

BOOKS AND ESSAYS SPECIAL ISSUE

High Country News

For people who care about the West



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Close Ties in Big Landscapes

Finding a bit of the Rockies
in Northern Mongolia

By Sarah Gilman

The long road home for
one California tribe

By Ana Maria Spagna

High Country News

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Horse tour guide Batdelger, above, demonstrates how to befriend reindeer in the Mongolian taiga. Right, three generations of Maidu, including elder Beverly Ogle, her daughter, Brenda Heard, and granddaughter, Yasmin Holbrook, display the traditional baskets woven with local willows by their ancestor, Ce'este (known as Nellie Thomas). SARAH GILMAN, LEFT, COURTESY MAIDU SUMMIT CONSORTIUM



Close Ties in Big Landscapes

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By Betsy Marston



On the cover
Tsaatan nomads in
a traditional felt
roundhouse, called a ger,
where these "people of the
reindeer" tend herds that
provide food, clothing and
transportation in northern
Mongolia.

ART WOLFE / ART WOLFE STOCK



High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization that covers the issues that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the region's diverse natural and human communities.

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Editor's note

The real work



On a hot, dusty August Saturday a few years ago, people from all over the North Fork Valley convened at a country veterinarian's office just outside Paonia, Colorado (*HCN*'s hometown). We came with paintbrushes and paint, wheelbarrows, buckets, rakes and shovels, food and drink. About a dozen of us, ranging in age from 8 to 70-something, got to work scraping and repainting the shabby old building, cleaning up the grounds and repairing the roof.

We did all this for Dr. Norman Vincent (known around town as "Doc V") — the man who stitches up our injured dogs and tends to our sick cats at any time of the day or night, vaccinating them and cleaning their teeth, and charging just a fraction of what a big-city vet would. After we'd finished, Doc V's place was transformed. And, in a way, so were we.

That night, I looked up a half-remembered passage from the writer and critic Wendell Berry: "And the real name of our connection to this everywhere different and differently named earth is 'work.' We are connected by work even to the places where we don't work, for all places are connected; it is clear by now that we cannot exempt one place from our ruin of another. The name of our proper connection to the earth is 'good work,' for good work involves much giving of honor. It

honors the source of its materials; it honors the place where it is done; it honors the art by which it is done; it honors the thing that it makes and the user of the made thing."

This special issue of *High Country News* looks at what we all can do as a community, when we let go of our Western individualism. Despite our rugged reputation, we are often stronger together than standing alone. Rebuilding a connection to a place can also build connections among people, as Washington writer Ana Maria Spagna describes in "The Exact Same Place," in which Mountain Maidu Indians formed a broad coalition to reclaim a sacred valley in California's Sierra Nevada from a utility company. In interviews with writers such as Erika T. Wurth, Mitchell S. Jackson and Bryce Andrews, we hear other perspectives on transcending the limitations — and learning the lessons — of community. And in "Claustrophilia," contributing editor Sarah Gilman finds that in the harsh, unpeopled spaces of Mongolia, as in the American West, closeness is more than comfort: It can mean survival. (Especially if you haven't brought a tent.)

Whether to get through one bitterly cold night, or to thrive over a lifetime, we need each other more than we're willing to admit. Accepting that we are part of a community, that we rely on each other — that can be where the real "good work" is. —Jodi Peterson, senior editor

Contributors

Michael Engelhard

lives in Cordova, Alaska, where it's impossible to drive to anywhere with a bookstore. He is working on a book about polar bears but will not consider bringing a bear along on his next promotion tour.



Sarah Gilman

has plenty of awkward Dr. Fleischman moments in her new city of Portland, Oregon, where she is an *HCN* contributing editor and freelance writer. She was the magazine's associate editor in Paonia, Colorado, for more than six years.



Page Lambert's writing is found inside sculptures at the Denver Art Museum, online at *Huffington Post*, and within dozens of anthologies. She

leads outdoor adventures and writes the blog, *All Things Literary/All Things Natural*.

Emma Morris is an environmental writer. She lives in Klamath Falls, Oregon.



Melissa Mylchreest writes poetry and nonfiction in western Montana. When she's not writing, she likes to cook, make functional art, and spend as much time as possible outside.



Laura Paskus is an independent reporter and radio producer based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She's a former assistant editor of *High Country News*.



Laura Pritchett is the author of several books, most recently the novel *Red Lightning* (Counterpoint, 2015). More at www.laurapritchett.com.



Jenny Shank's novel

The Ringer won the High Plains Book Award and was a finalist for the Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers Association's award. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian* and others.



Ana Maria Spagna

is the author of two essay collections, a memoir/history, and most recently, the handy guidebook, *100 Skills You'll Need for the End of the World (As We Know It)*. She lives in Stehekin, Washington, with her wife, Laurie Thompson.



Mushroom hunters

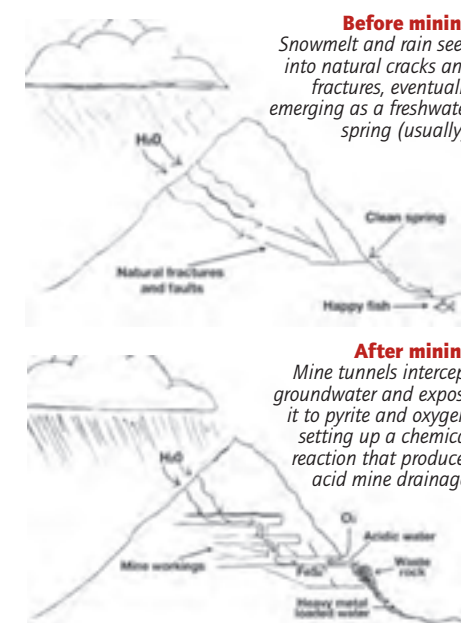
A colorful and diverse collection of workers spends months scouring forest floors for money-making fungi, as seen in this gallery. Here, Dao sorts burn morels in Carmacks in the Yukon Territory. He and his wife, Aloune, fled war-torn Laos in the 1970s and now spend nine months of the year on the road picking and buying mushrooms.

OLIVIER MATTHON hcne.ws/hunt-mushrooms

8-27 the percent of California's moisture deficit attributable to warm temperatures caused by anthropogenic climate change. CALLY CARSWELL hcne.ws/CAdrought-climate

Chemistry 101 on the Animas

While there are a variety of ways that mining can pollute watersheds, the most insidious and persistent is acid mine drainage, a natural phenomenon exacerbated by mining. Acid mine drainage was the root cause of the Gold King blowout, and it plagues tens of thousands of abandoned mines across the West. It's almost impossible to fix, and it lasts forever. How it works:



Once water (H_2O) meets up with oxygen (O_2) and pyrite (FeS_2), a chain of reactions occurs, one of the products being H_2SO_4 , otherwise known as sulfuric acid, or runoff that tends to have a pH level between 2 (lemon juice) and 5 (black coffee). JONATHAN THOMPSON hcne.ws/GoldKing-water

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Not on a rez: finding a complete life in the urban West

Q&A with Erika T. Wurth

BY LAURA PRITCHETT

Erika T. Wurth is Apache/Chickasaw/Cherokee and grew up near Denver, Colorado. She now splits her time between Denver and Macomb, Illinois, where she teaches creative writing at Western Illinois University. Her debut novel, Crazy Horse's Girlfriend (Curb-side Splendor, 2014), is informed by her youthful experience — the community she both was drawn to and eager to escape (reviewed in HCN, 5/25/15). It follows Margaritte, a drug-dealing 16-year-old Native American floundering in a Colorado town haunted by poverty, unemployment and drug abuse. Margaritte's examination of her life — and those around her — is both tender and fierce, whether she is considering her cokehead boyfriend, her good-hearted but troubled cousin, her alcoholic father, or her own problematic future. Wurth recently spoke with HCN about her characters, her communities and the future.



COURTESY ERIKA WURTH

High Country News How important has your heritage been in your life and writing?

Erika T. Wurth I was bused to school in an area with a cultural mix: Natives of all tribes, Latinos, working-class whites — the common denominator being the mullet (which I did not have). I think that novels from Native perspectives of all kinds are necessary, but I wasn't seeing mine. Over 70 percent of Native people live off reservations, in cities like Denver and the outlying areas. Where were the novels about that?

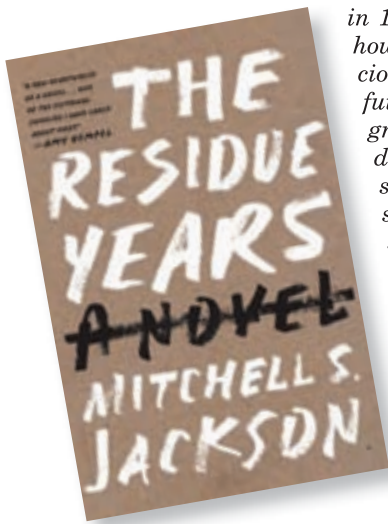
I take great inspiration from where I come from; I feel that you might as well poetically render what you know (and what you can imagine). Also, the larger Native writing world has been incredibly supportive. Writers like Susan Power, Eden Robinson and Sherwin Bitsui have given me a wonderful peer group.

The counterpoint of home

Q&A with Mitchell S. Jackson

BY DEVON FREDERICKSEN

Mitchell S. Jackson grew up in a version of Portland, Oregon, far from today's Portlandia, where white hipsters quibble about culinary ethics and artisanal ice cubes. For Jackson, growing up black in 1990s Portland meant figuring out how to avoid letting his race and socioeconomic circumstances define his future. His award-winning autobiographical novel, The Residue Years, describes a mother and son who pursue their dreams despite the constraints of race and class: Champ sells crack to escape poverty, while his mother struggles to get clean. Jackson served 16 months in prison at 25, for dealing crack, earned an M.F.A. in creative writing and now teaches at New York University (The novel was reviewed in HCN, 3/17/14). Survival Math, a nonfiction account of his family, is forthcoming from Scribner.



High Country News Portland has been called the whitest city in America. How does your novel tie into this community?

Mitchell S. Jackson By ignoring (Portland's reputation). Growing up in northeast Portland, it was predominantly African-American. So we were, I guess, insulated from that. But now, I can see how some of the issues that were happening in northeast Portland (might have been) because it was predominantly African-American, in that there weren't enough resources and people who cared about the community for it to not be like that.

HCN Who were you hoping to reach with this novel?

Jackson If you're a writer — and especially if you're writing literary fiction or literary nonfiction — your audience is white. But I always intended *Residue* to be for the people from my community. That's why I kept a lot of the diction, because it really wasn't for the highfalutin literary readership.

HCN What was it like to serve time, and then speak at prisons after your book came out?

Jackson It feels almost like a calling — like

I had to go through that little bit of time in prison so I could come back and talk to these guys and connect with them. The average person — they look at a prisoner as someone who's violent or doesn't have any feelings, or doesn't have any loved ones. And that's just not the case. They're human beings and they've been put in situations or sometimes, they're just making bad decisions. It's made me a more forgiving person than I would've been.

HCN Your mother's crack addiction began when you were 10, and you started dealing as a teenager. How did you not let these circumstances derail your life?

Jackson Well, they did. (laughs) They did in most of the ways they derailed my friends. Part of the reason I was able to get back on track is because I always valued school. I had teachers who took interest in me and told me I was bright. I also came from a family who emphasized school. I really never wanted to be a successful drug dealer, because I knew how much of my morality I would have to give up.

HCN Portland is divided into four quadrants, and most of *The Residue Years* takes place in the Northeast Quadrant, where you grew up. How have these neighborhoods changed?

Jackson When I came home when the book

HCN Communities can sometimes bind or hurt an individual. How does Margaritte experience her community's limitations?

Wurth Margaritte is much "cooler" than I was in high school — she has friends, sells drugs, has sex — and I was essentially a loner. What we have in common is this: the strong desire to leave your community, with the added burden of honestly knowing that you deeply come from it and have love for it. I did not want to write a book wherein the character "went back to the reservation and found herself." I wanted a different narrative. I wanted to write about someone who could stay and find a way to live authentically as a human being.

HCN In a review, Sandra Cisneros notes that you "chronicle the poor with compassion and respect." Readers automatically root for Margaritte, but her future, frankly, seems pretty bleak. What are your thoughts on what the future holds for young people, particularly Native Americans?

Wurth Social media is something that is making the larger population aware of our greater issues. When most people think of Native Americans, they think about stereotypes. Social media has rallied a lot

of Natives, made us feel that we are not alone, and there has been real progress on issues — the mascot issue, rape on reservations by non-Natives, the trafficking of Native women. I think that Natives are beginning to feel collectively and increasingly that our languages, our values, and our political issues are something to fight for, and I see a strong sense of intellectual and creative activity around these issues.

HCN How do you see your work as fitting in the larger scope of work set in the contemporary West? Have urban life, teenage pregnancy and contemporary issues been given their due?

Wurth I think that when people think about the West, they think about cowboys, or, perhaps in the case of Colorado, of biking, hiking, skiing. Pregnancy and drugs and these kinds of issues have been talked about, but not in a way that's sensitive and sophisticated and literary, at least not when it comes to people of color. Young people deserve more than black-and-white life lessons.

HCN What are your hopes, in that regard? What would you like contemporary literature to look like, and what will be your role in that?

Wurth The feedback (for my new novel) is that it's unrelentingly dark, when most of my white male peers write dark subject matter and are lauded for it. What's ironic is that so many publishing companies are losing money, but they keep on publishing the same thing over and over — either stereotypical subject matter about people of color or the same white middle-class stuff. What people want is interesting and dark and sophisticated literature, and the publishing world needs to stop risking nothing and gaining nothing.

HCN What's next for you?

