

Book Reviews

Wilderness Medicine, 4th edition

Paul Auerbach, editor

Philadelphia, PA: Mosby, 2001

US \$199, 1936 pages, 1248 illustrations

When Paul Auerbach's lifework came to the door, it bowled over my 3-year-old daughter—literally. It is gargantuan. The fourth edition of *Wilderness Medicine*, our specialty's unabridged omnibus, is as impressive as Harrison's *Principles of Internal Medicine*. New updates and a modern layout make it crisp and clean, despite its heft.

The layout is much improved from the third edition. In this edition, the chapters are grouped in 12 well-defined sections. Although many disciplines overlap, it is easy to find information, especially with the exhaustive index. Also, the text is sizable (unlike Harrison's, for which you need a magnifying glass). New for this edition, color photographs are interspersed in the text instead of being grouped at the end, as in the previous edition. The addition of color photographs also allowed color sidebars, charts, drawings, and headings. In short, the chapters are readable and the graphics are outstanding, especially those detailing procedures such as vaginal delivery.

Auerbach assembled an all-star cast, 118 experts in fact, to pen the 79 chapters. Every chapter has been updated and many were expanded, especially the chapters on animal bites, heat illness, hypothermia, high-altitude disorders, and marine hazards. Most authors have fine-tuned the art of integrating basic science with field assessment and treatment, a rather tricky task. Most include detailed step-by-step instructions for procedures and treatments that are clear and easy to follow. The chapters include a multitude of references. The 36-page flagship chapter, "High-Altitude Medicine," has 376 references, for example.

The content upgrade is perhaps most significant in nonmedical topics, such as nutrition, navigation, clothing, and equipment, with added chapters on the elderly, prevention, and pain management. As mentioned, there is some overlap and repetition among the varied disciplines. For example, the chapter titled "Avalanches" includes discussions on cutting-edge equipment, such as the Avalung breathing vest, backpack airbags, and digital transceivers, but so do the chapters "Backcountry Equipment for Health-Care Professionals" and "Wilderness Survival." Consistent with a modern trend in wilderness medicine education, there is an overall emphasis

on improvisation; in fact, an entire chapter is devoted to the topic.

The book is mainly geared toward outdoor emergencies, with an emphasis on mountain and dive medicine and search-and-rescue situations. There is a notable lack of discussion on individual sports, especially skiing and snowboarding, the most popular winter outdoor sports. There is also little information on the chronic diseases seen in wilderness sports, for example, surfer's ear or specific patterns of tendonitis from rock climbing or mountain biking. As with previous editions, the book includes some esoteric topics. A skimpy chapter titled "Cave Rescue" may have better served readers if it covered high-angle rescue and extrication in dank places in general; this would have been applicable to canyoneering, glacier travel, ice climbing, and rock climbing in addition to caving. Also, mountain and desert survival are somewhat haphazardly lumped into a general chapter on survival, while less common polar and jungle climes have their own chapters. These are minor oversights, perhaps rendered moot by the sheer volume of information that is actually covered and the tangential topics that are, in fact, very important, such as natural disaster management and wildland fires.

The price of US \$199 is about as reasonable as one would expect for such an academic text. One has the option of buying the CD-ROM for the same price or in combination with the text at a discount.

Wilderness Medicine has a broad focus, beyond emergency, primary care, travel, military, and sports physicians. It will be useful, perhaps mandatory, for paramedics and emergency medical technicians, search-and-rescue professionals, park and forest rangers, aeromedical nurses, and any health care or search-and-rescue provider who works in a wilderness or travel capacity. Interestingly, this work has spawned 2 additional books by Auerbach et al, a scaled-down *Field Guide to Wilderness Medicine* and a layperson's text, *Medicine for the Outdoors*.

As its poundage demonstrates, *Wilderness Medicine* is the definitive work on our unique and hedonistic subspecialty (Auerbach admits he is "the luckiest editor on earth"). My daughter was okay after she dropped the book. Luckily, The North Face "Tigger" sleeping bag was the next package.

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