"A remarkable book...beautifully written, deeply felt....The language begins in Western territory and experience but in the hands of an artist it touches all landscapes and all life. Doig is such an artist."

--- The Los Angeles Times

"...One expects a writer who attempts a memoir to have a large store of memories to draw on. Even so, Doig's powers of recall are nothing short of uncanny. The detail of people and events that his remarkable memory supplies, going back to his early childhood, make his story vivid and interesting, yet he never allows the book to become a mere chronological recitation...This House of Sky is worth reading just to savor the writing alone. There is an entrancing rhythm, balance and tone to Doig's simple, clear prose that imparts poetical beauty..." (Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 27, 1978)

"...a compelling exploration of a personal past and present that becomes far more than the sum of its small parts....This House of Sky is a book of deep love and grace, of painful and gallant rhythms. Mr. Doig's sense of the land and his marvelous sensitivity to the lives that touched his own make This House of Sky a work of art."

--- The Washington Star
"A masterpiece by two men joined in the past."

—THE SUNDAY OREGONIAN

"[Doig's] fascination with Swan is easy to understand, for Swan was an engrossing diarist—gossipy, humorous, vividly descriptive, seemingly determined to put the whole of his experience into writing—and the book is a fine one."

—THE NEW YORKER

"We owe Doig more than we can repay for letting us make the enchanting journey that connects today and the past through the pages of 'Winter Brothers.'"

—THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

"Doig's absorbing account of the season he spent peering over the shoulder of a man 11 decades older than himself . . . is a double portrait of striking clarity, yet with wonderfully subtle hues."

—SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"[A] gorgeous tribute to a man and a region unjustly neglected heretofore. The reader has the pleasure of encountering two contrasting styles and two angles of view, both infused with the fresh air and spirit of the Northwest."

—THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

"I admire this . . . for its broadened horizons and greater historical resonance, and for the way Doig stays stubbornly at the heart of his West, or Wests. He is not only a writer to be watched, he is already important."

—WALLACE STEGNER
"...Like a meticulous shipwright or carpenter, Ivan Doig fashions books of beautiful conception and impeccable workmanship. Employing a clean, clear prose as sturdy as the pine and fir and spruce of his native Montana, Doig writes paragraphs and chapters of unobtrusive brilliance...In The Sea Runners, a superbly simple adventure story puts four men against the all but infinite vastness of the North American continent...Doig's muscular, exact prose, his tactile sense of detail and his craftsmanlike control of form all contribute to a remarkable evocation of the human spirit in context with inhuman forces. (Boston Sunday Globe, Oct. 10, 1982)

THE SEA RUNNERS
In 1852, four men, Scandinavians indentured to the Russian Fur Company, plot their escape from virtual enslavement in the frontier Alaskan settlement of New Archangel. In a remarkable evocation of human endurance pitted against the furies of the elements, this poetic novel tracks the "vast weeks of dare..." as the four escapees dwindle to two in an incredible canoe journey down the Pacific Northwest coast to America. The four men, coarse and brutal, distinctive in background and the survival skills each brings to the perilous journey, share a commonality—paddling against the constant push of the North Pacific current as it wears deep into their bodies and souls. Doig, whose previous books, 'This House of Sky' and 'Winter Brothers,' won praise, creates his fictional sea-runners from the historical records of a similar "great and terrible journey."

"A tense, shrewdly modulated sea adventure....Readers who hailed This House of Sky and Winter Brothers will find this another safe harbor, for Doig continues as a prose writer of exulting originality....A polished chronicle of physical and spiritual endurance."

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--Library Journal

"Blending historical detail and believable dialogue with a remarkable ability to describe the natural world, Doig has fashioned a delightful adventure novel....A winning combination of Northwest history, muscular prose, and raw adventure."

--Booklist
"Doig seems to be one of those enviable writers whose every book is better than the previous one. The new novel is full of good writing and the sweat and tears and laughter of hardworking plain people....[Ivan Doig's writing] is more virile than [Paul] Horgan and less romantic than [Wallace] Stegner. A truer comparison might be with Robert Louis Stevenson because of Doig's magical welding of history with fiction, of adventure with everyday life, of legend with lore."

--Reid Beddow,
The Washington Post Book World

"His prose is at once simple and direct, yet rich and fanciful....The voice of his narrator is so binding that the audience is propelled into the lives of the characters....This reader can't wait for the sequels."

--George Harmon,
The Chicago Sun Times

"English Creek is old fashioned in the best sense of the word: Doig is concerned with the telling of a story that entertains, and he is also concerned with the novel's moral and ethical implications....he deserves to be better known."

--James Kaufmann,
The Christian Science Monitor

"Ivan Doig has a rare, uncanny skill for bringing history to life....In English Creek, his second novel, Doig again achieves a flawless weld of fact and fiction....[The characters] stay on long after the book is closed, more colorful and enduring than the history that inspired them. No more can be asked for the storyteller's art."

--Carol Van Strum,
USA Today

"Despite its setting in the most mythic of all American landscapes, English Creek is neither nostalgic nor simple: It's too concrete and detailed in its evocation of the past....In supple, muscular prose as terse and yet redolent with meaning as the speech of Montana, Ivan Doig grapples with universal issues of character and morality."

--Wendy Smith,
Newsday

"There is...a pervasive warmth, a gentleness, an affection for those long-distant Depression years and the toughness, the innocence, and the sense of community they shaped."

