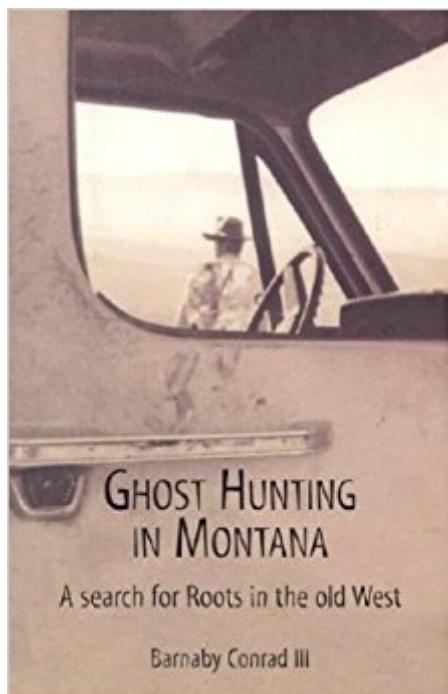


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Ghost Hunting In Montana: A Search For Roots In The Old West



Synopsis

Everyone dreams of jumping in their car and hitting the road for parts unknown, and ultimately discovering the mysteries of the "Old West." In the summer of 1989, Barnaby Conrad did just that. For five months, he journeyed nine thousand miles through all the rough terrain of the Montana landscape in search of adventure, his family roots, and the history still breathing in the carcass of myth. With humor and insight, Conrad encounters car-fighting cowboys, wolf biologists, modern-day mountainmen with flintlock rifles, xenophobic fly fishermen, philosophical Indians, New Age religious groups, and even grizzly bears drunk on fermented corn. Between accounts of his adventures, he pays literary homage to Montana's originals, like Charlie Russell, Will James, A. B. Guthrie, and Thomas McGuane. While traveling through such historic sites as Fort Benton and Glacier Park, Conrad revives such colorful ghosts as Calamity Jane, Butch Cassidy, General Custer, and the Sundance Kid. *HOST HUNTING IN MONTANA* provides an engaging insight into the past and present of this mystifying known as Big Sky Country. In this evocation of the old and new West, Conrad discovers not just the insider's Montana, but also the American in himself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Searching for family roots and adventure, Conrad, a former editor of *Horizon*, set out on a five-month, 9000-mile journey through the back roads of Montana. Often traveling by horse or canoe through "snow capped mountains, down her big rivers, up her box canyons, into her vast forests, across her sagebrush flats," he found true tales of the Wild West: gunfights, railroad building, prospecting, cowboys and Indians, and men confronted with grizzlies, wolves and coyotes. While

native Montanans cling to their roots and look warily on newcomers, outsiders are discovering the wild beauty of this "Last Best Place," which now has its share of yuppies, artists, writers and celebrities. No mere travelogue, this is a lively and entertaining account of a little-known part of America and the colorful lives of its people. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A slow poke through Montana by Conrad (former editor of *Horizons*), a guy who likes a side dish of bile to accompany his travels. Conrad hits the road in the Big Sky State to take in the scenery and dig up a little family history. The family side of the story comes and goes--both grandfathers moved to the territory back in the late 1800s--with Conrad trying valiantly to paint them as fascinating characters. They're not, even with murder, mayhem, and adultery thrown in. Nor does Conrad succeed as an artful recorder of today's Montana. He can't help trotting out the obligatory Montaniana--barroom fisticuffs, brushes with Mr. Griz, trouty days, whiskey nights--while historical context comes in spurts from the ``Billings was named after Frederick Billings, an executive of the...'' school of background information. He mooches around with a fine disregard for the consequences, a little piece of bravery much to his credit. Most folks Conrad runs into are either forlorn, bitter, drunk, or just plain ready to brawl--bump into someone and get your lights punched out, mention the wrong name and get your lights punched out, offer an ill-timed comment and get your lights punched out. Then again, maybe he just spent too much time in bars. There is a wealth of detail in these pages, some of it captivating, from ghoulish doings in Great Falls to the virtues of buffalo meat to tensions over wolf reintroduction to the quick portraits of the folks he crosses paths with, but little, if any, continuity. One item is cobbled to another, a pastiche from which an image of Montana never emerges. Don't expect to learn why they call this land the Last Great Place; even as a miscellany, Conrad's sidelong glimpse of Montana never conjures much excitement. (Photos, not seen) -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It is a great book - I am from Montana and I bought the book as a Christmas gift for family member

