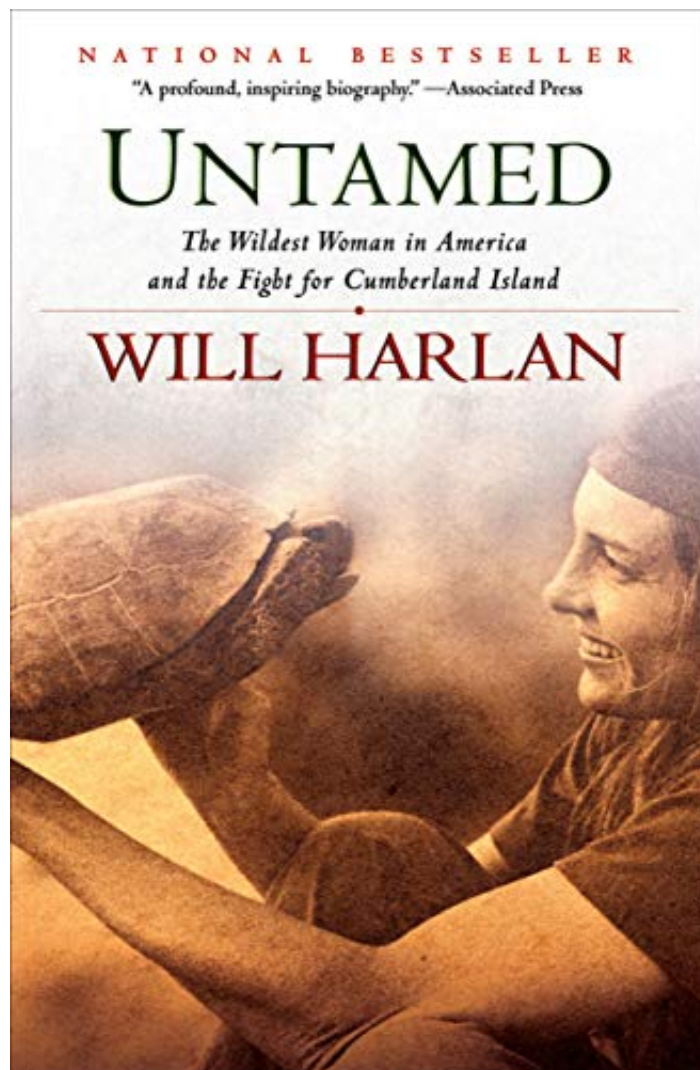


Untamed: The Wildest Woman in America and the Fight for Cumberland Island

by

Will Harlan



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Synopsis

The inspiring biography of the adventuresome naturalist Carol Ruckdeschel and her crusade to save her island home from environmental disaster. In a “moving homage . . . that artfully articulates the ferocities of nature and humanity,” biographer Will Harlan captures the larger-than-life story of biologist, naturalist, and ecological activist Carol Ruckdeschel, known to many as the wildest woman in America. She wrestles alligators, eats roadkill, rides horses bareback, and lives in a ramshackle cabin that she built by hand in an island wilderness. A combination of Henry David Thoreau and Jane Goodall, Carol is a self-taught scientist who has become a tireless defender of sea turtles on Cumberland Island, a national park off the coast of Georgia (Kirkus Reviews). Cumberland, the country’s largest and most biologically diverse barrier island, is celebrated for its windswept dunes and feral horses. Steel magnate Thomas Carnegie once owned much of the island, and in recent years, Carnegie heirs and the National Park Service have clashed with Carol over the island’s future. What happens when a dirt-poor naturalist with only a high school diploma becomes an outspoken advocate on a celebrated but divisive island? Untamed is the story of an American original who fights for what she believes in, no matter the cost, “an environmental classic that belongs on the shelf alongside Carson, Leopold, Muir, and Thoreau” (Thomas Rain Crowe, author of *Zoro’s Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods*). “Vivid. . . Ms. Ruckdeschel’s biography, and the way this wandering soul came to settle for so many decades on Cumberland Island, is big enough on its own, but Mr. Harlan hints at bigger questions.” —The Wall Street Journal “Wild country produces wild people, who sometimes are just what’s needed to keep that wild cycle going. This is a memorable portrait.” —Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature* “Deliciously engrossing. . . Readers are in for a wild ride.” —The Citizen-Times

