



A Grip on the Mane of Life: An Authorized Biography of Earl V. Shaffer

David Donaldson, Maurice J. Forrester

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After serving four and a half years in the army during WWII-mostly in the battle-torn islands of the South Pacific-and along the way losing his best friend at Iwo Jima, Earl Shaffer came home to Pennsylvania with a large dose of military depression. After rattling around for a while he decided to act upon a prewar dream of hiking the entire Appalachian Trail, a decision that was spurred by reading a magazine article stating that such a feat was likely impossible.

Earl achieved his goal, and history's muse presented him with a personal niche in her gallery. Over the course of three decades he wrote a memoir of that hike which was published by the Appalachian Trail Conference as *Walking with Spring*. The book became an instant hiking classic. Most of Earl's writing was devoted to his first love, poetry. Earl penned more than a thousand poems during his lifetime, a trove that includes a respectable number of polished gems.

In mid-career he returned to hiking. In 1963 he hiked five hundred miles of the Cascade Crest Trail, and in 1965 he again hiked the entire Appalachian Trail-this time in the opposite direction. When not hiking, Earl spent most of his free time working on the Trail. He built trail, constructed shelters, and masterminded a major trail relocation in Pennsylvania.

These were not his only interests. Earl was moved by the plight of Native Americans. In the early 1960s Earl played an active role in the ultimately failed effort to stop construction of Pennsylvania's Kinzua Dam. After what one would think was already a full and productive life, Earl had yet another dream-his grand finale. In 1998, Earl decided to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his first A.T. thru-hike by doing an encore. Just a few weeks shy of his eightieth birthday Earl Shaffer climbed yet again to the crest of Maine's mile-high mountain, Katahdin, whereupon the Appalachian Trail icon became a national legend. This book is his story.

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