

Into the Wild

Character List

Chris McCandless

- The main character of our novel also known as Alex Supertramp when he begins his journey to seek discomfort
- Inspired by the adventurers of the times before him such as Jack London, Emerson, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and many others
- A quite misunderstood man, he hoped to locate the true meaning of life and seek his dreams beyond the materialistic ventures of commercial life
- Spends his time on the pursuit of Alaska navigating the Western United states where he meets a plethora of people who become attracted to his realistic and non-superficial attitude
- A true man of his word, he left everything behind including his Datsun, money (which he donated to OXFAM charity for hunger ← ironic since he died of hunger), and eventually his life
- He went to seek his dreams to live off the grid and he ultimately died doing the thing he loved so much
- One can say he was an unprepared dreamer, but maybe he was a little more than a dreamer.

Carine McCandless

- The younger sister of Chris whom he had a phenomenal relationship with
- When visiting people such as Gail, Westerberg, Ronald, and Charlie, he would always speak of Carine
- They had a bond like no other and Chris often confided in her
- Through their childhood, her and Chris would bond through the fighting of their parents and would later go on to separate until the death of Chris
- Hearing from the news by her husband, Fish, who heard the news from Sam McCandless, she was heartbroken and screamed so loud her husband was afraid she would rouse the neighbors
- Chris and her differed in their beliefs about wealth as she hopes to become a millionaire by an early age
- She shared Chris's beliefs about racial injustice

Walt McCandless

- The father of Chris whom Chris dislikes as he gets older
- A NASA engineer and a brilliant man who designs satellite systems
- 2 years prior to Chris's death, he had made the decision to cut off all connections from his family due to his father
- It turns out that while married to Billie, Chris's mother, he had been in a relationship with his previous wife and fathering two families
 - Chris refers to it as bigamy
- It is ironic that at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where Chris visited before being picked up by Jim Galliens, there was a satellite that had been designed by Walt
 - If this was anymore of an indication for Chris to enter the bush, we do not know

Billie McCandless

- The mother of Chris who married Walt when she was 22
- The fighting between her and her husband caused the close bond between Carine and Chris and led to Chris's eventual complete separation from his family
- Having heard of the death of Chris from Sam McCandless she is overcome with grief and unable to imagine why Chris would take the risks he did
 - They say that if he would've taken his dog, Buckley, he maybe would not have taken the risks that he did
- She forms a great relationship with Jon Krakauer and visits the bus in the epilogue with him

Jon Krakauer

- The author of our story who also includes a personal tribulation of his
- Unbeknownst to most of us, he is actually a world class climber
- In chapters 14 and 15 he tells the story of his trials and tribulations to climb the Devils Thumb, a very large mountain in Alaska in 1977
- He relates this story to the story of Chris McCandless to serve as a rebuttal against those that believe Chris's dream was nothing more than a suicide attempt
- Failing to reach the summit of the mountain on 2 occasions, he felt his life might just about end on the side of Devil's Thumb
- He builds up the courage to reach the summit and completes the dream that he had
- He compares this dream to that of Chris, except he just managed to survive it
 - This line that he draws differentiates the reasonings for why Chris entered the wild and further promotes Jon's theory that Chris was only looking to fulfill his dreams, not commit suicide.
- He draws the line of similarity between Chris and him with their relationships with their fathers

- Jon's father had big dreams for him and his siblings as they were younger to go to Harvard Medical school and become doctors
- Jon took a different path and ultimately disappointed his father
- He explains that his and his father's dreams were so different yet so similar
- In the late years of his life, his father is admitted to a psychiatric ward where he becomes insane and loses all touch with reality
 - Jon describes him in a gruesome way and feels no sense of connection with his father

Wayne Westerberg

- A friend of McCandless and boss of him for quite some time in Carthage, South Dakota
- A Renaissance man of the plains, he is a farmer, welder, businessman, machinist, ace mechanic, commodities speculator, licensed airplane pilot, computer programmer, electronics troubleshooter, video-game repairman.
- He originally picked up Chris while he was hitchhiking in Montana, and offered him a job on his grain elevator in Carthage
- He becomes very close to Chris but is a convicted felon for pirating satellite television services ("Black Boxes")
- Before leaving the job, Chris leaves Wayne a copy of War and Peace and suggests that he will enjoy and connect with many of the points made in the book
- Chris buys two postcards while at the University bookstore in Alaska just before entering the wild
 - He sends these cards to Wayne as well as Jan Burres
 - In the letter to Wayne he explains that this will be the last he hears of Chris and that it will be a long time before they see each other again. He tells him that if things turn fatal that Wayne was a great man. He ends it by saying, "I now walk into the wild. Alex"
- Wayne hears of Chris's death on the radio
- Wayne is ultimately the one who identifies Chris as the dead man in the bus with his social security number he managed to find from his working papers years back
 - The first set of working papers he filled out included bologna answers such as his social security number in which he wrote, "I forget"
- Westerberg also reveals to us that he thought Chris would return to work after his Alaskan trip as he one told them that he was planning to write a book about his travels