Wurth I hope my agent sells my novel, which is about Native American gangs. There's no other novel like it out there. It's literary and sophisticated and human and dark. Where are the Philip Roths of this generation? I see the postmodernists, and I see genre folks, but where are the people writing big novels about American life? There is a place for it still. □



was coming out, I attended a meeting with the mayor, the police chief and some local community leaders, and they passed out a sheet listing all the crimes in the area for the previous week. (In the past) if there was a shooting or a stabbing, it was, like, 95 percent of the time in Northeast. So they passed out this sheet, and in north and northeast Portland there were no crimes. But out in "The Numbers" (far east Portland) — where they'd pushed all the people who used to live in Northeast — there were two shootings, a stabbing, a car theft, a robbery, and I was like, "Wow, they really just relocated the problems." And so it was interesting to see that you can just take a problem area and plant it somewhere else.

HCN You seem to have a reverence for Portland.

Jackson It shaped me. I spent 25 years there, so I think the important parts of me were built in Portland. The people that I love — my primary, my first loves — they're in Portland. I recognize the struggles of the city, and I feel more deeply connected to them than I do to the struggles of New York.

HCN Your protagonists keep



searching for a home that is out of reach. What do you see as home, and how has that idea changed?

Jackson I still consider Portland home. I forget who said: "You can never go home again." I think in a certain sense that's true, because the Portland that I knew is gone. But I still feel a real deep connection to the people there, and want to represent the Portland that's gone. (At the Breadloaf Writers' Conference) the first story that we workshopped was by a guy who lives in Portland now. And his story is about a potbelly pig, and he spoofs Whole Foods and riding your bike everywhere and growing organic weed, which I understand is an element of Portland, but I just — I don't understand that. If there was no *Residue Years*, there would be very little counterpoint to that idea of Portland. So now, I want to be the counterpoint of home. □

The landscape of inspiration

Bev Magennis, author and artist, follows her whims in New Mexico

BY LAURA PASKUS



Name Bev Magennis

Age 73

Hometown

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Vocation Visual artist-turned-novelist

She says "I feel that I've been at the mercy of my whims and dedicated to my whims, and I've always had to kind of apologize about that."

Original first line of her forthcoming novel, *Alibi Creek* "Walker was an asshole." Though he's no longer the novel's protagonist, she still favors his character: "I love his inane energy. I loved that I could go anywhere with him."

Immigrated to the U.S. from Toronto, Canada 1964

Recommended writing book *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, Janet Burroway

Bev Magennis started decorating The Tile House in 1984 and finished 11 years later, using more than 130,000 pieces. COURTESY ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Just a block off a busy intersection in Albuquerque's North Valley, a tile-covered two-story house stands like a poem. Mosaic flowers spring from its base and pueblo-style rainclouds grace the front gable.

For 11 years, Bev Magennis added one ceramic tile after another to her home, not intending from the start to cover the entire building. "I just get on a track," she says today from her new home, which is tile-less and about a mile away. "I love a long-term project."

In more than three decades as a visual artist, Magennis created life-sized figures — even a "dome lady" large enough to sleep a family for the night. (At one point, she considered building a series of dome women and creating a sort of motel. Her then-husband was less enthusiastic about the idea.)

In 1993, she left Albuquerque for rural southwestern New Mexico. Catron County is home to Mexican gray wolves, the nation's first designated wilderness area, generations of Anglo ranching families and a fair amount of social tension — sometimes boiling, sometimes just awkward. And for 17 years, it was home to Magennis, too.

"The land was so great, so quiet," she says. But a few years ago, she returned to the city, which she appreciates for its emotional freedom. "I still long for (the coun-

try). But I know the reality."

Many people are tempted to create new lives for themselves in the West's isolated towns and rural landscapes. But making artwork, building a home, or even running a farm are not the same as belonging to a community. Those enchanting little towns aren't always sustainable places to raise a family or thrive emotionally — especially if you're an outsider, and a mistrust of outsiders and new ideas persists. Nearly a decade passed, for example, before a local storeowner's wife — passing change across the counter — *almost* made eye contact with Magennis, a petite, warm woman who was raised Jewish, grew up in Toronto, and describes herself as a "hard-core feminist."

Magennis came to New Mexico in the mid-1970s as part of Roswell's Artist-in-Residence Program — it was the best year of her life, she says — and then taught art in Chama. She didn't start writing until she was in her 60s. After recovering from ovarian cancer, she decided to try her hand at fiction.

Now, she's no longer constructing giant works of art or tiling houses. Rather, she's working on a series of books based loosely on life in Catron County. Although they're not classic mysteries, they do involve murders and missing people and the sorts of things that happen in the rural West when the law is loose and isolation wears away the good sense that people might other-

wise possess. *Alibi Creek*, the first in the series, is set for publication in March 2016.

"When you're living in a place like that," where eccentricity is tolerated, she says, but not liberalism, "you do get to a place beyond politics with your neighbors, because you need them. You need someone to talk to."

And that's what the main character in *Alibi Creek* lacks. Lee Ann, who is neither eccentric nor liberal, has no one to talk with as she grapples with an errant brother (the "asshole" character Magennis loves), a dying mother and a disappearing God. Plus controversy over the misuse of federal money at the county commission where she works, controversy of the sort that *HCN* readers will recognize.

"People are so proud of — and they should be proud of — this great tradition of ranching and surviving and endurance," she says of her former neighbors. "I mean, those people *endure*." But, she adds, rural Westerners can become so locked into their traditions, they can't see that the world has changed.

"It's admirable, but sad at the same time," Magennis mentions, for example, the defiant swagger some people display when insisting they'll never use computers. "That insistence might make them feel strong. But it's not actually a strength," she says. "The more narrow you are, that locks you in." □





Agriculture and aesthetics go hand-in-glove

Author Bryce Andrews pursues ranching and writing in Montana

BY PAGE LAMBERT

At the age of 6, Bryce Andrews sat at his family's kitchen table in Seattle, listening to rancher Pat Zentz talk about building sculptures and pulling spotted knapweed. Art and agriculture went together, the boy assumed. The next year, curators at the University of Washington's art museum installed "The Myth of the West," an exhibit his father organized, while young Andrews stood wide-eyed before Albert Bierstadt's painting *Yellowstone Falls*, then turned and practiced his quick draw facing Warhol's *Double Elvis*. That same year, his family visited the Zentz Ranch in Montana, in a pilgrimage that would become an annual event. Sixteen years later, Andrews himself began living the myth of the West, when he became an assistant livestock manager on a different ranch.

Andrews' first book, his award-winning 2014 memoir, *Badluck Way: A Year on the Ragged Edge of the West*, begins with his

journey from the "damp claustrophobia" of Seattle to the 20,000-acre Sun Ranch in remote southwest Montana. "I had practiced this departure many times," he notes. "I was headed away from my youth." The Madison Valley opens before him, peaks rising like "glinting canine teeth," the Madison River drawing "a golden line through the heart of the valley," which is home to two small towns, Ennis and Cameron. Intrigued by the ranch owner's mission to reconcile the needs of wildlife, livestock and the land, Andrews gives narrative weight to all the members of this community, not just people and cattle, but wolves and grizzlies as well. "One of our great failures," he believes, "is that we do not allow animals to be individuals. When gritty struggles play out on the landscape, it matters *which* wolves, *which* people, and *which* cattle."

But not everyone in the community views wolves as individuals, and gritty

struggles soon erupt. "The choices made at Sun Ranch about living with wolves," says Andrews, "boiled over onto the rest of the landscape. If one ranch has wolves, that policy impacts neighbors."

The Sun Ranch was a transformative experience, a proving ground that began shaping a three-pronged life as writer, rancher and conservationist. Afterward, Andrews continued working at the confluence of agriculture and conservation, managing multiple ranches in Montana, co-founding the Oxbow Cattle Company (a grass-fed beef ranch near Missoula) and consulting on land stewardship. When not on horseback, he wrote, and finally, in 2014, he sold his half of the grass-fed beef operation to concentrate more fully on writing and consulting.

The co-existence of aesthetics and manual labor is a major theme in Andrews' life. Figuring out how something works, whether a landscape or a novel, is a hands-on process. "Right now, I'm framing my first gable roof over a little wood-fired pizza oven," he says, "and writing a collection of linked short stories about drought, ranching, neighbors and the contemporary West."

Drawn to places where people are practicing agriculture in the context of wilderness, he is fascinated by the delicate balance that lets people ranch and farm among wild creatures, in wild landscapes. He and his girlfriend recently spent a month in Costa Rica in the largest remnant of old-growth coastal rainforest north of the Amazon, working with scientists at a remote research station at Osa Conservation. The nonprofit group's vision closely aligns with Andrews' own: the desire to see communities thrive through increasing engagement with the natural world.

"The Osa Peninsula is as different from Montana as any place I could imagine, but it's like you picked up the resource issues of Montana, and dropped them into a jungle. We talked about cattle ranching, co-existing with jaguars, banana farming, oil palm farming, water and subdivisions." All undeveloped land, he believes, is forgiving, resilient land. "A rancher can make a decision that turns out not to be the best, but if the ecosystem is intact, the land will recover. Spring will come around. The Montana landscape, like Costa Rica's, is infinitely complex and interesting. I want my writing to be a little bit like that, too."

Andrews also wants to move deeper into the world of art and community, not to join the ranks of the new agrarians, but to help inspire young people to be creative thinkers in the context of practical work. "Perhaps someday," he says, referring to an idea currently simmering on his back burner, "there'll be a ranch-based apprenticeship program combining agriculture with a curriculum in ethics, aesthetics, science and writing." □

Name Bryce Andrews

Age 32

Hometown Seattle

Vocation Writer, rancher and conservationist. "These three things have an equal claim on my attention."

Studied Environmental studies with a writing emphasis at Whitman College and the University of Montana

First published piece "Living precariously with wolves and cattle," *High Country News*, Writers on the Range, Aug. 6, 2007

Favorite nonfiction titles *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold; Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*; *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* by Paul Shepard; Loren Eiseley's *The Unexpected Universe*; David Quammen's *Monster of God*.



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Sellers at a Roadside Market, Estelle Stinchfield.

HISTORY COLORADO, PHOTO BY JAY DILORENZO

**THE DENVER ARTISTS GUILD:
ITS FOUNDING MEMBERS;
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY**

Stan Cuba

224 pages, softcover: \$39.95.

University Press of Colorado, 2015.

Toward the end of the Roaring '20s, 52 artists gathered in downtown Denver for the inaugural exhibition of the Denver Artists Guild. Made up of painters, sculptors and photographers, the guild went on to become one of the three longest-lasting fine arts organizations in Colorado. *The Denver Artists Guild* celebrates the group's history and showcases its work in vivid color. Masterful pastels, dreamy watercolors and impressionistic oils provide a sense of the Colorado arts community from the exciting days before the Great Depression until after World War II. Of particular note are the oils of Robert A. Graham, who painted the landscape around Golden, Colorado, and Rocky Mountain National Park in vibrant, loving detail. A companion exhibit is being held at the Byers-Evans House Gallery in Denver through Sept. 26. **GLORIA DICKIE**

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Skipped issue, and visitors

As summer slides into fall, we're taking a two-week publishing break to savor the season, can some peaches and salsa, and watch for the first changing aspen leaves. So we're skipping an issue — we publish 22 times a year — but fear not: The magazine will be back in mid-October. In the meantime, visit hcn.org for fresh news and opinion.

We always relish having visitors here at our western Colorado headquarters.

David and Pam Palmer came through Paonia in mid-August, hoping to beat the heat back at home in Gilbert, Arizona. Days earlier, on their way north, the Palmers watched the orange plume of mining waste in the Animas River flow through Farmington, New Mexico. David, a geologist with El Paso Natural Gas, plans to check U.S. Geological Survey stream gauges when he returns home, he says, to determine whether or not the EPA was telling the truth about the volume of the toxic spill, estimated at about 3 million gallons.

On her way to nearby Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, **Lynn Eby** from Albuquerque stopped by for a quick visit. She's friends with former editorial intern **Katie Mast** (summer 2013), and when Lynn was looking for a "place to lay her head" during her travels through the West, the name of our small town rang a bell.

From Portland, Oregon, came **Dennis Wentz**, who dropped by our office in late August following a visit

with his daughter, who lives in nearby Crested Butte. Dennis, a longtime reader and frequent writer of letters to the *HCN* editor, formerly worked for the USGS, where he studied the effects of acidic mine drainage on water quality in Colorado during the 1970s. Though he eventually moved to Oregon, he still returns to Colorado each fall to photograph the golden aspen trees.

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

The HCNU Classroom Program gives away free magazine subscriptions to teachers in higher education for their students. Thanks to grant funding, we are able to engage young readers in the important issues facing the American West with this program. If you know an instructor who might be interested, please send them to hcn.org/edu to sign up and find out more.

CORRECTION

Alert reader **Chuck Brushwood**, of Omak, Washington, sent a note about our Aug. 17 story "Sea lions feast on Columbia salmon": "The shotgun you describe in your article is almost certainly a Remington 870 marine magnum, not a 'Remington .780.' 870 is the model number (not caliber or gauge) of one of Remington's very popular and widely sold pump-action shotguns. I own an 870 myself that I use for waterfowl, upland bird, and forest grouse hunting." Thanks for the close read, Chuck!

—Jodi Peterson for
the staff



From left, visitors Dave Herz of Paonia, Michael "Muktuk" Arsulich of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and Elliot Silberberg from Italy, came by, as did Lynn Eby. **BROOKE WARREN**



CLAUSTR

FEATURE AND
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
SARAH GILMAN

I can see a spark of tired panic in Jo's eyes as they meet mine. Our narrow Purgon — a Russian-made UAZ van that resembles a jacked-up VW bus — is bursting with people. The rigid seats, which face each other like those in a diner booth, are crammed with butts, and our knees interlock like a human zipper. In the back, where baggage and boxes of supplies serve as yet more seats, two weathered old men hunch below the ceiling. In the front passenger seat, a woman settles on the lap of the standby driver.

And yet here we are, picking up another passenger. She looks like she weighs maybe 100 pounds soaking wet, but where will she fit? There's a slim gap between Jo and her neighbor; the newcomer clambers over and wedges in sideways. Finally, finally, after six hours of waiting, the driver decides that we're full. He grinds into gear and we chug free of Murun, Mongolia — capital of the country's northernmost province — toward the remote village of Tsagaan Nuur, near the Russian border.

