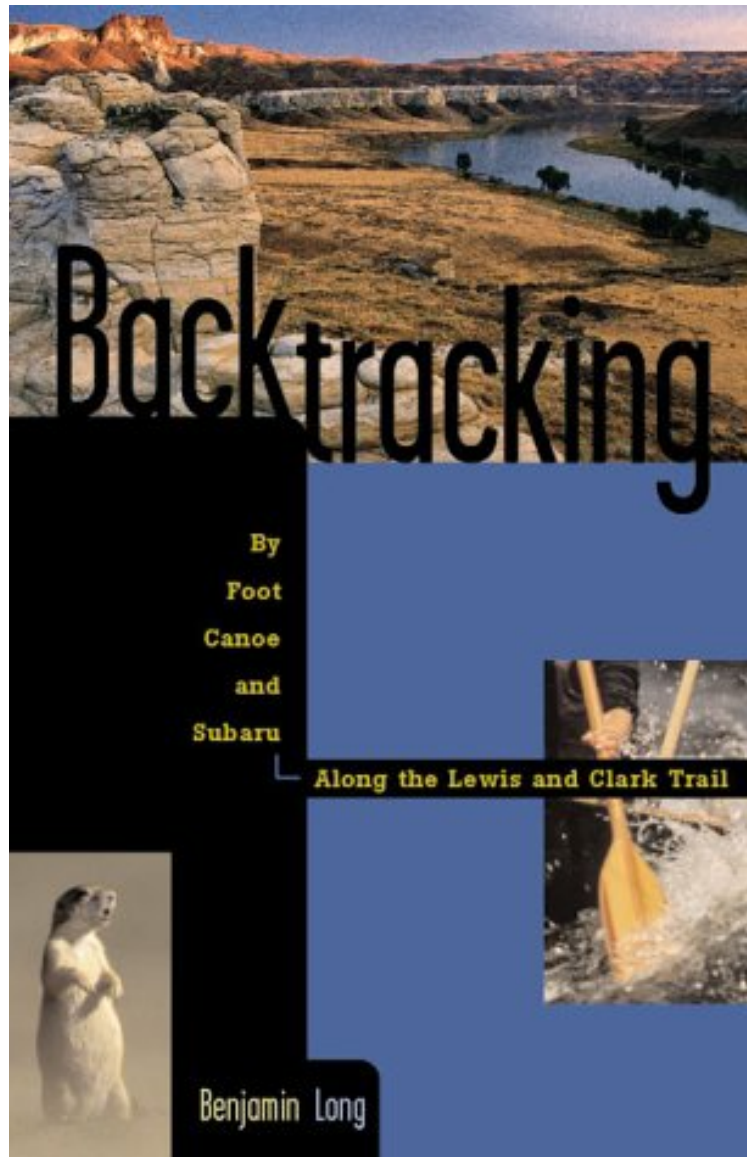


(Ebook pdf) Backtracking: By Foot, Canoe, and Subaru Along the Lewis and Clark Trail

Backtracking: By Foot, Canoe, and Subaru Along the Lewis and Clark Trail

Benjamin Long

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Benjamin Long : Backtracking: By Foot, Canoe, and Subaru Along the Lewis and Clark Trail before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Backtracking: By Foot, Canoe, and Subaru Along the Lewis and Clark Trail:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The book title is somewhat misleading. By J B. The book is more or

less an update on various wildlife from the time of the Corps of Discovery trip to modern day. This could have been a much better and informative book that is most disappointing. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not what I expected

By Colorado Kacey I expected this to be a book where the author learns about Lewis and Clark by examining the places that they had been; that is, using the idea of backtracking to discover Lewis and Clark from a unique perspective. In the introduction, the author and his wife sell their home and buy a Subaru repair manual, preparing me for the story of an epic journey undertaken by various means of transportation. However, this is not what the book is about at all. It has more to do with checking in on the animals that Lewis and Clark mentioned in their journals two hundred years before. Each chapter focuses on a different animal, related in an apparently arbitrary order. We don't hear much about the journeying to visit these animals, and very little about Lewis and Clark. Then the book ends; there is no conclusion to the idea of an epic break in the author's life brought up in the beginning, nor much attempt to tie the chapters together. In spite of my disappointment, the book is well-written in a journalist's style, and none of the chapters would look out of place in a nature magazine if accompanied by large color photographs. Perhaps the only chapter that really stood out to me, however, was the beautiful dance of the sharptail grouse and how they affected native culture. I can certainly recommend that chapter to anyone.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Backtracking by Foot, Canoe and Subaru along the Lewis and Clark Trail

By Sam Adams "Benjamin Long spent 10 years as a newspaper journalist in Montana covering natural history, wildlife, and environmental issues of the West." (backcover) This book is similar to *Our Natural History: The Lessons of Lewis and Clark* by Daniel Botkin, except it is less scientific, more journalistic, and overall a more personal narrative than Botkin's. The author writes about the prairie dog, grizzly bear, buffalo (bison), beaver, cutthroat trout, sharptail grouse, the whitebark pine and cottonwood, Clark's nutcracker, the wolf and coyote, and the white sturgeon. As a journalist, the author favors political rhetoric over objectivity, for example, on page 46 he writes: "I am convinced that if grizzlies had evolved opposable thumbs, they would be the ones studying us and we would be the ones hiding in the mountains." Earlier on page 30, after mentioning the shooting of buffalo from passenger trains in the 1870s, he remarks: "Bison were the varmints of their day. Today we settle for prairie dogs. The only difference is the size of the target." On the modern day shooting of prairie dogs, he mentions on page 27 that as a boy he saw shooting them as "a harmless diversion" then continues with: "I grew out of it, but not everyone does."