--The New Yorker
"Ivan Doig's magnificent new novel is an answer to the prayer of anyone who has loved a distant country or experienced the full-hearted enthusiasm of youth.... Part immigrant saga, part intelligent western, part sweeping romance, Dancing at the Rascal Fair further establishes its Seattle author in the front ranks of contemporary American writers.... Doig writes with grace and eloquence.... In this fine work of fiction, every word, every surprise, every resolution rings true."

--Michael Dorris,
The Seattle Times

"Ivan Doig is a happy mixture of poet and historian. In just nine years he has produced five truly distinctive books set in Montana and the Pacific Northwest, three of them novels. All beautifully evoke the American westering experience and firmly establish Doig as one of our finest Western writers."

--Richard Critchfield,
The Washington Post Book World

"Against a masterfully evoked backdrop, Mr. Doig addresses his real subject: love between friends, between the sexes, between the generations.... Doig's prose is as tight as new thread and as special as hand-made candy.... Dancing at the Rascal Fair races with real vigor and wit and passion."

--Lee. K. Abbott
The New York Times Book Review

"I find myself filled with such high praise for this book that instead of relating paltry bits of it, I want to quote the whole glorious thing.... It is dazzling to watch Doig depict generous, high-spirited characters."

--Pamela Gullard,
San Francisco Chronicle

"In his impressive new novel, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Ivan Doig stakes a claim to the mantle worn by Wallace Stegner for half a century, the reputation as our foremost recorder and interpreter of life in the historic high, dry American West. With This House of Sky, English Creek and especially this book, he has earned it.... His greatest strength is exploring the coagulated feelings of human beings within the family. His characters are not the morality-play heroes of the genre Western, but real people, tangled in their feelings, handicapped by their deficiencies, deeply decent, yearning for closeness, finding it only intermittently. Their melancholy dance of life is rendered with exquisite nuance." 

--Winifred Blevins,
Los Angeles Times Book Review
ICK McCASKILL, the protagonist of "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," is a crusty, retired Montana sheepherder with a willful and beautiful daughter, a wicked way with a one-liner and a serious disdain for most of what modern America has wrought — especially as the acne blight of contemporary life has manifested itself on the craggy face of his beloved state of Montana.

You wouldn't say that Jick is terminally annoyed, but you might not want to invite him on a long trip, either. Which is exactly what Jick's daughter, the maddening, mercurial Mariah, blithely does. The Montana centennial is in the offing and Mariah, a talented photojournalist, and her ex-husband, Riley Wright, a columnist, have been assigned to come up with a series of features on the state for their paper, The Montanian. Mariah dragoons the reluctant Jick into chauffeuring the pair around in his Winnebago while they go poking into the far corners of the state looking for story ideas.

Since Jick and Riley harbor a cordial loathing for one another, it's a mismatch made in heaven, but it sure makes for a hell of a book. "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" (Atheneum; $24.95) is the third entry in Ivan Doig's Rocky Mountain trilogy ("English Creek" deals with the Far West of the 1930s, and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" with the late 19th century), and even if there's not much in the way of two-fisted action and if the sex is by inference only, this is still a book that sports major huevos.

Burr Snider,
San Francisco Examiner

"An extravagant celebration filled with devotion, and with passion for its locale, its people, and their history....Ivan Doig is a writer whose work makes readers recall why they love to read....His novels lay whole worlds at your feet and invite you to make them your own."

Susan Dodd,
The Washington Post
Fifteen years after This House of Sky, Doig (Ride with Me, Mariah Montana, 1990, etc.) returns to his earliest days in another profoundly original and lustrous re-creation.

Inspired by wartime letters (just recently presented to the author) from his mother to a favorite brother stationed in the Pacific, Doig traces his family's struggles from Montana ranches so isolated that "weather was the only neighbor" to the shared hopes of an Arizona defense workers' housing project and back to Montana, with its steady string of natural indignities. Doig's parents eke out a living, always on the verge of better times despite the shadow of his mother's asthma and the prevalence of daily hardships: coyotes near the sheep ranch; infested one-room houses; road mud "thick enough to float a train." His mother's death comes without warning, on the author's sixth birthday, just as the sheep are ready for shearing and a certain healthy profit. "Nobody got over her," Doig writes, "those around me in my growing-up stayed hit."

Doig captures the serial disasters, as well as several cherished family scenes—including a lunch of Spam sandwiches and lime Kool-Aid—with the clarifying beauty and sure shaping hand of his first book. Even when mining some of the same material that appeared there, he claims new territory for the significant figures in his life.

-KIRKUS REVIEWS

In poetic and precise prose, Doig has crafted a worthy complement to the acclaimed memoir, This House of Sky. While that book concerned family tensions after his mother Berneta's death in 1945, here, prompted by a cache of his mother's letters to her sailor brother from that year, Doig recreates a life "the five-year-old dirtmover that was me" could hardly have known. He describes life in an Arizona housing project for defense workers, where his family moved to spare his mother's asthma. He tracks down his Uncle Wally's old beau, about whom his mother wrote. He recalls the battle between his grandmother and father over his mother's medical condition, "the geography of risk" and the family move back to Montana ranching. Doig's writing is immensely quotable—listening to his elders was "prowling with your ears."

What makes this book so touching is that, through letters, Doig realizes how much he, the writer, owes to "this earlier family member who worked hard."

-PUBLISHERS WEEKLY
"...Bucking the Sun is one of those books that takes you over as you read it, invading your daydreams, lodging its cadences in your brain, summoning you back to the page."

-- Washington Post

"...Doig now has to be considered the premier writer of the American West."

-- Chicago Sun-Times

"Bucking the Sun derives its narrative energy from as tangled a web of familial and psychosexual rivalries as one is apt to encounter this side of Hamlet or The Brothers Karamazov."