After 30 minutes of paved road, we veer abruptly onto a dirt two-track winding into the hills. Jo's husband, Sean, who finished a Peace Corps assignment here in 2007, grins knowingly at Jo and me. "Jiiinkheene," he comments wryly, drawing out the Mongolian word. *Jinkhene* translates roughly as authentic, or old-school. But it can best be defined by what follows.

The Purgon bounces and shudders: The passengers brace arms against seats and each other's knees, occasionally knocking heads. The Purgon grows steadily chillier: The passengers produce a laptop and memory stick and put together a compilation of Mongolian power ballads that the driver plays on repeat for the next 12 hours. The Purgon bogs in the mud: The passengers tumble out and push, sprinting in all directions when it lurches free at high speed. Through it all, everyone smiles, everyone laughs. There's something almost tender about the ease with which strangers drowse on each others' shoulders through the night. Shepherd slumps against meaty policeman; meaty policeman slumps against Sean; Sean, wincing, flattens his 6-foot-4-inch frame against the Purgon wall and my feet, which I had propped up to keep my knees from cramping.

The Mongolians are better at this than us.

In my early 20s, I was in a similar situation on a Greyhound bus between Kansas City and Denver. When the sleeping teenage girl next to me began drooling on my shoulder, I felt not tenderness but silent, half-homicidal rage.

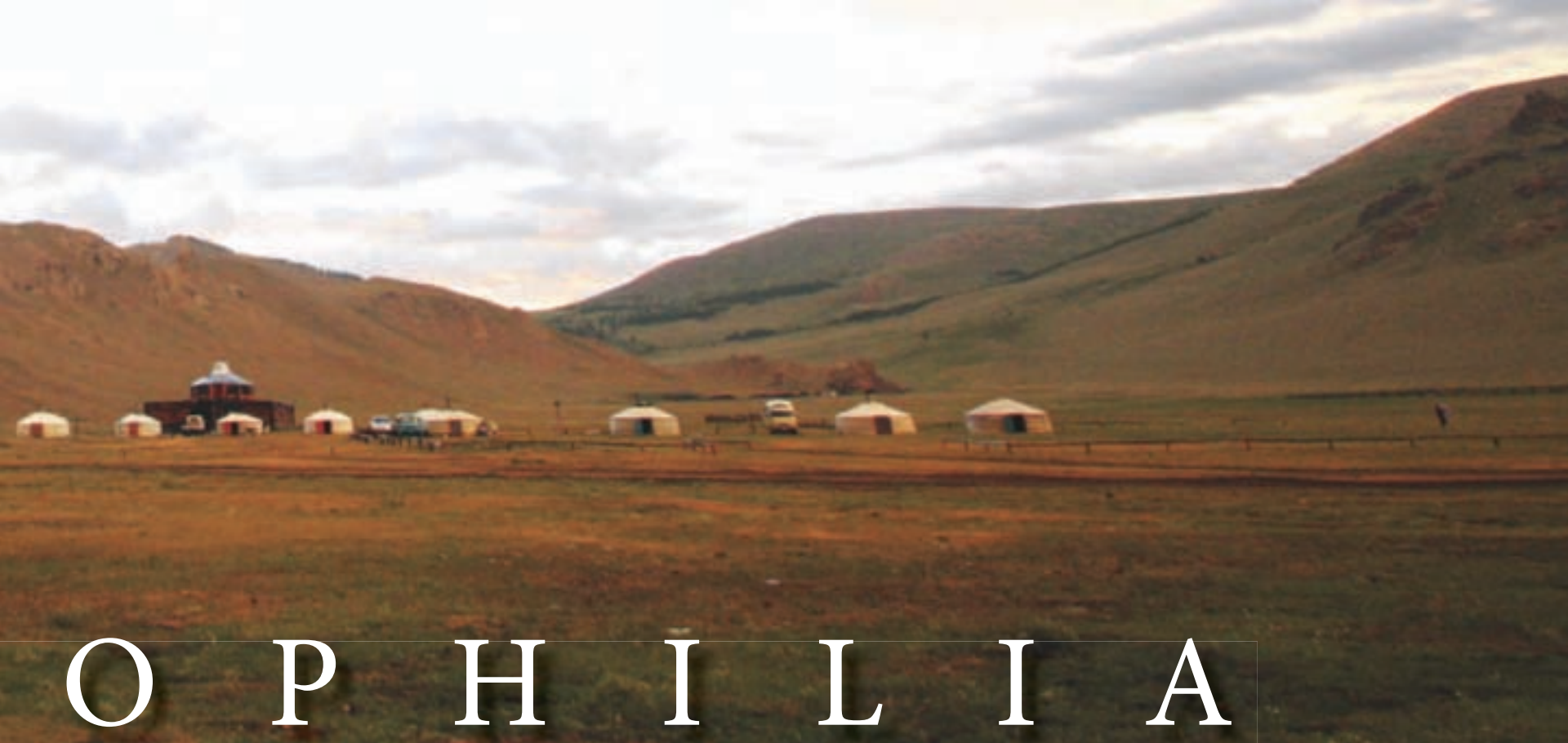
Now, though, watching these strangers touch each other as casually as friends, I feel differently. Beyond the smeared windows stretches one of the most sparsely populated landscapes in the world. There are no fences, and little interrupts the gentle roll of the steppe besides patches of dark trees and congregations of plump sheep, yaks and horses. Felt roundhouses called *gers* — the traditional homes of pastoral nomads — appear now and then like white buttons stitched haphazardly onto rumpled green fabric. Sean has told us about the nomads' generosity, how they will offer even unexpected visitors salted yak-milk tea, food, a bed. And I've read of the blizzards and subzero cold that pummel people here each winter. Maybe, I think, in all this beautiful, brutal vastness, a tiny enclosure that brings the world to a human scale is to be shared, not defended. How else would anyone survive in such a place?

WHEN I LEFT FOR THE THREE-WEEK SUMMER TRIP TO MONGOLIA, my friend Rob — who had been in the Peace Corps there with Sean — joked that I'd love it, since I basically already lived in Mongolia. He was referring to Paonia, Colorado, a town of 1,500 on the rural Western Slope of the Rockies, where I had spent the past six years. While Jo and other friends I grew up with in Boulder, Colorado, moved on to New York or L.A., Boston or Seattle, I had edged downward in town size and upward in acres of open space, from Walla Walla, Washington, to a series of small mountain towns back in our home state.

I was chasing a feeling I had one summer during college, when Jo and I took a day trip to Rocky Mountain National Park. We pulled off the road above treeline and sprinted to an overlook, racing a thunderstorm. Staring across the tundra-velveted swaybacks of retreating peaks, I knew with uncharacteristic certainty that I wanted to settle in their midst. When a permanent job opened in Paonia a few years later, I saw my chance at last.

I imagined my new life would resemble the 1990s TV show *Northern Exposure*, about the quirky fictional town of Cicely, Alaska. Maybe I was Maggie, the hot-yet-rough-around-the-edges bush pilot, self-sufficient to a fault. True to my fantasy, I spent my free time exploring desert buttes, wandering solo through aspen groves and canyons with a heavy pack, picking my way up to the Continental Divide to peer into glacier-hewn drainages. Once, I looked up from washing dishes to see a moose wander past my kitchen window, smack in the middle of town,

A tourist *ger* complex in the western Mongolian province of Arkhangai.



O P H I L I A

just like in the show's opening credits. She was loose-jointed and gangly in that way moose have, and I followed her down the alley, ducking out of sight when her head swiveled my way.

Unlike my fantasy, though, I was desperately lonely. I worked late and came home to an empty house. The isolation of my cat, locked indoors to keep her from murdering birds, seemed a bleak metaphor for my own life. "Give it a year," my parents said helpfully, when, curled in a ball on the porch swing, I called them one night. "Maybe it will get better."

Better, I repeated to myself, hiking alone to the highest point on the rim of the Black Canyon southwest of town. Storms brewed over the piñon-studded horizon, unreachable across the canyon's steep maw and its faint roar of whitewater. Who was I kidding? I wasn't *Northern Exposure's* Maggie. I was the show's Dr. Fleischman — a citified know-it-all, bumbling through a working-class community and a landscape he didn't understand. As thunder rumbled closer, I hurried toward lower ground. There was a crack, an explosion of stars, and I found myself sprawled in the trail, blinking stupidly up at a fat juniper branch. Lightning? No. With my head bent in thought, I had run straight into a tree. I gingerly touched my scalp; my fingers came back smeared with blood.

Anthropologists say Euro-Americans like me tend to expect more personal space than people from many other cultures. But far from crowded cities, lost in western Colorado's wild jumble of mountains and mesas, I'd begun to want *less* personal space, not more. I wanted someone to share it with me.

IT'S VEILED, WHITE-LIT DAWN when Jo, Sean and I spill blinking from the Purgon in Tsagaan Nuur, where our hostess, Ulzii, greets us at her compound of tourist gers. Some other Peace Corps contacts told us she could arrange for us to travel even farther north, into some of Mongolia's remotest country. We have our hearts set on the taiga, where an ethnically distinct people called the Dukha, also known as the Tsaatan, make their living herding reindeer and, increasingly, accommodating visitors like us. We wander blearily around Tsagaan Nuur's scatter of buildings, buying food for the week from rickety log cabin groceries, securing the last of our permits from a military outpost. It takes a few hours and another cross-country Purgon ride for Ulzii to find the guide she has in mind.

He's a wiry fellow named Batdelger, with steep cheekbones shaded under a ballcap. Ulzii says we'll be able to stay with his

aunt in the eastern taiga. But first, he has to wrap up the day with his sheep. An hour passes, then two. His children practice their English on us and demonstrate how to bottle-feed a spindly-legged foal. We ask Batdelger's wife how we will make the long horseback ride to the Dukha camp before dark, and she gently ribs us about our impatience — *tourists!* — then pours more tea.

The horses that Batdelger finally rounds up are tiny and strong-headed, and Sean, atop a chestnut stallion, resembles a top-heavy centaur with a small and rebellious set of horse parts. My horse isn't much more accommodating. For his clumsiness, I name him Mr. Umbles, after the symptoms of hypothermia you learn in wilderness medicine — mumbles, fumbles, tumbles. In revenge, Mr. Umbles drops suddenly to his front knees in a marsh, nearly pitching me headfirst into the mosquito-clouded shrubbery. I call him "Utaa" after that — "smoke" in Mongolian, for his dappled gray coloring — hoping this show of respect will dampen his urge to kill me.

Sometime around 9 p.m., Batdelger points out a low, doorless building where we can rest for the night. Sean asks in Mongolian if there's shelter farther on. Batdelger says yes. We still feel good, and so continue up a valley shaggy with high grass and willow. Black stands of conifer climb its slopes to the noses and knuckles of mountaintops, which peek down like poorly concealed spies. The low sun paints Jo's face gold as she turns in the saddle to smile at me.

We dismount on a spit where two streams meet. I glance around — there's a well-used fire ring, but no structures. Before I left the States, I complained to Sean that I was having trouble finding room in my pack for camping equipment. He told me I could leave that gear behind: We would be staying with families in their homes. But that is not how things will work tonight. "Does he know we don't have sleeping bags?" I ask Sean. Sean turns to Batdelger, and they speak briefly. Sean turns back to us. "This is it," he says.

Batdelger looks exasperated. Had he known we were so poorly provisioned, he could have brought a tent, he explains calmly. Or pots to cook our dehydrated food. But somehow those details got lost in Ulzii's negotiations, or in the gap between Sean's days as a fluent speaker and the considerable amount of Mongolian words that have come back to him since his return. We settle down for a poor meal around a handful of blazing twigs. The bread we bought turns out to be rancid, but with

*Beyond the
smeared
windows
stretches one
of the most
sparsely
populated
landscapes
in the world.
... Little
interrupts
the gentle
roll of the
steppe besides
patches of
dark trees and
congregations
of plump sheep,
yaks and
horses.*



*The Dukha
village, when
we finally
arrive, is like
something
from a dream.
The lichen
grows spongy
and ankle
deep. Canvas
teepees called
urts spread
across the
basin, and
reindeer the
color of snow
and earth
meander past
errant satellite
dishes ...*

enough Nutella on it, you almost can't tell. We pass around peas, spooning directly from the can. I collect our plastic bottles and fill them in the stream, then pull out our SteriPEN to purify the water. It feels awfully light. I test the button. Nothing. Then I check the ... I smile meekly at my friends. "No batteries," I say, holding up the empty chamber.

As the last light fades, Batdelger stalks off with his short saddle pad to find a place to sleep. We collect our own pads in tense silence, then poke through the trees until we settle on a lumpy but soft deposit of needles. Even wrapped in every piece of clothing we have, it is a cold and miserable night. Jo is the smallest, so we sandwich her in the middle. She attaches to my back like a hungry lamprey, and Sean to hers. When we turn over, we do so in unison, unwilling to give up each others' heat. My feet grow numb, and I flex my stiff hands. I imagine Utaa, hobbled in the meadow below, laughing. *Who's Mr. Umbles now*, he would say in Mongolian.

HOW DO WE COME TO BELONG ANYWHERE? One answer is that we find each other.

In stressful alpine environments, plants grow and reproduce better near other plants. Some animals, when threatened by predators, clump together in larger groups. Humans are among the most spectacularly social species on the planet, perhaps in part because the more cooperative among our ancestors were more likely to thrive in a difficult and dangerous world. Life is "not just a struggle for survival," as mathematician and biologist Martin Nowak recently put it. "It is also, one might say, a snuggle for survival."

And in Paonia, I began to piece together a sort of tribe — at work, at pickup ultimate Frisbee games. A new roommate quickly became a dear friend. An intern waded with me to an islanded bridge in the town's flooded river to see the stars. A man asked me to dance at a bar, kept ahold of me the whole night, then surprised me with a kiss when I moved to leave.

