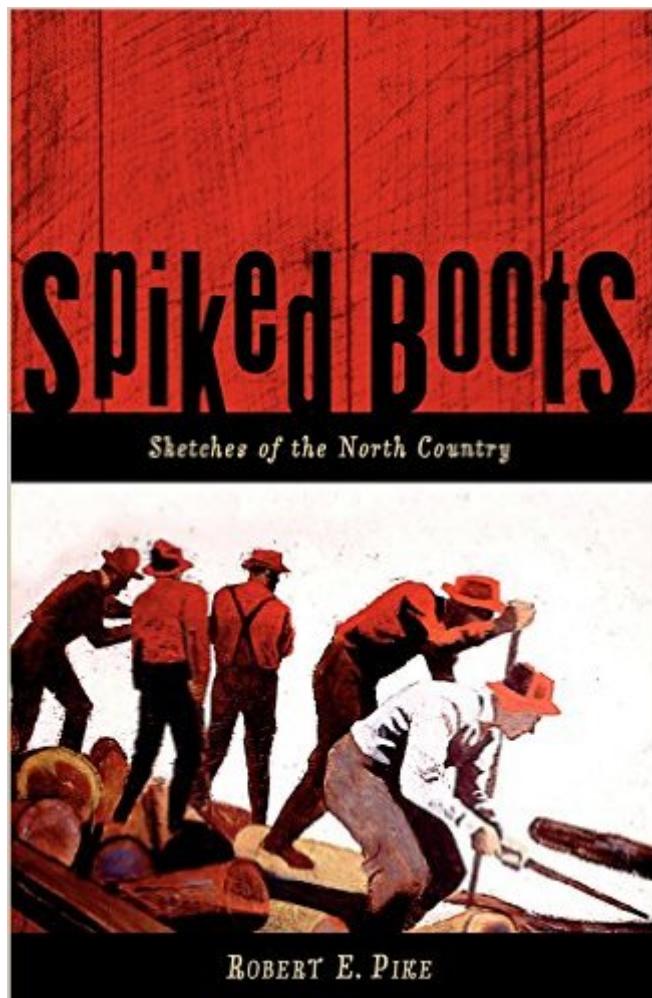


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Spiked Boots: Sketches Of The North Country



Synopsis

In the days of log drives on the rivers of New England, whenever a riverman was killed on the drive, his comrades hung his spiked boots on a tree to mark the spot. As a youth, Robert Pike spotted such a pair of boots, and from that moment was born his lifelong fascination with the colorful history of the New England logging industry. The dozens of tales he collected are narrated here by "Old Vern," a cantankerous backwoods character. Here are legends and wild anecdotes of the loggers and rivermen who worked in the woods and on the Connecticut and Androscoggin Rivers, plying their romantic, dangerous trade in the early part of this century. Others tell of "quaint characters" and "unusual specimens of God's carelessness"--people like Ginseng Willard, who slept in a coffin for two years just to get used to it, or Ervin Palmer, a hermit who dreamed of making a violin that would duplicate the sounds of the natural world. Although Pike was a respected scholar and historian and the author of many books, Spiked Boots is the one he wanted to be remembered by. We are proud to restore to print this important piece of New England folk history. Illustrated with never-before-published photographs from the author's private collection, and a new foreword by Helen-Chantal Pike, who grew up hearing her father's tales as bedtime stories.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is aptly titled as it concerns those hard-working, hard-living souls who were all but born wearing spiked boots and is a continuing saga of this section of New England known as the "north country". These true accounts of activity in the wood and lumber industry are well detailed from early in the 1800's until the last drive in 1915. Interspersed in these narrations are related stories of

heroic deeds, impossible feats of skill, strength and daring; folk lore, superstition and camp fire tales all of which are skillfully described by Pike. These are so well presented that at times it is not easy to separate fact from fiction. Only after years of traveling in the north country, re-living the camp life and winning the confidence and respect of the woodsman was Robert Pike able to put together this story of a by-gone era. He tells it in true vernacular-a peavey is a peavey that was the everyday tool of the woodsman. The bridal chain was the brake that held back the sled load of logs going down the mountain. His description of the lumber baron-good or not so good- is true to life. No artist could paint a better picture of those spiked boots living in that ice water for days, and weeks, on end. Hardy souls that respected their fellow workers is the tribute describing the strong men of the north country. Spiked Boots is one segment of our culture worth knowing and re-reading.

Spiked Boots is among a rare breed of books, either fiction or fact, that can take the reader directly into the minds of the characters and places the author is talking about. Robert Pike approaches the tales of Vern Davison, Jack Haley, and a host of others with such clarity you are transported directly back 100 years to the logging industry of the "north country." You sit in your chair reading the book and the words slowly turn into the wind rushing by your face as you are transported into the horse drawn carriage with Vern Davison and Robert Pike, and you find yourself slowly engulfed in another era. Not to be overlooked in the new Countryman Press edition is the foreword added by Helen-Chantal Pike, Robert Pike's daughter. The foreword adds a look into Robert Pike's life that only a daughter could bring into the book, from the tales of the original "peddling" trips, to the meaning of his writings to himself, to the intimate detail of Robert Pike reading a well worn copy of Spiked Boots over and over again during his last years of life. Also added to the new edition are several photographs culled from the Pike Archives featuring a rare photographic glimpse of the scenery and people that the tales of Spiked Boots originates from. One can fully appreciate the men spoken of as they gaze at the picture of Ginseng Willard next to the coffin he slept in for two years to, "get used to it." For fans of America, for fans of history, for fans of self-reliance, the new edition of Robert E. Pike's Spiked Boots is not one to be missing from the shelves of the library. It offers a rare glimpse at a by-gone era, of men and women that no longer exist in this form of ruggedness that made America what it is today.

Robert Pike grew up in northern VT at the turn of the 20th century, and steeped himself in the lore of that area and era: the loggers, the eccentric woodsman, the singular history of the most independent of the United States. Throughout his long life, Pike wrote several books about the North

Country. One book, "Tall Trees, Tough Men," has been in print since its original publication in 1967, but most of his other books were self-published out of his house in New Jersey. "Tall Trees" is his most respected book among historians, but "Spiked Boots" is his most beloved. His love of the region and its characters comes out in full, and his penchant for story telling, especially tall tales, is razor-sharp. "Spiked Boots" had been previously re-issued by Yankee Press. In this latest re-issue from Countryman, it is augmented with a new foreword by his daughter, Helen-Chantal Pike, and new photos culled from Pike's extensive personal archives. To read "Spiked Boots" is to truly travel back in time to a unique American era.

Robert Pike is a very entertaining author, he writes well, his sense of humor comes through in his work, and in the two books I've read of his, the material itself is funny as well. But there's more to it than that, especially in Spiked Boots, there's A LOT of heart. This book is mainly the tale of the author's relationship with Old Vern (a man who IS new england if there ever was one). Vern, and many of the other people Mr. Pike writes of are more interesting and special than any characters in fiction because they lived. This book helped me see New England in a different time, but it also allowed me to see what hasn't changed over the years. The book is less about the logging industry and more about some of the people around it; especially Vern Davison. He seemed like quite a man, I would have liked to have met him, and heartily recommend reading about him and others in this book.

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