

Author's Note and Chapter One: The Alaska Interior

Vocabulary

asceticism – existence stripped bare of any luxury or indulgence
divergent – going in different directions
enigma – a mystery; something that is difficult to understand or explain
fulminated – ranted; criticized in an energetic way
moral rigor – extreme attention to ethical questions and shadings
muskeg – boggy areas, especially those where peat is formed
renunciation – turning away from or against
shards – broken pieces
transcendent – beyond the bounds of normal experience
unsullied – pure, clean

1. What is the purpose of the Author's Note?

2. What are Krakauer's credentials for writing *Into the Wild*?

3. What is the personal history of Chris McCandless?

4. What themes does Krakauer introduce in the Author's Note?

5. What is the purpose of the quoted material at the start of Chapter One?

6. Who is Alex?

7. Who is Jim Gallien, and how did he meet McCandless?

8. What was Gallien's assessment of McCandless?

9. What kind of advice did Gallien give McCandless?

10. What was McCandless's response to Gallien's offer?

11. What did McCandless give Gallien, and what was McCandless's behavior toward the older man?

12. What did Gallien give McCandless?

13. Why did Gallien decide not to alert the authorities about McCandless?

14. Gallien's statement that McCandless would "probably get hungry pretty quick and just walk out to the highway. That's what any normal person would do," is an example of the literary device of irony. What is ironic about the statement?

Chapter Two: The Stampede Trail

Vocabulary

amalgam – a mix
anomaly – an exception to the standard or norm
antimony – a metal found in ore that is used in metallic alloys and medicine
contumacious – stubborn, especially stubbornly disobedient
cordillera – a string of parallel mountain ranges
desolation – barrenness; the lack of growth or health
escarpments – a series of long, high rocky ridges
glacial till – mixed soils and rocks carried by a glacier's movement
ominous – warning of danger
oxidized – combined chemically with oxygen
ramparts – rocky supports (in this case, supporting ridges or foothills)
subcutaneous – under the skin; internal

1. Why would Krakauer include a quote from another author (Jack London) as the heading for this chapter?

2. What is the purpose of the detailed descriptions of Mt. McKinley, Denali, and the Stampede Trail?

3. How does Krakauer know that in 1992, “six people in three separate parties happened to visit the remote vehicle on the same afternoon”?

4. What was considered to be the cause of Chris McCandless's death?

5. How did the police know the body was that of Chris McCandless?

Chapter Three: Carthage

Vocabulary

abstraction – an idea or concept, rather than something tangible
altruistic – motivated purely by charity or kindness
anthropological – relating to the study of cultures
apartheid – the legalized separation of people of different races
clapboard – overlapping wooden boards or shingles
contrite – repentant
estranged – not close to; emotionally separated from
grain elevator – a building used to elevate and store grain
hyperkinetic – overactive
in stir – in jail
itinerary – a list of destinations on a trip
jetsam – items cast overboard from a ship; cast-offs
mawkish – idealized; sickeningly romantic
mien – the appearance or behavior
odyssey – a long, complicated journey
onerous – heavy; burdensome
plebeian – common; low-level
stasis – slowness; balance
surrogate – a substitute
tendrils – curls
visage – the face
vulnerability – the capacity to be bruised or hurt; tenderness

1. Who is Wayne Westerberg?

2. Describe Westerberg's first encounter with McCandless, including the hospitality McCandless was offered.

3. Local color is introduced when a writer uses regional or colorful terms to present an image of a distinct area or culture. The terms leather tramp and rubber tramp qualify as examples of local color. What culture do they describe, and what is the difference between rubber tramps and leather tramps?