Sort review

Will Harlan is editor in chief of Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine and a nationally acclaimed journalist whose work has appeared in National Geographic Adventure, Sports Illustrated, The Wall Street Journal, and BBC.com. He is also one of the country's top trail runners. He lives on a farm in the mountains of North Carolina. About the Author A New York Times Bestseller A Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Series pick One of Ebook Tops's Top 100 Books of the Year A Daily Beast Best Nonfiction Book of the Year Winner of the Langum Malott Prize Winner of the 2015 Society of Environmental Journalists Rachel Carson Environment Book Award An Advisory Council for the Georgia Center for the Book's "Books All Georgians Should Read" "Vivid. . . Ms. Ruckdeschel’s biography, and the way this wandering soul came to settle for so many decades on Cumberland Island, is big enough on its own, but Mr. Harlan hints at bigger questions. Who does this island belong to? The Park Service, the Carnegies, Carol—and, for that matter, the turtles? What is the difference between stewardship and ownership? Carol

Ruckdeschel found a home as the latest in a series of women who have tried to protect Cumberland Island. The difference being that, rather than being a Carnegie, she is a benevolent invasive species of one.”—Wall Street Journal“Harlan intimately and expansively profiles a fearless Southern island dweller. . . . A moving homage and an adventure story that artfully articulates the ferocities of nature and humanity.”—Kirkus Reviews“Carol Ruckdeschel isn’t quite your mother’s idea of a role model, but she is my idea of an inspiring woman. Her gifts are many, her commitment resolute, her contribution world-class. And boy—as you’ll read—has she had fun. What a story! It’s as beautiful as the island she loves.”—Carl Safina, author of *The View from Lazy Point* and *A Sea in Flames*“Now this is an adventure story. Untamed is the true-life saga of a brilliant, beautiful woman who became her own tall tale. Just to survive, Carol Ruckdeschel had to become as elusive and mysterious as the creatures she first set off into the wilderness to study. Hunted by her enemies, stalked by an ex-lover, living off the land, Ruckdeschel found herself locked in a battle of wits to stay alive and pursue her scientific passion. This is no *Sad Girl on a One-Year Quest for Love and Backbone*; Carol Ruckdeschel is on a mission, and she’s smart and lethal enough to deal with anyone who tries to stop her.”—Christopher McDougall, author of *Born to Run*“A true action hero, Carol Ruckdeschel is using her powers of insight, persuasion, and personal commitment to protect a wilderness island off the coast of Georgia. She’s not just bemoaning the tragic decline of the natural world that sustains all life on earth, humans and turtles included. She is also putting her own life on the line to save what’s left. Thanks to Carol, there is hope for wild creatures who have preceded humankind by hundreds of millions of years—and hope for an enduring future for ourselves as well.”—Sylvia Earle, record-setting oceanographer, National Geographic explorer-in-residence, 2009 TED Prize winner, Mission Blue founder, Time’s first Hero of the Planet, and author of *The World Is Blue*“Wild country produces wild people, who sometimes are just what’s needed to keep that wild cycle going. This is a memorable portrait.”—Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, winner of the 2013 Gandhi Peace Award, founder of 350.org“Get ready to inhale steaming carcasses, gun smoke, and salty sea air. Harlan has a magic touch for storytelling. He rings out every sensory detail in this compelling sketch of a controversial, no-holds-barred life.”—Jennifer S. Holland, National Geographic writer and New York Times bestselling author of *Unlikely Friendships*“Open this book to the brine of salt marsh, the musk of turtles and sea breezes, and the astonishing story off Carol Ruckdeschel. From the first line I was captivated by this biography of a fierce and enigmatic passion for wildness, mesmerizing and beautiful. May we all learn something of love from it.”—Janisse Ray, author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*“Untamed is not only a page-turner but also a show-stopper. Its engaging protagonist, Carol Ruckdeschel—a combination of Jane Goodall and Annie Oakley—is kaleidoscopic in her paradoxes: ‘brutal and benevolent, savage and sympathetic, cutthroat and compassionate.’ Harlan has written an environmental classic that belongs on the shelf alongside Carson, Leopold, Muir, and Thoreau. This crafty, adventurous biography reads like a good novel and leaves readers in tears. It’s a tale of an American hero told by an American hero, and the collaboration is luminous.”—Thomas Rain