-- Entertainment Weekly

"What Doig understands well and describes with fascinating power is the way nothing in life is ever still."

-- San Francisco Chronicle

"The reader is pulled into their story by a puzzle the author has set....The device works beautifully and so does Doig's rogush novel."

-- Time

"Bucking the Sun is a glorious piece of writing."

-- Gannett News Service

"...a neat, excruciating Agatha Christie country house murder set down in sprawling Montana."

-- New York Times

"Ivan Doig is a terrific writer and a great storyteller."

-- Christian Science Monitor
A Family of New Deal Dam Builders

Novel spotlights those who helped tame water in the West

BUCKING THE SUN
By Ivan Doig
Simon & Schuster; 412 pages; $23

REVIEWED BY JOHN HARVEY

Since his award-winning memoir, "This House of Sky," was published in the late 70s, Montana-born writer and historian Ivan Doig has used the novel form to speculate upon the lives of people who lived and live in the West.

With "Bucking the Sun," which is principally set in the upper reaches of Missouri River country in the Depression years leading up to the start of World War II, he has achieved his most adroit blend of fact and fancy in what is perhaps his best book since that first work.

What sets Doig apart from others who have farmed the same terrain is the deft way he handles the fruits of his research; fact and anecdote are woven into the text with a light and often humorous touch. The sense we have is of a storyteller who is familiar and comfortable with his material; as readers, we trust the teller, and so we trust the tale.

Taking as its basis the construction of the Fort Peck Dam, a major New Deal project that brought work to thousands and in so doing flooded vast tracts of land, Doig centers his story on the lives of the Duff family — whose men were immigrants from Scotland, as was the case with Doig's own kin. If Doig the historian, with his light but liberal use of archive material from the Fort Peck Dam oral history project and the pages of the "Engineering News-Record," gives this saga an authentic structure, it is Doig the novelist who lifts it to great heights with his portrayal of the five Duff men — two brothers and three sons — and the women they love and marry.

"Selfmade men always do a lopsided job of it," the novel begins — a wonderful phrase — and in part that is what the story explores: Hugh Duff and his twin sons, Neil and Bruce, forever adapting to the changing demands of the land and work around them, learning as they go. Set against them is the older son, Owen, who turns against his father by going to college to study engineering and helpsmastermind the building of the dam.

They are a headstrong bunch, creatures of hard work and heady Impulse, adroit with their hands in every sense, and given to wooing women on the tight-grained tongue-and-groove dance floor of the Blue Eagle — a floor they laid themselves in a single night.

Hugh, the father, is stubborn and strong-willed, loving his wife Meg almost despite himself in a relationship that owes as much to attrition as it does to affection. He respects and admires Meg just as he writhes under the weight of her judgment, her "nurselike sense of attention, the way of peering at you as if clerking for God." And some Friday nights, his pay burning a hole in his back pocket, he kicks over the traces and defies her by spending the night in town, drinking the whorehouse dry.

Hugh never quite forgives Owen for turning his back on him and finding a life of his own — a life that threatens the one Hugh had struggled to build for himself — yet nevertheless he eventually bows to the inevitable and accepts work on the construction of the dam. He moves himself and Meg into an ill-built shack, which Owen, tellingly, papers over with blueprints to stem the cold.

The younger sons also benefit from Owen's patronage and find work attached to the new project; Neil is seemingly the more stable, while Bruce jumps fitfully from one dangerous task to the next, relishing each new risk. When Hugh's brother, Darius, a left-wing agitator from the shipyards of the Clyde, arrives without call or expectation in their midst, things are thrown up into the air even more. Not only are Darius' political beliefs a potential threat to the building of the dam, the love he has nurtured all these years for Hugh's wife, Meg, has the capability of wenching that central relationship asunder.

But this is not a book about men doing what men do; women are given nearly equal space in the story. Their strengths are their own — they are handsome, willful, dangerous — and they are not used solely to hold family and community together, though to a point they do that too. There is a pervading sense that Doig, in common with, say, two writers as different as Larry McMurtry and Carl Hiaasen, not only respects women, he actually likes them. For example, Owen's wife Charleen, independent and single-minded, becomes as involved in the running of her own business as Owen is in his work on the dam.

Some way into the novel, Doig uses a perfect simile: "This family is like nine radios going at once . . . Every Duff a different station." It's apt because these Duffs are talkers, and when they're not talking, they're singing, or dancing, or doing all three at once. The remark also describes how the narrative works, the skill with which we are switched around from voice to voice, location to location, eavesdropping on a sentence here, a brief scene there, a near-documentary description or the most intimate of moments. This is a story about connections, attractions, shifting currents and the relationship between

See Page 4
Doig’s great achievement is to string his compelling narrative along these connections between outer and inner worlds, the silent stirrings of the human heart and the swelling moments of a river, both imperceptible until it is almost too late. He does this with dramatic sweep and yet great subtlety, letting the human and the natural spheres spin together and bind to one another, almost unseen.

John Harvey’s forthcoming novel is “Easy Meal” (Henry Holt).
review compendiums done for Amazon.com are in Carol Solle: Website Postings file
see also quotes in "content" provided Amazon.com 7/96, in Amazon.com file
EARLY RAVES FOR "THE SEA RUNNERS" BY IVAN DOIG, "A PROSE WRITER OF EXULTING ORIGINALITY"*

THE SEA RUNNERS

In 1852, four men. Scandinavians indentured to the Russian Fur Company, plot their escape from virtual enslavement in the frontier Alaskan settlement of New Archangel. In a remarkable evocation of human endurance pitted against the furies of the elements, this poetic novel tracks the "vast weeks of dare," as the four escapees dwindle to two in an incredible canoe journey down the Pacific Northwest coast to America. The four men, coarse and brutal, distinctive in background and the survival skills each brings to the perilous journey, share a commonality—paddling against the constant push of the North Pacific current as it wears deep into their bodies and souls. Doig, whose previous books, "This House of Sky" and "Winter Brothers," won praise, creates his fictional sea-runners from the historical records of a similar "great and terrible journey."