Gail Borah

- The girlfriend of Wayne Westerberg who draws friendly attraction to Chris during their presence
- While in Carthage they grow close and Chris confides his love for his sister in Gail

- She explains to us that Chris would often eat an absurd amount of food and speak of the beauty of his sister Carine
- One night Chris plays the piano and stuns everyone, including Gail
- When saying goodbye to Gail, Chris is seen crying. This indicates to her that he will not return from his journey to Alaska

Jim Gallien

- Upon hitching a ride from Mr. Gaylord Stuckey, Chris gets a ride from Jim to his final destination
- The book promptly begins with Chris hitching a ride with Jim and is later explained in greater detail at the end of the book
- Wavering as to whether he should leave Chris, he tries to convince him to stay with him or to at least phone his parents.
- Chris is defiant and sternly denies
- Jim gives him a pair of boots and the lunch that his wife had packed him that day
- The date was April 28, 1992 when Alex entered the woods
- He also gave Chris his phone number and told him to call when he returned from his excursion... Jim felt that his trip would be short lived
- Jim reads of a dead man in the newspaper who was supposedly found in a bus and knows it was certainly Chris
- He was the last person to see Chris

Jan Burren

- Jan picks up Chris was hitchhiking in Arcata, California but she was from Arizona
- Chris camps with them for a few days and then disappears
- On December 13th, 1991, Chris appeared back to them in Arizona
- She lives with her boyfriend, Bob, and they live in a very interesting area of Arizona called the Slabs
 - “The Slabs functions as the seasonal capital of a teeming itinerant society—a tolerant, rubber-tired culture comprising the retired, the exiled, the destitute, the perpetually unemployed. Its constituents are men and women and children of all ages, folks on the dodge from collection agencies, relationships gone sour, the law or the IRS, Ohio winters, the middle-class grind.”
- At the Slabs flea market, he found great joy in helping with Jan and Bob’s book stand
 - He was particularly interested in the classics
- At the end of his life, but the beginning of his journey, he sent postcards to both Jan and Westerberg
 - “This is the last communication you shall receive from me. I now walk out to live amongst the wild. Take care, it was great knowing you. ALEXANDER.”

Ronald Franz

- He meets Chris in Salton City, California
- He was a leatherworker and Vietnam War veteran, a man of eighty years old
- He is a recovering alcoholic and his wife and son were both killed in a drunk driving accident
- He has spent the majority of his later years adopting children from overseas
 - To salve his loneliness in the years after the accident, he started unofficially “adopting” indigent Okinawan boys and girls, eventually taking fourteen of them under his wing, paying for the oldest to attend medical school in Philadelphia and another to study medicine in Japan.
- After building a strong relationship with Chris, he offers to adopt him but Chris says he will decide this when he returns from Alaska
- Chris completes the belt of his life in the company of Franz and is one of the most symbolic pieces that Chris ever possessed, telling the story of his life
- Chris confided into Franz that he should turn his life around and take some risks, living the nomadic life
 - “ I think you really should make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt.”
- Franz took this to heart and packed up his things into a portable camper and hit the road like Chris
- When picking up other hitchhikers, he overhears them talking of a dead “survivalist” and he learns that Chris is dead
 - The night he dropped off Chris, Franz prayed to God to keep his eye out for Chris in the wild
 - Franz felt that God had failed him and became an atheist
 - After he hears about the news of Chris’s death he drives to the liquor store and breaks his long and hard worked sobriety.

