Trespassing Across America: One Man's Epic, Never-Done-Before (and Sort of Illegal) Hike Across the Heartland

Ken Ilgunas
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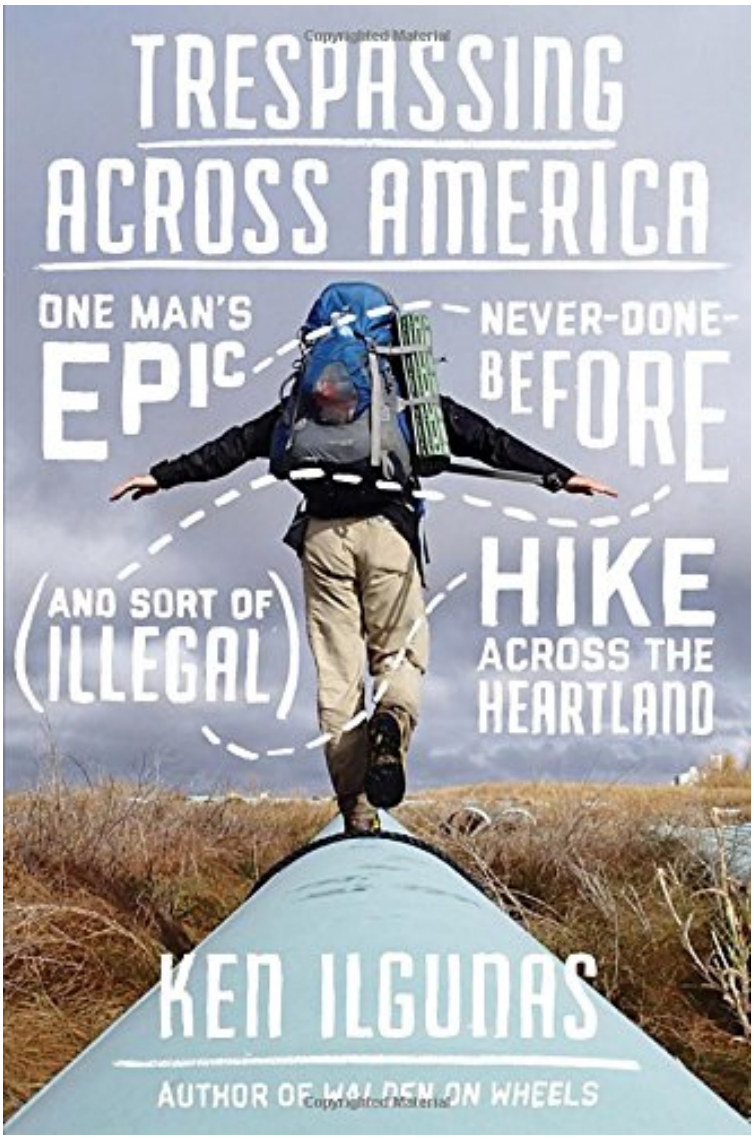

#773975 in Books Ilgunas Ken 2016-04-19 2016-04-19Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.27 x 1.02 x 6.30l, 1.14 #File Name: 0399175482288 pagesTrespassing Across America One Man s Epic Never Done Before and Sort of Illegal Hike Across the Heartland | File size: 32.Mb

Ken Ilgunas : Trespassing Across America: One Man's Epic, Never-Done-Before (and Sort of Illegal) Hike Across the Heartland before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Trespassing Across America: One Man's Epic, Never-Done-Before (and Sort of Illegal) Hike Across the Heartland:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An American Masterpiece! The exhilarating (and horrifying) account of a young mans wondrous 136-day adventure of a lifetime.By Denny HatchAt age 29, Ken Ilgounasa so-so student, career hitchhiker, Alaska tour guide and driftersuddenly saw the XL pipeline as the perfect symbol of the twenty-first century. It was a war zone where environmentalists were pitted against industry, where the hopes for our future clashed with the habits of our past.So he decided to hike the length of itwalk 1,195 miles from Hardisty, Alberta to Port Arthur, Texas. He has produced a truly brilliant kaleidoscopic portrait of America and our neighbor to the North. Here are unforgettable images, brushes with danger and death, and parade of motley characters. Many are salt of the earth. Others might be called Epsom salts.One of the many benefits youll gainpainlessly and pleasurablyfrom TRESPASSING ACROSS AMERICA is deep knowledge of energy, fossil fuels and climate change. When Ilgunas started out, he assumed he would be virulently disparaging of big oil. He writes:Was I anti-oil? The tar sands and the Keystone XL struck me as a pretty terrible idea. But how could I be anti-oil when all of my gear, clothes and food were made with, made of, and transported by oil? I was wearing nylon pants and a polyester shirt, which were materials made from oil. Oil was in my pack, my shoes, my trekking poles. Id originally wanted to travel the XL without using any oil. But where would I, for instance, get shoes that werent shipped with oil. How could I get food without any trace of oil? I could bring a rifle and hunt rabbits and deer, but what oil-run machine had cut the wood for the stock? What fuel ran the furnace that shaped the barrel? Where did the lead come from? Oil was everywhere and in everything.Another gift Ken Ilgunas gives the reader is a slew of easy-to-understand quickie factoids that you can gleefully drop at dinner parties. For example: I didnt know this at the time, but there are 150,000 miles of oil pipelines in the United States alone. Add gas pipelines, and we have more than 1.7 million miles of pipes. These are our veiled veins, silently moving fossil fuels beneath the ground like blood beneath skin. Currently, there are 1.4 billion cows on Earth whose farts make up the worlds largest source of methane, a greenhouse gas 105 times more potent than carbon dioxide. A 2006 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report found that cows generate 18 percent of the worlds greenhouse gasesmore than worldwide transportation.Cows were a big part of Ilgunas struggle with nature. He had to deal with thousands of cows in his footslog across the plains of two giant continents:To me, cows were not docile bovine creatures that they were to most people, but, potentially a swarming herd of ill-tempered water buffalo that could fend off a pride of lions with their organ-rending horns and flank-to-flank formations. The very last thing I wanted was to end up on the news as the cultural spectacle of the latest person killed by an amiable animal in the once-every-few-years Man killed by goat story.Etched in your memory will be mental images of Ilgunas lurid descriptions of what oil exploration does to the ecosystem such as this $200 sightseeing flight he splurged on for an overview of Fort McMurray, Alberta.But the autumnal wonderland came to an abrupt end as we approached and then passed over an enormous tailings ponda lifeless gray sea of sludge, the liquid residue of the bitumen-to-oil refining process. The ponds, which are more accurately described as lakes, bore no sign of bird, wind ripple, or fish. They were still, silent, dead. And they were everywhere. After the refining process, the oil industry creates these giant man-made lakes to store all the toxic fluids. As of 2010, the tailings ponds covered about seventy square miles of northern Alberta, with some ponds as big as 7,500 acres, or half the size of Manhattan. Migrating ducks are known to rest on the ponds, and because the ponds have killed thousands of them, the oil industry had placed scarecrows (dubbed bit-u-men} wearing orange HAZMAT suits in the middle of them. Beyond the pond was one of the pits, a breathtaking mud crater that was of such breadth it almost stretched to the edge of the viewable earth.Above all, you savor dozens of delicious cameo portraits of myriad characterssome wonderfully warm, others not so. One of my favorites:When freezing, saturated, and exhausted, I got to Antlers, Oklahoma, (which boasts of being the Deer Capital of the World), I went straight to the local pizzeria and changed into my dry clothes in the bathroom before ordering myself a supreme pizza. A family with two little girls, whod seen me come in, was curious what I was doing in Antlers. So they came over and asked. I told them tales of charging moose, stampeding cows, and crazy Nebraskan cops. I left out the dilapidated homes, crazy dogs, and strange men walking toward me at night, thinking that I had a good reason to remember the better side of Oklahoma. The girls posed for pictures with me, saying they were going to talk about my trip with their class, and the grandfather left ten dollars on the table, went to the register, and paid for my pizza.In short, you will adore TRESPASSING ACROSS AMERICA as will everyone you recommend it to. It is life changing.In my opinion, every citizen of the world should read it.Denny Hatchdennyhatrch@yahoo.com3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Really enjoyed this gentleman's descriptions of his adventuresBy lost in montanaReally enjoyed this gentleman's descriptions of his adventures. He gives the opinions of people from many walks of life regarding the pipeline without bias. The issues are complicated and the author takes into consideration just how the pipelines existence or non-existence impacts lives. An entertaining author who makes you think.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not worth finishingBy rebecca SchaubachI wont be listening to the rest of this book, I made it about half way through. My husband and I both thought it sounded interesting so we bought it to listen to on a cross country road trip. We thought it would be a story about back country hiking/backpacking with some thoughtful discussion about the effects of pipelines on the natural landscape. Instead, we found a book full of liberal agenda undetones. The author assumes that all ranchers, pipeline workers, and general rural folks are gun happy, uneducated and of the shoot first, ask questions second type. Hes constantly worried about getting shot by land owners as he

tresspasses on their property, but repeatedly ends up getting invited in for dinner and a warm bed to sleep in before he continues on his way. This does not seem to change his opinion of these folks. The book is beautifully descriptive but the flourishing use of adjectives gets exhausting after the first hour of the book. There are wandering tangents including history lessons and in depth descriptions of the tv programs one of his impromptu hosts family watched, I suppose as a reference to the conservative type of person the host is but it seems utterly unnecessary aside from accentuating the political tone of the book. Half way into the book, I still dont know what the end goal/conclusion or general theme of this book is supposed to be and I dont really care to find out. I wouldnt waste your money or time on this book.

Now that President Donald Trump has revived the Keystone XL pipeline that was rejected by former President Obama, Trespassing Across America is the book to help us understand the kaleidoscopic significance of the project. Told with sincerity, humor, and wit, Ilgunas's story is both a fascinating account of one mans remarkable journey along the pipeline's potential path and a meditation on climate change, the beauty of the natural world, and the extremes to which we can push ourselvesboth physically and mentally. It started as a far-fetched ideato hike the entire length of the proposed route of the Keystone XL pipeline. But in the months that followed, it grew into something more for Ken Ilgunas. It became an irresistible adventurean opportunity not only to draw attention to global warming but also to explore his personal limits. So in September 2012, he strapped on his backpack, stuck out his thumb on the interstate just north of Denver, and hitchhiked 1,500 miles to the Alberta tar sands. Once there, he turned around and began his 1,700-mile trek to the XLs endpoint on the Gulf Coast of Texas, a journey he would complete entirely on foot, walking almost exclusively across private property.Both a travel memoir and a reflection on climate change, Trespassing Across America is filled with colorful characters, harrowing physical trials, and strange encounters with the weather, terrain, and animals of Americas plains. A tribute to the Great Plains and the people who live there, Ilgunass memoir grapples with difficult questions about our place in the world: What is our personal responsibility as stewards of the land? As members of a rapidly warming planet? As mere individuals up against something as powerful as the fossil fuel industry? Ultimately, Trespassing Across America is a call to embrace the belief that a life lived not half wild is a life only half lived.

"A combination of Thoreau, John Steinbeck, and Ian Frazier . . . an unforgettable read.Men's JournalA timely and riveting book . . . written by a courageous young man struggling with the chaos he is inheriting from his elders . . . The book mirrors its young author: impulsive, tenacious, reflective and, amazingly, cautious . . . a welcome message of resistance and hope.Evaggelos Vallianatos, Huffington Post[A] fascinating and breezy new effort . . . [Ilgunas] does a masterful job weaving the details of his daily travels into a work of prose that is difficult to put down . . . a very good book from a writer we should hope has many more waiting to come out.Bruce Andriatch, The Buffalo News Ilgunas is something of an heir to Bill Bryson in his ability to find humor and irony in random encounters on the road. But he also brings to his work a John McPhee-like talent for placing big-picture environmental issues into an accessible narrative thats both entertaining and perceptive. Woven into this narrative are profound insights both about the beauty of the natural world and our alternately loving, twisted and exploitative relationship with it. Ilgunass writing is funny, self-knowing and often moving.Joanna OSullivan, Asheville Citizen-Times [A] compelling book . . . outlines a journey that started about a pipeline and became much more.Melanie Wilkinson, York News-Times A rich, perceptive book, an amusing and interesting tale beautifully mixed with thoughtful insights into Ilgunas himself as well as the world that he was seeing more closely than most people ever do . . . at times funny, and at other times philosophical and even poetic.Linda C. Brinson, Greensboro News RecordOne of the great adventure stories of modern times.Vick Mickunas,Dayton Daily NewsWhen Ken Ilgunas sets out to walk the proposed route of the Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta to Texas, he knows he is heading into the heartland of the debate about climate change. What he cant yet know is that, by confronting the challenges of this epic journey, he will emerge renewed, emboldened and filled with hope. An exhilarating adventure."Candace Savage, author of Prairie: a Natural Historyand A Geography of BloodYou could argue that a cross-country pipeline is itself a trespassthrough watersheds, communities, livesso moments when various authorities challenge Ilgunass route work as tiny cosmic jokes. But this is not heavy book. Trespassing Across America is a delight. In the end, walking across the country turns out not to be about you, but about the country and all the land and people that make it one."Robert Sullivan, author of Rats and The Thoreau You Dont KnowAbout the AuthorKen Ilgunas has worked as an elementary school tutor, an Alaskan tour guide, and a backcountry ranger at the Gates of the Arctic National Park. He has hitchhiked 10,000 miles across North America and paddled 1,000 miles across Ontario in a birch-bark canoe. Ilgunas has a B.A. from SUNY Buffalo in history and English, and an M.A. in liberal studies from Duke University. The author of the travel memoirWalden on Wheels, he is from Wheatfield, New York.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.***This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof***Copyright 2016 Ken Ilgunas Escape from Prudhoe BayDeadhorse, AlaskaFall 2011I can say this from experience: Theres nothing like washing spoon after spoon in the middle of the night in a silent kitchen at a working camp three hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle that makes you think about the direction your life is headed in.A

year before I threw on a backpack and set off on a hike across North America, I found myself driving a mud-caked van full of bed linens to a working camp in Alaska called Deadhorse, where I was to assume the position of camp dishwasher.It was a 250-mile ride up the gravel and dirt Dalton Highway that links the interior of the state to the Prudhoe Bay oil fields along the Arctic Ocean coast. It was late and dark, yet the storm clouds zipping from one end of the sky to the other still held within them a curious pink-red hue. Between the time lapselike passage of the clouds and the deathly still tundra plain (where the wind has no trees to shake or leaves to scatter), I felt as if I were entering some disturbing, unworldly, goat-headed netherworld.This place is just weird, said Liam, a cook in the passengers seat, looking up at the clouds.I was thinking the same thing, I said.Deadhorse houses about three thousand oil-field laborers who live at the work camp for a month at a time before they fly back to wherevers home for a week or two. In Deadhorse, there are no churches, schools, families or anything that would make it resemble a normal American town. It is a cold, lifeless, cheerless (and nearly femaleless) place