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--Booklist

EXTRAORDINARY PRAISE FOR IVAN DOIG'S PREVIOUS BOOKS

For This House of Sky (1978):

"A remarkable book.... beautifully written, deeply felt.... The language begins in Western territory and experience but in the hands of an artist it touches all landscapes and all life. Doig is such an artist."

--The Los Angeles Times

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--Time Magazine

For Winter Brothers (1980):

"A gorgeous tribute to a man and a region unjustly neglected heretofore... infused with the fresh air and spirit of the Northwest."

--The New York Times Book Review

"A simple, loving ceremony of touch."

--The Washington Post

"We owe Doig more than we can repay for letting us make the enchanting journey that connects today and the past through the pages of Winter Brothers."

--The Christian Science Monitor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ivan Doig has worked as a ranch hand, newspaperman, magazine editor, and writer. He is the author of three textbooks and two works of non-fiction, the highly acclaimed This House of Sky and Winter Brothers. Nominated for a National Book Award in contemporary thought, This House of Sky won a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. Winter Brothers, also a winner of the Pacific Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award, has been adapted for a public television documentary which will air this fall. Born in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, Ivan Doig received a B.S. and M.S. in journalism from Northwestern University and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington. He lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol, where he is currently at work on a novel set in Montana. THE SEA RUNNERS is Ivan Doig's first novel.

THE SEA RUNNERS
a novel by Ivan Doig
Publication Date: September 30, 1982
Price: $13.95

August 1982
Fifteen years after *This House of Sky*, Doig (*Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*, 1990, etc.) returns to his earliest days in another profoundly original and lustrous re-creation.

Inspired by wartime letters (just recently presented to the author) from his mother to a favorite brother stationed in the Pacific, Doig traces his family's struggles from Montana ranches so isolated that "weather was the only neighbor" to the shared hopes of an Arizona defense workers' housing project and back to Montana, with its steady string of natural indignities. Doig's parents eke out a living, always on the verge of better times despite the shadow of his mother's asthma and the prevalence of daily hardships: coyotes near the sheep ranch; infested one-room houses; road mud "thick enough to float a train." His mother's death comes without warning, on the author's sixth birthday, just as the sheep are ready for shearing and a certain healthy profit. "Nobody got over her," Doig writes, "those around me in my growing-up stayed hit."

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-PUBLISHERS WEEKLY
Edward Hoagland has praised his work for "lore, love and grace combined."
"Ivan Doig is one of the best we've got—a muscular and exceedingly good writer who understands our hunger for stories."

--Annie Proulx
"ENGLISH CREEK" BY IVAN DOIG

A NEW NOVEL BY "THE MOST IMPRESSIVE WESTERN WRITER OF OUR GENERATION"*

When Ivan Doig's first novel and third book appeared in 1982, Henry Kisor wrote in the Chicago Sun-Times, "This House of Sky and Winter Brothers proved his originality as a thinker. Now in The Sea Runners, he has become a splendid lyric storyteller."

Among the other nationwide raves, The San Francisco Chronicle said, "Doig has won a reputation as the most impressive Western writer of our generation."* And the Houston Post commented, "Doig gives the reader a look at a little-known time and place through the eyes of believable and sympathetic characters....He is working on a second book of fiction, set in Montana. If it turns out to be as good as The Sea Runners, it will be something to look forward to indeed." Now Ivan Doig's eagerly-awaited second novel ENGLISH CREEK is set for publication by Atheneum on October 24, 1984 ($15.95) and it is certain to fulfill the highest expectations of his readers.

ENGLISH CREEK takes place in Montana in 1939--as the clouds of the Depression are vanishing and the clouds of war gathering. It is the story of one summer in the life of 14-year-old Jick McCaskill as he approaches adulthood, "old enough to be on the edge of everything and too young to get the middle of any of it." With a keen eye and fine sense of humor, Jick recounts the events of that summer--from the annual sheep count with his father to a July Fourth rodeo and picnic, from long days stacking hay ("It occurs to me: does everybody these days think that hay naturally comes in bales?") to the high drama of an end-of-summer raging forest fire. And he brings to life the people--his forest ranger father, his brother Alec who, against his parents' wishes, wants to forgo college for a girl and cowboy life, Stanley Meixell, a hard-drinking ex-ranger, who seems mysteriously linked to his father's past, and a host of other colorful characters.

As the story unfolds against the beautiful and awesome Montana landscape, Doig once again brilliantly captures a special time and place. Early readers are unanimous in their praise:

"Doig catches magnificently the flavor of the speech and life in the Northwest....The rodeo and barn dance are a beautiful and amusing piece of Americana, while the pioneering and human spirit of Jick and his clan echo throughout."

--Publishers Weekly

"Doig's reconstruction of 1930s fire-fighting--from the roar of a tree 'crowning out' to dust and char--is a spellbinder....A savory, warming, and finely crafted novel."

--Kirkus Reviews (starred)

-more-
"We become entirely absorbed in his recollections of a hard, unforgiving rewarding country life. An excellent coming of age novel."