Gene Rosellini, the Mayor of Hippie Cove

- The first person that Jon compares Chris to
- In 1977 he decided to devote himself to an ambitious anthropological experiment
- He wondered whether humans could live as our forebears had when mammoths and saber-toothed tigers roamed the land or whether our species had moved too far from its roots to survive without gunpowder, steel, and other artifacts of civilization
- He filled his days with calisthenics, weight lifting, and running
- His experiment lasted for more than a decade and he had reached an answer to his question

- “I learned that it is not possible for human beings as we know them to live off the land”
- At age 49 he had a recast of his goals and wanted to walk around the earth with nothing but his backpack
- He never got to fulfill this as he killed himself via stab wound

John Waterman

- The second person that Jon compares to Chris
- He was born in the same Washington suburbs that gave shape to McCandless
- He was a small man at only 5’3
- In 1969, as a sixteen year old, John climbed Mt. McKinley, becoming the third youngest person to stand atop the highest landform on the continent
- John’s brother Bill went missing and left without a trace and after John learned to climb, eight of his friends and climbing partners were killed in accidents or committed suicide
- In March of 1978, Waterman embarked on his most astonishing expedition, a solo ascent of Mt. Hunter’s southeast spur, an unclimbed route
 - After 81 days, he reached the summit
 - He spent a total of 145 days alone on the mountain counting the ascent and descent
- Success did not put Waterman’s dreams to rest but instead agitated them
- He was known for always taking notes, carrying clipboards and pens
- He planned to make a solo ascent of the south face of the Denali
 - The first time he told the pilot to turn the plane away, “I don’t want to die”
 - The second time his cabin caught fire and his equipment and accumulation of notes, poetry, and life’s work was destroyed
 - He admitted himself to a psychiatric institute but two weeks later left because he felt there was a conspiracy afoot to put him away permanently
- In winter of 1981 he launched another solo attempt on Denali
- Talking crazy and stupid shit he said goodbye to his friends as he would never see them again
- He had become less cautious and this ultimately cost him his life
 - It is assumed he broke through a thin snow bridge and plummeted to his death
 - They found a note inside of his mountain house that said, “My last kiss”

Carl McCunn

- The third man that Jon compares to Chris
- He went to Alaska to shoot pictures of wildlife
- He went in with film, a rifle, a shotgun, and 14 rounds of provisions
- He forgot to ask the pilot to pick him up and this ultimately ended his life

- He dumped his rounds and found himself angry at this decision later when he would need them
- One day in September Carl sees a plane fly above
- He recalls that he raised his right hand to the plane
 - He thought nothing of it but it turns out this signal was a signal of “OK” and the pilot probably never thought twice about flying away
- He was a ‘dreamin’ kind of dude’ who neglected the important things
- Even as he was starving it is likely that he believed someone would come to help him
- In November he finished the last of his rations
- He says a prayer to God and shoots himself in the head
 - Two months later Alaska State Troopers came across his camp

Similarities and differences between Rosellini, Waterman, and Carl

- Like Rosellini and Waterman, McCandless was a seeker and had an impractical fascination with the harsh side of nature
- Like Waterman and McCunn, he displayed a staggering paucity of common sense
- Unlike Waterman, McCandless wasn’t mentally ill and unlike McCunn, he didn’t go into the bush assuming someone would automatically appear to save him
- Jon says that Chris was not mentally ill, but perhaps a pilgrim

Everett Ruess/Nemo

- The fourth man that Jon compares Chris to
- This man is an accurate depiction of Chris, unlike the other three men
- In 1934, this peculiar twenty year old boy walked into the desert and never walked out
- Many years ago Everett Ruess carved his pen name into a canyon wall below a panel of Anasazi pictographs near the Davis Gulch in Utah
 - Chris did the same when he inscribed, Alexander Supertramp, into the bus
- His pen name was Nemo
- He departed into Davis Gulch and mysteriously disappeared
- He dropped out of UCLA and spent the rest of his life on the move, living out of his backpack on very little money
- He was an adolescent esthete, an atavistic wanderer of the wastelands
- The peculiar thing about him was that he went out and did things he dreamed about, not just a two week vacation
- In letters he said that he would never stop wandering and that he would die out there
- In letters he said that he wanted to live life more intensely because he was unsatisfied
- In letters he said that the wilderness was too good to pass up
- He changes his name twice, to Lan Rameau and Evert Rulan
- It is widely believed that he fell to his death

- Some argue that he was killed and robbed
- He may have been encouraged to call himself Nemo by Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, in which Captain Nemo flees civilization and severs his "every tie upon the earth"
- Ken Sleight, an investigator of the death, believes that he drowned
- Everett and Chris followed their dreams
- Jon compares the two men to the Irish monks known as papar
- They travelled not to find wealth, but to find lonely places, where the anchorites might dwell in peace, undisturbed by the turmoil and temptations of the world

