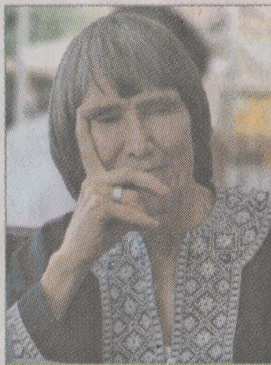


2-7-2019

Debut collection of essays from a young writer celebrating Vermont

"The Animal One Thousand Miles Long: Seven Lengths of Vermont and Other Adventures" by Leath Tonino Trinity University Press, 2018

The animal in the title is a creature Aristotle invented in *The Poetics* to demonstrate that an observer of a gigantic object could see only its parts, and thus lost perception of its "unity and wholeness." Tonino implicitly compares Vermont to this animal; his 20 essays, collected from periodicals published between 2011 and 2017, portray his adventures and observations in all parts of the state. Together, they also portray his impossible yearning to experience the whole by feeling "the infinite invitation that is the terrain of home."



One-Minute Book Reviews

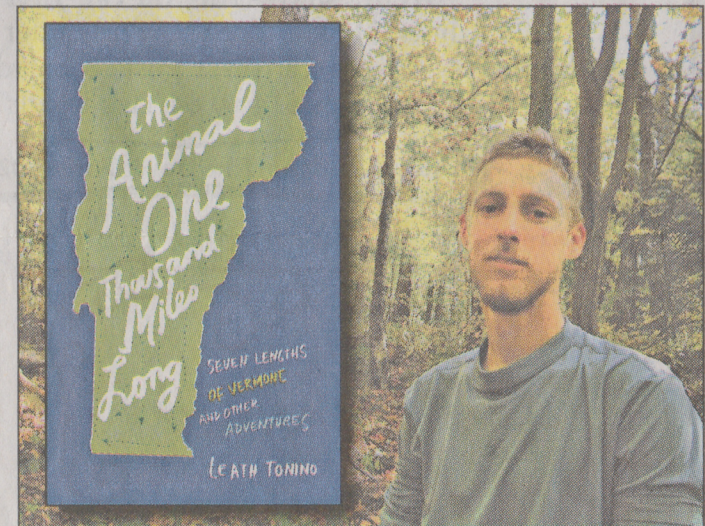
Laura Stevenson

Young and vigorous, Tonino is an enthusiastic adventurer. "Seven Lengths of Vermont," for example, opens with his vow, upon returning from several years "bumming around the West," to rediscover his native Vermont by touring it in seven different ways in the course of a year. The reader (presumably ensconced on a sofa) then becomes his vicarious companion as he hikes the length of the Long Trail, hitchhikes around the state in over 30 rides; completes a three-week, 300-mile ski trek along the Catamount Trail; bikes through the state in a tour of some 500 miles; paddles 260 miles in a canoe trek along the Connecticut River; swims, in 10 days, the length of Lake Champlain; and finally, climbs into a friend's small plane for a two-hour "vast and fast" flyover of the whole state. At the end of the year, Tonino has experienced parts of Vermont from many angles and at many different speeds in an attempt to under-

stand the whole.

There are more parts, of course, and more ways to investigate them. In "The Smiles are Huge" Tonino goes jack-jumping, a winter sport practiced only in Vermont. Other portraits of his cold and exhausting winter adventures (biathlons, New Year's Day kayaking, sled-packing) prove that Vermont offers winter opportunities far beyond commercial skiing. Mingled with Tonino's delightfully ironic portrayals of his adventures are interesting considerations of Vermont's present wilderness (its official Wilderness areas) and its unofficial wilderness, thousands of acres of trees that are the result of ecological collapse and subsequent regeneration.

Between 1791 and the War of 1812, Tonino says, Vermont had the fastest growing population of any state in the union; a half-century later, its population had declined 40%. Why? Because the early settlers had clear-cut its virgin forest, raised sheep that overgrazed the resulting pastures, and abandoned it as the topsoil washed away. Tonino's essay "Seeing is an Art" portrays one of the first naturalists to recognize man's catastrophic effect on his landscape: Darwin's contemporary George Perkins



Leath Tonino

Marsh, a distinguished resident of Woodstock. As a cautionary tale about this destruction, Tonino offers the 19th century town of Glastenbury (near Somerset), in which 21 brick kilns produced charcoal, each of them burning 50 cords of wood a day, and a sawmill turned out 1,000 board feet an hour ... until, with no more trees to hold mountain topsoil, the town disappeared after the "fresheet" of 1898. Hiking to the town's location, Tonino found all signs of civilization covered by regrown forest – a "wilderness in recovery, the flow of wildness across

time." Tonino's adventures encourage Vermont natives and visitors to look at the wilderness about them, instead of assuming that wilderness can be found only in the West.

Provided that they heed George Perkins Marsh's observation that "sight is a faculty; seeing, an art," they will develop a deep appreciation for the varied and beautiful wild parts of the animal a thousand miles long.

Laura Stevenson lives in Wilmington and her most recent novels, "Return in Kind" and "Liar from Vermont," are both set on Boyd Hill Road.