My folks were right: These small accumulations of welcome can and do happen wherever we land, if given time. But with time, I also learned how different they can feel in a small town. In that ocean of open country, Paonia came to seem a sort of life raft — sharpening and clarifying the connections I had, and forging new ones I would never have had otherwise. The passengers aboard were who they were; I could not silo in only with people my age, my interests, my background. I still wandered in the hills, but my sense of hopeless drift stopped. These

were the shoulders I could sleep on, the knees I could brace against. And I would not have chosen different ones.

The curly-haired clerk at the hardware store, a man in his 60s, let me split his firewood, more for the company than out of necessity. He made me lasagna in return, told me trails where I could see more moose, and showed me how to use a chainsaw so I could help him buck rounds from blown-down aspens on the mesa north of town. I fell in love with the rogue kisser from the bar — a talented carpenter who was as broken-hearted as he was dear. He took me swimming in the river, tattooed one of my drawings on his skin, invited me to hard-drinking parties with local kids who opened their doors to me as if I weren't an outsider. One day, he showed up unannounced at my office, covered head to toe in concrete dust, and gave me a flower he'd twisted out of baling wire on his break.

There was the friend who hadn't learned to read until he was a teenager, and yet could make his own biodiesel and fix anything, who never charged you what his labor was worth and always had wine and chocolate in his truck in case you wanted to watch a movie. The former large-animal vet who tenderly handled your pets and never charged enough, either. The volunteers who ran the ambulance service, ferrying wheezing old ladies 30 miles down the two-lane highway to the nearest hospital. The friends who hunted and shared their bounty. The single moms who watched each others' kids. The head of the local environmental group who seemed to take on everyone else's wounds — including mine, when my carpenter's broken heart broke my own.

There was darkness in that bright place, too — alcoholism, drugs, deep political divides, crippling poverty, unacknowledged racism. People died or were terribly injured in drunk-driving accidents. During one quarrel, a man threatened his inebriated friend with a shotgun, accidentally firing it into his belly. An ugly divorce ended in a violent murder on the train tracks, just blocks from my house.

The night before that happened, the not-yet-murderer had bought drinks for some of my friends at the local brewery — a tiny former church that filled to standing-room-only on cold winter nights. It was a macabre twist on Paonia's stewpot closeness: With so few places to gather, everyone went to the same places, the same potlucks, the same Thursday-night dance parties and concerts in the park.

It was not that these things were good, though they often were. It was that we craved their energy, craved other people:

The emptiness around us pushed us into each other's arms. Once there, I discovered just how many different kinds of people I could love — both for their weaknesses and their strengths.

EVENTUALLY, THE LIGHT RETURNS, first blue, then the same honeyed hue that lit Jo's face the previous evening, turning each glossy willow leaf into a candle flame. Sean creaks up from our row of saddle pads and starts a new campfire at the edge of the forest. I follow its smoke down the hill past where Batdelger tends the horses, and fill the same plastic bottles from the same stream. We smile and nod our heads in greeting, and he follows me back to the others. There is the same rancid bread and Nutella, the same dried fruit and nuts. But things have shifted somehow. Today, we have the empty pea can, and I fill it with water and place it in the coals to boil, then brew black tea in my thermos. As the sun climbs, we pass it from hand to hand, each cradling it for a moment to warm our fingers, our faces. Then a long sip, and on to the next person. Outside our tiny circle of warmth, the taiga spreads away, gorgeous and aloof; inside, the long night's chill melts from our bones.

The Dukha village, when we finally arrive, is like something from a dream. The lichen grows spongy and ankle deep. Canvas teepees called *urts* spread across the basin, and reindeer the color of snow and earth meander past errant satellite dishes, their tendons clicking over their anklebones like those of their caribou cousins. When it rains, people watch Korean soap operas. When it doesn't, the kids stand in a circle outside listening to "Moves Like Jagger" and other pop music while punting a volleyball, or ride out on reindeer to herd the rest of the reindeer back to camp. The women milk the animals multiple times a day, using pails of the thick, white liquid for cheese and tea. They roll out their own noodles, make bread in the coals of their fires. The men throw guns on their backs and ride off for days. Their resourcefulness, their practical use of both tradition and tech, is both utterly foreign and strangely familiar.

Punsal, Batdelger's wizened aunt, cackles over our shyness, our wide-eyed appraisal of the place, and, with the three of us sharing her extra bed, her own joking speculation about which of us women is the real wife. We carry water and cook for her, and she chain-smokes cigarettes rolled on pages torn from a book that Sean surmises is a Mongolian play. My birthday falls in that week, and after Jo and I have returned from a hike, Punsal taps me on the shoulder with a wide, toothless grin, and produces a bouquet of tiny orange poppies from behind her back. She gestures at the paperback I'm reading, then helps me spread each bloom between its pages with her shaking, deeply lined hands.

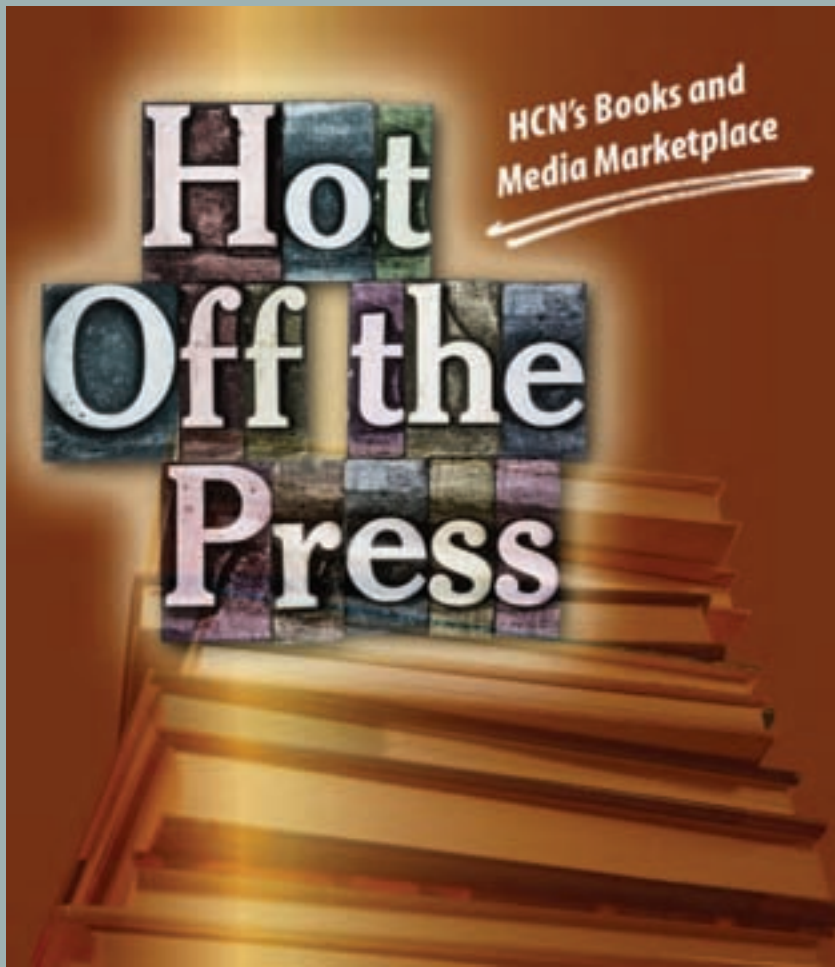
A couple of days later, Batdelger collects our horses at dawn to avoid another frigid campout. As we begin to ascend the steep pass that marks the beginning of our journey in reverse, I'm startled to find myself weeping. The taiga mountains, rolling away in broken waves toward Russia, bear a heartbreaking resemblance to the peaks that first called me into Colorado's rural backwaters. This trip marks the end of my time there: In my last years in Paonia, I had realized that I was still on my way someplace else, though I wasn't sure where. Once home in the U.S., I will try life in a big city, in a different state. The choice feels right, but the knowledge of what I will lose has suddenly cut through me like a knife.

Late that evening, as we pile into the Land Rover that will take us back to Murun, we are mostly quiet. Too exhausted and saddle-sore to contend with another night in an overfull van, we've paid the drivers enough to ensure that we have it to ourselves. Jo and Sean take one bench seat, I take another, and we toast each other with Tiger Beer, a weak, American-style lager that seems to fit this final surrender to our weak, Euro-American constitutions. I use mine to wash down a Dramamine tablet, and we retreat into our separate cubbies and ourselves.

As I float in a druggy stupor, I smile through the rear window at the long line of peaks, which cradle the sunset sky in their jagged fingers. But something still isn't right, and at a petrol stop, we fix it. It takes only a few minutes to fold the back seats flat. Then, we curl up beside each other with Jo in the middle, and go to sleep at last. □

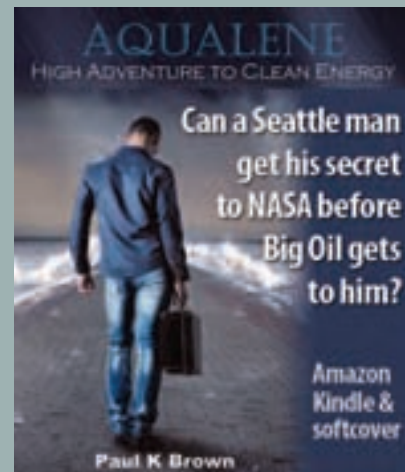


Clockwise from top left: Reindeer relax in the Dukha camp, deep in the taiga near Mongolia's northern border; Punsal collects milk for the day's tea; Dukha children offer a wood chip that bears striking resemblance to a cracker; Jo and Sean visit the neighbors for bread and talk.



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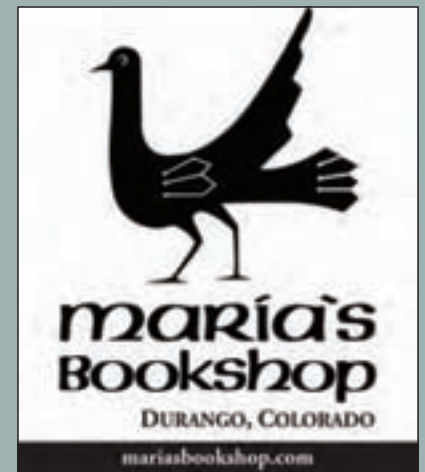


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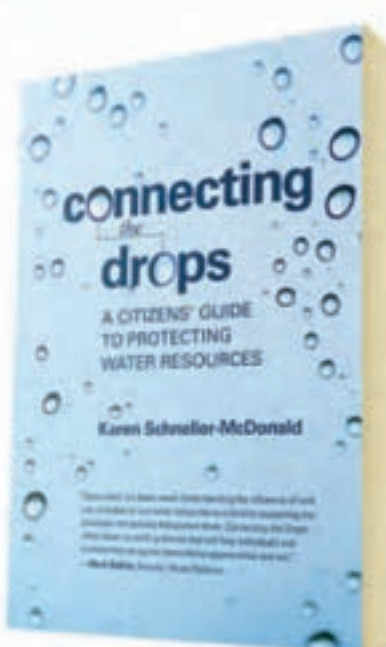
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A baker's dozen of self-published books

The rise of self-publishing and digital publishing has allowed many fine but otherwise unknown writers to get their voices out into the world. It's extremely difficult for new authors to break into any of the big publishing houses or even the independent presses. And it's hard to get new books reviewed: At *HCN*, for example, we seldom review self-published books. Though some of them are excellent, they're

not always well-written or well-edited, and we lack the staffing to go through all the volumes we receive.

But here are some titles that have come out over the past year that we think our readers might enjoy. Book descriptions are supplied by their authors, Amazon.com and publishersweekly.com. We've also listed places where you can buy these books.

Spider Woman's Loom, Lorie Adair, Foreverland Press. foreverlandpress.com; Amazon.com

Set on the vast and starkly beautiful Navajo Reservation in the aftermath of Indian agents exploiting the land and sending children to faraway boarding schools for assimilation, *Spider Woman's Loom* is narrated by Noni Lee, an old Navajo weaver whose instinct for survival and fierce resistance drives away even those she loves most. When her estranged niece Shi'yazhi returns, Noni Lee is forced to face memories of her own innocence and beauty as well as the haunting traumas that stripped them away. Weaving a traditional rug, Noni Lee reconstructs a history and sense of family for herself and Shi'yazhi — the legacy of Spider Woman, whose gifts of creation and resiliency are a rite passed mother to child.

The Ballad of Desiree, Susan Carr. Amazon.com; BN.com; Ingram

In the early 1970s, Desiree, a 22-year-old free spirit, travels the logging roads of Idaho and Washington, where she meets a Gypsy man named Ruby and Big Paul Skinny, an L.A. songwriter who discovers Desiree's beautiful singing voice. From the mysteries of a Native American smoke lodge to the idylls of a mountain homestead to the bohemian lights of a burgeoning Seattle music scene, the novel takes readers through a turbulent decade that changed everything.

Jiggles, Rolf, and the Remarkable Finale to Frank Stone's Career, Wendell Duffield, iUniverse. Amazon.com; bookstore.iUniverse.com

As aging atheist and semi-retired geologist Frank Stone becomes depressed over the possibility that his exciting career of studying volcanoes is rapidly coming to an end, the opportunity to pursue one last project unexpectedly enters his university office. The bearer of this welcome news is Richard Stewart, the university's seismologist and a staunch Mormon. In spite of their fundamentally opposed views of the roles of science versus faith in life's journey, the two professors join forces to correctly forecast and then monitor an eruption that feeds lava into the Grand Canyon, and thereby dams the Colorado River.