--Library Journal

"In its leisurely passage through a single summer, this novel marvelously evokes Montana--the country, the life, the people, the occupations... Here is the real Montana, the real West, through the eyes of a real writer."

--Wallace Stegner

"A marvelous stretch of writing from the heart of the big sky country, at once an homage and a celebration of a way of life that is passing."

--Wright Morris

"Ivan Doig writes about Montana with an ingratiating combination of lyricism and precise description... The coming-of-age story is affecting... but the real hero here is Montana itself, from its hayfields and sheep ranches to the grandeur of its towering mountains."

--Booklist

Ivan Doig grew up in northern Montana along the Rocky Mountain Front where ENGLISH CREEK takes place. "One of my first memories," he writes, "a few months before my sixth birthday, is of hearing my parents and their neighbors discuss the radio news of the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in April, 1945. Thus it is very nearly forty years now that I have been listening to Montanans. But never with more benefit than during the writing of ENGLISH CREEK."

Doig has worked as a ranch hand, newspaperman, magazine editor and writer. His 1978 book This House of Sky was nominated for a National Book Award in contemporary thought, and it was also honored with a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. Winter Brothers, published in 1980, was also a winner of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award, and was adapted for a public television documentary. The Sea Runners, Doig's first novel, was published to high acclaim by Atheneum in 1982. Born in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, in 1939, Doig received a B.S. and M.S. in journalism from Northwestern University and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington. He lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol, and is currently at work on the second novel of a trilogy about the fictional McCaskill family and their Two Medicine country.

ENGLISH CREEK

Ivan Doig

Publication Date: October 24, 1984 ($15.95)
Ivan Doig: The Old West And the New

DANCING AT THE RASCAL FAIR
By Ivan Doig
Atheneum. 403 pp. $18.95
By Richard Critchfield

I VAN DOIG is a happy mixture of poet and historian. In just nine years he has produced five truly distinctive books set in Montana and the Pacific Northwest, three of them novels. All beautifully evoke the American westering experience and firmly establish Doig as one of our finest Western writers.

Look at his achievement: This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind, published in 1978 when he was 39, is a powerful memoir about his widowed, sheep-herding father, Charles Doig, son of Scottish immigrants, who instills in his son a deep affinity for language, storytelling and the raw Montana landscape.

This strong sense of the land and a growing preoccupation with time are further developed in Winter Brothers (1980), interwoven observations by Doig and excerpts from the 1862-90 diaries of James G. Swan, an obscure artist and observer of coastal Indian life in the Pacific Northwest.

The imaginary retrieval of the past became central in The Sea Runners (1982), his first novel. Based on an actual event, it tells of the escape by four indentured Swedes from Russian America (1853 Alaska) to what is now Oregon in a stolen canoe; two die on the way. It is a little masterpiece of harrowing adventure.

In English Creek (1984), the first novel in a projected trilogy, Doig introduces the fictional McCaskill family and their sprawling Two Medicine Country. This is the familiar geography of This House of Sky, though the town of Dupuyer, just below the Rocky Mountain Front, has now become Gros Ventre (the locals say "Grove-on"). It is summer in the 1930s and Jick McCaskill, the 14-year-old narrator, goes on a horseback trip with his forest ranger father, Varick. Some of the set pieces in this coming-of-age story, such as a Fourth of July rodeo and a forest fire, are terrific.

Dancing at the Rascal Fair is the trilogy's second volume. Another panorama of life in Two Medicine Country, it takes place much earlier, 1889-1919. —Continued on page 11
Dancing at the Rascal Fair

and its dramatic thread is the friendship and eventual falling out of two Scotsmen, Rob Barclay and Angus McCaskill, Jick's grandfather. They venture from Glasgow by steerage, fellow villagers of Neathemuir, and homestead as neighbors in Montana, doing what they know, sheep-farming. At work out on the range, in the lambing shed and docking corral, over 30 years they prosper. Angus teaches in a one-room school and, thwarted in his love for Anna Ramsay, another teacher, he marries Rob's sister, Adair.

Time passes through them as they go from youth to middle age, and blizzards, the 1918 influenza epidemic and the raw, rugged land take their toll. The building of fences to divide the once-open rangeland into national forest spells the passing of these pioneer days.

The book is warm in feeling and rich in texture; I found that it packed more emotional punch once Varick, the McCaskills' only child, enters the story; there are strong overtones of Doig's own relationship with his father. Indeed, Charles Doig is quoted at the outset: "Scotchmen and coyotes was the only ones that could live in the Basin, and pretty damn soon the coyotes starved out." An attraction of Doig's books is how they all fit together; they expand our experience.

Doig does better to convey the quiet feel and detail of ordinary life than to crash cymbals in dramatic crescendo. As Chekhov said, the best writers are realistic and describe life as it is. Doig has said that he tries to "make the stuff up as realistically as I can." But to describe past life as it was is to lack the stimulus of immediate experience. How does he breathe so much life into it?

The secret of Ivan Doig's gift, I think, is his sense of surfaces and place and his ear for dialogue; his people come alive when they talk. And they talk all the time. All but one of his books is written in the first person.

In the earliest, 1889, passages of Dancing at the Rascal Fair, his two Scots speak English strongly influenced by Biblical and Shakespearean cadences. By 1919, they sound a lot more like their fellow American sheep-herders and ranchers. Doig can enter the talk of Burns-quoting Scottish immigrants or grim Scandinavian escapees of a century ago. Or the talk of modern cowboys at a rodeo. He changes his voice as he becomes for the time being one of them.

