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Teaching, Learning,
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THE NATURE OF NATURE: SPACE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY ON THE
APPALACHIAN TRAIL (311 pp.)

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The purpose of this study was to examine nature experiences; how these experiences in nature impact place-making and in turn are impacted by place; why someone would choose to engage in an intense nature experience (in connection with significant life experiences); how people connect to nature and what their construction of nature is; and how knowledge is generated during an informal nature experience. A naturalistic inquiry methodology was selected to explore how Appalachian Trail thru-hikers experience and connect to nature, what prior nature experiences and formative influences led them to undertake a long-term outdoor experience, and the relationships between space, place, identity, and power.

To address this purpose, I collected data from 18 Appalachian Trail thru-hikers via in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation field notes, and an autoethnographic research journal. The results of this research included a number of emergent findings. The emergent themes fell into the following categories: awareness of nature, identifying as a participant or observer in nature, power over nature, power of nature, social experiences, nature experiences, learning, significant life experiences, formative influences, reasoning, relationships with nature, bounding/bordering nature, conceptions of nature, place-making, and evolving identities. The results are presented in this

dissertation in support of an argument for environmental education scholars and practitioners to attend to varying constructions of nature as a space, as well as how identity shapes experience and place-making.