Opposites clash under the vast Western sky

Master writer Doig sends a son and his dying father on Montana explorations

Mountain Time
By Ivan Doig
Scribner, 316 pp., $25

The new West confronts the old West in Ivan Doig’s new novel when Mitch Rozier, brooding environmentalist, comes home from Seattle to tend to his rainbow-chasing Montana father, a “sonofabitching guy who is always out to make a killing instead of a living.”

Mountain Time is a rich, resonant read, crafted out of Western talk and terrain. It deals with the history we’re given and the history we make for ourselves in a story about three sets of relationships: between lovers, between sisters and between father and son.

Between father and son.

The son left Montana more than 30 years ago, a big kid from a small town, banking his football scholarship as if it were a bingo jackpot. At the University of Washington, he grew “incurably curious about the insides of sentences and would rework a piece of writing until the paper gave out.”

He ends up as an environmental columnist for a weekly newspaper in Seattle. But the paper is dying, and Mitch is haunted by “the ghost chorus of his trade”: Wallace Stegner “magisterially whopping the nail on the head in every sentence of his hallowed ‘wilderness letter.’” Feverish Bob Marshall, the Thomas Wolfe of the Forest Service, writing and hiking himself to death in the mountains he so adored, his epitaph theirs: “How much wilderness do we need? How many Brahms symphonies do we need?”

The father, never asking that question, never makes a killing. He barely makes a living on land whose natural crop is cantaloupe-size rocks. His back yard is a rust museum of dead equipment when he summons his son home for a final, environmentally dubious get-rich-quick scheme and to reveal he’s dying.

“The involuntary clerkwork of closing down a parent’s life. The time came; it always came. The when of it was the ambush.” Doig likes those zinger sentences. He has written two family memoirs, including the heartbreaking This House of Sky, and five previous novels, including a sweeping Montana trilogy that covers three generations of the McCaskill family.

In Mountain Time, Mitch lives with Alexander (Lexa) McCaskill, a fellow refugee from Montana who, after cooking on fish boats in Alaska, turned to fancy catering for Seattle’s software crowd. Both are divorced and sorting out their relationship “a hilly day at a time, sometimes bumpy minute to minute.” At 40, Lexa has “adjusted to a lot of life’s double talk, but modern living-together still took some tip-toeing through the terms.”

Adding to “the dose of family,” as Lexa puts it, is her overpowering photographer sister, Mariah (“highly cameraed up,” their father said of her approach to life). The three of them — Mitch, Lexa and Mariah — end up in an adventure that threatens to alter everything and revolves around an accident of history.

Doig writes playfully about the pretensions of the cyber-frontier and of the baby-boomer West, but he is at his best recreating the past and linking past and present. The only problem is that the McCaskill sisters, strong, independent women, are richer and more enduring characters than the illusive Mitch.

Doig is a writer who deserves wider recognition. Mountain Time is for readers who admire novelists who treat the landscape with as much affection as their characters (think Stegner or David Guterson). Here’s hoping Doig’s next novel brings the legendary Bob Marshall, in a cameo appearance here, fully back to life.

E-mail bminzesheimer@usatoday.com
A return to mountain roots

Son leaves Seattle to play out this tale of family love and turmoil in Montana

“Mountain Time”
by Ivan Doig
Scribner, $25

BY TIM McNULTY
Special to The Seattle Times

Seattle writer Ivan Doig’s popular Montana trilogy, which follows four generations of the spirited McCaskill clan, might just have to become a quartet.

“Mountain Time,” Doig’s sixth novel, returns to the enduring themes and expansive landscapes that inspired his most memorable work: the complexities of love, loss and family loyalties played out against the rugged Montana land.

The characters in this novel find their way back to their mountain roots by way of contemporary Seattle. Along the way, Doig gives us some delightful takes on the city, including the ’60s, city newsrooms, old neighborhoods, new “cybernaires,” and characters we feel we already know.

Mitch Rozier’s life on the coast is coming unraveled. An aging and somewhat jaded environmental columnist for a Fremont-district alternative weekly, he is no longer at the top of his game. A final blow comes when he learns that, after 25 years, his paper is going free, becoming, in his words, street litter. Things are not faring well at home either.

His relationship with his partner, Lexa (of the aforementioned McCaskill clan, featured in the Doig books “English Creek,” “Dancing at the Rascal Fair” and “Ride With Me”) is rocky at best, and his grown children from an earlier marriage want nothing to do with him. When the call comes from his father, a hard-bitten Montana ranch hand from whom Mitch himself has been estranged for much of his adult life, he heads back to his boyhood home to help sort out the old man’s tangled affairs.

Mitch’s father, Lyle, is a working study of the last gasp of the Old West. Surrounded by rusting farm equipment, junked trucks and stocks of old newspapers, he squints at a rapidly changing world through a haze of tobacco smoke. His latest get-rich scheme, selling the family’s scant landholdings to a gravel company that plans to lace the Rocky Mountain front with mining roads, is put on hold by his son’s arrival. The novel seems poised to take off in the direction of environmental journalism, but Doig has other veins to probe. Soon after his
arrival, Mitch finds that his father is dying of leukemia, and the tangled affairs confronting the son are now of his own making. 

Readers of Doig’s earlier novels will recognize the looming scarps of the Jericho and Roman reefs that frame the tiered ridges of the Two Medicine River country. Doig has fashioned a mythic landscape as memorable and real as Faulkner’s. The same affections, betrayals and wars of the heart that propel his earlier novels endure here, along with the weathered limestone hills. Doig is at his best when sketching human frailties against the broad historical sweep of the mountain west, and Mitch’s desire to understand the rift between him and his father sends the novel back through the Montana of the 1930s, as well as the hard-worked fields of his own youth.

To add to the emotional mix, Lexa arrives to help with Lyle and confront her relationship with Mitch. With her is her sister, Mariah, a photographer, who stays on to document Lyle’s last days as a human-interest story for her paper, the Montanian. If the cast is beginning to sound a bit crowded, it is. Mariah whirled through the earlier novel, “Ride with Me, Mariah Montana,” and her presence here seems superfluous. But Doig’s storytelling thrives on the emotional entanglements between kin and kindred and the uneasy resolves to which they lead.

Doig also loves to brush his characters against historical disasters. Lexa’s father just missed being sent out to fight the disastrous Mann Gulch fire, which took the lives of 12 young firefighters; her great-grandfather barely survived the deadly 1918 influenza epidemic. Mitch, too, seems to have caught the family penchant for the near-miss. Chance alone kept him from Coldwater Ridge the morning Mount St. Helens erupted; his partner, who was also covering the story, was less fortunate. History figures strongly into Lyle’s story, too — the Depression and World War II helped harden his mind-set. But Lyle’s battles were largely self-generated, and the only fatalities were his relationships with his wife and son.

“Mountain Time” clearly moves away from the bulky historical scaffolding of Doig’s most recent novels: Montana’s centennial in “Ride with Me,” and the building of Fort Peck Dam in “Bucking the Sun.” The history shaping the lives of these characters is written into their own hearts.

In what seems a final irony, Lyle asks his son to spread his ashes on a remote mountain in the heart of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, a place, in life, he would as soon have seen logged and mined to eviscerated heaps. Mitch is galled by the request, but his search for the reason behind it leads him to the truth of a family secret, the source of his own estrangement from the embittered old man, and possibly, a key to his own self-knowledge.

In “Mountain Time,” Doig has delivered us another classic.
Tale of Family Turmoil Set in the Rugged West

Book Review

BY MICHAIL FRANK
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

MOUNTAIN TIME
by TedC. Dong
Scifiction
325, 318 pages

{...}

L. van Doig's new novel, "Mountain Time," is his sixth work of fiction, quickly announces itself as a story concerned with the West. There are the abundant references to the big names (and hearts) of Westerns—naturalists—literature: Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Aldo Leopold, Wallace Stegner and Bob Marshall, inspiration behind Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness Preserve.

Doig also turns his attention to the Western cataclysm—the Valdez oil spill, the eruption of Mt. St. Helens—and fuses them into the characters' back stories, sometimes credibly, sometimes with the creaky sound of a theme being spliced into a life. Inevitably, he captures the landscape, which is majestic and beautiful but at the same time corrupted, abused, endangered. Out of these bricks much Western fiction has been built, not a little by Doig himself.

Patina-stained brickwork does not always lead to felicitous storytelling, however, and although there is much to admire in "Mountain Time," especially in the relationship between its protagonists, Mitch Rosen and his captainless-dying father, Lyle, there are also stretches of narrative that feel under-imagined and mechanical.

A man of substantial physical bulk, Mitch Rosen has, at 50, put in 25 years at Conspica, an alternative Seattle paper where he writes a column called "Coastwatch." Thinking back over his life's work during an airplane journey, Mitch reflects that he has "tried to use the utmost to give his way among all of it spattered down there—the serpentine coastal capes, the snake routes of rivers, the strangely serene cliff-faces of dams, the lathering forests, the valleys going to suburbs, the rumbling but restless earthquakes faults, the cloud-high mountains made of internal fire.

A 50-year-old man reviewing his life's work is bound to be thrown into some kind of crisis, as indeed Mitch eventually is. It takes quite a while for Mitch—and "Mountain Time"—to reach the true protections provided by the senior Ro-

zter. Along the way, the reader meets Mitch's girlfriend, Leda McCaskill, a caretaker to the latest Seattle cyber-millionaires, and the estranged children from his first marriage, Jocelyn (who, by moving to the West, becomes a somewhat more vivid, though still underexplored, presence in Mitch's life) and Blitz (who is estranged from his father). Also on the scene are Lyle, Mitch's employee, whose paper is losing money, and Mariah, Leda's sister, a photojournalist who accompanies Leda and Mitch to Lyle's bedside to document his dying.

Mariah, unfortunately, brings out some of Doig's less elegant writing. There is the therapy facile motivation for her photo essay (she did not have a chance to grieve for her mother's death); she and her sister speak in dialogue that is arch and unconvincing, and she and Mitch engage in a barely implausible flirtation that Doig concocts to add tension to the novel's slack last lap.

Mariah does succeed in instigating some moving photographs of the dying Lyle, and it is no wonder. He also brings out Doig's most honest work: Lyle, with his "drill-bit way of looking at you," is the philosophical and psychological opposite of his son. He is preoccupied with his experiences of World War II; as the owner of gravel pits in the Rocky Mountains, he is an abuser of the Western landscape who intends to abuse it further, by selling out to a company that wants to put roads down into the Bob Marshall Wilderness in order to drill for oil; he has little illness with, or feeling for, nature, people and his only child.

Yet he is capable of surprises. Lyle has established a relationship (by e-mail) with Mitch's estranged son that Mitch has not; as he dies, he changes his mind about nature and asks that his ashes be scattered over the wilderness that, his son maintaining, he wanted "carved up into money."

In these conflicts between Lyle and son, Doig has found implausible marriages between the most unlikely characters, setting and situation; they stand out as the most memorable interludes in this otherwise uneven book.
An eloquent coda to a family trilogy

BY RON FRANSECELL

In Montana, not far from where Ivan Doig grew up beneath the big sky that still haunts him, three rivers flow together to form the deep, wide Missouri, leaking through time and landscape, the old West and the new.

Like the brawny Missouri, Doig has channeled three deep literary tributaries into "Mountain Time," a coda to his McCaskill family trilogy. Mitch Rozier is flotsam, a 50-year-old environmental columnist for a post-hip alternative Seattle weekly paper. He's a Baby Boom-er treading water amid temenos job security, estrangement from his grown children and the complicity of his scrappy lover. Lexa McCaskill is jetsam, an earthy, divorced Montana expatriate catering to wanky Seattle software saviors, also going nowhere.

Together, they're caught in the undertow of Lyle Rozier, Mitch's father. Lyle is dying of leukemia, and Mitch is summoned back to his childhood home in Montana, where he's caught up in the ordeal of his familial obligation: "You can't not go home again when someone is sitting there dying."

Mitch faces an ancient question unearthed by a new generation and twisted to fit a new sensibility: Dare we go home again? That's what Mitch asks himself when his father calls from Montana:

"The old hated tone of voice. Lyle Rozier proclaiming he had the world on a teterope and a downhill pull at last. Rubbing his opposite ear as if the words had gone right through him. Mitch winced into the phone that next morning. How many times had he heard this, or something an awful lot like it?"

But Mitch's reluctant reunion with his crusty old dad is flooded with lingering family disappointments and secrets — and the revelation that Lyle wants to sell the family land to a gravel company, and rewrite his own life history in the process. Lexa comes along for moral support but brings her sister, world-weary photographer Mariah McCaskill, who documents Lyle's deathwatch and proves a bittersweet reminder of Lexa's unrooted angst. Lyle and Mitch, Mitch and Lexa, Lexa and Mariah: Their disparate, desperate lives flow together when they hike into the mountains on a sad journey to scatter Lyle's ashes, with passages among the most stirring pieces of Western nature writing you'll find.

Three people, three intense relationships, three rivers. "Mountain Time" is the confluence: the very real familial clash between Lyle and Mitch echoes the clash between the historic and contemporary West, where exploitation has always been at odds with environmental anxiety. But the reader also stands on the near bank of a dynamically flawed history in which men have both protected and profaned the Western landscape.

Doig's poetic prose remains intact here, but for the first time in his literary career he's pretty funny, too, especially when he's satirizing the fiddles and excesses of the Pacific Northwest "Cyberite": the Cascadia (newspaper) building was in Seattle's Fireman district, where the Sixties still roamed. The hampsten necessities of life were available there, as were cafes with good rowdy names such as The Longshoremans Daughter, plus deluxe junk shops, plus bars that were museum pieces from the days when hair was hair."

Or this description of Mitch's "lactose-intolerant" cubicle mate: "Shyann had gone on and on in an awed whisper about corporately responsible non-lactose vegan dietary rules until it dawned on the (staff) that no milk in the office meant no letters in the office, and she was rudely hooted down."

