



The Leatherman: A Wanderer's Poems

Mr Kristian J Kuhn

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The Leatherman (ca. 1839-1889) was a peculiar vagabond who traveled a circuit between the Connecticut River and the Hudson River roughly from 1856 to 1889. His background is little known. All that is recorded appears in a few newspaper clippings – he was fluent in French, spoke broken English but often grunted at those he encountered. On his person at the time of his death was a French prayer book. The Leatherman walked a 365 mile route that took approximately a month in western Connecticut and eastern New York. He lived in rock shelters or “Leatherman Caves.” Along his 365 mile loop he would stop at towns to procure his food and supplies. The locals in these towns nicknamed him the “Leatherman” for his attire which was completely made of leather – everything from his hat to his shoes. Some of the local newspapers from the time recorded that he was exact in his rounds, so some of the townsfolk would have food ready for him, which was often left outside for him on doorsteps and porches. No matter the clime or season, the Leatherman donned his adornments. In times of cold he would heat his rock shelter with the wood he piled there for such an occasion. Records indicate that the Connecticut Humane Society had him arrested and hospitalized after many became concerned of a sore on his lip. Legend has it that he escaped from the hospital to rejoin his journey. Nobody knows why the Leatherman did this, but I think that he did so because he was love-stricken. After losing the love of his life, Margaret Laron, he embarked upon this journey. These poems are what I surmise his meditations to be, his prayers, his musings.

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