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Traveling The Power Line: From The Mojave Desert To The Bay Of Fundy (Our Sustainable Future)



Synopsis

In our power-hungry world, all the talk about energy—what's safe and what's risky, what's clean and what's dirty, what's cheap and what's easy—tends to generate more heat than light. What, Julianne Couch wanted to know, is the real story on power production in this country? Approaching the question as a curious consumer, Couch takes us along as she visits nine sites where electrical power is developed from different fuel sources. From a geothermal plant in the Mojave Desert to a nuclear plant in Nebraska, from a Wyoming coal-fired power plant to a Maine tidal-power project, Couch gives us an insider's look at how power is generated, how it affects neighboring landscapes and the people who live and work there, and how each source comes with its own unique complications. The result is an informed, evenhanded discussion of energy production and consumption on the global, national, regional, local, and—most important—personal level. Knowledge is the real power this book imparts, allowing each of us to think beyond the flip of a switch to the real consequences of our energy use.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Flip a switch and voilà! , the lights come on. Bump up the thermostat, and kiss that winter chill goodbye. It's magic, really, or might as well be for all the average user

knows about the origin of the electricity that makes one's life run smoother, brighter, warmer, faster. To investigate such established sources of energy as nuclear, natural gas, and coal as well as cutting-edge technologies involving wind, solar, hydropower, tidal, and biomass production, Couch traveled from her resource-rich home state, Wyoming, to visit producers of various forms of electrical power around the country. Whether motivated by concerns over global warming, disturbed by the nation's dependency on foreign suppliers, or troubled by the depletion of natural resources, the debate over how to become a more energy-efficient nation is, well, a highly charged one. There is no simple solution, and no process is perfect, but as Couch demonstrates, all have important roles to play in our nation's energy policy. In clear and straightforward terms, Couch demystifies the science and takes an equitable and even-handed approach to the politics involved in energy production. The result is an accessible primer and essential guide to crucial issues surrounding critical challenges. --Carol Haggas

"In this smart, highly engaging energy travelogue, Julianne Couch offers readers a clear, inside look at the many ways electrical power is produced across the United States. Traveling the Power Line is an indispensable guide to both current practices in energy technology and future possibilities for renewable resources." •Ann McCutchan, author of *River Music: An Atchafalaya Story* (Ann McCutchan 2012-09-20) "Julianne Couch has a knack for disarming the wonkiest engineers and discovering the intrigue in cooling rods and geothermal brine. Her travels along the power line are entertaining, but her book is more than that. From here we can start making smarter, kinder, more realistic and responsible decisions about our energy future." •Bill Bishop and Julie Ardery, coeditors of *The Daily Yonder* (Bill Bishop and Julie Ardery 2012-09-20) "If you're looking for a complete analysis of the world's energy problems, look elsewhere (but expect a mind-numbing, 1,000-page, multivolume set). But if you want a crisp, engaging, and insightful tour of the world of energy production, this is your book." •Jeffrey A. Lockwood, coauthor of *Philosophical Foundations for the Practices of Ecology* (Jeffrey A. Lockwood 2012-09-20) "In a book that is part travelogue and part news report, Couch lucidly confronts the specter of what she calls the 'new energy crisis.' . . . Couch does not offer any opinions on which fuels are ultimately best for an energy-hungry America. Instead, she presents information clearly and objectively to help readers better discern 'the difference between numbers meant to impress, stories meant to persuade, and facts that prompt action.' Fair, thoughtful and balanced." •Kirkus (Kirkus 2013-02-01) "In clear and straightforward terms, Couch demystifies the science and takes an equitable and even-handed

approach to the politics involved in energy production. The result is an accessible primer and essential guide to crucial issues surrounding critical challenges." – Carol Haggas, Booklist – starred review (Carol Haggas Booklist 2013-02-15)"This lucid guide gently encourages readers to think about what goes into creating the electric grid." – Sandy Amazeen, Monsters and Critics (Sandy Amazeen Monsters and Critics 2013-04-01)

Almost everyone has an opinion on energy policy and what method(s) for producing electricity should be promoted in this country. And most of those opinions are half-baked. TRAVELING THE POWER LINE won't make you an expert, but it will make you better informed. And, hence, it will make you a better citizen. Julianne Couch is a journalist. At the time she researched this book, she was teaching at the University of Wyoming and living in Laramie, Wyoming. Her starting point was concern for the ecological condition of the planet, as reflected in her efforts in her personal life to conserve energy and reduce her carbon footprint, although she wasn't rabid about it. Curious to know more, she researched and wrote TRAVELING THE POWER LINE. Couch investigates nine different ways of producing electricity: wind farm; coal-fired generation; nuclear; natural gas; biomass; geothermal; hydroelectric; solar-thermal power; and tidal power. Believing that seeing enhances understanding, she visited a facility engaged in each form of electrical generation: from a near-by wind farm in Wyoming to a nuclear plant in Nebraska to a geothermal plant in Utah to an experimental project in easternmost Maine to use underwater currents (principally tidal currents) to generate electricity. The result is a readable -- and instructive -- book. Each of the chapters is about twenty-five pages long. They are not highly technical. By and large, Couch takes the reader along with her as she investigates each form of electricity-generation, and the reader hears what Couch hears from plant operators, public interest advocates, and independent experts. By and large, Couch refrains from advocating one form of power generation vis-a-vis another, although the underlying bias is towards reducing greenhouse gases without crippling industry and the economy. The lessons are that one cannot look at any form of electrical generation in the abstract, that no one form is the be-all and end-all, that one must also consider distribution and patterns of consumption, and that in evaluating the economic and ecological efficiency of any proposal for a new electrical generation facility there always are a multitude of factors to consider (down to whether certain species of animals - for example, the sage grouse - will be listed as endangered). Along the way, Couch exposes some of the commonplaces and shibboleths of contemporary public debate as falsehoods, or at least unhelpful overgeneralizations. Couch's prose is not brilliant, like that of her journalistic hero John McPhee. Sometimes it is even a tad pedestrian. And there are a

few instances in which an edit (or a stronger one) would have been useful - such as when she "putted along" [should be "puttered"] U.S. 30 at sixty miles per hour. But her writing is lucid, and the book never bogs down in details. If anything, the reader comes away wanting to know more - and with this subject, that's a good thing.

A brilliant idea poorly executed. Tell the reader the fascinating story of power delivery from plant to home. Visit sites across the nation. Speak clearly. Alas, little of this perks through the political moraine of 'alt energy' and disaster reflections. We are unknowing recipients of extreme energy efficiencies because of the grid (great book, Grid, by the way) and the invisible workers who maintain it. This work does little to demonstrate awareness or authority.

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