Humor aside, "Mountain Time" is still a serious story from the reigning master of new Western literature. It is a story about moving forward by going back. For Doig, now 60 and living in Seattle, the long journey home is mixed with the autobiographical "This House of Sky," and has continued through fiction ("English Creek," for example) and nonfiction ("Heart Earth," his 1993 memoir and sequel to "This House of Sky."). It's not necessary that the reader be able to recite McCaskill family history from memory to enjoy "Mountain Time," just more fun.

"Mountain Time" will not displease those who rank Doig among the best living American writers, and one might even begin making comparisons to some of the best "dead" ones, too.

Like Faulkner, Doig is not just another regional writer with an ear for the perfect-pitch of parochial rhythms and shallow roots in the Rocky Mountains. He looks homeward, and he sees a place in all our minds, not just in those of us who live in and write about the West.

So it is with rivers. They move on, gaining strength as they go, by some bigger water. Then someday, whether in rain or snow, they come back. Doig keeps coming back, undiminished.

A Wyoming novelist and newspaperman, Ron Franscell is the author of "Angel Fire" and the upcoming mystery "The Deadline."
Ivan Doig again weaves masterful Western tale

Ron Franscell

In Montana, not far from where Ivan Doig grew up beneath the big sky that still haunts him, three rivers flow together to form the deep, wide Missouri, facing through time and landscape, the old West and the new.

Like the storied Missouri, Doig has channeled three deep literary tributaries to "Mountain Time," a coda to his McCaskill family trilogy, Mitch Rozier is a Wyoming novelist. And one might even imagine: The Deadline, one of the San Francisco Chronicle's 100 best nonfiction books of the 20th century West, and has continued through fiction ("English Creek," for example) and nonfiction ("Heart Earth," his 1993 memoir and sequel to "This House of Sky"). It's not necessary that the reader be able to recite McCaskill family history from memory to enjoy "Mountain Time," just more fun.

"Mountain Time" will not dissuade those who rank Doig among the best living American writers, and one might even begin making comparisons to some of the dead ones, too. Faulkner comes most readily to mind: The Snopeses of Yoknapatawpha County are no more troubled or human than the McCaskills of Montana's Two Medicine country — two great rivers in different landscapes.

But like Faulkner, Doig is not just another regional writer with an ear for the perfect-pitch of parochial rhythms and shallow roots in the Rocky Mountain Front Range. He's bigger than the Big Sky. He stands upon the shoulders of Wallace Stegner and A.B. Guthrie, taller than Edward Abbey and Tom McGuane, and seen much farther. He looks homeward, and he sees a place in all our minds, not just in those of us who live in and write about the West.

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‘Muscular’ author fails in attempt to lift reader into action

By Dan Carpenter
BOOK EDITOR

I tend to drift in the opposite direction when I come upon a novel whose protagonist is a writer. When the writer is a newspaper writer, I tend to break into a trot.

An exception is Annie Proulx’s The Shipping News, whose forlorn menagerie of smalltown ink-slingers is so far removed from my experience, and just about anybody else’s, that I have no fear of the familiarity that breeds contempt.

Odd, then, that the estimable Proulx provides one of the jacket blurbs for Ivan Doig’s latest novel of the great outdoors, Mountain Time.

Her praise for this “muscular and exceedingly good writer” derives from his overall oeuvre and not specifically this entry, and I have a feeling politeness would compel her to leave matters vague.

Whatever authority and stylistic power may have earned the National Book Award finalist his high stature as a chronicler of the West are as sparse here as spreading oaks in his native Montana.

Though he hustles us to Seattle, San Francisco and Alaska as well as the home territory in this rather compressed story, none of those landscapes is conjured anew.

Nor is there much freshness to the characters, particularly the main one, Mitch Rozier, a 50-year-old environmental columnist for a failing Seattle alternative newspaper who hears “the ghost chorus of his trade keening at him. Ed Abbey smoldering in his grave in the slickrock desert, Stegner magisterially whopping the nail on the head in every sentence of his hallowed wilderness letter.”

Of course Mitch Rozier wishes he could write even faintly like Edward Abbey and Wallace Stegner. The reader only wishes Ivan Doig could; alas, his “muscular” prose, at least in Mountain Time, reads more like your local sportswriter trying to make a preseason exhibition game seem like an epic. And whoever left him alone with a love scene should be forced to judge the next 10 Raymond Chandler parody contests.

“Mitch enveloped her, jolting her off her footing, seeming to stagger a little himself as he gave her a kiss that could have been felt in France. After the maximum visitation back and forth by their tongues, he pulled his head back and said thickly: ‘She wasn’t anybody. You’re it.’”

Things get said thickly a lot in this book, with less justification than love-drunk Mitch has.

Perhaps Doig, following Stegner and Jim Harrison and Ken Kesey and so many other sensitive, leathery guys, is just mining a played-out vein. When a middle-aged man returns home to his estranged dying father in the rugged beauty of the West, accompanied by two women who are rivals for his affection, and undertakes a quest to learn the old man’s Dark Secret, we have more potential for a feature film than a piece of original literature. When Sundance does this one, the question will be whether Robert Redford will give in and play the old man or try to pull off the maximum visitation thing as a romantic lead one more mountainous time.

“Life is unfair, I can take,” Mitch Rozier says in reference to a handsome cyber-millionaire who’s one of the novel’s many stereotypes. “But this guy has more going for him than Jesus did.”

Lord knows Ivan Doig has a lot going for him also. He needed to get going, in some new directions.
Summer book capsules

From Staff/AP reports

Here are some capsule descriptions and mini-reviews of recent books:

- "A Very Strange Trip" (Bridge Publications) by L. Ron Hubbard and Dave Wolverton.

This story, based on an unpublished story by the late Hubbard, is about an offbeat road trip and is a mixture of science fiction, adventure and light-hearted comedy. Everett Dumphee joins the army to avoid prison, but activates a time machine while transporting a truckload of experimental weapons. His romp through time while trying to return to the 20th century takes him to such eras as the Ice Age, the Mayan civilization and the Native American climatic of the late 1800s. Humor is derived from slapstick situations and references to popular culture.

- "Gabriella" (Forge) by Earl Murray

Gabriella Hall is a young English artist who, accompanied by her fiance, Sir Edward Garr, travels along the Oregon Trail in 1848 to paint portraits of the Indians. Also headed west is Quinncannon, a young man hoping to re-establish a fur-trading company there. His and Gabriella's journal entries tell the tale of their journey, of Quinncannon's growing love for Gabriella and of his bitter rivalry with Edward, a strong opponent of U.S. expansion into the Northwest.

- "Mountain Time" (Scribner) by Ivan Doig

Three types of relationships — father-son, sisters and lovers — figure into this tale about Mitch Rozier, 50, a journalist who returns to Montana to tend to his cantankerous dying father, Lyle. Joining Mitch is his girlfriend Lexa, who longs to settle down, and her sister, Mariah. When the three hike into the mountains to scatter Lyle's ashes, their lives and relationships undergo profound changes.

- "Sharpe's Triumph" (HarperCollins) by Bernard Cornwell

This 15th in the series featuring Sgt. Richard Sharpe has the 19th-century British soldier playing a pivotal role in the Battle of Assaye, one of the great victories for the future Duke of Wellington and a milestone in Britain's colonization of India. Sharpe is at Fort Chasalgoon in 1803 when it is attacked by a band of mercenary soldiers led by Maj. William Dodd. Sharpe, the only surviving witness, heads the search for Dodd and his army.

- "A Certain Age" (Doubleday) by Tama Janowitz

This darkly comic novel follows Florence Collins, a single woman in her 30s, as she searches for a rich husband and affluent lifestyle. Florence, a low-salaried jewelry appraiser at a minor New York auction house, attends every social event possible, and spends her small paycheck and her mother's inheritance on designer clothes and on expensive cosmetics and beauty treatments, all in the hope of meeting Mr. Rich.

- "Exposé" (Mira) by Laura Van Wormer

Sally Harrington has left her writing job at a Los Angeles magazine for a job at a local newspaper in Connecticut. After she helps a man who thinks he is having a heart attack, his wife, Verity Rhodes, editor of a high-end magazine, gratefully gives Sally a plum assignment: profile Cassy Cochran, TV network president. Sally's research reveals Cassy to be an upstanding professional, but Verity isn't pleased: She wants Sally to dig up some dirt.

- "Lady Bird" (Scribner) by Jan Jarboe Russell

This biography of former first lady Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson traces her childhood, success in business and role in LBJ's life, career and presidency. When LBJ unexpectedly assumed office in 1963, the Johnsons were thrust into the Vietnam War, the Cold War and the war on poverty, and Mrs. Johnson had the unenviable task of replacing Jackle Kennedy, one of America's most popular first ladies. Russell, a Texan who has covered the state's politics and culture for 25 years, draws upon interviews with Mrs. Johnson and with Johnson family members, friends and advisers.
desperate and disparate lives flow together when they hike into the mountains on a sad journey to scatter Lyle's ashes.

Three people, three intense relationships, three rivers, Mountain Time is the confluence. The very real familial clash between Lyle and Mitch echoes the clash between the historic and contemporary West, where exploitation has always been at odds with environmental anxiety. But the reader also stands on the near bank of a dynamic, flowing history in which men have both protected and profaned the Western landscape, which is as much a character in Doig's work as any McCaskill.

Doig's poetic prose remains intact here, but for the first time in his literary career he's pretty damned funny, too, especially when he's satirizing the foibles and excesses of the Pacific Northwest. "Cyberia": "The Cascopedia [newspaper] building was in Seattle's Fremont district, where the Sixties still roamed. The hempen necessities of life were available there, as were cafes with good rowdy names such as The Longshoreman's Daughter, plus deluxe junk shops, plus bars that were museum pieces from the days when hair was Hair."

Mountain Time will not dissuade those who rank Doig among the best living American writers, and one might even begin making comparisons to some of the best dead ones, too. Faulkner comes most readily to mind: The Sartorises of Yoknapatawpha County are no more troubled and no more human than the McCaskills of the Two Medicine country in Montana. Two great rivers in different landscapes.

Ron Franscell is a Wyoming newspaper editor and novelist.

From Doig, a coda for the McCaskills

By Ron Franscell

In Montana, not far from where Ivan Doig grew up beneath the big sky that still haunts him, three rivers flow together to form the deep and wide Missouri, lacing through both time and landscape, the old West and the new.


And like the brawny Missouri, Doig has channeled three deep literary tributaries into Mountain Time, a coda to his McCaskill family trilogy. Mitch Rozier is flotsam, a 50-year-old environmental columnist for a post-hip alternative Seattle weekly paper, a Baby Boomer treading water with his own past and present: estrangement from his grown children, tenuous job security and his scrappy lover.

Lexa McCaskill is jetsam, the earthy and divorced Montana expatriate swirling in Mitch's eddy, cataloguing Seattle software soirees, also going nowhere.

Together, they are caught in the undertow of Lyle Rozier, Mitch's father. Lyle is dying of leukemia and Mitch is summoned back to his childhood home in Montana, where he's caught up in the ordeal of his filial obligation: you can't not go home again when someone is sitting there dying.

Mitch faces an ancient question unearthed by a new generation, twisted to fit a new sensibility: Dare we go home again? That's what Mitch asks himself when his father calls from Montana: "The old hated tone of voice. Lyle Rozier proclaiming he had the world on a towrope and a downhill pull at last. Rubbing his opposite ear as if the words had gone right through him, Mitch winced into the phone that next morning. How many times had he heard this, or something an awful lot like it?"

But Mitch's reluctant reunion with his crusty old dad is flooded with lingering family disappointments and secrets... and the revelation that Lyle wants to sell the family land to a gravel company, and rewrite his own life history in the process. Lexa comes along for moral support but brings her sultry sister, world-weary photographer Mariah McCaskill, who documents Lyle's deathwatch and proves a bitter reminder of Lexa's unrooted angst. Their
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Scowen, 316 pages, $25
Reviewed by Ron Franscell

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PASSAGES
From Page 1

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Lyle and Mitch echoes the clash between the historic and the contemporary West, where exploitation has always been at the root of the Rocky Mountains. He’s bigger than the Big Sky. It stands upon the shoulders of Wallace Stegner and A.B. Guthrie, taller than Edward Abbey and Edward Abbey and Tommy McGuane, and seems much further. He looks homeward, and he sees a place in all our minds, not just in those of us who live in and write about the West.

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PASSAGES: A father-son clash mirrors changes between the old frontier and the new in Ivan Doig’s latest novel.

NORTHEAST PASSAGES

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Dare to recite McCaskill family history from memory to enjoy “Mountain Time,” one of the Chronic’s 100 best Western nonfiction books of the 20th century, and has continued through fiction (“English Creek,” for example) and nonfiction (“Heart Earth,” his 1993 memoir and sequel to “This House of Sky.” It’s not necessary for the reader to be able to recite McCaskill family history from memory to enjoy “Mountain Time.”

“Mountain Time” will not dissuade those who rank Doig among the best living American writers, and one might even begin making comparisons to some of the best dead ones, too. Faulkner comes most readily to mind: The Spooner of Yoknapatawpha County are no more troubled or human than the McCaskills of Montana’s Two Medicine Country — two great rivers in different landscapes.

But Doig is not just another regional writer with an ear for the parochial rhythms and shallow roots of the Rocky Mountains. He’s bigger than the Big Sky. It stands upon the shoulders of Wallace Stegner and A.B. Guthrie, taller than Edward Abbey and Tommy McGuane, and seems much further. He looks homeward, and he sees a place in all our minds, not just in those of us who live in and write about the West.

Doig is not just another regional writer with an ear for the parochial rhythms and shallow roots of the Rocky Mountains. He’s bigger than the Big Sky.

So it is with rivers. They move on to some bigger water, gaining strength as they go. Then someday, whether in rain or snow, they come back. Doig keeps coming back, undiminished.

PASSAGES: A father-son clash mirrors changes between the old frontier and the new in Ivan Doig’s latest novel.

NORTHEAST PASSAGES

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PASSAGES: A father-son clash mirrors changes between the old frontier and the new in Ivan Doig’s latest novel.
Wests collide in Doig’s ‘Time’

“Mountain Time” by Ivan Doig


REVIEW BY TOM WILLIAMS

What happens to people honed on Montana granite when they become expatri­ates in the skin-deep culture of the upwardly mobile? Nothing very nice, to judge by the characters in Ivan Doig’s newest nov­el, “Mountain Time.”