Here is Angus McCaskill, noting infant lambs are "a majority of legs, long and askew as the drone pipes of a limp bagpipe." The same narrator voices Doig's creed of realism: "It would be heartening to think the world is growing less harsh, but the evidence doesn't often say so."

Nor is Doig's gift merely literary. Besides his intuitions and artistry there is the iron of purpose of an ex-ranch hand who has earned his PhD in history. An enormous researcher, Doig is one of those historians who goes from library to library forever on the scent of new documentation. He pours over faded records and newspapers, he reads, he hikes, he explores, and he talks to all the old people he can. Unusual among novelists, he provides an acknowledgments section at the back of each book, telling how he put it together and who helped him.

In Montana and the Pacific Northwest, this gifted poet-historian has enormous, vivid experience to draw upon as he sets out to rescue some more of our past from oblivion. Let us cheer him on, hoping the next nine years will be as productive as the last.
Spurred by the 1989 centennial of Montana’s statehood, moody widower Jack McCaskill, turning 65, criss-crosses the state in a Winnebago with his photographer daughter, strong-willed, feisty Mariah, and her ex-husband, Riley, a reporter. In this crowning volume of a trilogy, which includes English Creek and Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Doig again displays a masterly skill in depicting the American West which few writers match. Instead of patriotic hoopla, the canvas is dotted with failing ranches, oil pumps clanking away in farmed fields, Montanans tensely poised between an uncertain future and a frontier past. Jick, who narrates this road story with brash humor, faces two emotional crises: Mariah precipitously announces plans to remarry Riley; and Leonia, Riley’s mother, who once had an ill-fated fling with Jick’s dead brother, joins the caravan. This entertaining ramble adroitly blends travelogue, family drama, history and newspaper lore.

--Publishers Weekly

The conclusion to Doig’s Montana trilogy centered on the McCaskill family: Dancing at the Rascal Fair was set in the homesteading era, English Creek during the Depression. Here, a contemporary picaresque odyssey through Montana’s centennial moves mostly on father-daughter aggravation and expertly done (and well-researched) landscapes.

Jack McCaskill, at 65, has lost his wife Marcella to cancer. His daughter Mariah, a photographer with “a chance that’ll never come again,” invites him to travel in a Winnebago with her and ex-husband Riley, an impulsive, eccentric journalist, as they explore Montana à la Charles Kuralt. In a sometimes shrill, sometimes nostalgic tone, Jack narrates the ensuing journey to publication and to love. Jick has been grieving, but in the Winnebago he witnesses daughter and son-in-law seemingly fall in love again as they endlessly argue over destination, story angle, and almost everything else. We get a lot of McCaskill family history, a Blue Highways-like sampling of Montana’s old geezers, grizzlies, mining country, and “true grit”; and, as Mariah looks for the right pictures and Riley builds a following that is more than regional, Jick does in fact move forward again, with the help of a heart-to-heart with Leonia, Riley’s mother and a widow herself. Riley proposes again to Mariah and asks her to accompany him to California, where a big paper has made him an offer. Mariah wavers but finally realizes that “you and I love just some of each other.” So things go, in a book where the narrator wisely realizes that “Enumerating is one thing and making it all add up is another.”

A paean to Montana and frontiersmanship—but also a casually artful, and triumphant, end to Doig’s trilogy.

--Kirkus Reviews

To conclude his Montana trilogy (see also English Creek [BKLO 1584] and Dancing at the Rascal Fair [BKLO 8784]), Ivan Doig moves forward in time—and then looks back. What narrator Jack McCaskill calls “memory storms,” unprovoked assaults from the past, drive the action in this ruminative look at growing up and growing old, western style. A teenager at the time of the events in English Creek, McCaskill is 65 in 1989, a recent widower, and struggling to hold on to his beloved ranch in the face of massive societal change (“Maybe what I have known how to do all my life, which is ranching, simply does not register any more”). Reluctantly, he agrees to accompany his daughter, Mariah, a photographer, and her ex-husband, Riley, a reporter, as they tour Montana in a Winnebago, on assignment for a newspaper, gathering human-interest stories relating to the state’s centennial celebration. Personal history mixes with Montana history as the trio dodges buffaloes, visits the site of Chief Joseph’s surrender, and deal with unresolved and marital discord. Doig continues to excel at creating a sense of place, and, as before, the grandeur of the West is effectively set against the ineffable sadness of human lives—the mis­conceived motives, the coming together and the breaking apart, the private sorrows and the unrealized hopes.

--Booklist

To explore the meaning of Montana’s century of statehood, 65-year-old Jack McCaskill, his photographer daughter Mariah, and her newspaper columnist ex-husband Riley Wright tour the Treasure State in Jick’s Winnebago. While Riley writes on-the-scene dispatches and Mariah takes photos of the places they visit, Jick, the narrator, recounts the state’s—and his family’s—good and bad times. A lengthy picaresque with innumerable well-crafted vignettes, this leisurely novel could easily serve as a tour guide of Montana’s historic places. As the miles go by, Riley and Mariah again fall in and out of love, and Jick, a widower, unexpectedly finds a new mate. The concluding volume in the McCaskill trilogy, which includes English Creek (LJ 10/1/84) and Dancing at the Rascal Fair (G. K. Hall, 1989), is highly recommended for its depiction of the past’s impact on the present.