Crowe, author of *Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods*"This is going to be a winner. I loved it—and was even choked up a time or two by Carol's passion to save wild Cumberland. An 'undertow of awe' sweeps beneath the entire story. As Carol's life reveals, the battles for wilderness are many and the victories are short-lived, but ultimately the fight comes down to one thing: pure, unwavering love."—Brooke Williams, author of *Halflives: Reconciling Work and Wildness*"Deliciously engrossing. . . . Readers are in for a wild ride."—Citizen-Times (Asheville)"This is one gorgeous book, a testament not only to Will Harlan's obvious writing chops but also what the best in journalism is all about, the passion to dig and go beyond the obvious. Harlan's unflinching, inspirational biography of Carol Ruckdeschel . . . shows the reader her amazing character, spine and spunk . . . Untamed is a unique portrayal of a unique crusader . . . Very thought-provoking stuff, with beautiful writing and an eye-for-detail."—Society of Environmental Journalists

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What people say about this book

Frederick, "Keep Cumberland Island's Wilderness Wild!. I read this book with great interest and I enjoyed it. Whether some of the anecdotal stories about Carol are all entirely accurate or not, as some reviewers question, is unimportant. In fact, the stories themselves are unimportant. With something like a 100 visits to Cumberland over the past 30 years, I have heard them all before. Cumberland Island is a special place. The south part, is very friendly to families for hiking, camping, shark tooth hunting, meandering through the island's rich history, or spending a day at one of the world's great beaches. The north part is a little harder to enjoy, and well it should be. It is half an island where nature should be left to her own devices. Had it not been for a favored president's son getting married in the north, few would care about it. Even as you read this, there are a lot of people trying to turn Cumberland Island, this magnificent resource, into something that we already have a lot of; paved bike trails, motor vehicle tours, parking lots, beach boardwalks and all that come with them. I enjoy that too, but, a few places need to be preserved, giving turtle nesting a priority over sea kayak rentals and suntan lotion sales. Today, Cumberland Island is special, but, fragile. Fragile, not because of shifting sands, occasional wildfires, or summer storms, but fragile because a few political decisions could make it just another beach place, like the rest of the East Coast. I hope that everybody reads this book and that every reader comes away with the notion that the special places like Cumberland require the public's constant surveillance to keep them special. Harlan did not make this message explicit, but, it is imbedded in his book's pages. The government has done a lot to preserve our natural heritage, but, they often need help in making the right decisions and we need to keep an eye on them. Carol has kept an eye on them and deserves a major share of credit for how Cumberland has turned out."

Bondgirl, "This is Cumberland Island, GA. I live in Georgia, but I have never been to Cumberland Island. This book was fascinating, and I think it would be to anyone, not just someone from Georgia. Carol, the subject of the book (although I think she would say the island is the subject of the book) is beyond compassionate. As a child she identified with the animals, with most any living being, even if most people would shy away. She had better luck with non humans than humans, and she suffered for her losses. Carol was and maybe even is the premiere turtle nesting expert, having lived years tracking their journeys. Never one for pretense, Carol is quick to use every bit of what is provided, and has found little need for the luxury of modern life. Her joys are simple, a sunrise, and sitting on her porch at the end of the day. Fighting with both the Carnegie and Candler families over the preservation of the island, she has turned even the National Parks Service into the enemy because their efforts do not go far enough. Leave the island alone..that is Carol's mantra. I admire her efforts, she champions for wildlife, in the long run making the world a better place, one critter at a time."