John Franklin

- A nineteenth-century British naval officer whose smugness and hauteur contributed to some 140 deaths, including his own
- He was assigned to lead an expedition into the wilderness of western Canada
- On the expedition his men ran out of food and the men had to eat each other
- He was woefully underprepared for the voyage and was known as the Man Who Ate His Shoes
- He was hailed as a national hero
- He was given command of a second expedition which was relatively uneventful
- He returned to the Arctic for a third time
 - He and 128 men under his control were never heard of again
- Similar to McCandless, both were thought to have possessed insufficient respect for the land
- Franklin had never bothered to learn the survival skills practiced by the Indians and the Eskimos who had properly and successfully traversed the land in the many years prior
- Franklin tried to use military tactics in the wild, while Chris tried to live entirely off the country
- Chris knew when he entered the bush that he was giving himself a very slim margin for error and he was completely aware of what was at stake

Buck

- Chris and Carine's childhood dog
- It was a Shetland Sheepdog
- Chris and him became inseparable
- Chris asked to bring the dog with him on his excursion but he was denied because Buck had recently been hit by a car and was recovering
- It is debated that if Chris would've brought Buck he would still be alive today
 - He may not have taken the risks that he did if he had Buck

Thompson, Samel, and Swanson

- The men who find the body of Chris McCandless

Locations

Annandale, Virginia

- The hometown of Chris
- He once gave this address to an officer because he did not have the funds to pay a ticket
- Chris moved here when he was 6 due to Walt getting a job with NASA
- One day Chris picked up a homeless man and let him sleep in his RV at his home in Annandale
- The summer between his sophomore and junior years of college he took a job delivering for Domino's
- After his freshman year of college Chris returned home to Annandale and developed a software for his parents that they still use to this day for their business
 - He never told them how he did it
- A spoon was found in the bus that was from his Annandale house

Carthage

- A very secluded town in South Dakota with a population of 274
- Chris worked for Wayne Westerberg here
- Wayne tells us that in the town bar Chris used to enjoy drinking White Russian's
- Wayne owned a Grain Elevator here
- Westerberg picked up Chris in Montana and offered him a job in Carthage
- Chris like the town's stasis, it's plebeian virtues, and it's unassuming mien
- During those four weeks in Carthage, McCandless worked hard, doing dirty, tedious jobs that nobody else wanted to tackle: mucking out warehouses, exterminating vermin, painting, scything weeds.
 - At one point, to reward McCandless with a task that involved slightly more skill, Westerberg attempted to teach him to operate a front-end loader. "Alex hadn't been around machinery much," Westerberg says with a shake of his head, "and it was pretty comical to watch him try to get the hang of the clutch and all those levers."
- Chris returns in the spring and meets Gail Borah
- On McCandless's final night in Carthage, he partied hard at the Cabaret with Westerberg's crew

Stampede Trail

- The trail in Alaska that Chris follows into the Bush
- Jim Gallien dropped him off here
- This trail was Chris McCandless's intended route to climb Denali.
- It is located in Denali National Park. Bus 142 (The Magic Bus) is on the Trail

Bullhead City

- While here, Chris works at McDonalds and even opens a bank account
- He meets a man named Charlie who allowed him to stay in “his house” during this time
 - “The only drawback is this old guy, whose name is Charlie, is something of a lunatic and it’s rather difficult to get along with him sometimes.”
- With Franz, they go back to Charlie’s place and retrieve some of the things that Chris left behind
- He leaves Bullhead City one day and surprises Jan and Bob

The Slabs

- The Slabs functions as the seasonal capital of a teeming itinerant society—a tolerant, rubber-tired culture comprising the retired, the exiled, the destitute, the perpetually unemployed. Its constituents are men and women and children of all ages, folks on the dodge from collection agencies, relationships gone sour, the law or the IRS, Ohio winters, the middle-class grind.
- Here Chris stays with Jan and Bob working at their book stand at the flea market
- This was made up of an old navy air base that had been abandoned and five thousand drifters come in the winter to stay there.
- During his stay at the there a young seventeen year old named Tracy became madly in love with Chris.
 - Among the residents of the Niland Slabs was a seventeen-year-old named Tracy, and she fell in love with McCandless during his week-long visit. “She was this sweet little thing,” says Burres, “the daughter of a couple of tramps who parked their rig four vehicles down from us. And poor Tracy developed a hopeless crush on Alex. The whole time he was in Niland, she hung around making goo-goo eyes at him, bugging me to convince him to go on walks with her. Alex was nice to her, but she was too young for him. He couldn’t take her seriously. Probably left her brokenhearted for a whole week at least.”

