

# Last Child in the Woods

**Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder**  
 by Richard Louv (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005, \$13.95)

REVIEW BY JOAN BURTON

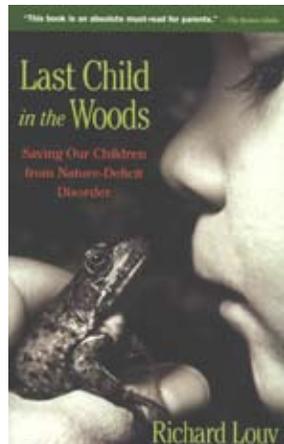
In *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv has analyzed a change in the way parents introduce their kids to the natural world, or perhaps don't introduce them at all. He says that in the last twenty to thirty years we parents have become more urban, more fearful, more programmed and perhaps less comfortable with the natural world ourselves. What is a nature deficit? It is lack of contact with nature, and lack of familiarity with one's natural environment.

Environmental education classes emphasize pollution and degradation in the remote places of the earth—the clearing of the Amazon jungle and drilling in ANWR—but not the local needs and issues of our own Northwest and neighborhoods. Microbiology is fashionable. Natural history is not taught.

In fact, today's students don't learn the names of the plants, birds, animals and fish anymore. Louv argues that if children don't know their names, why should they value them, or grow up to save them? Where will the future stewards of nature come from? Ira Spring asked the same questions toward the end of his life. "Green bonding," or the lack of it is what Ira called it. If Northwest children don't hike our trails, why should they care when they grow up if housing developments spread across our remaining forests, while logging and

gravel quarrying denude more land? He pleaded for parents to create green bonding for their kids.

Louv says many parents are afraid to allow kids to play outside at all. Granted, the murders on the Pinnacle Lake Trail



make us hesitate to hike alone now. But surely children should be able to play together safely in neighborhood parks without parental panic. Many eminent scientists remember that their initial curiosity stemmed from childhood play and long uninterrupted time spent in the natural world.

When I was a girl, we lived for two years at Indianola. The magic part was the outdoor adventure we could have every day. The Indianola beach framed a small cove of tideflats, and when the water came back over them, it was

warmed enough to make swimming a pleasure. The exposed sand held sand dollars, horse clams and warm pools with small crabs and baby perch. Magical too was the light of the ferry as it docked at twilight at 9:30 and the moon shone down on the beach. If I grew up to love mountains, hiking and the natural world, I can blame some of it on those summers at Indianola beach.

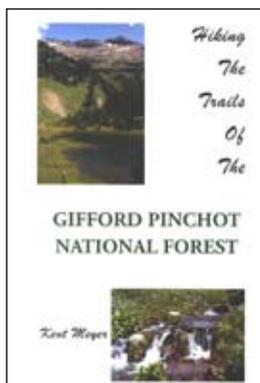
Contact with nature is healthy and healthful for kids and for all of us. We need the daily reminder of our relationship to the earth and other living creatures. Nature can help us grow, can heal us, can inspire us, can comfort us and can suggest creative bonds and new ways of seeing things.

It is both poignant and funny that when asked whether he would rather play outside or inside, one child, according to Louv, replied, "Inside. That's where all the outlets are."

*Last Child in the Woods* asks parents the question, "Do we want our kids to rely mainly on computers and video games as their source of information and entertainment?"

Washington Trails members and readers of this important and enthralling book will answer with a resounding "No!" ♦

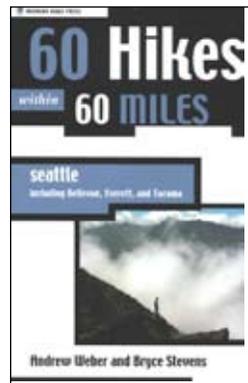
Joan Burton is a WTA member from Seattle and author of *Best Hikes with Kids: Western Washington and Cascades*.



## Hiking the Trails of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Kent Meyer  
 (JKM Publishing, \$13.00  
 2005, 360-574-0784)

A guidebook in the do-it-yourself tradition that inspired the original *100 Hikes* series, this book is packed with 40 great hikes in Southwest Washington.



## 60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Seattle

Andrew Weber/Bryce Stevens  
 (Menasha Ridge, 16.95,  
 2006)

The guide gives in-depth treatment to 60 day hikes (4 pages of maps and detailed route descriptions each) in the Puget Sound region. A good one-stop guide for those new to the region.