

Books for Winter Reading About Nature and Texas

Short cold days and long winter nights seem like a good time to read some good books. Here are a few from my collection that I recommend you consider this winter.

If you haven't read Aldo Leopold's, "A Sand County Almanac" that would be the first book I would recommend, and it is available from the AgriLife Extension Bookstore online for only \$7. Other books about Leopold are "The Essential Aldo Leopold: Quotations and Commentaries", by Meine and Knight, "The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays by Aldo Leopold" by Flader and Callicott, "Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of the Ecological Attitude toward Deer, Wolves and Forests" by Flader, "For the Health of the Land" by Callicott and Freyfogle, and "Round River from the Journals of Aldo Leopold" by Luna Leopold (Aldo's son).

Roy Bedichek's "Adventures with a Texas Naturalist" was written while the author was taking a sabbatical in a shack in the NE part of the Hill Country in 1947. Bedichek's book can be considered the Texas version of "A Sand County Almanac". Bedichek was a friend of Texas authors J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb.

In a similar vein, the much-acclaimed writer John Graves' "Hard Scrabble: Observations on a Patch of Land" is a series of essays, again based, like Leopold's work, on observations on his place in Somervell Co. SW of Ft. Worth. Actually any of the dozen or so books by John Graves is recommended, but especially, from my point of view, "Goodbye to a River" and "From a Limestone Ledge".

For folks interested in the history of the Great Plains, the Dust Bowl, and the Drought of the 50's, I would recommend "The Great Plains" by Walter Prescott Webb, "The Worst Hard Time" by Timothy Egan, and "The Time it Never Rained" by Elmer Kelton. The latter is actually a novel. I virtually never read fiction as there is too much non-fiction I am interested in, but this book about the drought of the 50s, set not far from where I grew up, is certainly an exception.

For a detailed description of life in Texas from the early 16th century until the Civil War, you should read C. Allen Jones' "Texas Roots: Agriculture and Rural Life before the Civil War". For a fascinating description of travels around the Hill Country, especially in the areas of New Braunfels, San Antonio, and Fredericksburg in 1845 to 1847, read "Roemer's Texas" (alternate title, "Texas with particular Reference to German Immigration and the Appearance of the Country") by Ferdinand Roemer, translated from the German by Oswald Mueller.

There is also a two volume set of collections of quotations from early explorers and settlers by Del Weniger, "The Explorers' Texas: The Lands and Waters" and Vol 2. The Explorers' Texas: The Animals They Found.

For more recent accounts of rural Texas life in the early 20th century, there is a book edited by Thad Sitton, "Harder than Hardscrabble: Oral Recollections of Farming Life from the Edge of the Texas Hill Country". This is based on descriptions of life in the early 20th century by people who were displaced from their homes in order to build Fort Hood in 1942. Also, "Yesterday in the Texas Hill Country" is a book by Gilbert J. Jordan about growing up in a German settlement in Mason Co. in the same period.

A more recent account of preserving and loving remnants of the Blackland Prairies of Northeast Texas is "Prairie Time: A Blackland Portrait" by Matt White, published in 2006.

Two more general recent books by Richard Louv about the lack of knowledge and experience that average Americans have with Nature and the consequences of that are, "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" and "The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder".

A recent book about the problems with non-native plants and the importance of conserving native habitats is "Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants", by Douglas Tallamy.

"Enchanted Rock: A Natural and Human History" by Lance Allred is a book filled with over a thousand pictures of wildflowers, animals, birds and insects Allred photographed in Enchanted Rock State Park, as well as geological descriptions and human history discussions.

Finally, but I hope not last on your list, is my book, "Hill Country Landowners Guide".

Happy Reading.

Until next time...

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of the book "Hill Country Landowner's Guide". He can be reached at jstmn@ktc.com. Previous columns can be seen at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org.