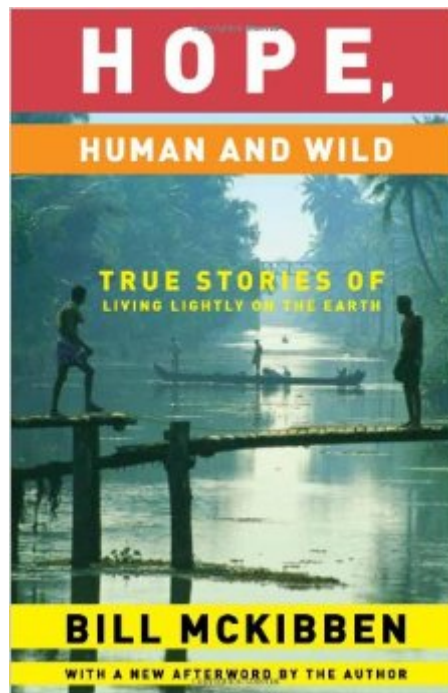


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# Hope, Human And Wild: True Stories Of Living Lightly On The Earth (The World As Home)



## Synopsis

Divided into three sections, *Hope, Human and Wild* profiles the efforts of three caring communities to preserve wilderness and reverse environmental devastation. They include the reforestation of McKibben's home territory, New York's Adirondack Mountains; solving traffic and pollution problems in the densely populated Curitiba, Brazil; and how the citizens of Kerala, India have demonstrated that quality of life doesn't depend on overconsumption of resources. This edition features a new introduction that revisits these places and explores how they've changed over the years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is an exploration into what's right and what's wrong with the planet and our relationship with it. It was written as a sequel to an earlier book by McKibben, "The End of Nature." In this book, McKibben starts by identifying some areas where there is hope for improvement in the environment in the future. The book is arranged in four parts. In the first part, McKibben considers examples of environmental recovery in his own region. He then turns to two parts of the world with very different local solutions to global problems. The first of these is Curitiba, Brazil, a city made famously livable by some very forward-thinking city planners. He then turns to Kerala, India, noting that a relatively high quality of life can be achieved with extremely limited resources, provided one addresses the key structural problems of society first. In the last section of the book, he reflects on

his observations from the three regions. McKibben hardly needed to look any further than his own backyard for proof that the environment can indeed bounce back to some extent from extreme abuse. His backyard in the Adirondacks is now full of trees, a condition that is now common throughout the Eastern United States. Much more common, in fact, than it was just fifty years ago. A little over a hundred years ago, most landscapes in the Northeast were treeless. The trees had been cut down to clear fields, to use for ship building and house construction, and most notably, to use for fuel. With the invention of a plow that could at last turn the thick prairie soil, many of the New England farmers pushed westward, glad to leave their cold, stony fields to grow up into forest again. But changes in fuel usage played an even larger role in the recovery of the trees.

Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on the Earth Bill McKibben (Little, Brown, 1995) 239 pp; \$ cloth The book under review here is the author's third. It follows *The End of Nature*, which argues that human society has now become big enough to alter "the most basic vital sign of the planet, its climate," and *The Age of Missing Information*, a book in which two dramatically divergent experiences are juxtaposed: watching 2,000 hours of consecutive cable television broadcasts, and spending 24 hours camped beside a pond on a mountain. McKibben aspires to write a kind of essay that is journalistically vivid, but also very personal - even, to use an old-fashioned phrase, "soul-searching." The search in this new book is reactive as well as affirmative. Like many of his likely readers, McKibben is deeply distressed by his knowledge of the damages human beings have visited upon the natural world. As a writer who has covered political and social issues for dozens of national magazines, he has gone to some effort to grasp the scientific analyses by which contemporary ecology measures the dimensions of our catastrophe. The other primary factor in setting McKibben's new book in motion, as he explains lucidly in the first chapter, is love for the landscape and people of his Northern Forest home, a very small town in the Adirondacks. Having found himself "depressed" by the writing of his previous books, McKibben deliberately set out to find occasions for hope, beginning with the astonishing recovery of the forests of the northeast. He recalls the observations of Timothy Dwight, who in the early 19th century traveled from Boston to New York City and passed no more than twenty miles of forest on his 240-mile journey.

*Hope, Human and Wild* is a kind of sequel to *The End of Nature* in which Bill McKibben highlights some positive, hopeful examples of sustainable human activity. He quotes Al Gore as saying, essentially, that our environmental problems now exceed our political ability to solve them. This is a

deeply disturbing statement, so McKibben profiles a pair of cities in Brazil and India where sustainability and quality of life movements have taken hold and are actually succeeding. The implications are obvious: if two Third World cities can pull this off despite long odds, both political and environmental, then why can't we? McKibben's studies of Curitiba, Brazil, and Kerala, India are both informative and uplifting, containing concrete examples of what creative thinking and political courage can achieve. We long, then, for a chapter or so in which these examples are applied to American urban centers; we long for a roadmap of possibilities applied to our culture of greed and consumerism. We long for an idea-or even the hint of an idea-we can use to break our cycle of destructive consumption. Instead, McKibben returns to his beloved Adirondacks and editorializes about the need for community, local economies, and so on. He demonstrates (I believe correctly) that sustainable agrarian communities beget sustainable wild lands and open space as well as a healthier human psyche. Trouble is, though, succeeding on this small scale will not make a dent in the larger problem. McKibben does not use this book to explore a more global vision. The seeds are there, but once the harvest begins he falls back upon his mountains and the good, community life one is often able to achieve when living on an urban income in a rural area.

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