Conrad's book is essentially an anti-Montana, anti American polemic, or at least his understanding of it. If you have long hair and consider yourself a poet or artist, basically you're "in" with Conrad. Any one else doesn't fit his warped view of what Montanans are or should be. Take this book for what it is--an item for the recycling bin.

Since I seem to be the first "civilian" to review this book, let me just begin by saying that the Kirkus Reviews capsule above is simply way off the mark. As someone who has spent a fair amount of time in Big Sky country--and as a writer intimately familiar with the challenges of crafting riveting non-fiction--I am pleased to say that Barnaby Conrad III's "Ghost Hunting in Montana" is a towering achievement, a book that in a perfect world should have made Mr. Conrad rich and famous. Meticulously crafted, yet told in a sprawling prose that befits his subject matter, Conrad somehow manages to leave virtually no stone left unturned as he simultaneously makes his way across Montana in every conceivable manner (by foot, automobile, horseback, and even canoe) and tries to come to terms with the legacy of a number of his famous forebears that left indelible marks on this wild and still largely untamed state. Prior to reading this book, if you would have asked me to describe Montana's people, I would have said something like, "Ranchers and environmentalists, some of them crazy. A few holdout cowboys. Religious cults. Movie stars. Recluses, hoboes, and Indians still pissed off about Custer. Rich yuppie outdoor freaks. Mystical weirdoes who worship wolves and buffalo. Arrogant Californians. And average Joes working average Joe jobs, trying to figure out where they fit in." Amazingly, Conrad manages to touch base with each and every one of these representative groups as he makes his way through the state, even stopping in for a chat with Montana's towering men of letters (the late A. B. Guthrie Jr. and Tom McGuane). Although born and bred in California, Conrad tries hard to come to terms with his frontier ancestry (and, contrary to what the Kirkus reviewer implies, Conrad's ancestors are very well known in Montana and were all larger-than-life frontiersmen and frontierswomen). As an accomplished, well-to-do 20th century urbanite, Conrad wants badly to understand why his forebears settled in such a harsh, unforgiving land and yet managed to become (for the most part) wildly successful. It is not an idle question, and Conrad does not treat it lightly. At one point, seeing the ravages that alcohol has visited upon a Blackfoot reservation, he wonders if the Indians would have been better off if they had never encountered his whiskey-trading great-grandfather. He begins to feel genuine shame. But Conrad's unflinching assessment of his famous family (including his mother's relatives, also from a well-known Montana pioneer clan) does not stand in the way of his yea-saying enthusiasm about Montana and Montanans in general. He drinks in bars with both Indians and whites, takes a saddle horse to the top of the Continental Divide, participates in a huge cattle drive to celebrate Montana's centennial, goes to rodeos in small towns and on Indian reservations, attends a celebrated pow-wow, makes friends with a renegade wolf biologist, and in the book's closing pages still manages to canoe for hundreds of miles down the Yellowstone River, retracing the journey of

William Clark at the close of the Lewis and Clark expedition. This is anything but lightweight journalism, and I think most Montanans would agree that Conrad does a damn fine job of "explaining" their contrary and contradictory state. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Five stars.

Having read this book my wife and I decided to take a trip to Montana. It proved to be one of the best trips we've ever taken. We followed the path of "Ghost Hunting in Montana" and met many of the people described in the book. If you read this book you will not be disappointed. This is one of the best non-fiction books that I have in my collection. I wish Barnaby Conrad would write another.

I can't put it any better than the first reviewer did- except to reiterate that this book is probably the world's best-kept secret in non-fiction literature. Buy this book if you: love the American West, like the outdoors, are a history buff, love travelogues, appreciate great writing and style, or just need something to read. Have given this book as a gift a half-dozen times, and all recipients LOVED it. Awesome. Six stars!

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