--Library Journal (starred review)

Publication Date: September 28, 1990 ($18.95)
Ivan Doig

RIDE WITH ME,
MARIAH MONTANA

ON THE ROAD WITH IVAN DOIG

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The rigors and splendors of travel competed during the writing of RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA as Doig traced out his characters' reportorial "circumnavigation" of Montana's landscape and history during the state's centennial year. At the National Bison Range at Moiese, a buffalo herd grazed past his car so close the swish of their tails could be heard. At the Chief Joseph Battlefield, while changing to a heavier coat as night and cold descended, Doig locked himself out of his rental car "fifteen miles from anywhere -- a bonehead maneuver I immediately foisted off onto one of my characters." Montana was being scorched by record heat in the summer of 1988 as Doig and his photographer wife, Carol, drove a newly rented motorhome out onto the prairie expanses. When the temperature hit 105, the motorhome conked out on a remote road. "Miraculously, with maybe a few cusswords thrown in," as Doig puts it, the vehicle was coaxed back to life, only to suffer system failures of one kind or another in each day's extreme heat until the ultimate meltdown, the air conditioner. The Doigs' final recourse: a bedtime visit to a swimming pool and then sleeping in wet bathing suits. "Clamminess never felt better," says Doig.

The grandson of Montana homesteaders and the son of Montana ranch workers, Ivan Doig lets his book have the last word on his belovedly difficult home country: "You look at the unbeatable way the land latches into the sky atop the Rocky Mountain Front or on the curve of the planet across the plains, and you end up calculating that our first hundred years here could have been spent worse."

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May 1990
NEWS OF

SUSAN RICHMAN, Vice President, Director of Publicity
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Ivan Doig

RIDE WITH ME,
MARIAH MONTANA

EXTRAORDINARY PRAISE FOR IVAN DOIG'S PREVIOUS NOVELS

For "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987)

"Ivan Doig's magnificent new novel is an answer to the prayer of anyone who has loved a distant country or experienced the full-hearted enthusiasm of youth.... Part immigrant saga, part intelligent western, part sweeping romance, Dancing at the Rascal Fair further establishes its Seattle author in the front ranks of contemporary American writers....Doig writes with grace and eloquence....In this fine work of fiction, every word, every surprise, every resolution rings true."

--Michael Dorris,
The Seattle Times

"Ivan Doig is a happy mixture of poet and historian. In just nine years he has produced five truly distinctive books set in Montana and the Pacific Northwest, three of them novels. All beautifully evoke the American westering experience and firmly establish Doig as one of our finest Western writers."

--Richard Critchfield,
The Washington Post Book World

"Against a masterfully evoked backdrop, Mr. Doig addresses his real subject: love between friends, between the sexes, between the generations....Doig's prose is as tight as new thread and as special as hand-made candy...Dancing at the Rascal Fair races with real vigor and wit and passion."

--Lee. K. Abbott
The New York Times Book Review

"I find myself filled with such high praise for this book that instead of relating paltry bits of it, I want to quote the whole glorious thing....It is dazzling to watch Doig depict generous, high-spirited characters."

--Pamela Gullard,
San Francisco Chronicle

"In his impressive new novel, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Ivan Doig stakes a claim to the mantle worn by Wallace Stegner for half a century, the reputation as our foremost recorder and interpreter of life in the historic high, dry American West. With This House of Sky, English Creek and especially this book, he has earned it....His greatest strength is exploring the coagulated feelings of human beings within the family. His characters are not the morality-play heroes of the genre Western, but real people, tangled in their feelings, handicapped by their deficiencies, deeply decent, yearning for closeness, finding it only intermittently. Their melancholy dance of life is rendered with exquisite nuance."

--Winifred Blevins,
The Los Angeles Times Book Review

"Ivan Doig's Dancing at the Rascal Fair is one of the rarest treats a reader may enjoy: a novel to be savored from word to word, page to page -- a realistic tale of pioneer Scottish ranchers battling for survival in the northernmost reaches of Montana, told in the lyrical prose and sly idiomatic wit that was their heritage from remote Gaelic ancestors."

--Noland Norgaard,
The Denver Post

--more--
"Doig's ability to capture in print the many conflicting emotions, phobias and dreams of all human beings is so rare that he has to be a very special person himself....This is a beautiful piece of work."
--Jeff Guinn, Fort Worth Star-Telegram

For "English Creek" (1984)

"Doig seems to be one of those enviable writers whose every book is better than the previous one. The new novel is full of good writing and the sweat and tears and laughter of hardworking plain people...[Ivan Doig's writing] is more virile than [Paul] Horgan and less romantic than [Wallace] Stegner. A truer comparison might be with Robert Louis Stevenson because of Doig's magical welding of history with fiction, of adventure with everyday life, of legend with lore."
--Reid Beddow, The Washington Post Book World

"His prose is at once simple and direct, yet rich and fanciful....The voice of his narrator is so binding that the audience is propelled into the lives of the characters....This reader can't wait for the sequels."
--George Harmon, The Chicago Sun Times

"Doig combines all of what is best about America in his story: the humor, the landscape, the ancestry of characters...The only solace in finishing this wonderful novel is the anticipation of the two more to come."
--The Chicago Tribune

"Two things make this nostalgic western novel especially delightful: old Jick's idiosyncratic theories about everything from in-laws to General Custer; and young Jick's reluctance to come of age, coupled with his precocious understanding that that's exactly what he's doing. Readers will delight in Mr. Doig's evocation of the Montana landscape through language that is tender, lyrical and forceful."