Please see **Self-published books**, page 19



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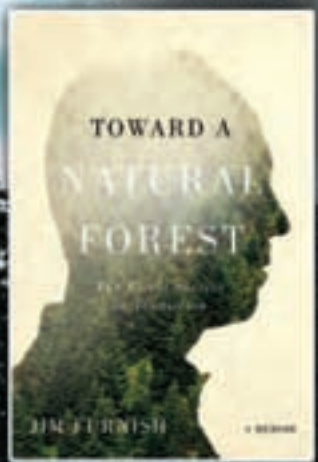
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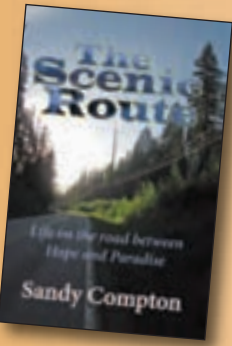
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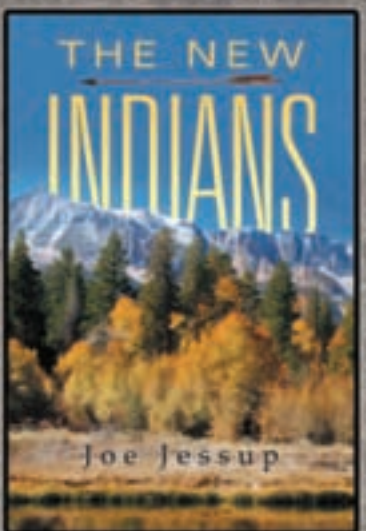
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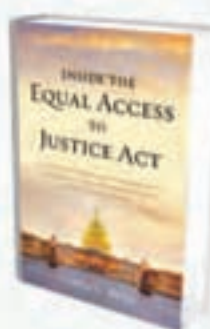
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Self-published books *continued from page 15*

Into the Roaring Fork, Jeff Howe, Cameron & Greys Publishing. Amazon.com; www.jeffhowebooks.com

They set out for Aspen in 1985 — a one-year post-graduation detour to play in the Rockies prior to entering the “real world.” They wouldn’t need much, just ordinary jobs with a ski pass attached, a one-bedroom apartment, and each other. But tempted by the decadent side of this iconic resort town, Alex Cavanaugh enters into an illicit agreement with a new acquaintance and finds himself on a remote forest trail, where the crime he is committing pales in comparison to the one his path will cross.

The Vendetta of Felipe Espinosa, Adam James Jones, Five Star Publications. Amazon.com; adamjamesjones.wordpress.com/book

1863. Civil War rages in the East. An unclaimed wealth of natural resources beckon prospectors to the West. Far from and between it all, a gunman stalks the territories on a divine mission to kill American settlers. He would elude governors and armies, bounty hunters and posses, until his demise at the climax of a fierce high country manhunt. By then, Felipe Espinosa had claimed more than 30 lives to quietly become one of the nation’s first serial killers and foreign terrorists.



The New Indians, Joe Jessup, iUniverse. Amazon.com; BN.com

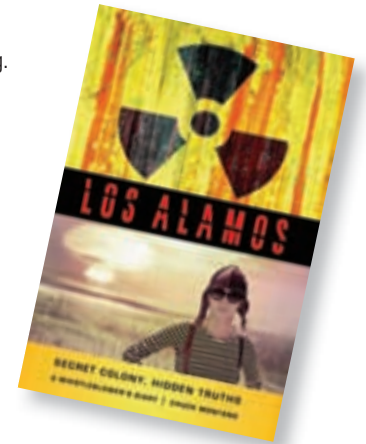
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Evel Knievel Jumps the Snake River Canyon ... and Other Stories Close to Home, Kelly Jones, Ninth Avenue Press. Amazon.com; BN.com

When 10-year-old Pick Patterson finds himself stuck with bossy Grandma Grace and unemployed, easygoing Uncle Buddy in Twin Falls, he thinks he’s in for a boring summer in a hick town in the middle of the Idaho desert. But when Evel Knievel announces he’ll jump the Snake River Canyon just north of town, everything changes.

Los Alamos: A Whistleblower’s Diary, Chuck Montano, Desert Tortoise Publishing. Amazon.com; BN.com; www.losalamosdiary.com

A shocking account of foul play, theft and abuse at our nation’s premier nuclear R&D installation, uncovering a retaliatory culture where those who dare to question pay with their careers and, potentially, their lives. This is a story about military-industrial dominance, and distortions of reality. It is a first-of-its-kind exposé, venturing past LANL’s armed guards and security fences to chronicle persistent, often successful efforts to prevent hidden truths from coming to surface in the wake of headline-grabbing events.



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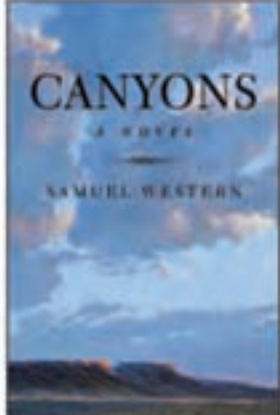
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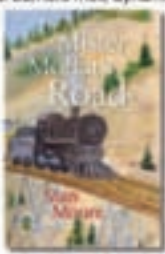
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Self-published books *continued from page 19*

The Rule of Equity, Jonathan Neville, CreateSpace Publishing. Amazon.com; BN.com; Jonathaneneville.com

After centuries of genocide, relocation and neglect, Native Americans watch as the government that oppressed them faces financial ruin, environmental catastrophe, and imminent social collapse. Hyrum Cobb, a brilliant Native American lawyer who heads the Bureau of Indian Affairs, devises a plan to reclaim America for his people — and for the benefit of all Americans.

Ring of Fire, Tanyo Ravicz, Denali Press. Amazon.com; www.tanyo.net/Ring_of_Fire.html

Master hunting guide Hank Waters, a former Navy pilot, runs a wilderness lodge on the Alaska Peninsula. The opportunity of his career comes when Prince Tariq, the Crown Prince of Rahman, arrives in Alaska to hunt brown bear. Waters has always been ambivalent about guiding his wealthy clients to hunt the bears that he loves, and his fears are not groundless. Can Hank Waters and his staff maintain order among men accustomed to having their way in the world? How far should Waters go to accommodate his guests in exchange for the money he will earn?



Smokey Bear is checked out by a vet. USFS

Smokey Bear: The Cub Who Left His Paw-prints on History, Karen Signell. Amazon.com; BN.com

How does an intelligent wild bear manage life in captivity? This is the first novel about the real bear cub who survived a forest fire high in the New Mexican mountains to become the living representative of his namesake, Smokey Bear. Authentic photographs and apt quotations enhance this heartwarming and bittersweet story, written for adults but with appeal for all ages.

Your Smallest Bones: Stories, Sean Taylor. Seventh Tangent. Amazon.com; BN.com

Of these 12 stories, seven have been previously published, and two received Pushcart Prize nominations. Taylor sets his tales mostly in San Francisco, often among 20-somethings struggling to make it as they navigate relationships, work, and life's alarms and excursions. Intelligent, subtle, minimalist stories by a promising young writer (from *Kirkus Reviews*).

The Illegal and the Refugee: An American Love Story, Ian Tremblay. Amazon.com; Apple iBooks; BN.com

A tale of tragedy and triumph that highlights the difficulties and the hardships of Latino immigration to the United States. With roots set deep in Mexico and Cuba, it is a story about letting go of the past, the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity and of deep, unconditional love. □



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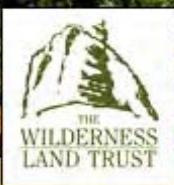
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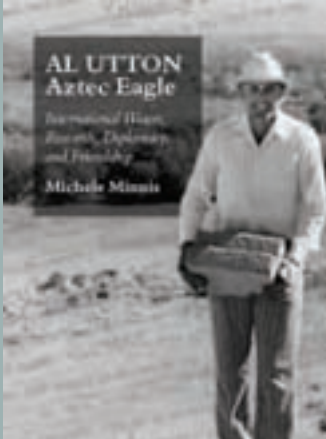
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The new critically-acclaimed book by legendary nature and wildlife photographer Thomas D. Mangelsen and noted environmental journalist Todd Wilkinson explores in breathtaking images and narrative the dramatic story of Jackson Hole mother bear Grizzly 399. She is not only the poster child for the greatest wildlife conservation success story in US history but many worry her survival is tenuous. Should the federal government remove the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear population from protection under the Endangered Species Act and clear the way for a trophy sport hunt of these legendary bruins? *Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek* will keep you perched at the edge of your chair, wondering from the first page to the last how many members of Grizzly 399's clan, if not the celebrated matriarch herself, will survive.

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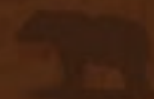
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The fall reading list

Summer is the time for outdoor pursuits — hiking, camping, biking, gardening, tubing, traveling. The long days and warm sunshine don't encourage much reading beyond your standard beachside thrillers. For months now, serious novels, nonfiction, even magazines have been piling up in teetering stacks around my house, and there's a fearsome backlog on my Kindle.

Now that the nights are getting cooler and longer, I'm finally thinking about settling down to read. I have to slim down my piles before they collapse in a massive book-a-lanche and bury the dog.

A few of the new titles I'm excited about include *Gold Fame Citrus* by award-winning Nevada author Claire Vaye Watkins (featured in a Q&A in our 2012 books/essays issue): "Set in an increasingly plausible-seeming future in which drought has transformed Southern California into a howling wasteland ... two refugees of the water wars (are) holed up in

a starlet's abandoned mansion in L.A.'s Laurel Canyon. Seeking lush landscapes, the pair head east, risking attack by patrolling authorities, roving desperadoes, and the unrelenting sun." As a contrast to that all-too-imaginable apocalypse, I'm also eager to check out William Finnegan's memoir, *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life*. It's an adventure story, an intellectual autobiography, and a social history — "the kind of book that makes you squirm in your seat on the subway, gaze out the window at work, and Google Map the quickest route to the beach," says the *Paris Review Daily*. And several *HCN* contributors have produced terrific new works, including Mary Emerick, Kurt Caswell, Samuel Western, Todd Wilkinson and Laura Pritchett.

Below is a list of some of the most interesting titles published between June and next winter, organized by author's last name. If a book is already available, no publication month is noted. JODI PETERSON



FICTION

The Japanese Lover, Isabel Allende, Atria, November

Vintage, David Baker, Simon & Schuster

Vagabond Song: Neo-Haibun from the Peregrine Journals, by Marc Beaudin, Elk River Books

Studies in the Hereafter, Sean Bernard, Red Hen Press

How Winter Began, Joy Castro, University of Nebraska Press, October

And West is West, Ron Childress, Algonquin Press, October

Did You Ever Have a Family, Bill Clegg, Gallery/Scout Press

The Last September, Nina de Gramont, Algonquin

Undermajordomo Minor, Patrick DeWitt, Ecco

Last Bus to Wisdom, Ivan Doig, Riverhead

Geography of Water, Mary Emerick, University of Alaska Press, November

The Girl Who Wrote in Silk, Kelli Estes, Sourcebooks Landmark

A Collapse of Horses: A Collection of Stories, Brian Evenson, Coffee House Press, February

The Girl from the Garden, Parnaz Foroutan, Harper Collins

Half an Inch of Water: Stories, Percival Everett, Graywolf Press

Dark Reservations: A Mystery, John Fortunato, St. Martin's Press, October

Mountain Rampage, Scott Graham, Torrey House Press

Buffalo Trail: A Novel of the American West, Jeff Guinn, G.P. Putnam's Sons, October

Not on Fire, but Burning, Greg Hrbek, Melville House

Dryland, Sara Jaffe, Tin House Press

Love in the Anthropocene, Dale Jamieson and Bonnie Nadzam, OR Books

The Last Pilot, Benjamin Johncock, Picador

The Story of My Teeth, Valeria Luiselli, Coffee House Press

Red Lightning, Laura Pritchett, Counterpoint

Still Life Las Vegas, James Sie, St. Martin's Press

Western Weird (Manifest West Series), Mark Todd (ed.), Western Press Books

Dragonfish, Vu Tran, W.W. Norton

All the Stars in the Heavens, Adriana Trigiani, Harper Collins, October

Maud's Line, Margaret Verble, Houghton Mifflin

The Dying Grass: A Novel of the Nez Perce War, William T. Vollmann, Viking

Gold Fame Citrus, Claire Vaye Watkins, Riverhead

Canyons, Samuel Western, Fithian Press

The Longest Night, Andria Williams, Random House, January

Your Heart is a Muscle the Size of a Fist, Sunil Yapa, Little, Brown/Boudreaux, January

NONFICTION, MEMOIR, BIOGRAPHY

Eve's Hollywood, Eve Babitz, NYRB Classics

Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism, Evan Berry, University of California Press

Howl: Of Woman and Wolf, Susan Imhoff Bird, Torrey House Press, October

Gold Fever: One Man's Adventures on the Trail of the Gold Rush, Steve Boggan, OneWorld Publications

The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey, Rinker Buck, Simon & Schuster

Getting to Grey Owl: Journeys on Four Continents, Kurt Caswell, Trinity University Press

Grizzly West: A Failed Attempt to Reintroduce Grizzly Bears in the Mountain West, Michael J. Dax, University of Nebraska Press

Loving Nature, Fearing the State: Environmentalism and Antigovernment Politics before Reagan, Brian Allen Drake, University of Washington Press

Of Wilderness and Wolves, Paul C. Errington, University of Iowa Press, November

The Haunting of the Mexican Border: A Woman's Journey, Kathryn Ferguson, University of New Mexico Press

Ponderosa: People, Fire, and the West's Most Iconic Tree, Carl E. Fiedler and Stephen F. Arno, Mountain Press

Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life, William Finnegan, Penguin Press

Rediscovering National Parks in the Spirit of John Muir, Michael Frome, University of Utah Press

The Color of Night: Race, Railroaders, and Murder in the Wartime West, Max G. Geier, Oregon State University Press, November

The Great Divide, Stephen Grace, photographs by Jim Havey, Two Dot Books

Nature's Housekeeper: An Eco-Comedy, Michael Gurnow, Blue River Press

Good Water, Kevin Holdsworth, University Press of Colorado, February

I Can Give You Anything But Love, Gary Indiana, Rizzoli Ex Libris

Sustainable Water: Challenges and Solutions from California, Allison Lassiter (ed.), University of California Press