4. When does Westerberg encounter McCandless again?

5. What kind of worker was McCandless, and how did Westerberg evaluate him?

6. Why did the author say that McCandless found a "surrogate family in Westerberg and his employees"?

7. Why did McCandless leave Carthage?

8. What evidence does Krakauer give that McCandless continued to be fond of Carthage and consider Westerberg his friend?

9. How does the reader know that *War and Peace* was important to McCandless?

10. Describe McCandless's early years and family life.

11. What was McCandless's financial background?

12. What clues did McCandless give that he was out of step with the commercialism of contemporary society?

13. How does the reader know that Chris McCandless went on long trips alone in his car?

14. How did McCandless's parents find out that he had left Atlanta?

15. What change did McCandless make that symbolized the new life he expected to build after he left Atlanta?

Chapter Four: Detrital Wash

Vocabulary

angularity – sharpness
 concave – hollowed out
 inimical – hostile
 physiologically – relating to the health of internal organs
 sensorily – relating to the five senses

1. The head note to this chapter concludes that people go to the desert “not to escape but to find reality.” How does this statement apply to McCandless?

2. What was the motivation for abandoning the Datsun, and why was the find of the car important?

3. For what purpose did the rangers decide to use the Datsun?

4. What was ironic about the rangers’ use of the Datsun?

5. Who is Jan Burrell, and how did she figure into McCandless’s travels?

6. Why did Jan Burres feel an attachment to McCandless?

7. How did McCandless's parents learn where he was, and what did they do with the information?

8. What did McCandless's parents learn from the investigator?

9. What did McCandless buy when he was in Topock, Arizona, and where did he get the money?

10. Describe the trip McCandless took with the canoe.

11. How did McCandless get to the ocean?

12. This chapter contains numerous excerpts from the journal McCandless kept. What is noticeable about the writing in his account of his Mexican adventure?

13. What did McCandless do when he gets back into the U.S.?

14. What did McCandless retrieve when he returned to the Detrital Wash?

15. Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the individual's responsibility and free will to direct the course of their life. What existential conclusion does McCandless reach when leaving Las Vegas?

Chapter Five: Bullhead City

Vocabulary

- bourgeois – materialistic
- constituents – members of a community who vote to elect their leaders
- denizens – residents
- espoused – claimed to champion
- fatuous – foolish, ridiculous
- ideologue – someone who follows a defined set of ideas or way of thinking
- lumpen – crude or ignorant people
- oxymoronic – containing a contradiction (e.g., jumbo shrimp)
- porous – having holes or gaps that allows something to pass through or be absorbed
- primordial – the basic or primitive developmental level; fundamental
- rheumy – runny; watery
- sedentary – inactive; lacking exercise
- turgid – heavy; graceless

1. What did McCandless do after he left Las Vegas in May 1991?

2. What kind of life did McCandless lead in Bullhead City?

3. How did the other McDonald's employees regard McCandless?

4. How did he find the trailer?

5. In a letter to Jan Burrese, McCandless assessed Charlie. What did he think of the older man?

6. When Krakauer found Charlie and interviewed him, how did Charlie assess McCandless?

7. What events occurred when McCandless left Bullhead City?

8. Describe the conditions and the residents of the Slabs. Note some of the local color that makes this community memorable.

9. Using the swap meet as a springboard, Krakauer talks about McCandless's love of books, especially the work of Jack London. What attracted McCandless to Jack London's work?

10. What character traits and skills does Jan Burrese recount about McCandless?

11. What was Jan Burre's reaction to McCandless's idea of going to Alaska?

12. What was Burre's assessment of McCandless's ability to survive in Alaska?

Chapter Six: Anza Borrego

Vocabulary

arroyos – dried creek beds
 bajada – plain, open land
 creosote – a desert plant with a thick, sticky resin
 desiccated – dried out
 filigree – a lacy pattern
 geothermal – heated by the temperature of the earth
 harangues – rants; going on and on about something
 hegira – a pilgrimage
 nexus – an intersection
 ocotillo – a flowered dessert plant
 phantasmal – filled with delusions
 platted – laid out on a plat or topographical map
 prodigious – plentiful; huge
 pseudonym – fake name or alias
 sink – a lowland
 snafu – a disaster

1. Who was Ron Franz, and how did he enter the story?

2. What does Krakauer think about the relationship between Franz and McCandless?

3. What is Anza-Borrego?

4. What is the Salton Sea?

5. How did McCandless and Franz meet, and what area did McCandless show Franz?

6. What is Oh-My-God Hot Springs? What literary term can be associated with the name?

7. What was the life story of Ron Franz?

8. How did the relationship between the older man and McCandless develop?

9. What role did leatherworking take in their relationship?

10. How did Franz and McCandless part company?

11. After leaving San Diego without finding work, McCandless made his way to Seattle, enjoying a new kind of transportation. What was it, and what were his comments about it?