Oh-My-God Hot Springs

- This spring was a line of shallow steaming pools lined with rocks and shaded by palm trees. The people living there were what most people considered to be crazy.
 - One Thursday in mid-January, McCandless was hitching back out to the bajada after filling his jug when an old man, named Ron Franz, stopped to give him a ride.
 - After a mile or so they arrived at a bizarre encampment, where some two hundred people had gathered to spend the winter living out of their vehicles. The community was beyond the fringe, a vision of post-apocalypse America. There were families sheltered in cheap tent trailers, aging hippies in Day-Glo vans, Charles Manson look-alikes sleeping in rusted-out Studebakers that hadn't turned over since Eisenhower was in the White House. A substantial number of those present were walking around buck naked. At the center of the camp, water from a geothermal well had been piped into a pair of shallow, steaming pools lined with rocks and shaded by palm trees: Oh-My-God Hot Springs.
- Chris did not live directly in the Springs but a few spots away on the bajada

Bus 142

- The bus that Chris finds on the Stampede Trail
- He makes it his home for the two month span he lives out there
- He engraves his name and many messages into this bus
- To this day people still visit it and leave things in memory of Chris
- Upon finding it he writes in his journal, "Magic Bus Day"

Devil's Thumb

- The mountain that Jon Krakauer attempts to climb
- Devils Thumb, or Taalkhunaxhk'u Shaa in Tlingit, is a mountain in the Stikine Icecap region of the Alaska–British Columbia border, near Petersburg
- Going against his father's wishes, he becomes a mountain climber and has a dream to climb this mountain
- Failing on two occasions, Jon builds up courage and finally reaches the summit
- He took a picture at the top to prove he had been there

Teklanika River

- About ten miles past the end of the improved road the Stampede Trail crosses the Teklanika River, a fast, icy stream whose waters are opaque with glacial till. The trail comes down to the riverbank just upstream from a narrow gorge, through which the Teklanika surges in a boil of white water. The prospect of fording this /affe-colored torrent discourages most people from traveling any farther.

- McCandless reached the Teklanika River his second day out. Although the banks were lined with a jagged shelf of frozen overflow, no ice bridges spanned the channel of open water, so he was forced to wade.
- To McCandless's inexperienced eye, there was nothing to suggest that two months hence, as the glaciers and snowfields at the Teklanika's headwater thawed in the summer heat, its discharge would multiply nine or ten times in volume, transforming the river into a deep, violent torrent that bore no resemblance to the gentle brook he'd blithely waded across in April.
- On July 5, however, the Teklanika was at full flood, swollen with rain and snowmelt from glaciers high in the Alaska Range, running cold and fast.
 - Yea Chris messed up... big time
 - If the river hadn't become a torrent he would still be alive
 - He had plans to cross the water and return to civilization but this was short lived
- In his journal he now wrote, "Disaster.... Rained in. River look impossible. Lonely, scared." He concluded, correctly, that he would probably be swept to his death if he attempted to cross the Teklanika at that place, in those conditions. It would be suicidal; it was simply not an option.

Detrital Wash

- Where the rangers find Chris's abandoned Datsun

Motifs/Themes: If you read the book these should be relatively easy to answer in your head so I did not answer them.

How does this novel fit into the themes of the course/what we have studied thus far? Is Chris McCandless a Romantic, a Transcendentalist, something else entirely? After reading this book, what portrait of America is revealed/highlighted in these pages?

What are the parallels between Jon Krakauer and Chris McCandless in terms of their lives, interests, personalities, etc.? How does Krakauer try to defend Chris from the criticism of those who might call him ignorant, self-obsessed, suicidal, etc.?

How is nature portrayed in *Into the Wild*? Is nature inherently dangerous? Beautiful? Complex? When it comes to his work as a writer, do you think Krakauer is more like Thoreau/Emerson in his descriptions of nature or like Jack London?

What is the role of literature within this book? Which authors play a role in shaping Chris's personality and thoughts? What ideas does he appear to be influenced by in his readings/the passages he highlights?

Is Chris McCandless a tragic hero? A disturbed young man? A prideful and arrogant product of a privileged household? Should we use his story as something to admire (within reason) or as a warning against pride, etc.?