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Miles from Nowhere: Tales from America's Contemporary Frontier

Dayton Duncan

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Dayton Duncan : Miles from Nowhere: Tales from America's Contemporary Frontier before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Miles from Nowhere: Tales from America's Contemporary Frontier:

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating Book About The America You Never Think About By Wayne A. Smith You thought the American frontier had disappeared? Well, Dayton Duncan spent a couple of years visiting those American counties that still meet the definition of frontier -- less than two people per square mile. In Miles From Nowhere, Duncan sheds light on what it means to live alone, really alone, no neighbors in sight or in small communities where there is no "next town over." There are quite a few counties in the mid-west and far west that meet the Census Bureau definition and the author provides an excellent sampling of what makes people stay or in some case move here. The place stories are sometimes fascinating and also interesting. One area of Nevada was the fallout zone for early nuclear tests -- chosen because it was almost empty. Duncan explores some of the people who lived under where the white ash fell and explores their continuing health problems as well as their exasperation with an unresponsive government. In Montana, there are still one-room schools where teachers live in trailers at the school site and teach one to ten kids from an attendance area measured in the hundreds or thousands of square miles. There are people in the mountains of Washington and Oregon who pack their cars with a week's worth of provisions in case they break down because that's how long it could take someone else to happen upon their stalled vehicle. And in Love County Texas, a county with under 1,000 people, the local elections are decided by feuds and family grudges that

separate people into warring camps for elected offices which hold no real power and have no real money to spend. I found a peek into these lives and stories fascinating and couldn't put the book down. Duncan has a way of getting these folks to open up and treats them matter-of-factly in a manner which allows the stories to speak for themselves. This is a very interesting book that opens up a part of America that almost all of the rest of us will only ever drive through while considering it empty. Its not all empty, in valleys and nooks and up miles of dirt trails and in other hide-a-ways live some of us who are Miles From Nowhere and live a life the rest of us would have a difficult time enduring. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A good read for any one who has traveled through places ...By Beth Cobbler As a person who has always had an odd fascination with places out in the middle of nowhere, I found "Miles from Nowhere" to be a very interesting book. The stories about the people Dayton Duncan meets "miles from nowhere" give the book color as they are interspersed with Duncan's facts, figures, and theories on the sparsely populated contemporary frontier. A good read for any one who has traveled through places in the United States where they've asked themselves, "Why would anybody want to live here?" 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. It takes a certain kind of person to appreciate this book By JDF3703 I found this a very interesting book but it is probably not for everyone. My Aunt had a 1600 acre ranch in Hemingford, Nebraska and I used to spend many enjoyable hours just exploring the landscape. I completely understand people's attraction or revulsion to the lifestyle. I would like to explore the areas mentioned in the book someday.

introduces a hearty cast of contemporary pioneers, including a mail-order bride, a polygamist mayor, a Navajo activist, and an octogenarian homesteader. By the author of *Out West: An American Journey*. National ad/promo. Tour.

From Publishers Weekly A perceptive and engaging observer, Duncan (*Out West: An American Journey*) set out in 1990 aboard the GMC Suburban truck he dubbed the Conestoga to describe life in several vast, underpopulated Western counties "where a land-hungry nation nibbled but lost its normal appetite." Duncan is no questing William Least Heat Moon or quirky Ian Frazier, but he ably melds history and reportage: as in the past, the schoolteacher and the rancher are the frontier couple. Although most frontier dwellers approach a cowboy stereotype, Duncan meets New Agers in Colorado's Saguache County; he notes a parallel to the days of the old frontier, when land was also marketed to people on the basis of dreams. Yet he also finds modernity, "the first commuters' gold rush," in Nevada, and regularly tracks the "irreducible minimum"--establishments a county can't function without--citing hairdressers and video rental stores. He concludes with a reasoned rebuke to the academics who argue that economic, climatic and social distress will depopulate these regions. "They have overlooked the irreducible minimum," he argues, claiming that sparsely settled places may undergo difficult adjustments but will persist. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Duncan traveled more than 30,000 miles of what he calls the contemporary American frontier, which consists of the 132 counties within 14 Western states that have fewer than two persons per square mile. For readers living in mainstream America, Duncan's tales sound like a report from a foreign country or a different time period. The strength of the book is in the accounts of people he meets in the nearly uninhabited--and sometimes nearly uninhabitable--regions. The residents are fiercely independent survivors who spend most of their lives battling the elements, yet they possess a deep love and respect for their surroundings. The same frontier spirit epitomized by the fur trappers and gold seekers of the late 1800s is alive and well, and Duncan, through his observations, descriptions, and characters, brings it back to life. This vastly entertaining and eye-opening reading experience is recommended for most collections. - Melinda Stivers Leach, Precision Editorial Svces., Wondervu, Col. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus s Duncan's *Out West* (1987), which retraced the route of Lewis and Clark, took the author to some remote locales--but to nothing like the outposts of civilization that he reports on in this solid, well-informed survey of the 132 counties in the American West that have population densities of fewer than two people per square mile. Duncan calls these counties--which sprawl over 15 states, with the greatest number in Texas, Montana, and Nebraska--the "contemporary frontier," and indeed there's an aura of rugged individualism about their scattered inhabitants that harkens back to the classic frontier. But there's also "an undercurrent of paranoia," Duncan says, bred by a vulnerability to an ex-rural America that uses these regions as waste dumps, nuclear-missile sites, and so on. It's this sort of unsentimental, balanced view of his subjects, backdropped by an in-depth historical framework, that gives Duncan's travelogue its resonance (though he displays neither the wit of an Ian Frazier nor the poetry of a Gary Paulsen) as he describes the many months he spent traveling the territory in a GMC Suburban ("a station wagon on steroids") that he christened the Conestoga. Typical of the counties is Nebraska's Banner County, with 1.1 people per square mile, whose businesses number a bank, two cafes, some home shops, and two hairdressers. Typical of the people the author met is the Texas UPS driver whose average day covered 338 miles in 12 hours--really just a Sunday drive in the American vastness that Duncan explores from myriad angles, covering ethnic groups (many Native Americans, few blacks); environment (harsh); crime (low); politics (often libertarian); death (often violent); grit and courage (endemic), and on and on. Sharply observed, literate travel writing that drives home just how big--and big-souled--this country really is. (Sixteen pages of bw photographs, one map--not seen) --