Girl in the Woods: A Memoir, Aspen Matis, William Morrow

Living off the Pacific Ocean Floor: Stories of a Commercial Fisherman, George Moskovita, Oregon State University Press, October

How the World Moves: The Odyssey of an American Indian Family, Peter Nabokov, Viking, September

The Origin Myth of Acoma Pueblo, Edward Proctor Hunt, Peter Nabokov (ed.), Viking, September

Beyond the War on Invasive Species: A Permaculture Approach to Ecosystem Restoration, Tao Orion, Chelsea Green

The Rocky Mountain National Park Reader, James H. Pickering, University of Utah Press

Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest, Lesley Poling-Kempes, University of Arizona Press

Dirt: A Love Story, Barbara Richardson (ed.), ForeEdge

Alaska's Skyboys: Cowboy Pilots and the Myth of the Last Frontier, Katherine Johnson Ringsmuth, University of Washington Press, October

Almost Anywhere: Road Trip Ruminations on Love, Nature, National Parks and Nonsense, Krista Schlyer, Skyhorse Publishing, October

Crossing the Plains with Bruno, Annick Smith, Trinity University Press, November

Last Chance Byway: The History of Nine Mile Canyon, Jerry D. Spangler and Donna Kemp Spangler, University of Utah Press, October

Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America, T.J. Stiles, Knopf, October

Ways to the West: How Getting Out of Our Cars Is Reclaiming America's Frontier, Tim Sullivan, Utah State University Press

Letters to My Grandchildren, David Suzuki, Greystone

The Coyote's Bicycle: The Untold Story of 7,000 Bicycles and the Rise of a Borderland Empire, Kimball Taylor, Tin House Press, February

Mountains and Marshes: Exploring the Bay Area's Natural History, David Rains Wallace, Counterpoint Press, December

Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek: An Intimate Portrait of 399, The Most Famous Bear of Greater Yellowstone, Todd Wilkinson, photos by Thomas D. Mangelsen, Mangelsen, October

The Exact Same Place

*It's a funny
word,
reclamation,
with a
definition
ripe with
contradiction:
to take back,
to make right,
and to make
useful.*

Folding chairs clattered, and conversations echoed off high ceilings. Several young men, heavyset with braids and ball caps and baggy jeans, held squirming kids while a group of women set up drums in a circle. A potluck table held salad and store-bought sheet cakes, and a crockpot full of venison stew sat atop a counter crowded with small-sized Dixie cups — the kind that hold mouthwash at the dentist or grape juice in some church communion ceremonies — filled with what looked like pudding. We were high in the Northern Sierra, in the shadow of Mount Lassen, and the California sun, even in November, shone yellow through picture windows. Outside, kids clambered on boulders, adults smoked a courteous distance from the door, and dogs lounged in the shade. Ken Holbrook approached, wearing a crisp white shirt, gray jeans and a red tie, the only tie in the room. He greeted me, as he'd greeted everyone, with a firm handshake and a wide boyish grin, and said he had a good story to tell.

The last time I'd seen Ken, he'd been balancing barefoot across a log over Yellow Creek with his two young kids in tow. A healing ceremony for land damaged by logging in Humbug Valley, a 4,500-foot-elevation valley sacred to the Mountain Maidu, had just concluded. Ken tossed an expensive camera over one shoulder, then reconsidered. He placed the camera and his car keys in the duff beneath a ponderosa pine, and set off to lead the way. The log was weathered gray, the creek shallow, the kids wildly exuberant. They crossed with ease and turned around to return as the sun glowed gauzy on a ridge-top fringe of conifers, the few still standing.

Now, six months later, Ken held a passel of responsibilities. As the new executive director of the Maidu Summit Consortium, one of the last remaining speakers of the Maidu language, and the youngest son of elder, author and activist Beverly Ogle, he was in charge of wrangling this lively crowd. Which by the looks of it would be no easy task.

The news, after all, was still new. After more than a decade of trying, the Mountain Maidu, a small and federally unrecognized tribe, had reclaimed title to Humbug Valley from Pacific Gas & Electric Company. It had been a long saga: A judge in the early aughts, in the wake of the Enron scandal, ordered the utility to relinquish thousands of acres to conservation stew-

Adapted and excerpted from *Reclaimers*, University of Washington Press.



ards. But PG&E did not consider the Mountain Maidu potential stewards. Like other outsiders, company representatives dismissed the Maidu as a loose band, a tribe without a central government and — until now — without a land base.

The Maidu were undeterred. They formed a nonprofit consortium, weaseled their way into meetings and recruited allies. They tackled on-the-ground projects — building cedar fences to protect gravesites and designing an interpretive kiosk, all as directed by a PG&E-appointed committee, in order to prove their ability to be good stewards on land they'd already tended for centuries. There were problems: A wildfire gave PG&E an excuse to clear-cut sacred sites and glean a little more profit before getting out. Most recently, they'd suffered the too-early death of Farrell Cunningham, one of their most charismatic



leaders. When consortium members and friends and family met in Oakland to await the final decision, no one knew for sure what would happen. Now, less than a week later, with Tasman Koyom, as the Maidu call Humbug Valley, already under snow, they'd gathered to celebrate in this brand-new community center in Chester, the nearest town. I'd driven 800 miles to join them, but my journey had been even longer.

A COUPLE OF YEARS EARLIER, I set out to find stories of people reclaiming nature. It's a funny word, reclamation, with a definition ripe with contradiction: to take back, to make right, and to make useful. The connotation is both moral and pragmatic, and sometimes the results are disastrous, but reclaiming seems to be an irrepressible human instinct. While some examples

bordered on deception — grass seed pressure-sprayed atop flattened former mountaintops to mitigate mining, for example, or new wetlands created in vacant lots to justify development elsewhere — other stories were inspirational and very nearly triumphant. The best of them seemed to be a kind of *re-reclaiming* — re-taking what had once been taken. Making right what had gone wrong. Re-defining what useful might mean. The Mountain Maidu's reclamation story — the one we were here to commemorate — was one of the very best.

I couldn't imagine how Ken Holbrook's story could be any better than that. But I was eager to hear it.

He'd recently traveled to Salamanca, Spain, he explained, to give a presentation on Maidu reclamation efforts. He described their plans to use traditional ecological knowledge — practi-

Yellow Creek as it winds through the newly reclaimed Humbug Valley, California.

BUD TURNER PHOTO
COURTESY FEATHER
RIVER LAND TRUST

“I had this great urge to return to Humbug Valley, to tell our relatives, the forest, the birds, the animals, the grass, that they belong to us, and the healing can begin.”

—Beverly Ogle, Mountain Maidu elder, on hearing the news that the Humbug Valley would be returned to her people

cal knowledge passed down over generations — to manage the land as an example not only to other indigenous people, but to land managers everywhere. Would-be reclaimers should seek alliances, he urged, partnerships with other organizations, as the Maidu had. When the deal was finalized, the Maidu Summit Consortium would hold fee title to Humbug Valley, but two partners — Feather River Land Trust and California Department of Fish and Wildlife — would jointly hold a conservation easement. The Land Trust would help determine how much development might be appropriate — campground improvements, for instance — then monitor that development. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife would manage the fishery, the pesky non-native brown trout and the wildlife, including endangered and potentially endangered species like the willow flycatcher and Sierra red fox. Even PG&E would remain a partner, in the financial sense: The company had agreed to provide funding for long-term planning and for two full-time staff positions, including Ken Holbrook’s. Still, the Maidu would own the land, and as owners they planned to hold ceremonies there, to use traditional ecological knowledge to tend the vegetation — to plant, nurture, prune and harvest — as their ancestors did, and to share these practices with visitors.

“But here’s the thing,” Ken said, leaning close. “When I spoke in Salamanca, I stood in the exact same place where Queen Isabella commissioned Christopher Columbus to come to the New World.” He paused and grinned.

“The exact same place,” he said.

RECLAMATION, IN THE OLD DAYS, almost always was the story of one great man — Floyd Dominy, say, or Gifford Pinchot, or John Muir — with a sweeping agenda. Even if their accomplishments, in hindsight, seem dubious, they sincerely believed in what they were doing. And there lies the rub. The definition of what constitutes “making right” is shifty. Taking back water that would be wasted running to the sea? Protecting forests from fires? Deeming land “untrammelled,” when it had been tended by indigenous people for centuries? Even Columbus must have had a righteous motive; it’s too cynical to believe it was all greed, and unrealistic to imagine he could’ve known the havoc he’d wreak. On the flipside, much could go wrong for the Mountain Maidu: Partnerships can sour, development can over-reach, and inviting more visitors to Humbug Valley — Farrell Cunningham had envisioned a future “Maidu National Park” — well, that’s a can of worms. Still, still, it’s our human instinct, and our human responsibility, to try to turn things around. Reclaiming isn’t preserving or restoring, but attempting to stand again in the exact same place, to try a new and better

way. Or in this case, an old and better way. If there’s a hint of Sisyphus to it — when the hell will we get it right? — there’s hopefulness, too.

These days, I’ve found that reclaiming is more often than not a communal effort led largely by women and characterized by stubborn endurance and inclusiveness. For 35 years, 89-year-old Phyllis Clausen of Friends of the White Salmon River worked to bring down the aging and inefficient Condit Dam with help from American Rivers, the Yakama Nation and eventually PacifiCorp, the power company itself. Timbisha Shoshone elder Pauline Esteves, who can remember when the National Park Service first moved into Death Valley, led her tribe to reclaim their homeland with help from as far away as Europe and as close, at times, as the park superintendent’s office.

Then there’s Beverly Ogle. Her two books brim with adaptable characters who defy stereotypes. Her great-grandfather, a gold-mining Maidu teetotaler, fathered more than 20 children via two wives, including Beverly’s great-grandmother, a Pit River Atugewsi woman whom he bought as a child at a slave auction. Beverly’s mother played the violin and was shunned at her Indian school for having a white father; she later worked for a time as a Forest Service fire lookout. Beverly’s uncles trapped otter, mink, ermine, beavers, bobcats, coyotes and foxes, some into the 1980s. Her extended family includes loggers, miners and power company employees, along with victims of those same companies, and activists, like herself, who fought against them.

Early in our very first conversation, she described forming the Maidu Summit Consortium. There was a time, she said, when different factions within the tribe fought one another.

“We had to be all pulling in the right direction,” she said, sitting in her warm kitchen while rain poured down the windowpanes. “Like the old saying goes: ‘You take two twigs, you can bust them, but you put a bunch together, it’s harder to bust.’”

Even after the Maidu were allowed to enter the land discussions with PG&E, most of the focus remained on other places, more developed and developable, around the nearby reservoir, Lake Almanor. The Maidu were interested in these lands, too, of course. They’d like to build a cultural center, a museum or gallery, somewhere near a tourist mecca. But it’s Humbug Valley, with its miraculously undeveloped meadows, a mostly still-healthy forest, and a naturally carbonated spring bubbling up among moss-covered boulders, that means the most. You can tell by the way Beverly drops her voice, the way her tone changes from outrage to excitement.

“In the four years I worked as campground host out in



Mountain Maidu baskets, woven by Céste in the traditional way using willows gathered from the Humbug Valley. At left, Céste, also known as Nellie Thomas, child on her back, with baskets in the Humbug Valley c. 1896 and below, with her husband, Syntonum (Fred Thomas), and another of his wives, Betsy, and their children.

COURTESY MAIDU SUMMIT CONSORTIUM



Humbug Valley, we'd have gatherings, bear dances, potlucks. It was great. It was so good for our Maidu people."

Our Maidu people. Never singular; never without the possessive.

YOUNG WOULD-BE RECLAIMERS often want to know how to make a difference. What to say? Love one place. Go to meetings. Make some food. Never turn down an ally. Never give up. Here's the truth: You alone, you can't do much. You with a bunch of friends, you can do one hell of a lot. Look around that room in Chester: You'll see a Bay Area lawyer who worked pro bono for years, forest supervisors and seasonal firefighters, an archaeologist in a wheelchair, a logger with earrings, traditional clapper-stick singers in derby hats, all of them part of the whole — even the lone writer from a distant state, assiduously taking notes in the back of the room. This, too, I want to say: Allow yourself to be sucked into the fold.

WHEN I HEARD THAT THE MAIDU had reclaimed Tasman Koyom, I did not wait for an invitation. I hopped in the car, landed in Red Bluff at nightfall and set up camp by the Sacramento River with two sleeping bags, a wool cap and mittens for reading by headlamp. But I couldn't sleep. I got up and walked in the light of the gibbous moon among live oaks, thinking this might be it, the last trip, the end of my journey. The next morning I visited Beverly Ogle at home, brought her a bag of apples I'd picked with my mother in late fall. She sat beside her woodstove with her children and grandchildren coming and going, and she beamed. Like Martin Luther King Jr., she said, she had a dream.

"Only difference is, I lived to see it come true," she said.

Now, at the community hall, the mood was like a sports team award banquet or a Fourth of July picnic, the gravitas understated, almost nonexistent. I filled a bowl with venison stew and picked up one of the Dixie cups and sat near the back of the room beside an elderberry flute maker, whom I'd met at the healing ceremony, and his family. While I waited for the stew to cool, I tasted the contents of the Dixie cup. It turned out to be acorn paste, a traditional Maidu staple that tastes exactly as you'd imagine: thick, earthy, nutty, slightly bland, filling, but not precisely satisfying. I choked it down with water. Considering the work that went into making it, wasting it seemed out of the question. Besides, it felt like communion. I looked around the room at the oddball assembly. I'd long since stopped trying to figure out who was Maidu and who was not. I remembered what Farrell Cunningham had said when we'd last gathered in Humbug Valley: We're all Maidu today.

WHEN THE FORMALITIES BEGAN, the first speakers were members of the Maidu Summit Consortium, people who endured years of negotiations and interminable meetings to get to this point. Their eyes sparkled as they described what this victory meant.