John, "you will not be disappointed. You will learn much about Carol the person Untamed, as told by biographer Will Harlan, is a gripping true story of eco-heroine Carol Ruckdeschel. "Carol Ruckdeschel" Harlan tells us early on, "is the wildest woman in America. She eats road kill, wrestles alligators and dissects dead sea turtles that wash ashore. She lives on a wilderness island in a ramshackle cabin that she built herself, and she eats mostly what she hunts, gathers and grows. She is a hard drinking, gun-toting, modern day Thoreau who is even more outspoken in protecting her Waldernesque Island." In self defense, Carol, shot and killed a "lover". As you read on you understand her to be more an impassioned courageous fighter for wilderness preservation than a gun totting cowgirl. Her story is an iconic epic in the modern clash between the forces of conservation and diversity and those of exploitation. Depending on how tamed or not your perspective, she is an eco-heroine or a whacko. Her "Waldernesque Island" is Cumberland Island off the coast of Georgia. Cumberland Island is one of the world's most biologically diverse islands and an important nesting spot for sea turtles. In no small part due to Carol's efforts in 1972 Cumberland Island was designated a National Park. Untamed reveals many layers to Carol's remarkable story. Her courage and passion helped save the Island from development and to gain it National Park status. This struggle brought her into direct and bitter conflict with such diverse adversaries as the Carnegie and Rockefeller families, National Park Services, tourists and poachers. If Harlan's opening comments spark your curiosity to read the book, you will not be disappointed. You will learn much about Carol the person and the self-taught marine biologist and how passion and unflagging courage can make a difference. You may learn more about yourself and where you fit in the struggle. Untamed raises very important questions about labeling as a means of social control. Why think Carol a whacko? A lot of people do. How else can you explain a woman who does such bizarre things as eat road kill, shoot suitors and scare off turtle egg poachers at gunpoint and more? Who determines by what standards and for what purposes that another earns the "scarlet letter" of deviant? There is a long history going back to Socrates of dissenters being labeled, devalued and punished by bullying, shunning, persecution and even death. Carol embraces and defends the natural world's diversity and its sensual, tactile, spiritual force as an essence never to be replicated by museums, zoos or aquariums. Untamed will gift you the image of Carol in the red glow of the setting sun riding the back of a great sea turtle from the shores of her island into the sea – two sentient beings intricately connected in a vast seemingly endless universe of union and mystery. How beautiful. How hard we must struggle to pass the importance of this beauty, this spiritual intimacy on to our children and they on to theirs to form the perpetual chain of stewardship."

Steel Magnolia, "Amazingly Well Researched and Interpreted. I learned so very much about an island I live near and turtles I see frequently. This book put together so much history and knowledge that made Cumberland become more important to me. We need more such books. And to think I read this for a book club and thought it would not be very enticing. There is so much in it, that I actually plan to go back through it and take notes so I have some important

facts at my fingertips.”

KC, “Read it and weep for the losers in this epic struggle are you and me.. This book reveals the true Cumberland Island past, present, and its dismal future. You'll learn about a woman who has, and continues, to dedicate her life to the preservation of the island, the animals that call it home and the battle against overwhelming odds. She has endured condemnation, corruption, slander, psychological and physical abuse, yet she perseveres to this day. She is an aging shepherd standing forever firm against a Goliath of wealthy special interests backed by an army of paid-for bureaucrats.”

Kindness Ambassador, “Spectacular. Fantastic true story. Expertly written.”

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