

Author Craig Romano: Blending Love of the Outdoors and Writing

Author Craig Romano is an award-winning outdoors writer and photographer who has written more than 25 books and articles for more than two dozen publications. He's been interviewed on television, radio, and in print. His outdoors guidebooks cover diverse topics, including hiking trails, urban trails, wildflower hikes, hiking with dogs, backpacking, and winter hikes, among more. His work spans the Pacific Northwest, including books on the Columbia River Gorge, Olympic Peninsula, the San Juans and Gulf Islands, Central Cascades, and Eastern Washington, and more locales.

I've had the pleasure of getting to know Craig and I've enjoyed hearing him speak on the topic of writing and his love of the outdoors. When I heard he had (yet) another great book coming out, I asked if we could chat over the topics of his books, writing career and love of the outdoors. We ended up covering this as well as some of his favorite places in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Enjoy!

Getting the Gig

Nancy Zaffaro: The first question I have to ask is the one I know my readers who love to travel and love the outdoors want to know. How did you get such a great gig? How did you get into outdoors writing?

Craig Romano: I have been into the outdoors since my family moved us to a small town in New Hampshire when I was 8. If you didn't like the outdoors, you'd be pretty bored growing up there. And I have been writing since I was a kid, too. I had my own column in my home town newspaper when I was 15. It was a natural progression to blend these two passions.

Nancy: How did you start writing guidebooks? How did your first project happen and how did you decide to make this your career?

Craig: I have been reading guidebooks since my 20s and always wanted to write my own. Through everything lining up for me, I got my first crack at writing one in 2004. My publisher was looking for a new "younger voice" to carry on the baton that guidebook legends Harvey Manning and Ira Spring had established. She became familiar with some of my writings through some outdoor publications I was writing for and decided to take a chance with me.

Nancy: What work did you do before doing what you're doing now?

Craig: Like most writers I waited tables for many years! But I had lots of fun jobs too. I was a ski

bum in Vermont, a back country ranger in New Hampshire, and a mountain guide in the Pyrenees of Spain and France. I taught high school for a few years and made the jump to write full time then!

On Writing the Guidebooks

Nancy: You've written more than 25 books and articles for more than two dozen publications. But being a travel and outdoors writer today means much more than writing and seeing your work published. You also need to hone your skills in photography, social media, PR and marketing. You appear on TV and you're interviewed by other publications. How do you balance all of these demands on your time so that you find time to write and deliver your projects on time?

Craig: Not sure if I ever balance my time especially too when I am trying to raise a young son and spend time with family. I try not to take on more than I can handle and I try to piggyback projects on each other so I can maximize my time. Being an East Coast Type A however, I do thrive on staying busy!

Nancy: How much research do you do before a project before you hit the road?

Craig: I am constantly researching projects before and along the way. Completing one of my books typically takes around 2 years-research-to writing-to editing.

Nancy: Your books are well-received and sell well. What makes them a success?

Craig: I have put my heart into them and my readers appreciate it. They know too that I research on the ground everything I write about so they can trust my works. There are many competing titles out there that lack the depth and detail that my books are known for. I have worked hard too to build a community of trail users and readers. I write for them. And I am committed to protecting our trails and wild places and have been very active with several conservation organizations. My readers appreciate that as well.

On the Guidebooks and Out in the Field

Nancy: Another thing I know about your work is that your books are also well-written and well-designed for both experienced outdoors-folk and those who may have less experience but want to get outdoors more, be more active. You recently completed a 21.5 mile, 5,000 foot vertical run up and over and back up and over Twin Peaks, Washington's Horse Lake Mountain. You also just completed a 41-mile day hike/run (with 10,000 feet of elevation) of the Mt. Hood Timberline Trail. And that's not your longest day on the trail. Trust me, that's something I won't be doing anytime soon. How do you manage to strike that balance for experienced athletes and those of us who are "recreational" out there?

Craig: While I am an ultra-runner regularly doing 20-plus mile day hikes and 30-plus mile trail runs, I do enjoy taking easy strolls on Urban Trails and Nature Trails too. I love being outdoors and on a trail—especially in a natural area—so I bring the same passion to my writing whether I am talking about doing that Timberline Trail in a day or doing an easy stroll on Sauvie Island. My readers range in abilities from super casual to super hardcore and I try to mix up my writing to keep them all reading.

Current and Future Projects

Nancy: What is your current or next project in the works?

Craig: I haven't officially signed the contract yet, but it's looking pretty promising that I will be doing an Urban Trails book for the other Vancouver—the big one! And I have signed a NDA for a real big project for next year!

Nancy: Some of your books have gone into second editions. When you update your books, what kind of changes do you make?

Craig: I re-hike everything so I can update conditions and other concerns. I also assess if a hike should stay in the book because of damage, neglect, etc. And I add plenty of new hikes to the new editions as well as expand some of the previous hikes. I also note any changes to management, passes, driving directions and other concerns.

Collaborations

Nancy: Your most recent book (your 26th!) is a second edition of *Hiking Washington's History*, co-written with Judy Bentley. (A fabulous topic, by the way. The book includes 44 new and updated hikes, full-color trail maps, a trails timeline, accounts from diaries, journals, and archives, and contemporary and historical photos.

This is not your first book written with a co-writer. How is working with another writer different from writing on your own?

Craig: I have collaborated with several other authors and I love the process. I try to co-write with other authors that will enhance my work by offering insights and perspectives that I could not possibly offer. In Judy's case, her knowledge of history and her storytelling skills are superior to my historical background and narratives (and I have a degree in History!) I could not have written such a book as a solo author. I am proud to have my name on the cover with hers, as well as other authors I have collaborated with: William Sullivan, William Dietrich, Aaron Theisen, and Rich Landers.

From East Coast to West Coast

Nancy: You've said that growing up in rural New Hampshire gave you the love of the outdoors. How did you make your way to Pacific Northwest and what has kept you out here?

Craig: I had biked out to the Northwest twice and did one road trip here before relocating—which was never in my plans. I was going through a bad divorce and needed time to get my head straight so I came out to Seattle to see my best friend (from NH who was then a grad student at UW), took a restaurant job and went hiking—a lot! I figured I would take six months or so and head back to New Hampshire.

But my life's course proved otherwise. I ended up going back to college at the UW, married a Vancouver WA girl and established my dream job as a hiking expert and prolific guidebook author. I never wanted to leave New Hampshire however and I deeply miss the culture (especially the Italian-American communities), landscapes, tight knit postcard towns and other special ways of life back east.

The Northwest has kept me with its spectacular geological diversity, large wilderness areas, and outdoor life styles. I head back to New Hampshire frequently and am raising my son bi-coastal so he gets the best out of both of these regions that are dear to my heart.

Favorite Outdoors Destinations and Future Travel

Nancy: Favorite all-time Pacific Northwest spots?

Craig: Too many to list—but the Glacier Peak Wilderness, Kettle River Range, Mount Rainier National Park, Southern Oregon Coast, Eagle Cap Wilderness, Columbia River Gorge, Mount St Helens, and Olympic National Park are all favorites among the favorites.

Nancy: What hikes, runs, races and paddles are on your bucket list, as both a writer, an outdoorsman and as a family man?

Craig: Too many to list! While I have spent most of my recent hiking time on the West Coast and Northeast, the Rockies need to be explored more! I am also looking forward to taking my son hiking overseas to some of my favorite places: Patagonia, the Apennines, Ireland and Japan. I also have my eyes set out hiking in Wales, more time in Quebec and the Maritime Provinces and Calabria in southern Italy. As far as races, I would like to do some cool ultras in other parts of the country especially California. And I hope to do a 100K. And finally depending on my son's future interests and if my body holds up I have entertained the idea of bicycling across country with him or doing the AT with my wife meeting us along the way at all of the great trail towns.

Who Else Should We Read

Nancy: What other outdoors writers do you enjoy reading; guidebook writers or otherwise?

Craig: As much as I love hiking Washington, there are so many other places out there I try to hike and visit too—and when I do, I like to get guidebooks for those regions too. I am a big fan of William Sullivan’s works and it was an honor to recently co-author a book with him. I rely on some of Scott Turner’s books when I am hiking in Southern California. For Northern California, John Soares is my trusted source. In British Columbia, Canada, it’s Steven Hui.

Nancy: Thanks so much, Craig!

Craig: Thank you!

For More:

- Author Craig Romano's [website](#)
- Take a look at author Craig Romano's author page and purchase his books on [Amazon](#)
- On our site: [Portland Guidebooks: Oregon Writers Share Where to Go, Where to Eat](#)

-All photos courtesy of Craig Romano.