"This is what I dreamed of as a child," Ken Holbrook began. He recalled camping in the valley, fishing in the creek, drinking from the carbonated springs, and I pictured him crossing Yelow Creek with his own kids.

Lorena Gorbet, another stalwart, unassuming leader, stood in a loose sleeveless summer dress at her place in the drum circle. "I never thought I'd see this day," she said.

One woman, impeccably dressed, with the poise of a no-nonsense substitute teacher or perhaps a U.S. senator, was the only speaker to show any hint of anger. She stood, trembling, and approached the microphone.

"I never thought I'd live to see Indians given *anything* by the dominant culture," she said.

The applause was long.

When at last Beverly Ogle rose, she described the moment she heard the news.

"I had this great urge to return to Humbug Valley, to tell our relatives, the forest, the birds, the animals, the grass, that they belong to us, and the healing can begin."

Our relatives. This connection with what's nonhuman, non-



sentient even, adds a new twist to the whole concept of community, one that's at the heart of books like Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* and M. Kat Anderson's *Tending the Wild*. Anderson argues for nurturing a "kincentric" relationship with nature, where plants and animals are seen as brothers and sisters. (Wallace Stegner said essentially the same thing 50 years ago, when he argued for the need to preserve wild places so humans remember that we are "brother to the animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong to it.") When I talked with Kat Anderson, she reminded me repeatedly, insistently, that the ideas were never hers. The cumulative wisdom belongs to generations of Native people gathering on the land in a twofold sense: coming together, hanging out, and gathering what they need. It might seem like a modest vision, but it's one with staying power. And when it materializes, like today, it feels huge.

At the end of the speeches, Brenda Heard-Duncan, Beverly Ogle's daughter, made a surprise announcement. It was a surprise to Beverly, at least; her kids had told me the day before. Beverly was receiving a special lifetime achievement award from the Indigenous Communities of Northern California. With it came a handcrafted bow. Brenda, who presented the bow, announced proudly that Beverly Ogle was the first woman ever to receive this award. But, Brenda explained, there were no arrows to go with it. The ceremonial arrows will come later, next spring, when the snow melts and the Maidu return to Humbug Valley.

As tables were cleared, I moved around the room saying goodbye. I stopped to see Beverly last. She sat with the bow in her lap, gazing out at the room from a table strewn with empty acorn paste cups and half-eaten slices of cake. I waited my turn behind other well-wishers, then sat beside her to congratulate and thank her: for her friendship, her inspiration, for welcoming me into the fold.

"Now the real work begins," she said. "And you'll be back." It was not a question.

I walked out into fading winter sun with my notes and an empty Tupperware container and drove until dark, from fire-scarred forest to wide dry basin, past small lakes — natural or dammed, it was impossible to tell — and small towns with boarded-up storefronts and tidy clapboard houses with porch lights on. I'd thought this trip would be the end, but now I knew the truth: The work of reclaiming never ends. □

At a healing ceremony held by the Maidu Summit in Humbug Valley, Beverly Ogle, Mountain Maidu elder and activist, is adorned with wormwood leaves before a sacred bearskin. Both have medicinal and spiritual properties.

JANE BRAXTON LITTLE

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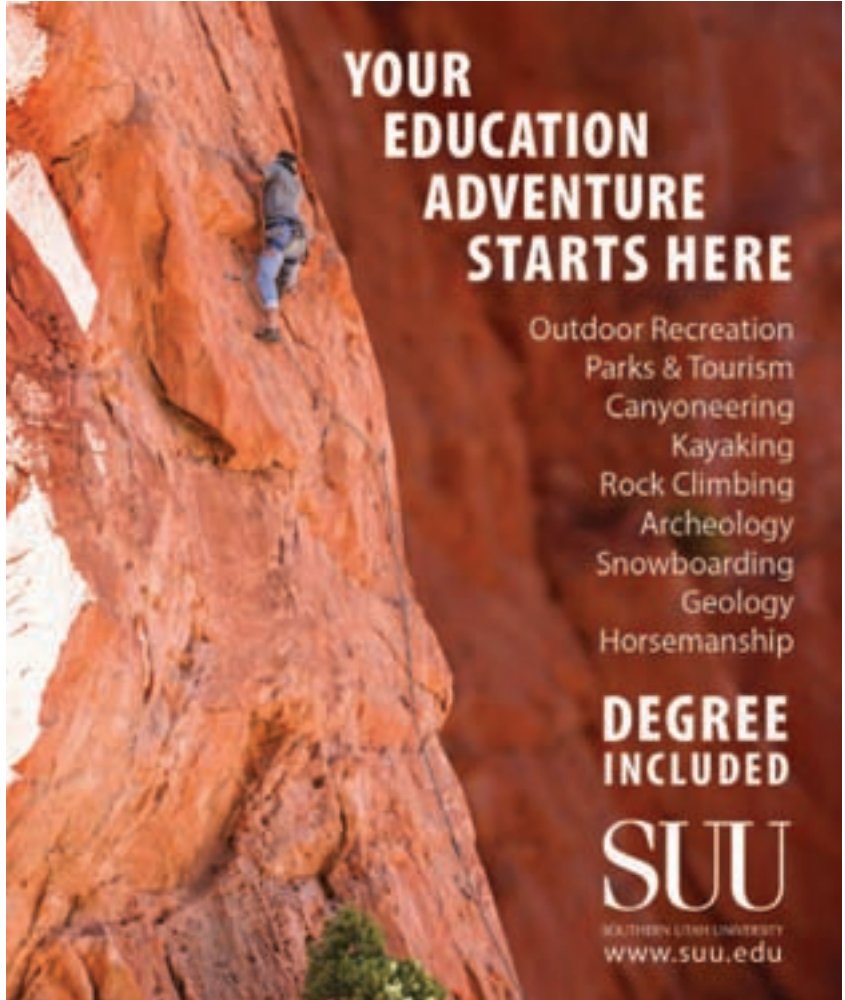
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Hidden gems: the short fiction of Lucia Berlin

Lucia Berlin was a Western writer of rare brilliance. When she died in Marina del Rey, California, in 2004, her fans were ardent, but few in number, perhaps because she wrote short stories and published her six collections with small presses. Her final three books appeared under the imprint of Black Sparrow Press, a California publisher known for featuring legendary outsiders like Charles Bukowski and John Fante. Berlin's work is at least the equal of theirs.

Berlin's admirers have long worked to keep her writing in front of readers, and now, Farrar, Straus and Giroux has published a posthumous selection of her work, *A Manual for Cleaning Women*, that demonstrates her mastery of the short story form. Berlin's stories, many of them semi-autobiographical, create indelible portraits of 20th century Western communities, generally seen from the bottom up, through the eyes of people on the margins — neglected children in mining camps, alcoholics on the streets of Oakland, and Mexican immigrant patients at subsidized medical clinics.

Describing the subjects of Berlin's stories can make her sound like a connoisseur of misery — but in fact, beauty, grace and humor are the resonant notes in her work, no matter how many minor chords she plays to achieve them. Take, for example, this scene from "Emergency Room Notebook 1977," in which the narrator sits on a bus with a blind man whose wife has just died. "He was very funny, describing his new, messy roommate at the Hilltop House for the Blind. I couldn't imagine how he could know his roommate was messy, but then I could and told him my Marx Brothers idea of two blind roommates — shaving cream on the spaghetti, slipping on spilled stuffaroni, etc. We laughed and were silent, holding hands ... from Pleasant Valley to Alcatraz Avenue. He cried, softly. My tears were for my own loneliness, my own blindness."

Born in Alaska in 1936, Berlin grew up in mining camps in Idaho, Montana and Washington. Much like a character in one of her own stories, she spent her childhood "moving too often to make a friend." While Berlin's father served in World War II, she lived with her grandfather, a respected but alcoholic dentist in El Paso. Berlin's mother was also an alcoholic — a heartless woman, whose memory haunts her daughter's stories. Berlin spent her life searching for and at times creating communities that would give her the love and acceptance she lacked at home. At one point, she lived near a Syrian family in El Paso. They became the inspiration for the family in her

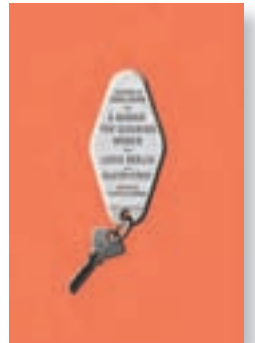
short story "Silence." "I gradually became a part of the Haddad family," the narrator says. "I believe that if this had not happened I would have grown up to be not just neurotic, alcoholic, and insecure, but seriously disturbed. Wacko."

After World War II, Berlin's family moved to Santiago, Chile, where her father oversaw mines and the family's fortunes soared. The teenage Berlin lived like a debutante, attending balls; her first cigarette was lit by Prince Aly Khan, the third husband of Rita Hayworth. She often uses this period of her life as a moving contrast to grittier moments. The prince appears briefly in the bittersweet "Angel's Laundromat," a story about a striking Jicarilla Apache the narrator meets at a down-and-out Albuquerque Laundromat, where they recognize the

creative writing teacher at the University of Colorado.

Berlin's stories often feature a first-person protagonist based on herself, frequently named Lucia, a woman who is perpetually seeking community and finds it in unexpected places. At a Catholic school Berlin attended, the other children shunned her because of her awkwardness and the back brace she wore for severe scoliosis. She found acceptance among the nuns in the kitchen during recess. In "Stars and Saints," the narrator helps the nuns remove dead mice from traps and in return is allowed to linger with them. "And the nuns were so pleased they didn't say anything about me being in the kitchen, except one of them did whisper 'Protestant' to another one."

As Berlin's protagonists grow up, they



A Manual for Cleaning Women

Lucia Berlin
432 pages,
hardcover: \$26.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
2015.



signs of alcoholism in each other and simply abide with one another while their laundry churns.

Berlin began studying at the University of New Mexico in 1955, where she married a sculptor and had two sons before her husband left her. She married and divorced two more times, had two more sons with her third husband, and raised her four boys while working a variety of jobs, frequently teaching or working in hospitals or medical offices. In 1994, Berlin moved to Boulder, where she became a beloved and influential

plunge into romances, experience heartbreak, job loss, alcoholism and motherhood, and find themselves tossed into new communities. The narrator in "Angel's Laundromat" says wryly, "Anybody says he knows just how someone else feels is a fool," but Berlin lived so many different lives that she could evoke the authentic feelings of a tremendous range of people. Her insights mark her not as a fool, but as a seer, a singular observer of the human experience who deserves to be read for generations to come.

BY JENNY SHANK

Lucia Berlin in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1963. Prince Aly Khan, the third husband of Rita Hayworth, lit Berlin's first cigarette when she lived in Chile.

BUDDY BERLIN/LITERARY ESTATE OF LUCIA BERLIN LP



American Copper
Shann Ray
302 pages,
softcover: \$16.
Unbridled Books,
November.



FIVE ACRE GEOGRAPHIC

The human cost of Westward expansion

Sometimes, the best new books don't seem that new after all. Perhaps a storyline, or the cadence of the language, or the cast of characters feels slightly familiar — not because it's derivative, but because it's a seamless part of a long and laudable tradition. Spokane-based writer Shann Ray's first full-length novel, *American Copper*, is one such book. Rather than diminish or be diminished by any of the similar voices that have come before — in particular Cormac McCarthy and A.B. Guthrie — Ray's prose proves a deft and distinctive addition to the iconic literature of the American West.

At its heart, *American Copper* is a classic story of Westward expansion. Set in Montana at the turn of the 20th century, it contains all of the conventional dichotomies: Cowboys versus Indians, progress versus tradition, nature versus industry, man versus woman. Ray weaves together the lives of the three protagonists — the smart, beautiful daughter of a copper baron, a giant, lonesome bar-fighter, and a Cheyenne rodeo star — with a meandering sense of inevitability; like the deep current in a river, we can feel the story moving steadily along, but we can't see far enough around the bends

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The implications of emptiness

and eddies to guess where it will end.

Ray is a poet at heart and a professor of reconciliation and forgiveness studies by trade, and the influence of both is clearly apparent in this novel. He writes with grace, not just in his language but in his careful and perceptive handling of history, race, gender and culture as well. In many ways, this is the story of the West's often unheard or overlooked voices. His prose is deliberate and measured, at times vaguely archaic. Each moment is distilled, lyrical and rich with insight: "(He) contemplated his will to live, where it came from and who shepherds the living and the dead. Winter set in like the teeth of a badger. His life seemed to walk away from him."

In the hands of a less adept storyteller, this could just be another tale of horses and violence, ruthless industrialists and rodeos, wide-open spaces and lawless towns and damsels in distress. But Ray brings to his writing a sensibility and sensitivity that elevates the story just enough; it's still a Western, yes, but it's a Western with a brain.

BY MELISSA MYLCHREEST

On the surface, California author Ruth Galm's debut novel *Into the Valley* is a sidelong, Didion-esque glance into a 30-something woman's unaccountable unraveling. Beneath the surface, it is skillfully whispered social commentary.

Caught between the counterculture of late 1960s San Francisco and her mother's conservative past, B. (as the main character calls herself) is inflicted with a strange malaise, one she calls "the carsickness," which can only be soothed by cashing counterfeit checks. In desperation, B. drives aimlessly through the Central Valley, hoping that "its bareness would reveal something, provide an answer she had failed to acquire."

The premise of *Into the Valley* does more than provide a pleasing nostalgia. (Ask yourself, when was the last time you wrote a physical check?) Galm's B. finds comfort in bank lobbies, "the right angles of the teller windows, the teller's movements like a soothing *port de bras*." These precise, clean moments give her a "cool expansive feeling" and are set against the repeated mention of dirty fingernails and unwashed hair — the physical manifestations of B.'s mental deterioration. Galm, without ever directly saying so, is asking us if we, too, don't

feel dirtied by the present, inflicted with a nameless unease and an urgent desire to escape: "She wanted only to get away, to start over, to undo something that seemed to bind her. She wanted only to find a calm quiet place to breathe."

