

Hell Creek, Montana. America's Key to the Prehistoric Past. By Lowell Dingus. 2004. St. Martin's Press, New York. 242 p. US\$22.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-312-31393-4.

Growing up in the small town of Havillah, Washington, it seemed as though life would never change. Not a whole lot happened in a community that consisted of a modest Lutheran Church and 7 people. Sure, a cow would escape from the Kuhlman's pasture every once in awhile and create some excitement, but for an 18 year old, it was just not enough. Naturally, like most kids in the same predicament, I counted the days until I could escape from the unchanging monotony of small-town life and experience the real world.

My opinion remained the same until I returned home after spending 3 months away at college. I was shocked to find things were not exactly as I had left them. There was barley growing in the field across from the church instead of alfalfa, and Mrs. Kuhlman had a sparkling new white fence. Sadly, there was also a face missing from the normal crowd at church Sunday morning. Leonard had suffered a heart attack while plowing in his field and passed away. Suddenly, it became very clear that even life in Havillah was not in fact static and unchanging, but was constantly evolving and being modified. Being away from home gave me a whole new appreciation for the so-called simple life of the country.

The book *Hell Creek, Montana* similarly follows the process of evolution in the remote town of Jordan, Garfield County, Montana. Garfield County is about the same size as Connecticut, yet has a population of only 1,589. Even today, Jordan is Garfield County's only town. Yet despite its size, the area around Jordan, which includes a tributary of the Missouri River named Hell Creek, has experienced remarkable events.

Lowell Dingus is a paleontologist who was drawn to the Hell Creek region around Jordan in the pursuit of dinosaur fossils. His main interest is telling the story of the discovery of the first ever *Tyrannosaurus rex* fossil, which was found in the area. But the countryside and the amazing people who live there also captivate him. As I do, Dingus realizes life is constantly evolving. In order to give his audience the full scope of the *Tyrannosaurus rex* discovery in the Hell Creek region, he reveals in his book a complete history of the area. In doing so, he creates a more compelling and captivating story, one that forces people to think beyond the simple events of the present.

The saga begins with a description of the area through geologic time. Sixty-five million years ago, the Hell Creek region was a lush, deciduous forest on the edge of an inland sea. It supported an array of dinosaurs, including the fearsome *Tyrannosaurus rex*.

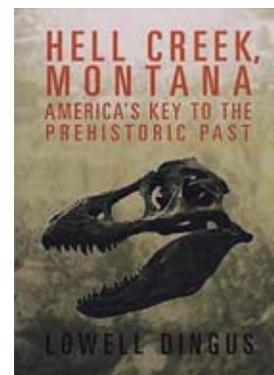
Dingus then proceeds to describe the early exploration of the area in the beginning of the 19th century. Louis and Clark passed through the Hell Creek region on their journey up the Missouri River in May of 1805. He tells the story of a grizzly confrontation that occurred not far from Hell Creek region on May 14, 1805. Since then, grizzly bears have ceased to exist in this area of Montana.

Following his discussion of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Dingus reveals the plight of the Sioux Indians in the Hell Creek region. Many of the battles of the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877, including Custer's Last Stand at the Battle of Little Bighorn and Sitting Bull's flight to Canada, relate directly to the area around Jordan in central Montana. In fact, the Hell Creek region was Sitting Bull's favorite bison-hunting ground. Later, as bison numbers declined on the Great Plains, William T. Hornaday took specimens from canyon regions around Jordan for the Smithsonian Museum. When, in the late 1800s, bison were close to becoming extinct, the specimens taken by Hornaday became extremely valuable.

After surveying the history of the Hell Creek region, Dingus delves into his main subject of interest, the discovery of fossils and the *Tyrannosaurus rex*. He follows the efforts of legendary paleontologists, such as Barnum Brown and Harley Garbani, as they made landmark discoveries in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He then tracks the chain of fossil discoveries to the present day, noting the role sediment layers in the Hell Creek region have played in revealing history. Dingus weaves in interactions between the locals of Jordan and the fossil hunters, making the reality of the situation come alive in the mind of the reader.

Dingus concludes his summary of the events surrounding the Hell Creek region of Montana by unfolding the latest colossal episode in the area. In 1996, a radical group called the Freeman had a standoff with the government on a compound near Jordan. As he tells the story of the town and how it was affected by the onslaught of media, the reader gets a feeling for the true lifestyle of rural farmers and ranchers.

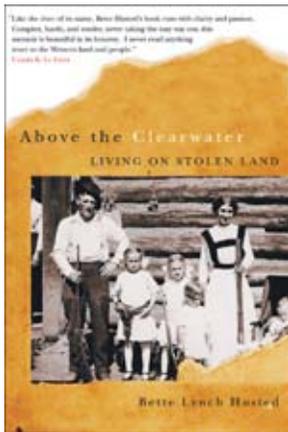
In *Hell Creek, Montana*, Lowell Dingus tells more than the simple story of the first discovery of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Rather, he tells a complete history of one seemingly unimportant area in the middle of nowhere Montana and, in doing so, also reveals the true nature of rural life. In the



past, I have fallen into the trap of thinking small towns are boring, monotonous, and stationary. Yet, as I found out, and as Dingus describes in this book, even though the future is uncertain, the one thing that can be counted on is that everything will continue to evolve and change. So Dingus not only tells the tale of a dinosaur, he tells the tale of the continuous process in life that is inescapable, even in the remotest areas of our landscape.

Amber Morris, Washington State University, Pullman, WA. ♦

Above the Clearwater: Living on Stolen Land. By Bette Lynch Husted. 2004. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, Oregon. 176 p. US\$18.95 paper. ISBN 0-87071-0097.



Those captivated by the history of America's western lands and its people will find *Above the Clearwater: Living on Stolen Land*, a memoir by Bette Lynch Husted, both engaging and educational. Authored by a woman who lived to tell of her life experiences, the author reflects on her life and weaves brief history lessons throughout. It is as though we are climbing the author's family tree, investigating one branch at a time. Some branches are slowly pruned off and other branches

grow in their place. The branches' leaves are the stories and life experiences of those family members. Among the stories, the book showcases family pictures, helping create a visual image of the friends and family members who contributed to her life's happenings.

The collections of stories are organized into 3 main categories: childhood, motherhood, and adulthood. Beginning her life on an Idaho homestead, she struggles with the idea of living on stolen land—land taken from the Nez Perce—the death of parents and loved ones, the challenges of motherhood, and the discovery of her passion in life, teaching.

The rich content of the book consists of personal stories, bits of poetry, and family photos, grouped into 3 main sections, each containing anywhere from 3 to 7 chapters. The stories are relatively short, sometimes only a few paragraphs, and seem random in arrangement. It is almost as though the leaves (stories) that fell from her family tree were raked into a pile, then randomly picked out. The subtitle however, is a bit misleading. Rarely does the author wrestle with the idea of living on stolen land but instead explores more of her life experiences, revealing her family's joys, tragedies, secrets, and unanswered questions.

Visually, this book is appealing to the eye. The black-and-white photographs reinforce the time period of the content. In retrospect, the tree as a whole captures the essence of times forgotten. Historians, naturalists, poetry lovers, and women of all ages will find *Above the Clearwater: Living on Stolen Land* a captivating book for historical research or for pleasure.

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