A substantial departure from his earlier work, Doig’s new book may dis­appoint fans of his lyrical tales of the rugged Monta­na Rockies and the men and women who match the­m.

“Mountain Time” spends at least half its pages fol­low­ing ex-Montanans Mitch Rozier and Lexa McCaskill through their lives in different versions of Seattle hip culture.

The dialogue Doig puts in these characters’ mouths is gratingly terse in­crowd.

These folks are from Two Medicine country? Appar­ently even a Montanan can be overlaid with trivial­ity.

The imminent demise of Mitch’s father brings Mitch and Lexa, together with her sister Mariah (of Doig’s “Ride with Me, Mariah Montana”), back to Montana.

Events conspire to bring Mitch and the McCaskill sisters to Phantom Woman Mountain and a rough, nominally cleansing adven­ture that resolves the unstable balance between their Old West roots and New West survival modes.

Doig’s premise is worthy and interesting. It involves a confrontation of the val­ues of the old and the new West. Unfortunately, the characters who carry the new west into the contest are thin and unlikable; piv­otal events are unconvinc­ing.

While “Mountain Time” isn’t up to Doig’s usual high standard, it is pleas­ing to note that he is bring­ing his considerable liter­ary skills to new territory.

Tom Williams is working on his doctorate in astrophysics at UNM.
Love and Grace  
by Thomas Fleming

Una vita in fabbrica:  
itinerario spirituale  
by Mario Marcola  
Milano: Maurizio Minchella Editore;  
101 pp., Lire 18,000

This is a remarkable book by a remarkable man. Mr. Marcola is well known to many conservatives in Europe and the United States for his observations on modern philosophies contributed over the years to Osservatore Romano. He is a keen student of Anglo-American conservative thought as well as having been a friend and translator of the late Russell Kirk. Dr. Kirk and the editor of this magazine are only two of many Americans whom Marcola has served as cicerone in their explorations of Italian political and cultural life.

Despite frequent bouts of ill health, Mr. Marcola exudes an air of benign understanding, though not complacency. What this little book reveals, however, is the long and hard road that has been traveled on this spiritual itinerary. Born into a family reduced to poverty, Marcola watched his father trying to preserve his dignity working in the factories of Torino. The young Mario was sent to work in a bakery. As he grew older, he drew up plans for his self-education, only to see them founder for lack of time and energy. He found time to study Italian literature, and learned German and English eventually.

After studying some accounting, Marcola went into the textile industry and by the time of his retirement had worked his way up to plant manager. His real life, however, was intellectual and spiritual. As a working man, he had an eager interest in Marx and the Russian Revolution, eventually finding in it a "Luciferian rebellion" of matter against form. Working among the looms and shuttles, he contemplated the great problems of existence and came to regard the factory as "a place of pain and sorrow, a nursery of men and women devoid of deep relations, without spiritual roots."

Factory work, he realized, was inherently dehumanizing:

The influx of machines modeled on scientific reasoning appeared... to be diabolical: assembly-line work mortified the personalities, creating psychological dissociations which were noticeable in the old workers, in their worn-out look, in a kind of inattentiveness which was the sign of an unconscious crisis, of the impossibility of being whole men like the old-time artisans and peasants from which they were descended.

Much of this memoir is devoted to Marcola's progress through books, from leftists to Nietzsche and Evola and finally to the wisdom of the great Italian philosopher Augusto del Noce. The higher truth is to be sought, he concludes, in the human work that "binds each and every person to a supernatural destiny of love and grace." This is not the mysticism that fleshes the everyday world of hope and fear, but an appreciation of the mysteries woven on the loom of life. "Every man has his talents and spends them not by himself but, in his liberty and autonomy, in harmony with a providential plan that hangs over him and protects him."

Thomas Fleming is the editor of Chronicles.

Our Time  
by Bill Croke

Mountain Time  
by Ivan Doig  
New York: Scribner;  
316 pp., $25.00

In a regional literary world ripe with poseurs, Ivan Doig may be the true descendant of Wallace Stegner. Unlike the typical carpetbagger who begins with preconceived notions as to the nature of the "real" West, Doig actually grew up here during an unforgiving time when the place was good for nothing except for what could be physically extracted from it. The two authors have led somewhat parallel lives, their work growing out of their Western roots, each accepting a necessary flight from beloved surroundings to an academic life lived in cities west of the West.

In Doig's new novel, Mountain Time, Mitch Rozier—at 50—is at loose ends. His career as an environmental journalist in politically correct Seattle ("Cyberia") is in a nosedive because of the financial restructuring of his paper, Cascadia. His ex-wife hates him, and his two now-grown children ignore him as he did them while they were growing up, his aged father is tormenting Mitch long distance with tangled business affairs that directly affect him. Mitch's girlfriend, a caterer and native Montanan like himself, is the glue that holds his life together.

Mr. Doig—author of the National Book Award nominee This House of Sky—is on familiar ground. In novels such as English Creek, Ride With Me, Mariah Montana, and Dancing at the Rascal Fair, he has created a Montana Yoknapatawpha, complete with multi-generational interrelated families and mutually remembered local history. A native, Doig knows the terrain of working-class Montana: the ranchers, farmers, and small-town businessmen who struggle to adapt to life in a changing West.

Mitch returns to Twin Sulphur Springs, "a country of great mountains and mediocre human chances," ostensibly to deal with his father's financial difficulties. There, Lyle Rozier nonchalantly tells him of the leukemia that is slowly killing him: "The doc says it's about got me. Why I called you." Lyle—a World War II veteran of the South Pacific—is a member of that great generation of Americans who expected nothing from life except the fruits of hard work, pain, and ultimately death, a generation—unlike their progeny—for whom whining and complaining were anathema. While sticking around to care for his ailing father (and forced to tolerate the annoying Donald Brainerd, a new West high-tech neighbor constantly complaining that Lyle's yardful of rusting farm machinery and "tractor carcasses" is spoiling his Bay Window view of the Rockies), Mitch is reminded—through flashbacks to his childhood—growing up in "the Springs"—what kind of man Lyle really is: a taciturn survivor of a life typically fraught with contradictions and emotional turmoil, including the guilt left over...
from his estranged wife's death in a car wreck years before.

Complicating all this are the McCaskill sisters, Mariah and Lexa. Mariah, the elder, is a successful globe-trotting photographer. She is middle-aged, divorced, but still retains a wild, red-haired beauty that can "cloud men's minds." Mariah talks the reluctant Mitch into permitting her to photograph the willing Lexa's last days for a newspaper photo series. Lexa McCaskill, Mitch's live-in companion, patiently awaits the passing of his mid-life difficulties so that they can get on with their lives.

The central theme of Mountain Time is the baby boomer generation's reaction to two inescapable facts: the passing of their parents, the realistic and hardworking World War II generation, and their relations with their own children, the alienated products of divorce, mindlessly gossiping through a seemingly nihilistic turn-of-the-millennium high-tech consumer society. Mitch spends a lot of time contemplating his dying father and his own out-of-reach kids, for which the idealism he acquired during his coming-of-age in the 1960's doesn't seem to be of much help.

Sigmund Freud wrote that the most poignant day in a man's life is the day of the death of his father. When Lexa finally passes on in his sleep, Mitch sees the event as anticlimactic and is merely numbed. He, Lexa, and Mariah set out on a backpacking trip into the stunning Rocky Mountain Front backcountry of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, with the idea of honoring Lexa's wish to have his ashes scattered — and the ritual photographed by the journalistic voyeur Mariah — atop the (fictional) Phantom Woman Peak. In 1959, the 18-year-old Lexa had helped build the Phantom Woman fire tower while employed by the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, in the course of which he met — unbeknownst to him — the renowned conservationist Bob Marshall (about whose legendary tramps in the Northern Rockies Mitch is researching a piece). On that summer day in 1959, Bob Marshall almost broke a leg on an unnailed step on the tower; in 1996, Mitch Rozier does so after a row with Lexa and the professionally minded Mariah over changing his mind about the ash-scattering ceremony, because "My father never cared a whoop about any of this [the Bob Marshall Wilderness]... He wanted it carved up into money. Just never quite managed to figure out how." Mitch's broken leg forces Lexa to hike out for help, leaving Mitch and Mariah to a contrived love affair in the fire tower cabin: a forced and predictable device designed to make for a happy ending when Mitch and Lexa reunite in Seattle at the novel's conclusion. Ivan Doig should know better.

He does know his Rocky Mountains, and he paints his landscapes well. He knows his ranchers and Hutterites too, and has a sharp ear for the nuances of colloquial Montana speech. But as the critic-poet Randall Jarrell once observed, "A novel is a long narrative with something wrong with it." Mountain Time is at once a beautiful and a flawed thing.

Bill Croke writes from Cody, Wyoming.

Damn Lies—or Statistics
by David B. Kopel

by John R. Lott, Jr.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 225 pp., $23.00

The most important book ever published about firearms policy is John Lott's superb More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws. No other firearms book has reshaped the political debate so profoundly or its author been subjected to such disbelief and misrepresentation. The intensity of the campaign against Lott is a powerful confirmation of his book's importance and one reason why it should be read by everyone who cares about firearms policy, which is literally a matter of life or death: Libbys who are trying to prevent the public from discovering John Lott's research are indirectly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent people every year.

Throughout the 19th century, "the right to keep and bear arms" meant exactly what it said: The right to carry a gun was protected as firmly as the right to own a gun. Some states, particularly in the South, enforced laws against carrying handguns concealed, but the right to open carry was almost universally respected. By the 1970's, however, the right to carry had been restricted in most jurisdictions. America was well on the way to treating guns like cigarettes: permissible in private but completely banned from public spaces.

In 1988, however, Florida—thanks to the energetic support of the Florida Chiefs of Police Association and Unified Sportsmen of Florida—initiated a national trend by enacting a "shall issue" handgun permit law, allowing any adult who has a clean record and has taken safety training to obtain a permit to carry a concealed handgun for protection. Now, 29 states have a law similar to Florida's, while Vermont and Idaho (outside of Boise) require no permit.

Before John Lott came along, a few researchers (myself included) had studied the effects of these laws. Clayton Cramer and I in the Tennessee Law Review had analyzed changes in murder rates in "shall issue" states compared to national trends and found tentative evidence that murder rates fell after enactment of "shall issue" laws. David McDowall in the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology had analyzed murder rates in five counties and reported that they rose. These efforts, nevertheless, proved far inferior to Lott's.

John Lott has blown all the previous research away: His work amounts to the most thorough criminological study ever performed. Lott collected data from every one of the 3,054 counties in the United States over an 18-year period and, in contrast to the Kopel and McDowall homicide-only studies, examined changes in the rates of nine different types of crime. He also accounted for the effects of dozens of other variables, including variations in arrest rates, in the age and racial composition of a county's population, in national crime rates, and in changes made to gun-control laws, including the adoption of waiting periods. Lott's findings show that concealed carry laws significantly reduce violent crime. On average, the murder rate falls by ten percent, that of rape by three percent, and aggravated assault by six percent.

While crime begins to fall off immediately, the benefits of concealed handgun laws take about three years to make themselves fully felt. This is not surprising: In most states, a flood of applications occurs in the first few weeks the law is on the
No Fences: The New Breed Of Western Writers

BY JOAN O'BRIEN


Whether in fiction or nonfiction, memoirs or nature writing, authors like Ivan Doig, Cormac McCarthy, Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, Gretel Ehrlich, William Kittredge and Levi Peterson are producing work with what Willa Cather called the grate theme of Western literature: the interplay between people and the land.

These lonesome cowboys of the New West—believing in the most solitary of professions evoke grand, natural landscapes and populate them with characters shaped by those spaces.

Doig, who will be in Utah this week to kick off the Great Salt Lake Book Festival, identifies that as a theme running through his books, whose characters "are, by and large, working people trying to find their way on the great and sometimes buffeting landscape."

His keynote address Friday evening, "Trying to Place It: The Western Writer and the Geography of Imagination," opens the two-day festival at Westminster College. Admission to Doig's talk begins Friday at 7:30 p.m. at Westminster Center, 1200 E. 1700 South, Salt Lake City. Cost is $5. On Saturday, the festival continues with dozens of events, all at Westminster College, 1810 S. 1300 East. See schedule, page D-5.

THE WEST UNDER COVER

Reviews of books of regional interest

Mountain Time
By Ivan Doig; Scribner; $25

BY MARTIN NAPARSTECK

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE
A little less than half way through his sixth novel, Mountain Time, Ivan Doig digresses to tell us about the time one of his key characters was 18 years old in 1939 and working at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp along the Great Divide in Montana: Lyle Rosier, a Montana native, and Joe Ferragamo, an 18-year-old from New Jersey, become friends while working on a fire tower atop Phantom Woman Mountain. The seven-page digression forms a wonderful short story of its own, about how two young men learn to take pride in building something, even when they don't do the job quite right.

It's typical of what's right with Mountain Time. It's not so much a novel with occasional digressions, but rather a string of wonderful digressions knitted together with a strong plot line. It's as if the lives of his characters are the accumulation of the intersections of the digressions.

Mitch Rosier, a 50-year-old environmental writer living in Seattle returns to visit his father, Lyle, in Twin Sulphur Springs Mont. It's a trip filled with bad memories and unpleasant truths. Mitch learns that his father is dying from leukemia. His writing career seems to have dead-ended.

His girlfriend Lexa seems at times to be distancing herself from him. His girlfriend's sister, Mariah, a world-traveling professional photographer decides she wants to photograph Lyle while he's dying. Lyle runs over Mitch's leg with a Dodge truck. And worst of all, the dying Lyle insists Mitch scatter his ashes from atop Phantom Woman Mountain. Mitch doesn't feel particularly close to his father: "Why can't people divorce their parents?" he wants to know.

Every few pages Doig stops his narrative to describe the environment, whether it's the rollerbladers zipping around him in San Francisco or the looming mountains ever in the background once the heart of the story moves to Montana. The technique provides a constant reminder that we are shaped by our surroundings.