Into the Valley is highly visual, suspenseful and appropriately grim, set in a landscape where spent sunflowers look "like a mass of defeated people." Even if B. is traveling with no destination, Galm's prose knows exactly where it's going. Crisp and clear, it touches down lightly, like a small stone bounding down a scree slope. "No part of the crocus came inside her, touched her in any way." Showy, but without extraneous scenes or details, *Into the Valley* is a solid, muscular piece of writing.

In the end, Galm brings us back to the '60s to show us how dystopian our present age is. The novel succeeds not by being a flashback to "the good old days," but by being a hard-eyed look into the mirror of today: the impersonal nature of technology, our estrangement from the natural world, and the psychic consequences these things produce, even if we don't realize it.

BY CHARLES FINN



Into the Valley
Ruth Galm
264 pages,
hardcover: \$25.
Soho Press, 2015.

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BROOKE WARREN

Wilderness redefined and defended



Satellites in the High Country: Searching for the Wild in the Age of Man

Jason Mark
256 pages,
hardcover: \$28.
Island Press, 2015.



The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation

Fred Pearce
272 pages,
hardcover: \$32.
Beacon Press, 2015.

You're hiking alone along a steep switch-back trail in Washington's Olympic Mountains, when suddenly you turn a corner and see a massive mountain goat, its black eyes trained upon you. A few years ago, a goat attacked and killed a man in this very park, and, at the thought, a trickle of sweat wends its way from your hairline to your collar. The goat is still looking at you. Then you remember that mountain goats aren't native to these mountains, meaning that both it and you are relative newcomers here. But does that — should that — knowledge do anything to diminish the wildness of this encounter?

Congress has the power to designate wilderness areas, but every wilderness lover has his or her own definition of "wild." A few purists would see the non-native goat as a deal-breaker, but increasingly, many people define wilderness regardless of whether a particular landscape is "pristine," or occupied by native or non-native species. Instead, they see wilderness simply as places that humans aren't currently managing, whether it's a remote mountain range or just an overlooked patch of pine trees by the railroad tracks. And this is true both of passionate, old-style wilderness lovers and of pragmatic, technophile greenies, as clearly evidenced by two new books.

Ecologists have known for generations that no place, no matter how remote, is absolutely free of human fingerprints. We tend to notice the obvious signs: the traces of an old road, or perhaps — as *Earth Island Journal* editor Jason Mark describes in his new book, *Satellites in the High Country* — a bright blue cooler washed up on a beach in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. But increasingly, our warming climate is changing ecosystems that humans have never visited. Either we accept a certain amount of human influence, or we'll run out of wilderness altogether. "Forget untouched," Mark writes. "What matters now is whether a place is uncontrolled."

Mark carves out a fine distinction between inadvertent influence caused by factors like climate change and intentional control. He offers a heartfelt ode to the continued importance of nonintervention in wilderness areas, even if doing so leads to unrecognizably changed landscapes. We should resist the temptation to help, he says, no matter the consequences. "The pika may perish," he writes. "The Arctic fox might slip into the great void of extinction. Places we've known and loved ... may become unrecognizable to us."

British journalist Fred Pearce takes a surprisingly similar stance in *The New Wild*, although rather than despairing at the resulting changes, he sees them as exciting. We live, he believes, during a dynamic time in our planet's history. He delights in tweaking the noses of those who despise so-called "invasive species." For him, that doesn't restore wildness but rather reduces it in a futile attempt to freeze nature in time. His "new wild" is a mash-up of natives and exotics that vigorously adapt to climate change, pollution and incoming species without our assistance. Conservationists should embrace such landscapes, from abandoned industrial sites covered in plants that thrive on metallic soils to second-growth tropical rainforest. We should be, he argues, "supporting the new, rather than always spending time and money in a doomed attempt to preserve the old."

Both Pearce, the technology-loving pragmatic environmentalist, and Mark, the traditional wilderness lover, agree: Even in a world of overwhelming human influence, we shouldn't intrude on every landscape with our well-intentioned sprays and shovels, poisoning weeds and relocating species. Both writers argue for keeping some places uncontrolled, unmanaged — wild, in perhaps the simplest sense of the word — as an arena for undirected evolution, as a traditional conservation practice, and as a good way to practice humility and retain essential

mystery in the world.

Both base their arguments for nonintervention in part on the notion that as the world changes, it is nature — not human beings — that will figure out how to adapt. By killing non-natives, planting disease-resistant trees or shooting invasive barred owls to save spotted ones, they say, we may inadvertently prevent the species-level evolution and ecosystem-level re-sorting that help create more resilient natural landscapes.

Pearce uses science to bolster his case, picking apart the surprisingly thin evidence that non-natives cause lasting harm, except in a few cases (like the brown tree snake, which has destroyed most of Guam's native birds). Mark's arguments have a more ethical, spiritual and emotional flavor. Wilderness and wildness, he declares, are very good for the human soul. He says little about non-natives, but notes that he considers those introduced Olympic mountain goats to be indisputably wild, in part because as fierce, "feral" beasts, they are capable of killing us.

The two writers' arguments for letting nature take care of itself are compelling and make interesting back-to-back reading. But there's one aspect of both books that will alienate many readers: Both authors accept extinction as inevitable, to a certain extent. And many environmentalists will find it hard to accept that an abstract notion of resilient wildness is more important than, say, the survival of the Arctic fox. As Mark says, hewing to a policy of nonintervention as ecosystems change and species wink out "will require an emotional fortitude to which we are unaccustomed, an almost Buddhist sort of nonattachment." We should rather restrict our emotional engagement to immediate and instinctive experiences in the wilderness itself, whether that be awe, reverence, or — in the case of coming face-to-face a mountain goat — naked fear.

BY EMMA MARRIS

Notes from the road to bestsellerdom

We pulled up at the Eagle River Nature Center north of Anchorage — a large but cozy log cabin on grounds sparkling with snow — happy to have escaped the city’s traffic. Inside, a dozen scruffy bird-lovers waited to hear me read from an anthology of wildlife stories I’d just had published. I’d chosen to share one contributor’s essay about “Gandalf the Grey,” an injured great gray owl from a raptor rehabilitation center, who visited classrooms as an education bird. A handler with a different owl perched on her fist stood next to me as I unboxed signed copies of the book. “When do we get to touch the owl?” a kid piped up when I opened the floor for questions after the reading. But the bird was not in a petting mood. Halfway through the presentation, it had noticed a stuffed eagle with fully spread wings, mounted below the cabin ceiling. It had gone into a frenzy, diving off the handler’s leather glove, flapping wildly upside down on its leash. The handler finally put the bird back in its cage.

Touring authors are encouraged to play Indian flutes, tap-dance, juggle their books blindfolded, or at least behave unexpectedly, even outrageously.

I had planned this book tour like a field marshal plans a military campaign. A four-day Book Blitz South would target eight locations in the Anchorage and Mat-Su area; the nature center was our last stop before heading back home to Fairbanks. Fliers had been printed and hung, emails and press kits distributed, and the events listed in newspapers and online. My girlfriend, the book’s designer, acted as liaison, trip photographer, finance officer, driver, quartermaster and motivational coach rolled into one.

Long ago, I realized that words alone rarely draw crowds any more, unless you’re a politician. Touring authors are encouraged to play Indian flutes, tap-dance, juggle their books blindfolded, or at least behave unexpectedly, even outrageously. Teaming up with falcons and owls from the rehab center was supposed to benefit everybody involved; we could all use the publicity.

When we first rolled into Anchorage, thousands of animal lovers thronged the streets. Alas, they were there to see dogs, not us: I had forgotten that the Book Blitz weekend coincided with the Iditarod, the world’s most prestigious sled dog race. Still, I hoped that a trickledown from the human surge would reach some bookstores.

The luncheon at a posh hotel seemed like an auspicious beginning. The audience of gray-haired, well-dressed journalists looked as if they could tell *coq au vin* from *bouillabaisse*. My choice of reading — an essay rejected by *Gourmet*, about a friend who feeds his family on roadkill — elicited gasps, eye-rolls and even chuckles, but probably did not help with selling the book.

Our next stop, the museum, was being renovated, and foot traffic through the bare lobby, behind the owl’s back, made the bird nervous and incontinent. At the artsy café, with my voice beginning to sound like a raven’s, I struggled to be heard over the hissing espresso machine and coffee grinder.

The Barnes & Noble manager gave me a prime spot at a table facing the entrance, where I could make eye contact with customers as they entered. Light from the low-angle sun made me squint, though, so I resembled a shortsighted bookworm more than a sharp-eyed wilderness guide and auteur. When I

tried to remedy that, I looked like a sunglassed Mafioso. With each frigid gust from the sliding doors, the poster of my book’s cover swiveled on its stand, causing the printed grizzly to scan the room as if in search of prey. The store did not allow raptors, and I felt lonely without a feathered companion.

At our next-to-last stop, a bookstore-cum-café, the manager expected a signing, not a reading. There were no extra chairs, and I found myself separated from the birds and their handlers by a shelf full of gewgaws. In a last-ditch bid for attention, I rearranged some books on a shelf, placing my brainchild between two local bestsellers, hoping to profit by proximity.

After two hours of signing, or rather non-signing, I had sold five books total — four of them to the bird handlers.

Descending into Fairbanks, red-eyed from driving all night through a blizzard, I reviewed the trip in my mind. Sales had been slim, our earnings almost devoured by the cost of gas. Yet I hoped that our stories would touch someone’s life, somewhere.

I later heard from a friend who used my own essay from the book to teach nature writing to students in China, and I wondered what they made of mountain goats stranded at sea level — how did these creatures quicken in their imaginations? Strangely, my words had traveled farther than I did, spiraling ever outward, released from my care like bold salvaged birds. □



Owls from the Alaska WildBird Rehabilitation Center accompanied Engelhard on his book tour. SEAN HOYER



HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

ARIZONA

Don't get the big head, Big Ditch: Some recent visitors have complained on Yelp and TripAdvisor that the Grand Canyon is really not all that grand. *The Arizona Star* compiled some of the more jaundiced online reviews, including this one from Jorbi P. of Somerville, Massachusetts, who jeered, "Whoopity do, Grand Canyon. You were caused by erosion. You don't have the coasters or dippin' dots. Jeesh, can you say over-rated?" Barry G. of Seattle said the same in fewer words: "Ehh. I've seen better." Paul B., location unknown, complained that he'd been "dragged here by the missus when I should have been playing golf. It's just a hole in the ground." A woman from Atlanta, Georgia, who goes by Iamtravelin-pam, had a different beef, based on her desire never to leave her car: "They've built so many buildings that they've stolen all the beautiful views from the road." Shane H. of Oakland, California, noting the discernment of "yelpers," lowered his rating of the canyon from one and a half to just one star after judging it "more like Mediocre Canyon." But Boston resident Frenchie takes the cake for being blasé: "(Grand Canyon) is about as disappointing as my trip to the Taj Mahal and Great Wall of China." John Wesley Powell, who led the first recorded trip down the Colorado River in 1869, had a slightly different view, though some people today would likely knock him for seeming to gush: "The elements that unite to make the Grand Canyon the most sublime spectacle in nature are multifarious and exceedingly diverse. You cannot see the Grand Canyon in one view, as if it were a changeless spectacle from which a curtain might be lifted, but to see it, you have to toil from month to month through its labyrinths."

THE WEST

Yet again, the natural world came up short, much to the disappointment of tourists to Yellowstone National Park, reports the *Missoulian*. Commenting on a visitor survey provided by Xan-



NEW MEXICO Ride 'em, deerboy!
CURTIS THOMSON AND MOLLY MAGNUSON

terra Parks and Resorts, one person wrote, "Our visit was wonderful but we never saw any bears. Please train your bears to be where guests can see them. This was an expensive trip to not get to see bears."

ALASKA

If only those disappointed Yellowstone tourists had traveled to Haines, Alaska, on the Chilkoot River, they might have seen "a man who donned a fairly realistic bear costume," reports *The Associated Press*. It was not clear what the ursine imitator hoped to accomplish by running around, and jumping up and down, though he did get within three feet or so of a sow and bear cubs that were gorging on salmon. Before anyone could detain him, the man drove off, still wearing his big bear head. Unexplained as well was the comment by Alaska Trooper Megan Peters: "This is not the first time we've encountered a man in a bear suit."

THE WEST

The numbers are staggering: Five major wildfires

covering 438 square miles, known as the Okanogan Complex, were burning near the town of Omak, Washington, as August ended, and more than 1,000 firefighters were on fire lines, with crews coming to help from as far as Australia and New Zealand. And "only 100 miles is under control," reports the U.S. edition of the U.K. *Guardian* newspaper. Yet an unlikely concrete dome just outside of Omak, which was turned into living quarters 15 years ago, lived up to its reputation as fireproof, surviving a fire surge with flames more than 12 feet high. Homeowner John Belles said he hosed everything down that he could, including himself. Once the flames got to within 50 yards, however, "there was nothing I could do." So he shut himself in the dome and waited. It got incredibly hot in there, he said, and the fire destroyed the electrical junction box, but the dome — and its owner — survived unscathed. Meanwhile, thousands of people have been forced out of their homes, and the

smoke is so thick that drivers have to use their headlights during the day. Matt Reidy, a former Forest Service ranger now working as a fire incident commander, recounted how he found a young couple still in their house on Salmon Creek Road. They had no clue that flames were advancing toward them, hidden by a ridge. When Reidy told them to run, "they picked up their belongings, just what they could hold, threw it in their car and they left. ... Within minutes the house was engulfed." Reidy said he was amazed at the intensity and height of the home-devouring flames, which were whipped up by winds of over 35 miles per hour. As for his own family in Omak, Reidy said that this summer's fires have forced them to evacuate three times.

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see hcn.org.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos #heardaroundthewest on Instagram.



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“ The abiding lesson I have learned from swimming is simple: **As the rivers, lakes and oceans go — so do we. We are the water.** ”

Matthew L. Moseley, in his essay, "Swimming through Canyonlands — a first," from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr