Fedarko, Kevin. *A Walk in the Park: The True Story of a Spectacular Misadventure in the Grand Canyon*. New York: Scribner, 2024, 488 pp.

Reviewed by Jack Ryan, Gettysburg College.

Kevin Fedarko’s *A Walk in the Park: The True Story of a Spectacular Misadventure in the Grand Canyon* describes how Fedarko and Pete McBride, his hiking partner, met, why they do what they do, and how they decided to walk the length of the Grand Canyon from east to west, a 750-mile trek and one of the most demanding hikes in the world. Fedarko understands the attraction and the challenge of wild places, and he knows what happens when lack of preparation for an extended journey into the wilderness exceeds logical thought. Fedarko pokes fun at himself and McBride, and together they function as a comic corollary to the professionals who save them from themselves. Fedarko’s affection for nature’s delicate details, his appreciation for the Colorado River’s turbulent power, and his knowledge of the Grand Canyon combine to make this book an essential part of any American Wilderness literature library.

Fedarko, a journalist and accomplished outdoor writer, has been studying, navigating, and respecting the Grand Canyon for years. His first book, *The Emerald Mile: The Epic Story of the Fastest Ride in History Through the Grand Canyon*, published in 2013, a *New York Times* bestseller, won both the National Outdoor Book Award and the Reading the West Book Award. The book’s focus is Kenton Grua’s scheme to shoot the Colorado River from the Glen Canyon Dam to Lake Mead, the length of the Grand Canyon. Grua and two friends, all accomplished river guides, used the river hydraulics created by an exceptional snowpack runoff to run the Colorado in The Emerald Mile, a wooden dory, in record time. Grua’s adventure was illegal, wrongheaded, and spectacular—they shot through the canyon in under thirty-six hours, an unbroken record.

McBride, a self-taught photographer and filmmaker, has worked for the National Geographic Society, Smithsonian, Google, and The Nature Conservancy. His book, *Grand Canyon: Between River and Rim*, winner of a National Outdoor Book Award, led to a feature-length documentary, *Into the Grand Canyon*, which was nominated for an Emmy Award in 2020. Fedarko and McBride know the Grand Canyon. *A Walk in the Park* clarifies the cost of gaining that knowledge.

Neither Fedarko nor McBride are novice backcountry hikers, but the decision to hike the canyon was not their best moment. Fedarko was born in Pittsburgh, and McBride hails from Colorado. On paper, they seem unlikely partners. McBride absorbed the culture of competitive athletes, particularly downhill skiers. Fedarko, who studied Russian History at Oxford University, escaped Pittsburgh’s pollution and the mining work that anchored his extended family. Recording adventures connected them. Past wilderness experiences helped make Fedarko and McBride a compatible team—one the scribe, the other the image maker. So, the notion that they would get in shape by hiking the length of the Grand Canyon to, well, hike the length of the Grand Canyon did not phase them.

Fedarko admits to being obsessed with the canyon for most of his life, beginning at age eleven when his father handed him a copy of Colin Fletcher’s *The Man Who Walked Through Time*, published in 1968, the same year Edward Abbey published *Desert Solitaire*. Both books stand as classics in the canon of American Wilderness literature. The image on the cover of Fletcher’s book features the author in full backcountry gear gazing at the canyon and the river, a visual invitation that Fedarko cleaved to for decades. His physical connection to the canyon started on the Colorado River. At the brink of middle age, while working on a magazine article, Fedarko elected to spend his summers as a dory volunteer, a trainee with dreams of becoming a dory trip leader. Things did not work out. Fedarko earned a nickname, Groover Boy, for scrapping his boats against the canyon walls; he managed a raft boat called *Jackass*, which carried river trip waste, both human and manmade. That position kept him on the river and in the canyon. He never graduated to a wooden dory.

What surrounded Fedarko, the spaces along and above the river, pulled at him. Then McBride suggested hiking the canyon. Fedarko saw himself in Fletcher’s boots, standing on the edge of the rim, looking into the rugged space below. *A Walk in the Park* opens with an Edward Abbey quote from *The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West*: “There are some good things to be said about walking. Not many, but some.” For two guys who neglected to unpack their gear until they reached basecamp, to wear gaiters, which prevent grit from sandy, rocky surfaces from entering hiking boots, and had no idea how to locate water sources, a portion of Abbey’s introduction to *Desert Solitaire* made more sense: “When traces of blood begin to mark your trail you’ll see something, maybe.” Late in their journey, Fedarko and McBride learn about the canyon, its people, and themselves during their year-long walk.

Fedarko presents himself and McBride as the Vladimir and Estragon of the Grand Canyon, continually searching for something, wondering why they are doing that, and grumbling at each other as their quest nears an end. While they are not equal to the professional backcountry hikers who save them and guide their walk in the park, Fedarko and McBride are professionals in their fields, and they respect the physical world and the perils wild territory presents. While struggling against the canyon’s formidable landscape and dangers, Fedarko traces the canyon’s history, including the native peoples whose legacy, stewardship, and commercial interests illustrate the spiritual power, complicated history, and possible future of the canyon. While Fedarko and McBride stumble along the landscape, it is obvious that each hiker takes the quest seriously, even if they are not as competent as the professional canyon hikers who befriend them. Fedarko cites his extensive source material for every chapter and includes a comprehensive bibliography of all the books, articles, and additional sources he used on his website.

Aware of their shortcomings but undaunted, Fedarko and McBride keep moving and recording. They reveal the beauty, danger, and mystery the Grand Canyon contains. *A Walk in the Park*, part memoir part participatory journalism, is a fast-paced compelling book, one that features unanticipated pleasure and history on every page. Every character this pair encounters is rendered in precise detail, from indigenous women to university professors to canyon country experts. Although McBride plays the role of the haphazard buddy in the book, his work, too, is an ideal companion to *A Walk in the Park*. Early in *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey describes the awe he feels looking at what was then called Arches National Monument: “Standing there, gaping at this monstrous and inhuman spectacle of rock and cloud and sky and space, I feel a ridiculous greed and possessiveness come over me. I want to know it all, possess it all, embrace the entire scene intimately, deeply, totally, as a man desires a beautiful woman.” Fedarko and McBride, enlightened twenty-first-century national park adventurers, detail exactly how much it takes to possess and experience the vast expanse of the Grand Canyon.