



Burntwater

Scott Thybony

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In Navajo country, where the land is thick with legends and forgotten histories, a writer sets out to find a place that no longer exists except on a few old maps: Burntwater. The story opens when two friends get stuck in a remote pocket of the desert as a winter storm moves in. They are taking a wandering route across the Four Corners region, curving through Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona on a long arc into the mythic heart of the country. As they travel, the author calls up past experiences in this land where the past flows seamlessly into the present. He remembers a medicine man whose chanting could start the cold engine of a Volkswagen. He describes an act of sabotage against an oil company by two Vietnam vets armed with deer rifles. He recalls how a winter of herding sheep for a Navajo family and a search for a Hopi known as the Sun Chief led him further into a human landscape as strange and compelling as the terrain.

This book takes the backroads, crossing the Colorado Plateau from the headwaters of the Virgin River to the mouth of the Dirty Devil, from the badlands below Twin Angels to a remote mesa in Bandelier. As the miles go by and the stories unfold, there is a growing sense of mystery, of words not spoken, of messages carried on the wind. Reaching the Shrine of the Stone Lions, the writer recounts a near-fatal descent into the Grand Canyon where he finds a way to reconnect with the beauty of life. There his journey ends with an emotional punch that goes straight to the mind and the heart.

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Judith Craig:

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Haley Thacker:

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