where nobody in his right mind would ever want to livean assertion that would insult no one, as it is held most ardently by those who call themselves permanent residents.I pulled into the Deadhorse Camp parking lot and carefully stepped out into fifty-mile-per-hour winds, placing my feet into the mud-gravel ground with all of my weight for fear that my handful of linens and I would capsize with the next heavy gust.How I found myself in Deadhorse is worth a story of its own, but suffice it to say, I was desperate and needed money. Id moved up to Alaska with the intention of turning a series of blog essays (from my web site, regrettably named The Spartan Student) into a book about a few years of my life during which I lived in a van so that I could afford grad school. But after a series of disappointments, I had to set my sights on the much more practical task of eking out a living.Deadhorse Camp is a steely rectangular Halliburton housing unit that runs entirely on diesel fuel. I worked alongside four coworkers all my age, cooking and cleaning for about fifty oil-field workers who stayed at our camp. Oddly enough, three of us had college degrees in Englisha degree that clearly did nothing to prepare us for the duties of succeeding in the professional world but did, however, empower us to have impassioned forty-five-minute conversations about whether the film Scream does or does not fit within the horror genre.I was given one side of a red-and-white outdoor Travco trailer that was outfitted with giant skis so it could be dragged over the ice in winter. The manager encouragingly referred to it as my writing studio, but the desk, which had been glued to the wall decades before, fell off the moment I placed my laptop on it.Coworkers shared the communal shower with the tourists and pipeline workers. Because, as we were told, water cost thirty-five cents a gallon, it was no surprise that the water flowed from the shower nozzle at an exasperating dribble. The water pressure being so slight, I had to stand directly beneath it. Whenever I turned to wash a different part of my body, Id accidentally nudge the hot-cold dial, which was hyper sensitive, so much so that a millimeter adjustment to the left or right would send either a boiling, skin-melting trickle onto my shoulders or a polar, heart-stopping slush.I didnt mind my accommodations at all. In fact, I was plenty amused with the novelty of the camp and its eccentric drabness, but the workthe work!was depressing. Id come into the kitchen at six p.m. (the dish shift) and scrub the bottoms of burned soup pots, dip my hand into sink drains to pluck out handfuls of slippery vegetables, and cram heavy black industrial trash bags into polar bearproof dumpsters. Id set up the salad bar, slice the bread, arrange the dessert rack, fold used cardboard, and clean up the kitchen for the morning cook. There once was a time when I was a student, a park ranger, an adventurer. And now look at me. Dishwasher.It sounds like your inner Odysseus is lost at sea, said Liam, Deadhorses thirty-year-old prize chef. Id just let out a sigh for the third time in an hour while trying to use a wire brush to scrub dried specks of mashed potato off the rim of a large metal stirring bowl.Oh, Liam. How I liked Liam! Every evening wed work alongside each other. Hed cook, Id clean, and wed talk. Our conversations were the only thing I looked forward to. Liam was a few years older than I was. He was extremely well-read and the sort of person who knows all the names of Homers Greek characters and who could apply his erudition to everyday issues, like the way he assigned some of the few female Deadhorse oil-field laborers with personality-revealing names such as Circe and Calypso. Liam was one of those rare people you come across in life who you want to stuff into a sack and carry with you wherever you go.My Deadhorse stay was supposed to last only a couple of weeks, but it would turn into a couple of months. Over the course of the summer, Id gone from the glorified title of writer-in-residence, to tour guide, to dishwasher, as if I were on some cruel, Scrooge-like, time-traveling tour, visiting my jobs of yesteryear, each demanding less skill and responsibility than the last.I cursed more. I told crass, tasteless jokes. I wore smelly, stained, soup-splattered shirts. I spent my nights drinking Pabst and watching TV series after TV series, and the beginnings of a paunch steadily strained the elastic in my black kitchen pants. I knew things were going from pathetic to thinking, Maybe Cymbalta is right for me? when I dropped a tray of turkey lunch meat onto the floor, and instead of cursing, I just stared at the meat sprawled across the linoleum in deadly silence.We need to get out, Liam said. We need to see the ocean.Our plan was to walk five miles to the Sagavanirktok (or Sag) River and paddle north three miles to the Arctic Ocean in lightweight inflatable kayaks called packrafts. Wed then paddle west for a few miles along the coast before heading back to Deadhorse, where we needed to be back in time for our kitchen shifts the next morning.We put on dry suits, strapped light backpacks around our shoulders, and hiked out over the flat, firm, easy-on-the-feet tundra. The fall foliage was colored with squash yellows, apple reds, and pumpkin oranges. Most of the birds had migrated south, but there were vestiges of summer swarms of flying life: snowy owls, loons, floating gulls, flocks of geese, and a clatter of ravens. Off to the norththrough Liams

