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Singing Stone, a Natural History of the Escalante Canyons by Thomas Lowe Fleischner

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BOOK REVIEW

Singing Stone, a Natural History of the Escalante

Canyons. Thomas Lowe Fleischner. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, Utah. 1999. \$17.95, paperback. ISBN 0-87480-619-4.

I enjoyed reading this book. The author has gained much knowledge of the Escalante Canyons area and is willing to share his enthusiasm for the natural beauty one can find there.

The structure of the book is logical, with 2 main groups of chapters: an introductory chapter woven around the geology of the area, followed by a chapter relating to biology, and then a historical chapter concerning various groups of humans that have been in the area. This group of chapters is followed by a chapter summarizing range policy considering both local and national scales and another addressing recreational issues impacting the area in ways that were perhaps unanticipated. This final chapter also summarizes at least some of the author's views on environmentalism and the current debate concerning wilderness and roadless areas in the West. I was pleased with his attempt to open the issue to discussion. He outlined the issues he perceives, and while it is clear what the author personally feels about human uses of the Escalante Canyons, he is equally clear about his assessment of why opponents to his views voice their concerns.

The closing paragraph of this 2nd group of chapters summarizes quite succinctly the previous many pages with the author's view:

The world casts its eye toward the Escalante Country and values its scenic beauty. More and more seekers come, hungry for fun. Local residents try earnestly to make peace with the values and influences of outsiders. Gaunt cows of flesh and blood begin to be replaced by cash cows of the tourist industry—motels, gas stations, souvenir, and gear shops. This new industry, based on this new valuing of the Escalante Country, may provide a sustainability that has eluded this hidden corner of the American dream. Or it may yield problems of its own. The future, as has always been the case, cannot be foretold.

While the future “cannot be foretold,” the author shares with us his opinions about what might generally be expected by highlighting the past, from a geologic, biologic, and historic summary, which is easy to follow. Additionally, the author voices a plea, in several places in the Prologue and Epilogue, for more people to consider studies of “natural history” for the values they offer to humans—humans which he and others sense are becoming more and more detached from the natural world.

The book itself is adequately sturdy. Notes and References sections provide the opportunity for scholars, both casual and serious, to pursue primary literature and assess the author's views objectively. The section Taxonomy of Species Mentioned in Text will allow casual natural historians a chance to communicate using scientific names of a few of the thousands of species that occur in the Escalante Country. Others might want longer lists of species in the area, but that information can be found elsewhere and is often cited in the References section.

I was somewhat disappointed with the choice and reproduction of maps in the front of the book. They lack contrast and detail that could have been possible by choosing other, or drawing new, maps. As produced, they fail to communicate the amazing topography and complexity of the country this author so obviously loves.

I would recommend this book to potential readers from all factions that love the Escalante Country. It offers a chance to see how the area has affected the life of one who may have views differing from their own. I feel that the author was successful in expressing his opinion without becoming overly condescending or apologetic. It is an easy book to read.

As an added note, I will search these canyons personally for the alcove, exact location not given, which has so impressed Thomas Lowe Fleischner through the years.

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