Benjamin Long and his wife constitute a micro Corps of Rediscovery as they follow in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark to discover two centuries later the state of the wildlife, the territory, and the West. Ben Long and his wife quit their jobs and sold their house to set out as the newest pilgrims to backtrack the Lewis and Clark Trail. From the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, the authors' mission was to check in on the wildlife that his famous predecessors so enthusiastically catalogued and recorded. From fearsome grizzlies to populous prairie dogs, with a living dinosaur thrown in (it lives at the bottom of the Columbia River!), *Backtracking* is an engaging adventure into the wilder parts of the American West.

.com Montana journalist Benjamin Long's retracing of the Lewis and Clark expedition is an American elegy. Long calls his mode of exploration "backtracking"--the opposite of following. "If you follow," an old trapper once explained to the author, "the animal is just reacting to your presence, trying to avoid you. Backtracking, you study the evidence as the animal laid it down." Armed with such knowledge and "weary of careers that found us impounded in our cubicles," Long and his wife quit their jobs, sell the house, and embark on their own Corps of Rediscovery in an old Subaru, hoping to uncover some sort of truth about the Western territory nearly two centuries after America's most famous explorers. That truth, sadly, is mostly about loss. "Of all the passages from the journals of Lewis and Clark," writes Long in the introduction, "the ones that fueled my imagination--fire were those with images of wilderness and wildlife." In this spirit, each subsequent chapter of *Backtracking* is devoted to a life form that Lewis and Clark encountered on their two-year odyssey. On the Great Plains, Long pays a visit to beleaguered prairie-dog towns, whose residents intrigued Clark enough that he sent one on a long trip back East, where it "lived out the rest of its days in a Philadelphia museum." Like Old West ghost towns, the legendary prairie-dog towns have seen their citizenry dwindle to bust--from an estimated five billion residents to perhaps three million--bringing an entire ecosystem to near-collapse. Another mammal Lewis and Clark could hardly avoid was the grizzly bear, with Lewis famously recording, "I must confess I do not like the gentleman and had rather [sic] fight two Indians than one bear." Long and his wife, however, must detour away from the original trail with a team of wildlife biologists since "the bears can no longer be found anywhere along the explorers' four-thousand-mile route." And so on, with American bison, Westslope cutthroat trout, sharptail grouse, wolves, and more vanished. If this all sounds a bit depressing, at least Long proves an informed and companionable guide along the way. Much has changed in the 200 years since Jefferson first commissioned Lewis and Clark to investigate the newly bought Louisiana Purchase. What hasn't abated is the desire to seek out America's remote natural riches. --Langdon Cook

From Booklist ed with John Holt's *Coyote Nowhere*. Holt and Long, two Montana writers who set out to find America's Old West buried beneath its twenty-first-century trappings, have produced remarkably entertaining books, effectively combining memoir, travelogue, and history. Holt, the author of 13

previous books (mostly about fishing in Montana), set out with his partner, photographer Ginny Diers, to peel back the modern age and reveal the remnants of the Old West. He found what he was looking for in the lives of a handful of ranchers, Native Americans, and fisherman, all of whom are living like their ancestors might have lived a century and a half ago. He constantly contrasts the West he loves with the West being invaded by vacationers, recreational-vehicle owners, and others who seem determined to destroy what precious little remains of the glorious Wild West. This is a moving book and a heartfelt plea to keep the West alive. Although perhaps not quite so aggressive (Holt's prose is full of scathing remarks about people who thoughtlessly trample over the remnants of the Old West), Long's book is just as passionate. A former newspaper journalist who specialized in natural history and environmental issues related to the western states, Long took to the road with his wife, Karen Nichols (who, like Holt's companion, is a photographer), to retrace the steps of Lewis and Clark from the Missouri River to the Pacific. Like Holt, Long wanted to rediscover the past, to recapture the excitement Lewis and Clark must have felt when they saw grizzlies and beautiful vistas and tall, ancient trees for the first time. These books, separately or together, are sure to appeal to readers with an interest in travel or the American West. David Pitt Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved About the Author Benjamin Long spent 10 years as a newspaper journalist in Montana covering natural history, wildlife, and environmental issues of the West. He has contributed articles to River magazine, The Seattle Times, High Country News, and other publications. Long lives with his wife, Karen Nichols, in Kalispell, Montana