binocularswe saw a golden eagle on the ground flapping its wings at a ghost-white arctic fox that was obnoxiously running laps around it.We inflated the packrafts and let the Sagswift and powerful at these northern latitudescarry us to the Arctic Ocean. The ocean, though, wasnt a mere couple of miles away as Liam thought it was. Behind every bend in the river, we expected to see the chilly gray expanse of the ocean, but the river continued to meander northward with no end in sight.Our leisurely paddle downriver was brought to a halt when we caught sight of something big and white and round. Liam and I pulled over to the bank instinctively.Do you see that? I asked.He took out his binoculars.I dont know what it is, but its big and its moving, Liam said nervously.We were unarmed except for a canister of bear spray, and we had no strategy for dealing with a polar bear except to (1) Wait for it to get within twenty feet so we could drizzle it with a puff of cayenne or (2) Drop everything and hopelessly scamper across the empty tundra, which, with each passing second, appeared to be the far more sensible option.I frantically deflated my raft and sloppily strapped it to the outside of my pack with frozen hands covered in wet sand. The polar bear continued its swim toward us, my heart leaping every time I looked up and saw that it was getting closer. It was only a matter of seconds before we would have to drop everything and enthusiastically commit to our coldly Darwinian whoevers fastest wins option number two, but the bear turned out to be nothing more than a drifting seagull leisurely floating down the Sag. (Ones depth perception, we learned, cannot be trusted on this flat, lunar, North Slope landscape.)Okay, no polar bear, thank God, but we had other problems to deal with. For one, because of the rushed, slapdash nature of our adventure, we didnt think to bring any sleeping bags or tents. And because we were so far north and well past the northern tree line, there was no wood to start a fire. And after looking at my GPS, I saw that we had a twelve-mile hike back to Deadhorse, which would actually be more like fifteen when you factor in all the ponds, lakes, and tundra bogs wed have to walk around. And our biggest problem: we would have to walk through the vigilantly monitored, hyper-secure Prudhoe Bay oil fieldthe largest oil field in North America that, before drilling started in 1977, held twenty-five billion barrels of oil. Hiking through the oil field is strictly prohibited, and while we had no desire to break the law, there was no way we could get around Prudhoe Bay. Wed have to sneak through. Wed have to trespass.We had walked a mile southwest, or what we thought was southwest, and when I looked down and picked up my pack that Id set down a moment before, I wasnt sure which direction wed come from and which direction we were supposed to head. I did a 360. And then another 360. I was spinning.The land around us was perfectly flat. The sky was an overcast gray. Everything, up and down, left and right, looked exactly the same. I frantically spun and spun and spun, seeking a hill, a distant building, or a blotch of sunshine behind the clouds that might bring some sense to this senselessly unvarying plains landscape. But there was nothing. I pulled out my GPS, and it gave a different directional reading each time I looked at it. Twisting in circles, my compass seemed to be just as disoriented as I was. The plains, which Id thought to be the epitome of monotony and tranquility, turned out to be as mysterious and menacing as the core of a smoldering volcano.Sit down, Ken, I told myself. Calm down.But in addition to panic, I felt something else: the jolt of a raw encounter with an unforgiving wilderness, the exuberance of having a firsthand experience with the world, a wild gush of emotions that made me feel, though scared and panicky, overflowing with life.I sat down and made myself eat a sandwich. My compass needle ceased its spinning, and I was finally able to locate the bland southwesterly direction we needed to head toward.Hours passed. Night replaced day and a frosty mist clung to my facial hair. On the edge of a lake in front of us stood a giant bull caribou bearing a curled crown of antlers that were orbited by two batlike short-eared owls, both of whichafter the caribou had regally trotted off and disappeared into the fogcame to inspect us, hovering silently above our heads like kites.The distant horizon was speckled with the lights of oil camps and roadway lamps. In front of us was one such oil camp, a small metallic facility with about a dozen outdoor lights. We were all whispers now, wary of being caught and having to deal with the possibility of an interrogation, a fine for trespassing, or something worse. It was close to midnight, so we thought we could slip by undetected. As we neared the building, we saw some humanlike movement. A spotlight clicked on. Whoever was manning the light drew figure eights onto the tundra until he trained the spotlight directly on us.Were screwed, I whispered. Just stay still, Liam said. If they come near, just lie on the ground.What? I dont know, man. Maybe it would be better if we just gave in if theyve already caught us.I was equal parts disturbed by and admiring of Liams composure. How was he not nervous? We stood still for minutestwo mannequins frozen in midstride whispering out of the corners of our mouthsuntil we decided that the guy with the spotlight was probably too far away to see us. We started hiking again, lengthening our strides and adding an alarmed briskness to our gaits. We reached an industrial road and placed our footsteps in sync with each others to reduce the volume of our boots crunch over the gravel. We ducked under a pipeline and continued on.There were lights everywhere in all directions. White lights, orange lights, red lights, blinking lights, the lights of trucks prowling from facility to facility. They knew we were out there. Because of the depth perception problem, we couldnt tell which lights were close and which were far away. The buzz of machines was everywhere: beeps, honks, and whirring engines that had us swiveling our heads every few moments.Looking over the facilities, I thought that there was something disturbing about this place, this barren coastal plain. Id felt it ever since Id come up here and more so now that I was walking through the oil fields. The place made me think of the film Black Narcissus, set in the Himalayas in an old palace that a few well-meaning nuns were trying in vain to transform into a school. The wind from the mountains drove the nuns mad. It never stopped. It moved into their rooms, invading, molesting, reminding

them, like a ghost, that this place is and always will be a place of kings and queens, jewels and perfumes, self-indulgence and debauchery, and that you can either accept that or die trying to change it.Thats how I felt about Deadhorse. That we shouldnt be there. That this place was meant to be still and silent, unbothered and undeveloped. The giant drills, the mud-spattered trucks, the rusty oil barrels, the big diesel-run complex. It bore a special brand of uglinessthe ugliness of a place existing in complete disharmony with its surroundings. The oil was finite and Deadhorse was temporary. Well make a mess of the area for a few decades then leave the corrugated mess to the cold and wind forever after. And we are not real inhabitantsjust suckerfish along for the ride, desperately clinging to the belly of the great oil-filled beast.The Inuit, who once lived along these shores, built homes from the earth, kayaks from skins, clothes from fur. They lived and died here for thousands of years, leaving not the slightest blemish on the land. Surely they didnt view the coastal plain the way the oilman does. Here, the Inuits eye was probably drawn to caribou browsing amid a near-endless field of ripe cotton grass, the ecstatic leap of an ocean fish, the braided sinew of a perfectly crafted bow. Im guessing, but everything they saw must have glistered brightly with the beauty of sustainability, which is the same thing as the beauty of belonging: They knew that this place was their home and would always be their home, that their livelihoods were in harmony with the landa sensation unknown to most all of us. We, on the other hand, dont belong up here. At least not in this way. A place like this could drive a man mad. Atop a pingoa mound of earth-covered icethe silhouette of an arctic fox appeared. It tilted its head back and unleashed a cackling howl. I strode past it, keeping an eye on it, worried that its screams would draw the eyes of prowling oilmen. When I looked forward, I saw Liam pumping his arms, running as fast as he could over land he couldnt see beneath him. I mimicked Liams sprint until I got to where he was and dived behind another pingo.Why are we running? I whispered between breaths.Theres a truck following us with a spotlight, he said. You didnt see it?We heard the growl of the truck just behind the pingo, slowly prowling past while sweeping the spotlight over the land.This is it, I thought. All they have to do is get out and look over this pingo, and were caught.In truth, if we were caught, we probably wouldnt have received more than a slap on the wrist, but without thinking about it, I suppose we wanted to be scared, nervous, and panicky as we trespassed across forbidden lands. To those sound in spirit, this trip would likely have been considered unpleasant, but for those in existential despair, such unpleasantness can function as a restorative distraction, a resuscitating shock, a defibrillator charge to the soul.The oilmen never spotted us, and we continued on through night and fog, around lakes, and across the other waist-high branch of the Sag until we staggered into Deadhorse Camp. The trip was a disaster, but I thought: What would I do to have the life of the hiker? It was more than just a form of escape. On a hike, the days pass with the wind, the sun, the stars; movement is powered by a belly of food and water, not a noxious tankful of fossil fuels. On a hike, youre less a job title and more a human being. Our commute, our shift, our shows: How quickly does the routinemasquerading as lifeblock from our view the grand vistas of possibility. A periodic hike not only stretches the limbs but also reminds us: Wow, theres a big old world out there.This is the best experience Ive had in a long time, said Liam.I know, I said. Me. too.Invigorated by our hike, the kitchen conversations between Liam and me began to take on a tone of fanatical zeal. As the purposeless are wont to do, Liam and I continued to fantasize about grandeur, high adventure, true purpose. (At this moment, kitchen crews everywhere are plotting to take over the world.) Disgusted with what the oil industry had turned the Arctic coast into, we discussed putting a team of radical environmentalists together to commit acts of environmental terrorism. Liam would be the cook, I would be the letter-to-the-editor guy, and Liam knew a guy who might know a thing or two about explosives. These discussions would always begin in a spirit of whimsical and good-humored facetiousness, but would, by the end, take on an unsettling seriousness as we delved into the particulars: So do you or do you not know a guy?The Keystone XL Pipeline had become a hot topic during our nightly discussions. Wed read that protestors were performing acts of civil disobedience to oppose the pipeline that, if approved, would transport 830,000 barrels of tar-sands oil every day across the continent and help expand the already expansive tar sands of northern Alberta.There was something about being up in Deadhorse that made the idea of the 1,700-mile pipeline particularly upsetting. Here we were at ground zero of American oil development. We saw the industrial squalor, the depraved lifestyles, the sad, empty eyes of the workers. We felt the emptiness within ourselves. This place was an Ayn Rand wasteland, the epitome of our countrys wrongheaded conception of progress. The thought of creating more such places, more such jobs, and more such planet-warming greenhouse gases defied, in our eyes, all the tenets of good sense and reason.We wondered: If we totally buy into the evidence and civilization-ending projections of global warming, what is our duty as citizens of this earth? Is donating to the Sierra Club enough? Is our responsibility fulfilled if we vote for the right politician and bike to work on sunny days? Or is something more required? Physical action? Violence? Terrorism? If the planet is, in fact, being slowly strangled to death, isnt it our duty to do everything in our power to stop the perpetrators? Whats the most that one person can do?What if we hike the Keystone XL? Liam asked out of the blue.You mean across country? Across private property? Across the whole continent? I asked.Yeah, he said. Just like we did in Prudhoe Bay.Liams idea was crazy but not an I hope I wont have to find a way to get accepted into a gang in federal prison for being a terrorist kind of crazy. I felt a shocka ground-trembling lightning bolt that coursed through me, leaving in its aftermath a flurry of jitters that bordered on the erotic. Some deep, inner part of me recognized the brilliance of Liams idea with a startling immediacy. I hadnt begun to consciously rationalize why, but some farseeing

part of me knew then and there that I was going tono, had tohike the Keystone XL.Everything began to make sense. Being in Deadhorse. The nighttime hike out of Prudhoe Bay. This crazy period of my life could only end with a crazy conclusion. I dropped the mixing bowl into the sink, looked at Liam, and saidwith what must have been almost frightening excitementWe must