifully done.

This is a very superficial account of a "hiking" trip that involves rental cars and hotels. It's basically a short series of day hikes with too many irrelevant reminiscences of his days at Eton. I was offended by his repeated use of the old term for Sami people and the region of northern Norway that they inhabit (comparable to using racist terms for African-Americans). I was very surprised to see that the book was so poorly edited. My guess would have been that National Geographic would have access to proper fonts for Norwegian and people who can edit place names, etc. I also was very surprised that someone who teaches writing would have such a wordy writing style (for example, "the reason is because"). It just all added up to a very careless type of writing. Again, I would think National Geographic would be able to find editors to help an author overcome these kinds of things. It's a shame. Norway is a wonderful country, and an in-depth travel book would be such fun to read; however, this is not that book. There's not much here that you couldn't get in a tourist

guidebook. Update: I have since read *Three in Norway* by Two of Them, by J. A. Lees and W. J. Clutterbuck. These two men are some of the "ghosts" Watkins refers to--travelers from long ago. I got the book through interlibrary loan, and thoroughly enjoyed it. It has depth, humor, a genuine characters. Track it down, and read it instead. (See Wikipedia entry about the book.)

I just finished this travel memoir, *THE FELLOWSHIP OF GHOSTS* by Paul Watkins about his solitary hiking trip through the lesser traveled area of Norway that lies just below Trondheim. I gave it 3 stars in relative to a general audience, but for those who have a genuine interest in this type of trip, it is a definite 5 star find. The title is derived from the guidebooks that inform his journey, all written by Englishmen long-dead. It seems there is precious little available on this region of the world other than books written 100 or more years ago. The book itself is an inner exploration of a trekk. Words often fail this experienced writer as he attempts to convey the timelessness and the depths of silence that accompany him as he hangs suspended outside of the 21st century. He also explores the meaning of being a Norwegian, delving into our cultural differences and the meaning of Norway's Viking history. Although I know Norway rather well, this Central region (Jotunheimen and Dovrefjell) was a bit of a no man's land in 1967 when I was there for extended studies. I did not see much of it, and was told it was a place for the hardest of souls, or, alternatively, It was the realm of trolls and giants. It seems little tamed over the past 40 years by this account. I only wish I was strong enough now to attempt to emulate his itinerary! The book is a refreshing change from the derring-do approach of many mountaineering books and may serve to initiate some young minds about the value of such travels---But I suspect the most receptive audience will be people like me, who have already trekked through vast wilderness areas. We will certainly sit in our armchairs and relive our travels as we read through this book---

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