"English Creek is old fashioned in the best sense of the word: Doig is concerned with the telling of a story that entertains, and he is also concerned with the novel's moral and ethical implications....he deserves to be better known."
--James Kaufmann, The Christian Science Monitor

"Ivan Doig has a rare, uncanny skill for bringing history to life....In English Creek, his second novel, Doig again achieves a flawless weld of fact and fiction....[The characters] stay on long after the book is closed, more colorful and enduring than the history that inspired them. No more can be asked for the storyteller's art."
--Carol Van Strum, USA Today

"Despite its setting in the most mythic of all American landscapes, English Creek is neither nostalgic nor simple: It's too concrete and detailed in its evocation of the past....In supple, muscular prose as terse and yet redolent with meaning as the speech of Montana, Ivan Doig grapples with universal issues of character and morality."
--Wendy Smith, Newsday

"There is...a pervasive warmth, a gentleness, an affection for those long-distant Depression years and the toughness, the innocence, and the sense of community they shaped."
--The New Yorker

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--The New Yorker

August 1990
Ivan Doig

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May 1990
A NEW NOVEL BY "THE MOST IMPRESSIVE WESTERN WRITER OF OUR GENERATION"*

When Ivan Doig's first novel and third book appeared in 1982, Henry Kisor wrote in the Chicago Sun-Times, "This House of Sky and Winter Brothers proved his originality as a thinker. Now in The Sea Runners, he has become a splendid lyric storyteller."

Among the other nationwide raves, The San Francisco Chronicle said, "Doig has won a reputation as the most impressive Western writer of our generation." And the Houston Post commented, "Doig gives the reader a look at a little-known time and place through the eyes of believable and sympathetic characters....He is working on a second book of fiction, set in Montana. If it turns out to be as good as The Sea Runners, it will be something to look forward to indeed." Now Ivan Doig's eagerly-awaited second novel ENGLISH CREEK is set for publication by Atheneum on October 24, 1984 ($15.95) and it is certain to fulfill the highest expectations of his readers.

ENGLISH CREEK takes place in Montana in 1939—as the clouds of the Depression are vanishing and the clouds of war gathering. It is the story of one summer in the life of 14-year-old Jick McCaskill as he approaches adulthood, "old enough to be on the edge of everything and too young to get the middle of any of it." With a keen eye and fine sense of humor, Jick recounts the events of that summer—from the annual sheep count with his father to a July Fourth rodeo and picnic, from long days stacking hay ("It occurs to me: does everybody these days think that hay naturally comes in bales?") to the high drama of an end-of-summer raging forest fire. And he brings to life the people—his forest ranger father, his brother Alec who, against his parents' wishes, wants to forgo college for a girl and cowboy life, Stanley Meixell, a hard-drinking ex-ranger, who seems mysteriously linked to his father's past, and a host of other colorful characters.

As the story unfolds against the beautiful and awesome Montana landscape, Doig once again brilliantly captures a special time and place. Early readers are unanimous in their praise:

"Doig catches magnificently the flavor of the speech and life in the Northwest....The rodeo and barn dance are a beautiful and amusing piece of Americana, while the pioneering and human spirit of Jick and his clan echo throughout."

—Publishers Weekly

"Doig's reconstruction of 1930s fire-fighting—from the roar of a tree 'crowning out' to dust and char—is a spellbinder....A savory, warming, and finely crafted novel."

—Kirkus Reviews (starred)
"We become entirely absorbed in his recollections of a hard, unforgiving rewarding country life. An excellent coming of age novel."

--Library Journal

"In its leisurely passage through a single summer, this novel marvelously evokes Montana—the country, the life, the people, the occupations.... Here is the real Montana, the real West, through the eyes of a real writer."

--Wallace Stegner

"A marvelous stretch of writing from the heart of the big sky country, at once an homage and a celebration of a way of life that is passing."

--Wright Morris

"Ivan Doig writes about Montana with an ingratiating combination of lyricism and precise description....The coming-of-age story is affecting...but the real hero here is Montana itself, from its hayfields and sheep ranches to the grandeur of its towering mountains."

--Booklist

Ivan Doig grew up in northern Montana along the Rocky Mountain Front where ENGLISH CREEK takes place. "One of my first memories," he writes, "a few months before my sixth birthday, is of hearing my parents and their neighbors discuss the radio news of the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in April, 1945. Thus it is very nearly forty years now that I have been listening to Montanans. But never with more benefit than during the writing of ENGLISH CREEK." Doig has worked as a ranch hand, newspaperman, magazine editor and writer. His 1978 book This House of Sky was nominated for a National Book Award in contemporary thought, and it was also honored with a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. Winter Brothers, published in 1980, was also a winner of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award, and was adapted for a public television documentary. The Sea Runners, Doig's first novel, was published to high acclaim by Atheneum in 1982. Born in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, in 1939, Doig received a B.S. and M.S. in journalism from Northwestern University and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington. He lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol, and is currently at work on the second novel of a trilogy about the fictional McCaskill family and their Two Medicine country.

ENGLISH CREEK

Ivan Doig

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**Bucking the Sun**: Sample of review comments

“...**Bucking the Sun** is ...one of those books that takes you over as you read it, invading your daydreams, lodging its cadences in your brain, summoning you back to the page.”

-- Washington Post

“Doig now has to be considered the premier writer of the American West.”

-- Chicago Sun-Times

“**Bucking the Sun**...derives its narrative energy from as tangled a web of familial and psychosexual rivalries as one is apt to encounter this side of *Hamlet* or *The Brothers Karamazov*.”

-- Entertainment Weekly

“What Doig understands well and describes with fascinating power is the way nothing in life is ever still.”

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“The reader is pulled into their story by a puzzle the author has set....The device works beautifully and so does Doig’s *roguish novel*.”

-- Time

“**Bucking the Sun** is a glorious piece of writing.”

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“...a neat, excruciating Agatha Christie country house murder set down in sprawling Montana.”

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“Ivan Doig is a terrific writer and a great storyteller.”

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