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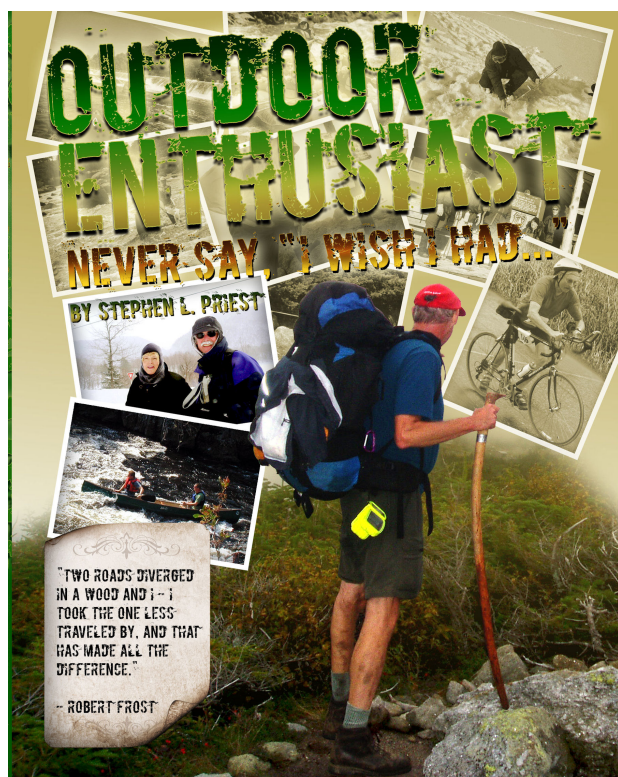
Enthusiast passes on tips, stories, love of outdoors

By Brad Viles

Stephen L. Priest of Bedford, N.H., loves the outdoors. You get that impression when you start reading his new book; “Outdoor Enthusiast: Never Say, ‘I Wish I Had...’”

Priest began his preoccupation with outdoor activities more than 25 years ago, when he ruptured his Achilles tendon in a pickup basketball game.

As Priest writes in the book, he faced the danger of using the injury as an excuse to keep him couch-bound and overweight. Instead of giving in to the easy temptation of a sedentary life, he goes to the cellar and digs out his retired pair of army boots. He puts them on, determined to walk two telephone pole lengths down the street in front of his house. After a couple of years of running a mile every day, he eventually pursues every type of outdoor activity he can find.



The book is organized in chapters that focus on all the different pursuits he has taken part in over the years. The first chapters cover triathlons: swim, bike and run competitions. His family, wife Cathy, sons Tim and Shaun and various friends join him as teammates and supporters.

Priest enters races in every New England state and finishes almost always in the back of the pack, just happy to finish. He also competes in an assortment of odd triathlons that include hiking, biking and golf in one event, to a winter triathlon involving downhill skiing.

Eventually, Priest ran as an unregistered runner, a “bandit,” in the Boston Marathon. He describes the scene as he approaches the 15-mile mark.

“People are clapping and yelling all around me. Suddenly the runners behind me start applause — the elder John Kelley, the running

legend who has won the Boston twice and finished over 50 times, is about to pass me! The thrill of John Kelley passing me in that first Boston is an honor I still remember.”

Priest ran 11 marathons and finished Boston three times.

Throughout all the events, he maintains his enthusiasm for the chance to just finish the race. At the end of each chapter he writes a few words of advice or some training tip he gained from participating. Some of the stories are really comical.

There's one race where he and his teammates actually finished first. They turned out to be the only competitors in their category — the five other preregistered teams didn't show up.

In the hiking chapter, the author gives tips on the many uses of carrying trash bags when hiking. Throughout the book are lessons he shares with the reader, some from mistakes he has made and others from things that he has learned to do right. For example, on a winter overnight in a snow mound shelter on Mount Washington he learned that snow burns.

When he and his partner are almost out of drinking water, they put snow in an empty pan.

"I learned that snow burns! It actually smells like burned toast as it disintegrates immediately upon reaching the bottom of the pan," he writes. In order not to burn the snow they learn to add a small bit of water to the pan first.

It appears that whatever activity Priest tries he embraces wholeheartedly. From running up Mount Washington and finishing in his usual position, last, to building a snow-mound shelter, he is vigorous in his attempts. He sees the outdoors as motivating.

In the canoeing and kayaking chapter he paddles one or the other of several rivers in Maine. Among the rivers he runs are the Mattawamkeag, the Androscoggin, the East Branch of the Penobscot, the Moose River Bow trip and the Allagash.

He spends several days camping along the rivers and runs Class II rapids with very little instruction. Sometimes the results are predictable. He dumps or scrapes by, but at this point in the book, you realize he's not going to be discouraged.

Interspersed throughout the book are sound outdoor techniques, like the 10 essentials for hiking or how to "peel" a kayak into a fast flowing river. There are itineraries for paddling treks and backpacking trips.



The book is part memoir, part manual for outdoor fun and part motivation for readers who may desire to experience the outdoors to the extent of the author.

Reading the book won't necessarily make you a more accomplished outdoors person. For that transformation you'll have to get out there and find your own adventure. But, if you enjoy a great collection of tales written in an easy-to-understand style, then this book could help get you off the couch.

Priest writes clearly and descriptively about all his adventures. One of those vivid moments occurs on the Moose River Bow trip, a five-day paddle.

“The Bow trip, like our other Maine canoe trips, offered us something different in outdoor experiences,” he writes. “The canoe rescue techniques we learned, the double rainbow, seeing the Bald Eagle, and most assuredly the lightning bolt, will all be remembered as making this trip especially unique.”

Priest has included in the book lists of resources for finding trail networks in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, guide services and a chapter on preventing outdoor-related injuries. There are more than 70 color photos — scenes, people and wildlife shots.

The one mantra that runs through the book is the phrase in the title, “Never say, ‘I wish I had...’” If there’s an adventure to be found, you can discover it yourself, according to Priest, by filling in the blank at the end of that phrase. As in, “Never say, ‘I wish I had ...’” spent more time outdoors. All you have to do is get out there.

The book is 219 pages and retails for \$34.95. It’s available at the following: the Saint Joseph College bookstore in Standish, www.Amazon.com, www.outdoorsteve.com (the author’s Web site) and www.createospace.com

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