12. From Seattle, McCandless returned to California. What was this second visit to Ron Franz like?

13. Franz made a family-oriented request of McCandless. What was it, and how did McCandless respond?

14. What was the tragedy of Ron Franz's life?

15. The author gives a brief character analysis of McCandless after recounting that Franz dropped him off in Colorado. What does the author say about McCandless?

16. From Carthage, McCandless sent Franz a long letter with advice and a summation of his philosophy. What did McCandless say about life, and what did he advise Franz to do?

17. How did Ron Franz respond to this letter?

18. How did Ron Franz learn that McCandless had died?

19. How has Franz's life changed since McCandless died?

Chapter Seven: Carthage

Vocabulary

ambivalence – a neutral reaction; indecisiveness
astute – insightful; sharp
canted – slanted
celibate – a deliberate state of sexual inactivity
corollary – a natural consequence or inference from known data
grubstake – money and/or supplies for a trip
maw – a large, intimidating opening
milo – a form of sorghum, is a grain that is used in foods and sweeteners
polarization – separation; divisiveness
succor – aid and comfort
surfeit – an excess

1. Why was Wayne Westerberg annoyed?

2. How did Westerberg summarize McCandless and his skills?

3. Who is Gail Borah, and what did she have to say about McCandless?

4. What is the author's analysis of the relationship between McCandless and his father?

5. The Krakauer goes on to comment on McCandless's sex life. What does he conclude?

6. The author includes three incidences of foreshadowing at the end of this chapter. What are they?

7. What is suggested by these examples of foreshadowing?

Chapter Eight: Alaska

Vocabulary

academia – the world of education
alpinists – specialists in climbing high and challenging mountains
asceticism – a pared-down existence without many worldly goods
Athapaskan – a local Alaskan population with their own language and culture
banalities – meaningless comments
bight – a small bay formed by a curve in the shoreline
burlesque – a ridiculous or extreme interpretation
cliché – an overused expression, example, or type
countercultural – against established norms of a culture
eremitic – hermit-like or reclusive
histrionic – overly dramatic
hubris – overblown pride
linguistics – the study of, the formation and development of languages
opprobrium – criticism; judgment
paucity – scarcity
pseudoliterary – a false display of scholarship
recondite – obscure; difficult for most people to understand
seine – fish with nets

1. What kind of reaction did Krakauer receive about his article in *Outside* magazine?

2. Why does the author include the story of his encounter with the man called the “Mayor of Hippie Cove”?

3. What is the purpose of including the full story of Gene Rossellini?

4. What motivated the author to include the story of John Waterman?

5. What are some parallels in the story of John Waterman and Chris McCandless?

6. What are some differences between the stories of Waterman and McCandless?

7. What purpose does the story of Chris McCunn serve in the narrative?

Chapter Nine: Davis Gulch

Vocabulary

- anchorites – hermits
- atavistic – exhibiting characteristics of distant ancestors or of early man
- currachs – lightweight boats developed in Ireland
- defile – a route notable for its narrowness; a gorge
- desiccated – dried-out
- ephemeral – fleeting; dying quickly
- esthete – one who seeks beauty
- aesthetics – the philosophy that beauty is an important basis of moral good
- graffito – personal markings in public spaces, similar to graffiti
- hogan – a log and mud shelter characteristic of the Navajo
- insinuated – worked one's way in
- ludicrous – ridiculous
- matrix – a grid
- mythographers – those who develop a myth about another person
- nom de plume – a French word meaning pen name
- petroglyphs – carvings in rock walls
- pictographs – pictures from an earlier era drawn or painted on a rock wall
- potsherds – broken bits of pottery
- stratum – a layer of rock in a larger formation
- talus – a natural land form caused by accumulated rocks and dirt
- veracity – truth

1. Summarize story of Everett Ruess.

2. What are the main theories about how Ruess died?

3. Ken Sleight has studied the story of Everett Ruess and discussed Chris McCandless with the author. What is Sleight's conclusion about the two young men?
