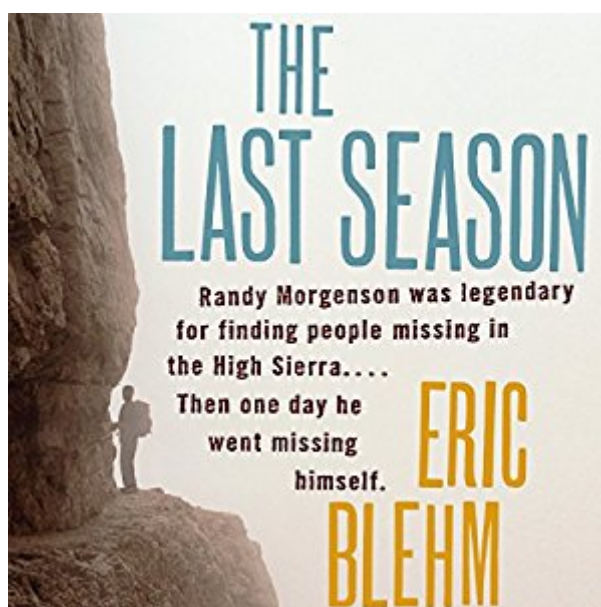


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# The Last Season



## Synopsis

Destined to become a classic of adventure literature, *The Last Season* examines the extraordinary life of legendary backcountry ranger Randy Morgenson and his mysterious disappearance in California's unforgiving Sierra Nevada - mountains as perilous as they are beautiful. Eric Blehm's masterful work is a gripping detective story interwoven with the riveting biography of a complicated, original, and wholly fascinating man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was a backcountry ranger in the High Sierra and Rocky Mountains for many years with both the Natl Park Service and USDA-Forest Service. This is a compelling book because it captures the culture, values, accomplishments and limitations of living a backcountry life. "Wilderness teaches a person the answers to questions that we have not yet learned how to ask" (photographer Nancy Newhall). To paraphrase Isaac Walton's "The Compleate Angler" (1650), "time spent in mountains will not be counted against the rest of your life." Randy was well known and admired because he lived a backcountry life and lived it well. He modeled first-hand knowledge and care and respect for wild ecosystems. Being a backcountry ranger immerses you in rarified air and light, extends the useable light of every day, winter and summer and in many ways is living a religious experience, a special calling. This sets you apart from the every day world and makes it hard on relationships, personal and professional. Each day is a wealth of learning opportunities that teaches you to not take life and people for granted. Randy lived with the understanding of Sierra Nevada mountaineer

Norman Clyde, "the mountains will always be there tomorrow, make sure you can say the same." Randy relished every day with Clyde's thought in mind. We are all envious of Randy, he lived a full life (including the ups and downs) doing what he loved and doing it well. As with Alsup's (2001) "Missing in the Minarets" the search for Walter A. Starr, Jr., in 1933, "The Last Season," immerses you in the culture, shortcomings, accomplishments and day-to-day activities of Sequoia-Kings Canyon Natl Park backcountry. Everyone involved is passionate.

This is a book I staggered through in a few days: here is an emotionally significant, compelling biography of a contemporary man, Randy Morgenson, and the people about him that contributed to and helped define his humanness. Eric Blehm's spyglass peek into Randy's life is both tense and tender and - while a major search and rescue effort to find Randy after he is reported missing in the Sierra backcountry is woven throughout the book - it is about our relationships and community with others and nature. We are all without purity; Randy Morgenson models his humanity cloaked in honesty, deceit, heroics, compassion, anger, frustration, and love. He has become a backcountry Ranger in the Sierra Nevada, both lifeline and escape from and for reality. He's a conflicted man in the end, but still a person I would have cherished knowing and appreciating firsthand. Like Randy Morgenson, I was fortunate to grow up in a family that spent summers in the Sierra. My father was a pioneering desert rat and Sierra maven; he refused to let his boys swim in fresh water sources, training us instead to look for dead ponds, without inlet or outlet. As young children, we learned it was noble (or so we thought then) to carry out someone's carelessly or purposefully discarded trash. By the time of my first extended backpack trip some 45 years ago, the Sierra had captured my soul and given me in return a sense of strength, confidence, quiet, and purpose. Unlike Randy, my life spun away from the Sierra except for as many backpack and camping trips I could manage. But, a piece of me always is fixed to the smell of these mountains, for it is my lifeline as well. This book is not just about Randy Morgenson. Like each of us, our stories involve a community of people.

On the morning of July 21, 1996, Randy Morgenson tied together the tent flaps of his ranger station at Bench Lake in Kings Canyon National Park and went on patrol. He was never heard from again. What happened to Morgenson and how that story was pieced together is the subject of Eric Blehm's, "The Last Season." Tracking down every detail of the Morgenson disappearance, Blehm interviewed the missing backcountry ranger's family, friends and co-workers. He also sifted through reports and logbooks from the Morgenson SAR. Not confining himself to a paper search, Blehm walked the ground, following Morgenson's probable last steps. The author's research, his affinity for

the missing ranger and his obvious love for the Sierra Nevada mountains all come shining through to make "The Last Season" a must-read. Blehm additionally tackles many issues important to seasonal rangers such as recognition of their term of service. Because it's biography, "The Last Season" is also a story about dreams and aspirations, successes and failures, friendships, love and human frailty. And it's also the story of the National Park Service when the Wilderness Act of 1964 was young - before it forever changed the concept of how our nation's wild lands would be visited and managed. How things have changed in 45 years! In 1965, Randy Morgenson's first year as a seasonal backcountry ranger, he wasn't required to know CPR. He carried no sidearm or handcuffs and had no training in search and rescue. In fact, Morgenson received no training of any kind before taking up his station at Rae Lakes, deep within the wilderness of Kings Canyon. At his post, located along the John Muir Trail, Morgenson was responsible for "spreading the gospel" of wilderness to as many hikers and packers as possible.

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