Sometimes those surroundings are people, as when Lyle, Mitch, Lexa, and Mariah visit The Springhouse Supper Club, a night-club, in Twin Sulphur Springs, and see a group of men enter, men they never expected would visit such a place: "the Hutterites dwelled in their farm colonies of a hundred or so people, talking German among themselves and following their Anabaptist communal religion. They had kept their way of life by avoiding things of the world that might infect it—television, radio, the camera's eye, public schools—and it might have been supposed that supper clubs would be prominent on that list."

Early in the novel we learn that Lexa helped Mariah start her photography career by getting goats to pose in interesting places:
"That summer the promontory rock turned into Grand Central Station for mountain goats, goats sniffingly curious, goats profoundly bemused, goats in win...some family groupings, goats in spectacular horned solo glory against the cliff line of the Rockies, roll after film roll of perpetually posing goats. Mariah had pictures all summer long in the Great West...Gleason, the Hungry Horse News, the Choteau Acroba...ultimately when the Associated Press picked one up, statewide?"

Not until the end of this two-page digression do we learn how Lexa helped Mariah: "Lexa's formula for making mountain goats line up and sniff with curiosity consisted of squatting here and there on that particular rock and urinating."

At another point, Doig takes us to World War Two and the American invasion of New Guinea: "Some idiot on his last cigarette had crumpled the empty pack and tossed it onto the floor of the landing craft instead of over the side and the wind went into the sump pump like silk drawers up a vacuum cleaner," and the soldier most drown before they reached shore; they do reach shore, where Lyle is almost killed by a Japanese soldier, only to be saved by his buddy from their CCC days, Joe Ferragamo, with a quick burst from his Browning Automatic Rifle.

When Lyle dies Mitch, Lexa, and Mariah climb Phantom Woman Mountain, and during a brief argument between Mitch and Lexa, Mitch falls down the steps of the fire tower his father had helped build decades earlier, again breaking his leg. He's holding the container with his father's ashes during the fall.

Near the end, the New Guinea digression, the story about building the fire tower, the Hutterites, and a group of other digressions intersect to form a single plot. It's a masterful bit of plotting, revealing the characters more fully, justifying episodes that earlier seemed merely interesting, and turning the collection of digressions into a single story. It's Ivan Doig, one of the West's best writers, at his best.

Martin Naparsteck is a novelist.
Western Writers Explore a Vast Landscape

The following is the schedule of events for the Great Salt Lake Book Festival Saturday at Westminster College, 1250 E. 1300 South, Salt Lake City. All are free.

All Day

The University of Utah's Marriott Library Preservation Department will operate a children's book hospital for worn and torn books in the Children's Library. Please limit of three per family.

10 to 10:50 a.m.

Joel Long, "Attic Triggers in Poetry."


Margaret Rosekowska, "Diving into the Story."

Aden Ross and Kaye Terry, "Collaborative Text as Art as Text.

Helen Cox, "Jump Start Your Book Group."

Evelyn Morey, "Storytelling Workshop for Parents and Teachers."

"Writing the West." Panel with Timothy Egan, Ann Walden and Steve Trimble.

Dawn Marano, "The Writing Life."

11 to 11:50 a.m.

Bibliotherapy, Salt Lake City Public Library Travel Books.

Kinde Nebeker, "Artistic Collaboration with a Poet."

Kathleen Glass, "The Blossom Farm."

Graciela Thomas & Linda Oda, "Multi-cultural Child."

11:55 to 12:50 p.m.

Kent Powell & Miriam Murphy, "Mining the Gold in Local History.

Jim Weiss, "Storytelling for Children."

Poetry Panel with Donald Revell, Katherine Coles, Ken Bower, Nathanael South, Salt Lake City.

Hal Cannon & Teresa Jordan, "Writing and Producing for Public Radio."

All are free.

Noon to 1 p.m.

Stephen Trimble, The Sugarbush "Oasis title presentation."

Morning presenters sign books, outdoor canopy.

1 to 1:50 p.m.

Pat Coleman, "What Shakespeare Knew."

Tony Weller, "Rare Books. The Whit's Whys and Hows of Collecting."

Bob Williams, "Sailing with the Titanic."

Ellen Meloy, "Deep Maps of Place: Landscape and Memoir."

Jackie Osherow reading Dead Man's Prayer.

Ron Carlson, "My Fictional Utah."

Neil Kramer, Marilyn Young, Dean Stein, "Weaving a Map of the West."

Luis Urrea, Stories from Nobody's Son.

1:55 to 2:50 p.m.

Critics tend to call it "The Arid Classic." But the fact that Western landscape is not only scenic but contested also makes it inspiring. In Doig's latest book, Mountain Time, one of the tensions is the conflict between the main character and his father over construction of a gravel road into a natural area in Montana.

The Last Ride With Me Mariah Montana, the son of a ranch hand. Both Doig and his character left Montana to seek an education and work. Doig earned his doctorate from the University of Washington before launching his writing career. His first success was This House of Sky, followed by English Creek, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Ride With Me Mariah Montana and Bucking the Sun.

If landscape is a dominant theme of Western life, so is the leaving of it. The Montana economy could not support Doig, nor could it the characters in his book. And Doig says he encounters similar economic refugees throughout the country when he is out on book tours.

The landscape is not the only space in Western writing. University of Utah English professor Steve Tatum has detected an evolution in what he calls "the tremendous amount of quality writing going on" in the West.

The authors evoke a sense of place in their writing, but not just one of landscape and nature. It is what Tatum calls "social space" where "people are moving and living." Ethnic writers, in particular, are creating work with that strong sense of social space, where different cultures interact and conflict.

Such writing pays more attention to the social realm, he says.

The social interactions are what people remember of Doig's books. "When people come up to me at signings, it's not about landscape," Doig says. "They identify with the characters."

Festival Schedule

The following is the schedule of events for the Great Salt Lake Book Festival Saturday at Westminster College, 1250 E. 1300 South, Salt Lake City. All are free.

7:30 p.m. speech is $5. The scores of readings, panels and lectures from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday are free.

The university's English Department, will bring together writers known nationally and regionally, including Ellen Meloy, author of The Last Cheater's Waltz: Beauty and Violence on the Desert; and several others.

The following is the schedule of events Saturday at Westminster College, 1250 E. 1300 South, Salt Lake City. All are free.

10 to 10:50 a.m.

Joel Long, "Attic Triggers in Poetry."


Margaret Rosekowska, "Diving into the Story."

Aden Ross and Kaye Terry, "Collaborative Text as Art as Text."

Helen Cox, "Jump Start Your Book Group."

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Kinde Nebeker, "Artistic Collaboration with a Poet."

Kathleen Glass, "The Blossom Farm."

Graciela Thomas & Linda Oda, "Multi-cultural Child."

"Utah contains more BLM acreage than any other state with the exception of Nevada and Alaska," notes author Dawn Marano, acquisitions editor at The University of Utah Press and a presenter at Saturday's festival.

"However unimpressed it seems to start with something as quantifiable as acreage, it serves to provide an immediate perspective on this thing we call the literature of the West. That is to say, how can one live here in the West where so much land is public, is available to be explored and experienced directly — in a way not possible in the East — and not be drawn into having or assessing one's relationship to it?"

University English professor Frances Coomes says.

"One of the things that Western writers tend to be more aware of is that people don't exist abstractly and separately from where they live. It makes a whole lot of difference whether you are growing up in Torrey or growing up in Philadelphia."

Camoin, who is helping to stage "A Writing From the Land" workshop this month in Torrey, says that even Western city dwellers have a heightened sense of nature. The West may be the most highly urbanized area of the country, but at least its residents have easy access to open space.

To Marano, whose parents moved West from St. Louis when she was a child, that open space meant more than recreational opportunity.

"Even though my dad's livelihood was what brought us West, I understood that the more important opportunities here had to do with what was intangible: In the West there seemed to be enough space for an individual to reinvent or reimagine himself or herself and to feel some attachment to that space and place in a direct, organic sense."

Of course, Western writing is not the only literature with a strong sense of place. Southern writing evokes the landscape powerfully, as does Northeastern local color writing.

But the fact that Western landscape is not only scenic but contested also makes it inspiring. In Doig's latest book, Mountain Time, one of the tensions is the conflict between the main character and his father over construction of a gravel road into a natural area in Montana.

The Salt Lake Tribune

Books

Sunday, September 12, 1999
“A Power Spot in My Memory”
Ivan Doig recalls Bob Marshall, the West and growing up Montanan

By ANDREA THOMPSON

Say the words “Bob Marshall” and the immediate association for most would be the spread of wilderness north of Missoula. For Ivan Doig, the name conjures a semi-mythical figure of an insatiable hiker and outdoorsman, a poetic conservationist with the tragic aura of an early death.

It’s this presence that infuses Doig’s latest book Mountain Time, lurking behind the journeys and encounters between characters, acting as the binding thread that invisibly links one to another. The story follows eco-journalist Mitch Rozier from Seattle to his childhood home near Choteau, an area Doig knows intimately from his own childhood in Dupuyer. The climactic and most stirringly written section of the novel concerns a three-day hike into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, which Doig based on his own backpacking excursion there that spurred his interest in the man behind the name.

“I started doing some research on Bob Marshall,” explains Doig. “The more I did, the more I realized what a marvelous, spooky, but effective figure he was.”

That inspiration touched Doig, whose enthusiasm for the poetry of landscape—particularly Montana and Alaska in Mountain Time—is translated in passages of lyrical passion. “I see the landscape as the stage for the lives of my characters. Those of us writing in the West have these memories of the Big Sky, outdoor experiences and the feel of the weather,” explains Doig. “But within that I’m prompted to go further, I’m interested in whatever poetry I can find, metaphors, descriptions, clouds coming over the Rockies. It’s a setting for my characters, but it’s a setting for my language as well.”

While Doig credits his life in the West as the inspiration for his fiction, he passionately argues against using the accident of locality to lump a group of disparate writers under the term “Western fiction.”

“We’re much better than that,” he argues. For example, James Welch in Fool’s Crow; making that leap into the mind of a people. That’s beyond a place, that’s just hellish good writing. Or Mary Clarence Blew. Again, this is potent literature. While it takes place within, it also goes beyond a geographic determinant. We’re a full orchestra, we’re not just noodling an Old Susanna, some Western tune out here.”

Doig also dismisses the appellation of “historical fiction” that many critics have affixed to his work. While a few of his novels draw from historical settings and even his contemporary novels, including Mountain Time, call up the shades of history to provide a textured background, Doig points out that the past has also been an essential part of fiction from Tolstoy to Faulkner.

“I mainly just consider myself a writer,” he says. “I’m always aware of characters and language, and I’ve always thought history is just part of our lives. The trick is to touch it with a magic wand and make it good, imaginative reading.”

Doig manages to do just that in his latest offering, deftly weaving the past into the narrative of the present. Focusing on the crisis of career and relationship catalyzed by a return home, Doig illuminates how each character’s actions are affected by prior events in their own lives and even in the lives of generations before them. Following Mitch in his tension-filled journey home to his father are Lexa and Mariah McCaskill, part of the family Doig created in his earlier Montana trilogy. The ever-shifting dynamics between the two Rozier men and the McCaskill women play out against the conflicts of Western expansion and environmental concerns, the dusty poverty of the pioneer families and the wealthy new settlers.

While Mountain Time incorporates characters from his earlier books, Doig describes his latest offering as springing from outside the blueprint of the series. “It partly came from seeds here in Seattle—of the rampant money with the software boom, looking around and seeing people try to lead their ordinary lives among skyrocketing property values and Starbucks popping up on every corner,” he explains. “I find it a fascinating scene as a writer to watch, and thought it would be interesting to set Montana exiles against this scene of Seattle becoming a ‘hot.com’ place.”

Fundamentally, Doig translates his love of Montana into compelling stories of relationships and landscapes. Despite his own residence in Seattle, his imagination is fed by the country of his youth, a place he calls a “power spot in my memory.” Although he moved from Montana in 1962, his tender treatment of the wilderness and his insistent fictional returns to the Montanan landscape attest to his rejoinder, “I think the question is more, did I ever leave?”

Ivan Doig will appear at Chapter One on Aug. 17 at 7:30 p.m., Fact and Fiction on Aug. 18 at 7 p.m. and at Waldenbooks on Aug. 19 at 6 p.m.
A Pulitzer winner expands on her award-winning series to the government's ongoing "culture of secrecy"

By RICK HARMON
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

When it comes to America's ongoing joy ride with atomic power, burying and unburying in one guise or another, seems to be the current fashion.

Last summer, Portland General Electric oversaw the removal and transport of the Trojan Nuclear Plant's decommissioned nuclear reactor from its location near Rainier for burial on the Hanford National Reservation in southeastern Washington. Meanwhile, on the national stage, scientists and politicians continued their fracas not-in-my-backyard debate about the "ideal" long-term burial site for the nation's deadliest radioactive wastes.

As for the burdens of unburying, Eileen Welsome's "The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War" joins an already impressive groundswell among journalists, historians and activists, a many-pronged effort to pressure the U.S. government into greater openness and honesty about its decades-long sponsorship of nuclear science and technology.

Welsome, an investigative reporter for the Albuquerque Tribune, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for her newspaper series on 18 people who unknowingly were injected with plutonium between 1945 and 1947 by doctors associated with the Manhattan Project, the U.S. Army's top-secret World War II mission to build the world's first atomic bomb.

Welsome might easily have written a much shorter book that simply expanded on her newspaper series and detailed her own 12-year relationship with the story. Such a book would have included her current prologue (if you read these 11 riveting pages, you will likely read the rest of the book) and about 150 of the published book's 564 pages. However, by placing her dramatic account of the 18 plutonium injected in the context of the government's larger program of human and animal experiments, Welsome has created a more compelling piece of journalism. Welsome's interest in the story of the Hanford nuclear complex, however, seems to have waned. She focuses more on the internal politics of the government's nuclear weapons program than on the actual experiments themselves. She also devotes a good deal of space to the story of Jesse Smith, a 16-year-old girl who was injected with plutonium in 1945 and later died of cancer. Smith's story is compelling, but it seems that Welsome is more interested in the political implications of the experiments than in the scientific ones.

Even though the Clinton administration has done more to loosen the Department of Energy's grip on the facts about the country's nuclear past than all nuclear presidential administrations combined, the work of a Portland oral historian and journalist, Michael O'Rourke, has shown that the agency's security apparatus has by no means retreated from its secretive activities.

O'Rourke's 1995 article in The Oregonian, "The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War," provides a valuable resource for anyone interested in learning more about the government's nuclear weapons program. The article is well-researched and well-written, and it provides a good overview of the government's activities during the Cold War. However, the article is not without its flaws. Some of the sources that O'Rourke cites are questionable, and the article does not always provide a clear picture of what happened during the Cold War. Despite these limitations, O'Rourke's article is still an important contribution to the understanding of the government's nuclear weapons program.
Bodeen reads from "This House." Charles Potts reads from "Lost River Mountain," Lee Basset reads from "Poems of Lee Basset 1973-2000," and Johny Alesian reads from "Living Among the Gentry," 7:30 p.m. Friday, Powell's City of Books, 1005 W. Burnside St.


Portland poets: The poets read from their works: Dan Raphael reads from "Isn't how we got here?" Douglas Spangle reads from "Zones" and David Evey reads from "Green Water Tower," 7:30 p.m. Monday, Powell's City of Books, 1005 W. Burnside St.


Willamette Writers: The winners of the Kay Snow writing contest read from their entries, 7 p.m. Tuesday, The Old Church, 422 S.W. 11th Ave. Details 452-1952.

Richard Borg: The author reads from his book "Fear of Blue Skies," 7 p.m. Tuesday, Looking Glass Bookstore, 318 S.W. Taylor St., and speaks as part of the Catlin Gabel School's Jean Voulim Distinguished Writers Series, 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, Cabinet Center Theater, The Catlin Gabel School, 8825 S.W. Barnes Road.

Frank McCourt: The author reads from his book "Tied," 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Congregational Church, 1125 S.W. Park Ave. First time, first served.


"River, Cross My Heart!": Brenna Clarke reads from her novel, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Powell's City of Books, 1005 W. Burnside St.


"The You That Is Everywhere!": Gary Rosenthal reads from his collection of love poems, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Powell's on Hawthorne, 3723 S.W. Hawthorne Blvd.

Gumboot poets: Gumboot Poetry is a mix of literary journal and gumboot machines; the gumboot poets read their work, 8 p.m. Thursday, Caffe Lena, 2339 S.W. Hawthorne Blvd.

Lizzy Calvert: The author reads from her autobiography, "My Name Is Izzy," 6 p.m. Friday, Tower Books, 1037 N.E. 102nd.

Blue Bepoza Press: Editor Jim Bodeen and three other poets read from their work.

McMurtry: West has yet to yield 'great book'

Continued from Page E5

the nature of storytelling and whether it might be different in time, space and Texas:

"My question to Walter Benjamin would be, what kind of stories arise in a place where something has never happened except, of course, the vagaries and vicissitudes of individual life?" McMurtry writes.

Indeed, the Pulitzer Prize winner defines his own writing (23 novels, three essay collections and more than 30 screenplays) as an exploration of frontiers, both of the land and the spirit. Taken in that light, "Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen" is about the frontier called Larry McMurtry, and this self-portrait is likely to be the closest thing to an autobiography we'll ever see out of tiny Archer City, Texas.

In the book, McMurtry extols the virtues of everything from a lime Dr. Pepper to rodeo queens, laments the decline of oral storytelling and cowboys, and paints a portrait of a landscape so vast and empty it hardly seems possible it could be filled to the brim with the spirit of its inhabitants. McMurtry writes poignantly, occasionally humorously, about his own cloistered childhood, spent largely in fear of shabbiness and poverty, and his surprising distaste for the cowboy life. He is most eloquent when writing about his own obsession for reading and books, two entirely different subjects for a man who is not only a prolific writer and reader but also a rare-book dealer and collector.

And from the most recognized name in Western literature, a man who long ago sensed a need for "social poetry" between "people and landscape" and who admires him and has liked "not a word" in a couple of his novels, comes a somewhat sudden assessment of the region's writing: "The American West has so far produced depressingly little in the war of literature. Out of it has done much more. The short story might have been more aptly titled "The Plutonium Files," but the longer book does a greater service.

What were these nuclear doctors up to, anyway? At the University of Chicago's Metallurgical Lab, at the University of Rochester Medical School's Manhattan Annex, at Vanderbilt University Hospital's benefit to their health (and certainly from potentially harmful procedures). For a few decades in the middle of the 20th century, however, those traditional constraints were breached against the rationale of a "higher cause": the need to gather any and all information of conceivable value in the struggle against world communism.

Scientists and medical doctors,
Woman, Victorious

"AHAB'S WIFE" RETELLS "MOBY-DICK" FROM A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW, SUBSTITUTING LOVE FOR VENGEANCE

By ELLEN EMRY HELTZEL
THE OREGONIAN

Early in Herman Melville's classic novel, "Moby-Dick," we learn about the origins of one of the men who will sail on Captain Ahab's voyage with destiny.

"Queequeg," Melville writes of the tattooed and tomahawk-toting sailor, "was a native of Kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South. It is not down in any map; true places never are.

It is with this same spirit of discovery that you should approach "Ahab's Wife," Sena Jeter Naslund's version of "Moby-Dick," as a story written in the style of the 19th century but with a wholly 20th-century sensibility. This is a place you won't find on any map because it is neither firmly rooted in its time nor in ours. But that shouldn't diminish the pleasure of reading a story that's both ambitious and full of little treasures that pay homage to the book that inspired it.


In contrast, "Ahab's Wife" imagines the story of "Moby-Dick" from a woman's perspective, and what a different story it is. Here is a tale of the importance of community, of love and caring in constant search of a home. It celebrates traditional feminine ideals while also jettisoning the notion that women are lesser actors on the stage of life.

Naslund, a novelist and professor of writing at the University of...
Lolita's account of past, present adds little to Nabokov tale

Women's voices seem to be everywhere these days. Besides "Abah's Wife," another current attempt to put a woman's perspective on a masterpiece is a first novel by an Italian short-story writer, Pia Pera. Her "Lo's Diary" (Foxrock, $22.95), a retelling of Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita," came out after a legal wrangle between the author and Nabokov's estate, which ultimately allowed the book to be published this fall with a preface by Nabokov's son, Dmitri. "Lo's Diary" features a Lolita for the '90s: This is a girl who knows what she's doing, deliberately arousing the fastid­ious old professor who from the start is dis­commodated by her presence. She is a wicked child, who not only treats her mother horribly (understandable, given her age) but also fries her hamster on a light bulb just to see what will happen (psychopathic, at any age). In "Lo's Diary," Lolita did not die in childbirth but instead has survived into her middle years and now wants to publish the diary that covers the years of Nabokov's original book. Names have been changed (she is Dolores Maze, not Haze, etc.), but the plot is the same, with embellishments intended to help us understand Lolita's dysfunction. Besides the loss of her father, Lolita now has a baby brother who died when she was 4.

The perils of walking in the steps of a great master are everywhere apparent in this book. Although Pera has created a spirited narrator, the girl is neither sympathetic nor deep (and Humbert, for all his flaws, is a man of complexity who tells his story with all the confusion that is rife in the human experience). Lacking the subtlety that makes "Lolita" such a great novel, "Lo's Diary" looks even paler in comparison than it would if it had been a free­standing work.

--- Ellen Emry Heltzel

NEW IN THE NORTHWEST

IN GOD'S COUNTRY
David A. Neiwert
Washington State University Press, $19.95 paperback

When the Oklahoma City bombering occurred in 1995, rumors of mil­litia involvement immediately began circulating. Timothy McVeigh was, indeed, a follower of the militia movement, David A. Neiwert's book "In God's Country. The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest" defines such militia mind-sets as the Patriot movement and describes how it has spread across the country. Neiwert, a Seattle journalist, writes, "The Patriot movement is an American political ideology based on ultra-nationalistic and selective populism which seeks to return the nation to its 'constitutional' roots — that is, a system based on white Christian male rule.... Patriot movement beliefs are deeply held with religious fervor. They promote a fearful, paranoid world view that isolates believers from the mainstream of society."

How does this apply to the Pacific Northwest? According to Neiwert, the Patriot movement has substantial roots here, especially in Montana. There, frustrated farmers, millworkers and loggers look for a solution to their economic problems and sometimes turn to the Patriot movement. Neiwert says that while most mem­bers of the movement are blue-collar workers, they are not stereotypical "beer-bellied louts and loudmouths who (like) to bellyache about everything in sight." Instead, they "are often Joe and Mary Smith from next door."

Neiwert reads at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Powell's on Hawthorne, 3723 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

--- Nicole Chvatal

LITERARY SNAPSHOT

Who: Christine Barnes
Residence: Bend
Author: Barnes has written three books: "Central Oregon: A View From the Middle," "Great Lodges of the West" and the new "Great Lodges of the Canadian Rockies" (W.W. West, Inc., $35).

What are they about? The titles are self-explanatory. "Great Lodges of the West" came out in 1997 and was a smash hit, selling about 30,000 copies and winning the 1998 Benjamin Franklin Award for best history book. "Great Lodges of the Canadian Rockies" is a sequel of sorts as Barnes, watercolor artist Fred Pflughoft and photographer David Morris moved north to Canada.

Stunning visuals: The parks and lodges get most of the credit, and Barnes is quick to give the rest to Pflughoft and Morris, whose work makes both "Great Lodges" books into coffee-table keepers that appeal to anyone planning a vacation in the West.

Another audience: Barnes did a bang-up job researching the construction of these beautiful lodges and included architectural plans and drawings that enhance the history behind the buildings. Architects noticed and have responded enthusiastically.

Previous writing history: Barnes started as a journalist and was the features editor at three Bay Area newspapers: the Contra Costa Times, the Oakland Tribune and the San Francisco Examiner.

Public appearances: Barnes will sign her books from 12 to 5 p.m. today at the Holiday Cheer and Author's Party at the Oregon History Center, 1200 S.W. Park Ave. At 7 p.m. Monday (her birthday), she will give a slide show at Powell's Travel Store, 701 S.W. Sixth Ave. At 4 p.m. Saturday, she will give a slide show at Paulina Springs Book Company, 252 West Hood St., Sisters.

--- Jeff Baker
Book festival is back next week for 2nd year at Westminster

By Dennis Lythgoe
Deseret News books editor

Last year's experiment was a winner, with 45 writers, poets, book dealers and historians conducting panels and workshops for 900 enthusiastic participants. As a result, "The Great Salt Lake Book Festival" for 1999 will be held once again the weekend of Sept. 17 and 18 at Westminster College.

And although the Utah Humanities Council is bringing in several heavy hitters, this is a festival intended not for the literary elite but for all lovers of books.

Ivan Doig, a noted Western writer and author of numerous Western-based novels, including his latest, "Mountain Time," just published by Scribner, will be the keynote speaker on Friday, Sept. 17, at 7:30 p.m. in Westminster's Jewett Auditorium. He will discuss the nature of his work--"Trying to Place It: The Western Writer and the Geography of Imagination," and will then sign copies of his book. (There is a $5 charge for this lecture.)

On Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., more than 60 writers will make presentations, ranging from nature writing in the West, poetry and contemporary fiction; Hopi, Apache, Navajo and English storytelling. (All Saturday events are free.)

There will be a number of demonstrations, including medieval book illumination, papermaking, letterpress printing, decorated paper, gold toothing, bookbinding and children's bookmaking workshops by Utah bookmakers throughout the day. Attendees may make their own paper from old blue jeans and shredded U.S. currency or watch us ink is made from iron galls. There will even be a child's "book hospital" to provide free "emergency treatment" for a favorite book. (Not more than three per family and no elaborate pop-ups or family heirlooms, please.)

Traditional music will be provided by the Beehive Band, many booksellers will offer displays of current books and visiting writers will sign their own books.
Has Doig filled role as premier Western American writer?

By Dennis Lythgoe, Deseret News staff writer

Although he writes rich Western novels based in the Montana landscape of his boyhood, Utahns can identify with Ivan Doig because he has been compared so often with their own Wallace Stegner. Since Stegner's death, some critics have said Doig is now the premier Western American writer.

"That's for someone else to say, I guess," said Doig, good-naturedly, in a phone interview from his home overlooking Puget Sound in Seattle. "Wally managed to fill so many roles — novelist, biographer, conservationist, professor and lots of others — I just concentrate on fiction, and I'm a fairly deliberate worker at that. That's the only portion of Stegner's shoes I would try to step into."

Doig's writing is prolific, and he has won awards for many of his beautifully written books, including "This House of Sky," "Winter Brothers," "The Sea Runners," "English Creek" and his most popular seller, "Dancing at the Rascal Fair." More recently, he has written "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana," "Heart Earth," and "Back the Sun."

His newest book, "Mountain Time," is hot off the press, published by Scribner. "The male protagonist," said Doig, "has turned 50 in 1996, a classic baby boomer, and it's about this generation, coming out of the 1960s, reaching one of those generational times of reckoning, sandwiched between growing children, who have gone on their own inexplicable route in life, and aging parents who are starting to lose control over their lives." The story begins in 1960, in Alaska, Seattle, and San Francisco. Then the characters are reluctantly pulled back to their Rocky Mountain roots in Montana by family obligations. In one case, a man "has to attend to a father of whom he has said, 'Why can't we divorce our parents?'"

It has been a busy year for the 60-year-old Doig, including not only his finishing "Mountain Time" but buying a new house and undergoing two knee operations. "I'm just catching my breath," he said. Following some speaking obligations and book promotion, he will return to Seattle to start work in October on a new novel, this one harking back "to the homestead community of 'Dancing at the Rascal Fair,'" his 1987 book that sold 200,000 copies.

Although a Montana native, he has come to love Seattle as well. "I claim dual citizenship in the Puget Sound area and Montana. Right now, as I look out the window, I see pretty little clouds perched on the Olympic Mountains and ships passing by. But I'm just back from two weeks in Montana, a visit that was glorious and triumphal with about 500,000 people at my talks there — and it's only a day's drive from Seattle to Missouri."

Doig is not new to Utah, having visited here several times to talk about his books and his ideas about the West. At the Great Salt Lake Book Festival, his subject will be "Trying to Place it: The Western Writer and the Geography of Imagination." Doig said he will be reacting to "the shorthand notion that where we come from on the map accounts for our books. That claim makes what hair I have left stand up on end. I think Western writing uses a lot more of the literary orchestra than simply that kind of one-note description. Character is very powerful in Western writing."

Historian Richard Maxwell Brown told Doig that such books as his "This House of Sky," and others written by William Kittredge, Terry Tempest Williams, etc., are "grassroots biography and autobiography. They are about the universals of human life." According to Doig, he and other Western writers "have grown up in the sagebush, but we're all trying to write beyond those outback roots — about love, family, work, life and death — and I think doing it damn well."

Although trained as a journalist, Doig also holds a Ph.D. in history, which he mines considerably for his books. By and large, he says, historians have been generous in evaluating his work. "Reviewers get snippy sometimes. William Paulinzer has been praised for getting into Mississippi history, so it never occurred to me that the past should not play a role in my novels. Some reviewers have not been happy to wade through historical background or flashback when they want a nuclear submarine surfacing or something."

As far as comparisons to Stegner are concerned, Doig says, "I think mine and Stegner's fiction is different. Mine is maybe funnier. I don't see myself using some template of me as my male characters. Wally himself would have fussed up doing a little of that. Characters change when you put them on the page, but I think I'm trying to make up a broader cast of characters, with more women than he did. Those are shades of difference between us."

Writing has never come easy to Doig, but he doesn't believe in writer's block, either: "A person can be blocked, but I'm not sure the writing is the culprit. I'm from a journalistic background, and I never met an editor who would say, OK, we'll just run a blank space there. I don't necessarily work consecutively through a book. If I don't know what comes next, maybe I'll skip ahead and write. You have to create characters and incidents. Some of them may come out by the time the manuscript is finished, but it gives me a critical mass to work with."

Doig recalls a sign he used for a long time that said, "Anybody can write on a good day." He has discovered that writers have to write on bad days, too. "It's part of being a professional. As I look back over my manuscripts, I find it pretty hard to tell the difference between the bad and the good."
Two sports stories that transcend the genre.

They’re the best basketball players you’ve never heard of. Guys like John Staggers, James "Spunk" Williams and Earl the Owl. Their Manager are amateur playground legends who never made it to an NBA court.

These stories bounce around courts in Harlem, Brooklyn, Philadelphia and Los Angeles like tall tails, but world-renowned authors have only way their stories spread. Until the recent publication of Pick Up Artus (Vero Books paper $15) that is.

Late Anderson, who writes for Sports Illustrated, and Chauncey Black, an editor at ESPN Magazine, have compiled an unforgettable, scannning treasury of the game that grows with portraits of young boys who做梦 made it past the playground, and truly, tragically, wound up on the other side.

But while the highlights of the book are the profiles, compete with vivid descriptions of legendary blacktop moves and contests, "Pick Up Artus" does more than just shine a light on unknown individuals. Anderson and Black trace the roots of the playground game, beginning in the 1970s and 80s, when basketball belonged to Jewish and Irish American kids. They describe the rising influence of black street players, the game that came to dominate the game in the middle part of the century.

The authors tell how money, drugs and crime began to infiltrate the playgrounds, fueled by the college programs and by street drug dealers. Along the way they also fascinatingly describe how Coover and then Reehart and Nate rode the manic-depressive influence of marijuana that led to the leaner, cleaner appearance of the world of basketball.

It’s a measured caution, but the authors never lose control of the material. They show from on high, but with a compassionate, personable, driven voice, the story never dries up. "Pick Up Artus" is about basketball, but only on the surface. It’s about the fate of the younger generation, the comparison of crime and opportunistic fame. It’s a rare book, a story about sports that transcends the genre. — Mark Simon
Lyrical language inspires high-country longing

By Bob Davis

With the exception of Tom Wolfe, I don't really like the snappy banter, made-up dialogue or inner monologues of most current fiction. Which brings us to Ivan Doig's latest book, Mountain Time.

It has snappy banter that seems so foreign to real life, at least my boring life. It has moments of introspection with such seemingly clear insight for our characters. And, unless Doig is eavesdropping on some really perky, yet morose, people at his local Starbucks, it has made-up dialogue.

It also has some interesting characters. Mountain Time's Mitch Rozier should be appealing to this reviewer. Like me, Mitch is an environmentally conscious journalist who is a former college football player. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough for me to suspend disbelief and actually care about Mitch.

Unlike me, Mitch is a divorced fifty-something who has been writing a weekly environmental column for more than two decades. He lives in Seattle with Lexa, his girlfriend, who is also divorced. He is estranged from his grown-up kids. He has a bad relationship with his cantankerous father, whose health is fading. That's a lot of drama for 300 pages.

Despite his flaws, it would be easy to like this guy. But to be honest, a collection of Mitch's weekly environmental columns might be a better read than following the twists and turns of his (1) midlife crisis, (2) strained relationship with Lexa, (3) weakened job prospects with his financially troubled employer.

Ivan Doig, who has been characterized as a great writer you've never heard of, can and does paint beautiful pictures with Mountain Time. His description of life in Montana along the Rockies is amazing. It makes one desire to be in the shadow of a mountain.

Here's a sample: "It was only midafternoon when they came to the clear rush of water. Aspens pintoed opposite bank, their leaves exquisitely trembling in the least whiff of breeze. From not far upstream poured the more industrious sound of a waterfall, twenty or thirty feet high, a toboggan of white water."

With writing like that, even this fiction-phobic reviewer can offer praise for Mountain Time.

I would suspect that readers who have never been on the trail might get a desire to strap on a pack and start hiking after reading this book. That alone is worth a recommendation.

Bob Davis is OpEd/Sunday writer for the Star-Telegram.
‘Libraries are oxygen,’ says writer Ivan Doig

Author to speak at library benefit

BY GALE PIEGE MANN
American staff writer

For novelist Ivan Doig, a consummate journalist and historian, libraries are “poultices of research” where treasure hunters are sure and characters rise from the archives.

From his Seattle home on Monday, the celebrated writer of the American West said he’s happy to be a part of the “Great Beginnings” event next month that will help raise money to build a new public library in Anacortes.

The library is certain to create new pride in the community and probably will become a civic centerpiece — not to mention the benefits to Anacortes readers and researchers, Doig said.

“Libraries are oxygen for me,” he said.

For his autobiographical first book, “This House of Sky,” Doig wanted to write about his father’s visits to the saloons in their hometown of White Sulphur Springs, Mont., because it was in those establishments that his dad hired his haying crews. Being a boy back then, Doig couldn’t remember the names of all the bars, but down in the depths of the University of Washington library he found a 1947 telephone book.

“There were the names, and then I began to bring back the personalities of these saloons,” he said.

For his non-fiction book “Winter Brothers,” Doig said he “practically lived in the (UW) library” to read the diaries of James Swan, who was the federal Indian agent to the Makahs at Neah Bay in the 1880s.

“And sometimes, what’s best about libraries is that you find things you’re not looking for,” he said.

For his first novel, “The Sea Runners,” beautiful old Russian maps offered up by a librarian at the Alaska State Library actually became a character in the book.

The Montana trilogy of “English Creek,” “Dancing at the Rascal Fair” and “Ride With Me, Mariah Montana,” took Doig to libraries in Scotland and to the archives of the Montana Historical Society.

Plenty of research also went into the new novel, “Mountain Time,” from which Doig will read at the Anacortes fund-raising event.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness, a million acres of magnificent landscape high in the northern Rockies, plays a big part in the book, which Doig calls a “cousin” to the trilogy.

A 1977 backpack trip with his wife, Carol, into high lonesome of the Bob Marshall Wilderness triggered in Doig an interest in the Forest Service recreation director for which it is named. And that meant a trip to read Marshall’s papers at the University of California at Berkeley.

Set in Seattle, Montana and Alaska, “Mountain Time” is the story of the intense relationships between a father and his son, the son and his girlfriend, and the girlfriend and her sister.

And as he does so well, Doig writes about the land and the people bonded to it — even if they no longer live in Montana. Many expatriates live in the Puget Sound region and many of them will relate to the characters of the new book.

“...the Montana Diaspora, the scattered tribe who, such as in my case, went out to find work,” Doig said.

“Mountain Time” is receiving favorable reviews from critics who enjoy Doig’s humor and dialogue, and the author said he works hard to deliver a good “reading” of these colorful scenes to his audiences.

“Writing is a performance art. I work from a script and mark it up the way a symphony conductor or choreographer would make notes on a score. Different scenes work for different audiences. I’m not an actor, but readers have come to expect a good performance, and I’ve seen in action other writers who one would think had never even heard of a bookmark.”

On hearing that the theme of the fund-raising event next month is “Great Beginnings,” Doig said that just like a good newspaper story, the opening line — the great beginning — of a novel has to immediately capture the reader’s attention.

“The first dozen or so have to be pretty goddamn good words. Sometimes I’ll work long and hard on the lead of the story. I probably rewrote the start of “This House of Sky” 75 times. But it’s worth it, because great beginnings are remembered,” he said.

Here’s the new one: “Lexa McCaskill ran both hands through her coppery hair, adding up the appetites.”

Doig tells us more about Lexa and the other characters of his new novel at “Great Beginnings,” the Anacortes Public Library Foundation’s fund-raising kickoff for a new library building, Saturday evening, Oct. 2, at the Anacortes Port dock warehouse.

The event includes an art auction, local food and drink, dancing to The Atlantics and Doig’s reading. Tickets — $30 each — are available now at Watermark Book Co., 612 Commercial Ave.
Poignant Mountain Time looks at lives in time of loss

By David Cummins


"For the past few months I’ve been wrestling with accepting and reconciling the need to establish my father in an extended-care facility in another city. I thought I wasn’t in the mood for a "relationship book," particularly one dealing with this topic. The review copy of Mountain Time lay untouched for a couple of weeks. I started reading it the same day as the funeral of my last remaining grandparent. This background, of course, affected my reaction to this book. I was fascinated by watching a man about my age deal with his dying father, and seeing him go back to his childhood home and deal with the memories and emotions that were all too familiar.

All over America, adults just entering middle age are realizing something with alarm. Dealing with aging and dying parents makes their comfortable lives quite different than expected, at least for a while. In Mountain Time, Mitch Rozier, age 50, finds that his life is moving sideways at best, not advancing. He is soon to lose a second-class job at a small newspaper, his two children of a failed marriage can’t stand to be around him, and he is drifting apart from his love interest, caterer and outdoorswoman Lexa McCaskill. Just as he realizes the need to lower expectations for his future, he gets a totally unexpected call for help from his father, Lyle. Rushing from Seattle to his boyhood home in Montana, Mitch thinks that he’s just going to talk his father out of a harebrained scheme to sell the homemade for quick profit. He soon learns that the real task is to help his father gracefully die from leukemia.

Mitch and Lyle have a complicated relationship, and writer Ivan Doig makes their awkward reconciliations at the end of the father’s life ring true to anyone who has already had occasion to deal with these matters. Learning of his father’s serious illness, Mitch soon realizes that his already-complicated life has taken on this unwelcome intrusion for its duration. He is joined by his girlfriend Lexa and her older sister Mariah, just back from a globe-trotting photographic tour. They give Mitch and his father both comfort and aggravation, having been drawn to this cluttered Montana homestead by a sense of duty and compassion.

Mariah, the photojournalist on the make, gets grudging permission to record Lyle’s last days as a photo essay to be published after his death. Mitch just hopes that the estrangement in his relationship with Lyle doesn’t show. Author Doig masterfully draws the backstory of this relationship. His skill in making these characters seem real gives the reader a sense of being involved in a true family drama as it unfolds.

Mitch is puzzled by his father’s last request — to have his ashes scattered to the wind at Phantom Woman peak. It is the deep wilderness site of a fire tower that Lyle built as a young CCC worker during the Great Depression. This is quite uncharacteristic for the father that Mitch thought he knew so well. By the end of Mountain Time, we see that figuring out this puzzle is the key to Mitch’s being able to reconcile his relationship with both his father and the women in his life.

On the week-long wilderness hike to Phantom Woman with Lyle’s ashes, the relationship between Mitch and the sisters McCaskill takes unexpected and dangerous turns, and near-tragedy occurs in more than just one way. This sad, dutiful hike will change all of their lives forever. The reader is intrigued at all of the threads of the story, past and present, weaved together into an outcome that is quite rewarding. Doig is a well-respected expert at making the outdoors real and understandable to the reader. His skills at writing dialogue equal his ability to describe the American West.

Mountain Time is highly recommended to any middle-aged person who is soon to be dealing with the reality of aging parents. Doig skillfully makes you relate to his story, and makes you understand how other people deal with this issue that can’t be avoided in our lives:

"America’s airport concourses were constantly crisscrossed with Baby Boomers trying to nerve up for the waiting bedside consultation, the nursing home decision, the choosing of a casket. Mitch could generally pick out the stunned journeymen’s home in airport waiting lounges, the trim business-woman who lived by focus sitting there now with a doll-eyed stare, the man celebrating middle age with a ponytail looking down baffled now at his compassion-fare ticket. Targeted from here on, for the involuntary clerical work of closing down a parent’s life: the time came; it always came. The when of it was the ambush."

These characters and their relationships seemed totally real. I felt that I was reading about people I knew doing things that seemed eerily familiar. It is rare to be so taken in by a work of modern fiction. That is the best indicator of its worth to the reader.

David Cummins is an Anniston dentist.
'Mountain Time' is new Ivan Doig novel

Mountain Time
Ivan Doig (Scribner, $25)

Celebrated Seattle author Ivan Doig twines together past and present, West Coast and interior West, documented history with fictive invention and the perplexing vagaries of kinship and partnerships in his new novel, "Mountain Time."

In this tale of generational conflict and romantic insecurity, aging environmental columnist Mitch Rozier is summoned from Seattle by his father, a tough old Montana ranch hand, to look over some papers. Lyle Rozier has set up a deal to sell the family's modest Rocky Mountain real estate holdings. A gravel company plans to churn up as much of the landscape as it can get away with.

This is just the latest in a long line of Lyle's half-baked, get-rich-quick schemes. As Mitch complains to his live-in lover Lexa, his dad is "always out to make a killing instead of a living."

But when Mitch arrives in Montana, he discovers that his father may be playing his final hand - he has been diagnosed with terminal leukemia. To help the old man through his final days, Mitch and Lexa orchestrate a clumsy tag-team commute back and forth between their lives in Seattle and Lyle's impending death in Montana. They are joined by Lexa's photographer sister, Mariah, who secures Lyle's permission to capture on film his journey toward death.

The environmental concerns that at the outset seem like the obvious point of conflict for this book instead take a back seat to Doig's investigation of human vulnerability. The elasticity of loyalty is central to these characters.

This is Mitch's chance to gain crucial insight into the troubled relationship he has had with his father, and perhaps apply those lessons to the estranged relationship he has with his own children by a failed marriage years before.

As in his other books, Doig shuffles actual historical events into the mix. There is no escaping the fact that a couple of the pivotal plot points in "Mountain Time" are shaped by foolish peccadillo, not tragic inevitability, but Doig's characteristically nimble prose (he describes it at one point as the "playful curlicues" of language) goes a long way toward smoothing over some of the improbable or entirely too convenient developments in this tale.

But even the go-for-broke inventiveness with story construction and language can wear thin, and Doig's snappy dialogue, particularly his attempts at Gen-X lingo, seems forced at times: (When Mitch asks the young co-worker with whom he shares a cubicle, she huffs, "We are over being cubicle together.")

When he turns his attention to the landscape, on the other hand, Doig cannot go wrong. Seattle, San Francisco, Eastern Washington and especially Montana - all of them ably explored as literary settings by other authors - simply gleam with newfound clarity under the pen of this master.

In "Mountain Time," of course, the landscape is much more than a setting. It also is a player.

While this may not be Doig's strongest work, it still is no disparagement to note that this time out, the author's reach has exceeded his grasp.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest.
Doig roams from Emerald City to Big Sky country

"Mountain Time" — by Ivan Doig — Scribner — $23.

Celebrated Seattle author Ivan Doig twines together past and present, West Coast and interior West, documented history with fictive invention, and the perplexing vagaries of kinship and partnerships in his new novel, "Mountain Time." In this tale of generational conflict and romantic insecurity, aging environmental columnist Mitch Rozier is summoned from Seattle by his father, a tough old Montana ranch hand, to look over some papers. Lyle Rozier has set up a deal to sell the family's modest real estate holding along the Rocky Mountain Front — a gravel company plans to chum up as much of the landscape it can get away with. This is just the latest in a long line of Lyle's half-baked get-rich-quick schemes. As Mitch complains to his live-in lover Lexa, his dad is "always out to make a killing instead of a living." But when Mitch arrives in Montana, he discovers that his father may be playing his final hand — he has been diagnosed with terminal leukemia. To help the old 'man through his final days, Mitch and Lexa orchestrate a clumsy team-tag commute back and forth between their lives in Seattle and Lyle's impending death in Montana. They are joined by Lexa's photographer sister Mariah, who secures Lyle's permission to capture on film his journey toward death.

The environmental concerns that at the outset add a layer of conflict to this book instead take a backseat to Doig's investigation of human vulnerability. The elasticity of life is central to these characters. Mitch, with whom Lyle shares a cubical office, huffs, "We are all at risk being cubical together," when he turns his attention to the landscape; on the other hand, Doig cannot go wrong. Seattle, San Francisco, Eastern Washington, and especially Montana — all of them are explored as literary settings by other authors — simply gleam with newfound clarity under the pen of this master. In "Mountain Time," of course, the landscape is much more than a setting. It also is a player.

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Barbara Lloyd McMichael, writes about the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest.
Nature wins in 'Mountain Time'

By Halle Shilling
Camera Staff Writer


The characters in Ivan Doig's latest novel aren't good at dealing with people. They are much better with landscapes, preferably those with large open spaces and mountains.

Doig, the critically acclaimed author of "This House of Sky" and other novels, tackles the contemporary West with an expansive story about two middle-aged baby boomers — a generation "jelly-sandwiched between grown children who've gone their own way and aging parents who are losing control of their lives," Doig writes — trying to understand their roots.

The book opens with Lexa McCaskill, a 40ish woman transplanted from Montana sheep country to Seattle, where she lives not so happily with her lover, Mitch Rozier.

Lexa is obsessed with her past and still trying to comprehend her failed marriage. Mitch is a 50-year-old environmental columnist for a failing weekly newspaper. He has virtually no relationship with his two grown children and he winces when his father, Lyle, leaves a message on his answering machine, which prompts him to return to his hometown.

"When the middle name of your hometown is sulphur, there is not much you can do about the smell of your childhood," Doig writes, introducing Twin Sulphur Springs, Mont.

Mitch discovers two problems back home. His father has terminal leukemia, and has concocted a terminal scheme to get rich quick: He's going to sell the family ranch to a corporation that will mine gravel to pave roads into the nearby Bob Marshall Wilderness Area — the only thing about Montana that remains sacred for Mitch.

Lexa arrives at the ranch to await Lyle's death with her sister Mariah, a photojournalist who convinces the other three to allow her to document the patriarch's last days for a photo essay. As Lyle lies dying, Mitch turns over every rock of his past, including Please see NATURE on 6F
Living on 'Mountain Time'

Novelist Ivan Doig's Montana roots run deep in his life and his latest novel

— Susan Gordon, Page 3
PREVIEW

Ivan Doig will sign copies of "Mountain Time" in Seattle at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Elliot Bay Book Co., 101 S. Main St.; at noon on Sept. 26 at Costco in Old Aurora Village; and following a 7 p.m. reading on Oct. 4 at the University of Washington's Kane Hall. No South Sound signings or readings are scheduled.

Author utilizes his Montana heritage in 'Mountain Time,' a book 'meant to ring your baby-boomer chimes'.

BY SUSAN GORDON
THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Financial success has blessed Ivan Doig with a picture-postcard view of the snowy Olympic Range.

He got it a year ago, about the time he finished his ninth book, "Mountain Time." The novel, a tale of Seattle baby boomers who return to their Montana roots, appeared in bookstores last month.

The writer and his wife, Carol, had lived in the same Shoreline neighborhood, north of Seattle, for about 25 years before moving to their present waterfront home. With nine books still in print, Doig has earned the wherewithal to move up in the world.

When he's not promoting his books, or doing research elsewhere, Doig rolls out of bed before dawn. By 6:30 a.m., he's in his basement office - facing the mountains - trying to make words dance.

"My internal clock runs on ranch and farm time," Doig explained.

At 60, he no longer rises early to haul water from a neighbor's pump, the way he did in Montana when his family lived in a house without running water. In his youth, Doig cleaned ashes from the kitchen stove, chased sheep across the Rockies' flanks, hoisted hay bales, drove tractor.

He was born in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., east of the Continental Divide. His father was an itinerant sheep rancher. His mother died of asthma the morning Doig turned 6. Doig was the couple's only child.

His grandmother helped raise him. A fountain of proverbs who quit school after third grade, she introduced Doig to the power of colorful language. His dad was a storyteller who took Doig to the bars, where he heard more.

The story of Doig's hard-scrabble upbringing is the heart of "This House of Sky." Published in 1978, the memoir was a finalist for the National Book Award and remains Doig's most highly acclaimed work.

Other books have added to Doig's following. Most are fiction, some are not, but all deal with the people and the landscape of Montana and the Pacific Northwest.

"He's one of the most important writers the Northwest has ever produced," said fan J.C. Mutchler, an assistant professor of Western U.S. history at Pacific Lutheran University.

Doig writes authentically about the West's beautiful, but harsh, realities because he's been there, Mutchler said. "I don't think he romanticizes .... He has that love of the land that any Westerner with a big W has."

Doig earned a doctorate in history at the University of Washington, but academia held no appeal. Still, even his fiction is woven around facts. "He definitely does his homework," Mutchler said. "He knows his history as well as anybody."

Doig's trilogy "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," "English Creek," and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" follow Montana families from the turn of the century through the Depression to the present day.


In "Mountain Time," Doig brings back some old characters. The new book hinges on two connected crises, but it's mostly about family. "What do we do when a parent suddenly becomes our child?" is how Simpson put it. The second issue is environmental. The dying dad wants to sell his land to an outfit that seeks to find gas and oil near a wilderness preserve.

"It's meant to ring your baby-boomer chimes," Doig explained. "You can't not go home again when these family obligations come and seek you out .... I wanted to explore that generational tussle."

Doig draws on Northwest lore, people

One of "Mountain Time's" characters is a writer. Mitch, who went to the University of Washington in the 1960s, when Doig was in graduate school. A minor scene in the book recalls Mitch's presence at what hip Seattle then called "the piano drop." The real thing was a Country Joe & the Fish concert on a farm near Duwamish, where 3,000 people gathered in April 1968 to see a helicopter drop a piano to the ground.

"I wish I'd gone to the piano drop instead of staying home writing my dissertation," Doig joked. Still, he got it in the book, plus a lot of other Seattle color.

Doig has called Seattle home since 1966. He goes back to Montana frequently: on book tours, for research, and to pick up memorabilia that brings stories to mind.

Doig owes much to his wife, who last year retired after 30 years teaching at Shoreline Community College. "I think a working partner, a working spouse, is necessary when you start out to be a self-employed writer," Ivan Doig joked about his and Carol's marriage. "But she now points out that I now support her and bought her this house."

The Doigs share a custom-made desk in the downstairs office, where Ivan puts down words on both yellow legal pad and a computer. "Pen, pencil, notebook, whatever it takes," he said. "Dialog often comes better by pencil on pad than in the computer."
the first rough draft." Doig doesn't like the computer, he says. The screen bores his eyes, it is the Royal Standard typewriter once acquired and never used isn't setup. "I'm not entirely the Luddite, sometimes portrayed as," Doig said.

At his desk, Doig fingered tiny antler-black-and-white-wisdom tooth, pieces of 1920s ranch hands: his dad,cles and a family friend. Nearby, another photo, a anonymous boy, a young student and teachers who sat for a portrait outside a turn-of-the-century Montana school. Doig said his next book will likely be back to that era. When he's sitting, he uses such pictures to mulate his imagination. He also says on notes, filed neatly on 5-by-5s. He pulled one out. Typed story in the middle was a single sentence. "Susan Duff knew that the aper of her life sat uneasy with other." She will probably be the protagonist of his next book, Doig said. But how those words will fit in, he can't say.

"When I was with Doig, the hardest part of book writing the first draft. He often doesn't outline plots beforehand. 'Art of writing any book is seeing here it's going to lead,' he said."

Doig prides himself on his work-like approach: his early rising, daily afternoon persistence. Since 1978, he has written with a new book every several years. When he's working on one, Doig writes between 400 and 1,000 words a day. "Sometimes" took him two years complete.

Some of Doig's characters are hero-like, in stature, but the writer is an average-sized guy—5-foot-9, 168 pounds. He writes every day, with no head and hair. Those days, he's eyebrows recall his red-head youth. He left Montana when he won a scholarship to Northwestern University in Chicago and studied journalism. For a time, he wrote editors for a chain of newspapers based in Illinois. He never worked as a reporter, but "unabashedly takes notes" wherever the fancy strikes him, that part of being writer, hanging onto the good stuff and using it "latterly." He keeps a tiny, wire-bound notebook tucked in a pocket of his light brown chambray shirt, his "dairy chic." He has an other pair of glasses (Doig switches among three prescriptions, including one for the computer.) At home, he also wears jeans and comfortable-looking shoes. He takes an afternoon break for a long walk with Carol and quits writing about 4 p.m. I was told he and Carol have a hink — he likes bourbon, she likes gin — and listen to National Public Radio news.

"I have a kind of daintiness of grasp and a maintenance of routine," he said. In writing leads to burnout, he gueses. "Steaminess is the way to go."
Big changes in Big Sky

Novel looks at boomers’ shifting lives, landscapes

By Edvins Beitsiks
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

WHEN YOU TALK about the gradual pounding-down of the American landscape, you can start with the fat-wallet colonies that have settled in the heart of Montana, former stomping grounds of author Ivan Doig.

“The Montana Riviera,” Doig calls it, pointing toward Bozeman and other towns taken over by the literati and glitterati. “All these people coming out from Hollywood, all this money from the movies and the arts. But it’s not the first time it’s happened...my great-grandparents used to milk cows for John Ringling of Ringling Brothers Circus, the kaiserlinoire of his time.”

Doig, 60, on a western tour to tout his newest novel, “Mountain Time,” just out from Scribner’s, said, “It’s an old story, a very familiar story. There’s a sense the West is being loved to death by these people. As Wallace Stegner said, “You can love a place and still be dangerous to it.”

That’s the theme at the heart of “Mountain Time,” a story of aging baby boomers trying to deal with the deterioration of their parents’ lives and the complications of their own lives in a changing landscape. Doig — author of novels “Bucking the Sun” and “Dancing at the Rascal Fair” as well as nonfiction works “Heart Earth” and “This House of Sky” — sees “Mountain Time” as a study in eternal questions being forced on a specific generation.

Mitch Rozier, 50-year-old writer for a militant environmental magazine, returns to his home in Montana to deal with the scrap ends of his father’s life. [See DOIG, B-6]
Big changes in Big Sky

Lyle Doig has decided to sell his home and land to a road-building agency intent on gouging into the Rocky Mountain Front. At the same time the elder Rozier, dying of cancer, asks for his ashes to be scattered from a fire tower on Phantom Woman Mountain, in the heart of the wilderness.

"Mountain Time" grew out of Doig's interest in what will happen when "the time of decision comes for baby boomers, when they will have to deal with the problems of their parents losing control of their lives. I asked myself how much..."

The New York Times

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Just one more piece that makes up the jigsaw puzzle of these United States. "It's another part of the territorially intricate country that this is," said Doig, adding San Francisco and its multicolored, multicultural neighborhoods to that mosaic.

It's important to keep the landscape of America, city and countryside, from deteriorating, said Doig, who remains optimistic in spite of evidence that the land is losing its fight against humans. "I think we've wounded the earth pretty hard out here," he said. "It's ugly, it's destructive what we're doing, but there's still some hope.

"We're not shooting each other right now. We're not killing each other for land, the way we did during the westward movement," said Doig. "We haven't had any blood wars in a long while, which says something good for us, I think."

DOIG from B-1

Reagan biography sparks controversy

able? Ronald and Nancy Reagan granted Morris complete indepen­dence in writing this book, never requesting any glance at his pages. Has Morris used or abused that independence? Should "Dutch" even be placed in bookstores without a clear statement within the text itself that identifies the fic­tional and nonfictional sections and sources? Does it bring Reagan to life or trivialize his historical significance? These questions will get thrashed out on the talk shows, in the news magazines, in publi­cations, perhaps in court­rooms over the ensuing months. The attendant publicity will assure that legions of readers will buy San Francisco Examiner

SAN FRANCISCO MOVIE GUIDE

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THE DUTCH from B-3
Eloquent landscape, but thin characters


By SAM COALE
Special to the Journal

Baby Boomers in Seattle. Mitch Rozier, 50, writes Coastwatch, a column on environmental issues for a weekly newspaper that’s about to close. He’s divorced, living with Lexa McCaskill, 40, who’s divorced, a former rodeo champion, a feisty hiker who works as a caterer. His father Lyle, living like a “Swamp Yankee” in Twin Sulphur Springs, Montana, has leukemia. Lexa’s beautiful sister Mariah, 42, who’s divorced and a world-hopping photographer, shows up and decides to shoot Lyle’s last days.

Mitch, Lexa and Mariah spar with Lyle at his rockbound ranch. Lyle has always been full of schemes that have never worked out. The latest is a collection of branding irons to sell. And he wants to sell his place to gas-and-oil interests who need gravel to build roads into the mountains.

Ivan Doig has written several novels about the West as well as non-fiction. He writes eloquently about landscape, in particular about the Rockies and other mountains: “You could see out over a dozen watersheds and headwaters, out to the dark peat of pine on a hundred mountains, out into supple valleys, out all the way to the half-mile-high walls of stone that fronted the mountain range.” And about light, weather conditions, rivers.

But Doig’s characters are hip, one-liner-spouting creatures who pass through ephemeral moods and whirms and leave no trace or shadow. They are arch and thin and drift or coast ineffectively from place to place or person to person.

The trouble is that Doig seems to like this would-be-casual humor. He writes the way his characters talk. “At best, Mitch could write a column with a skateboarder’s eye for odd angles and fast surfaces.” Doig quotes Robinson Jeffers, then quips, “It was a time when zinger sentences walked the earth.”

A “blonde and tawny woman” is quickly summed up: “Sheena@jungle.com.” Mitch’s dying dad Lyle thinks that the sisters, Lexa and Mariah, “had the sort of mouths that needed holsters.” Great line, but not much depth there.

Consequently, though Lyle and Mitch joust and feint (“Maybe in error, but never in doubt — that was my father”), and though inevitable death lurks in the wings, you don’t feel anything. It must be those “odd angles and fast surfaces” that Doig skates so well around and across. It makes for a sluggish, superficial book.

At one point Mitch thinks “that thick neck of the earth was always going to be a country of great mountains and mediocre human chances.” Maybe that’s the problem. At another Mitch reminded himself this was how occasion, not a why.

Doig is fine at hows — action, description — but not at whys — character, depth of emotion. There are some splendid set pieces: the trek through the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area in Montana; the flight up the pipeline from Valdez in Alaska; Mitch at 16, working for his father, picking rocks out of a field and getting his leg run over; Lyle’s memories of the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939 and fighting the Japanese in New Guinea; the final journey up a lookout tower to scatter Lyle’s ashes.

But the characters fade in and fade out, no match for the gnarled, knotty prose that works wonders on mountain vistas. Doig has a great eye, but it works best in solitary moments, observing the world around him, when nobody else is talking.

Sam Coale of Providence is a frequent reviewer.
McCaskill, who documents Lyle's deathwatch.

Their desperate and disparate lives flow together when they hike into the mountains on a sad journey to scatter Lyle's ashes.

Three people, three intense relationships, three rivers. "Mountain Time" is the confluence: The familial clash between Lyle and Mitch echoes the clash between the historic and contemporary West, where exploitation has always been at odds with environmental anxiety. Their story also reflects the dynamic, flowing history in which men have both protected and profaned the Western landscape, which is as much a character in Doig's work as any McCaskill.

Doig's poetic prose remains intact here, but for the first time in his literary career he's funny, too, especially when he satirizes the fashions and excesses of the Pacific Northwest "Cyberia": "The Cascopia [newspaper] building was in Seattle's Fremont district, where the Sixties still roamed. The hempen necessities of life were available there, as were cafes with good rowdy names such as The Longshoreman's Daughter, plus deluxe junk shops, plus bars that were museum pieces from the days when hair was Hair."

"Mountain Time" will not disdain those who rank Doig among the best living American writers, and might even beg comparisons to some of the best dead ones, too. Faulkner comes most readily to mind: The Sartories of Yoknapatawpha County are no more troubled and no more human than the McCaskills of the Two Medicine country in Montana. Two great rivers in different landscapes.

Wyoming novelist and newspaperman Ron Franscell is the author of "Angel Fire" and the upcoming mystery "The Deadline."
Mount. In Time.

By Ivan Doig.
Scribner. 320 pages. $25.

BY RON FRANSELL
Special to the Journal Sentinel

In Montana, not far from where Ivan Doig grew up beneath the big sky that still haunts him, three rivers flow together to form the deep, wide Missouri, lacing through both time and landscape, the old West and the new.

And like the brawny Missouri, Doig has channeled three, deep literary tributaries into "Mountian Time," a coda to his McCaskill family trilogy.

Mitch Rozier is flotsam, a 50-year-old environmental columnist for a post-hip alternative Seattle weekly paper, a Baby Boomer treading water with his own past and present: estrangement from his grown children, tenuous job security and his scrappy lover.

Lexa McCaskill is jetsam, the earthy, divorced Montana expatriate swirling in Mitch's eddy, catering swanky Seattle software soirees, also going nowhere. Together, they are caught in the undertow of Lyle Rozier, Mitch's father. Lyle is dying of leukemia and Mitch is summoned back to his childhood home in Montana.

Mitch faces an ancient question unearthed by a new generation, twisted to fit a new sensibility: Dare we go home again? That's what Mitch asks himself when his father calls from Montana:

"The old hated tone of voice. Lyle Rozier proclaiming he had the world on a towrope and a downhill pull at last. Rubbing his opposite ear as if the words had gone right through him, Mitch winced into the phone that next morning. How many times had he heard this, or something almost like it?"

But Mitch’s reluctant reunion with his crusty old dad is flooded with lingering family disappointments and secrets, and the revelation that Lyle wants to sell the family land to a gravel company and rewrite his own life history in the process. Lexa comes along for the ride, port but brings her own, more world-weary photographs.

Mariah McCaskill, who documents Lyle's deathwatch and presents Lexa's unrooted angst. Their disparate, disparate lives flow together when they hike into the mountains on a sad journey to scatter Lyle's ashes.

Three people, three intense relationships, three rivers. "Mountain Time" is the confluence: The familial clash between Lyle and Mitch echoes the clash between the historic and contemporary West, where exploitation has always been at odds with environmental anxiety. But the reader also stands on the near bank of a dynamic, flowing history in which men have both protected and profaned the Western landscape, which is as much a character in Doig's work as any McCaskill.

Doig’s poetic prose remains intact here, but for the first time in his literary career he’s pretty damn future, too, especially when he’s satirizing the folksy and escapist "Cyberia" Pacific Northwest.” The Casco [newspaper] building was in Seattle’s Fremont district where the Sixties still roamed. The hempen necessities of life were in his line there, yet were always too good, too cheap, the man who submerged in the machinery of the world, the man who couldn't keep a job.

"Mountain Time” will not disguise those who want Doig, a Northwestern University graduate, among the best living American novelists. And one might even be making comparisons to some of the best “dead” ones, too. Faulkner comes most readily to mind: The Snopeses of Yoknapatawpha County are no more trouble and no more human than the McCaskills of the Two Medicine country in Montana. Two great rivers in different landscapes.

A Wyoming novelist and newspaperman, Ron Franssell is the author of "Angel Fire" and the upcoming mystery, "The Deadline."
Ivan Doig novel depicts a people going downhill

By Ivan Doig
Scribner, 1999
$25, 316 pp.

"Mountain time" refers to that part of the country where the landscape has been whittled less by culture than by geophysical phenomena.

Travel into its rural areas and time seems to go backward. Relics of the past literally litter the land.

The Continental Divide is hard to stay on top of. Rugged men and women worked to settle the American West. Their children flowed away from its slopes like water.

Dreams are one thing, living another.

Nobody knows this better than Ivan Doig, born and raised in mid-century Montana. Son of a rancher and grandson of a homesteader, he witnessed rough life from a pioneer perspective. His Montana memoirs, published in 1978, became an immediate Western classic. "This House of Sky" detailed with devastating eloquence the passing of culture through land known best as "God's country." Subsequent novels have continued his theme of exploring soul growth in relationship to environment.

"Mountain Time," his newest novel, is a study in declination. Everyone and everything is going downhill: health, work, passions, land, even relationships.

Mitch Rozier is a man in midlife crisis when his cantankerous father summons him home again. Siphoned from Montana in the early 1960s by a University of Washington football scholarship, he has not been back to Twin Sulphur Springs except for an occasional visit. An environmental columnist for an alternative Seattle weekly, his job security is dubious. He hates writing anyway, dreads making the words up, does not enjoy his compatriots. A failed early marriage and estranged relationships with his children make him feel older than 50. Lexa McCaskill is a light in his life, but even their romance is dubious. Together five years, both are perplexed, still holding out on each other.

Mitch leaves Seattle and heads straight for home when his father announces plans to sell the family ranch to a gravel company. Lyle's issues are bigger than
Doig
Continued from Page C1

real estate, however. He is dying of advanced leukemia.

Lexa arrives with her photo-journalist sister in tow, and Mariah begins shooting Lyle on his death march. Complications arise, and a crisis ensues when Mitch fails to come to peace with his exasperating father.

Montana takes over, teaching Mitch the lesson he needs to jump-start his passion for life.

Ivan Doig is a fine writer — a master writer — even a tender writer, but "Mountain Time" is not his best effort.

Luminous prose is a craft, but even the best craft needs water and a pilot who can sound deep revelations. Doig's endeavor this time is ambitious but fallow, softened by too much solemnity, constraint and decorum.

Ara Taylor reviews books for The Bellingham Herald.

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West Side Stories

Readers rank the 20th century's best nonfiction this side of the Rockies

The trouble with compiling any best-of list is that the compiler never gets to take part in what makes lists so much fun, i.e., complaining about the omissions afterward. Nonetheless, it’s with great pride that The Chronicle hereby surrenders its list of the 100 best nonfiction books of the 20th century written in English about—or by an author from—the Western United States.

The Chronicle Western 100 owes its existence to precisely the kind of gripping it may now inspire. One year ago, the editorial board of a major New York publisher disseminated its list of the 100 best novels written in English and published in the 20th century. Critics promptly called the list too old, too white, too male and too representative of the publisher’s back-list. A month ago the same house promulgated a follow-up list of the 100 best novels written in English and published in the 20th century. The publisher’s back-list. The top vote-getter on the Chronicle Western 100 was Mary Austin’s “Land of Little Rain,” her classic 1910 account of the terrain between Death Valley and the High Sierra—a book Edward Abbey called “a small, tender, old-fashioned and engaging book, a part of the basic literature of American nature writing.”

Hard on its heels were Wallace Stegner’s “Beyond the Hundredth Meridian,” Abbey’s “Desert Solitaire” and Ivan Doig’s “This House of Sky.” Let no one blame himself for not having read all, or many, or perhaps even any of these books. Blame instead an East Coast literary establishment that tends to get the West wrong only when it isn’t ignoring it completely.

Look at the top 10 magnificent writers and reflect that none of them, not one, made New York’s nonfiction list. Not Austin, who blazed the trail for a century of writing about the wild. Not Stegner, whose Stanford writing program has nurtured generations of distinguished writers in the West. Not Abbey, whose comic novel “The Monkey Wrench Gang” helped radicalize environmental thinking in America. Not Doig, the Montana-born, Seattle-based master whose impatiently awaited new novel, “Mountain Time,” hits bookstores this summer. And not Evan S. Connell either, the San Francisco mailman-turned-novelist whose landmark examination of the American West but published here as well by the late, much-lamented Northpoint Press.

Connell’s “Son of the Morning Star” also has the distinction of getting a vote from the man to whom it’s dedicated, the gifted San Francisco writer Curt Gentry. “Heller Skelters,” Gentry and Vincent Bugliosi’s harrowing book about the Charles Manson murders, missed joining “Son of the Morning Star” on the list by the narrowest of margins.

So did books by Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, whose origins in Seattle and the San Fernando Valley, respectively,

> KIPEN: Page B5 Col. 1

1. "Land of Little Rain" Mary Austin
2. "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian" Wallace Stegner
3. "Desert Solitaire" Edward Abbey
4. "This House of Sky" Ivan Doig
5. "Son of the Morning Star" Evan S. Connell
6. "Western Trilogy" Bernard DeVoto
7. "Assembling California" John McPhee
8. "My First Summer in the Sierra" John Muir
9. "The White Album" Joan Didion
10. "City of Quartz" Mike Davis
Readers Rank Doig, Didion Works Among Best Nonfiction

John McPhee
His "Assembling California" was No. 7.

John Steinbeck
Co-wrote "Sea of Cortez," at No. 2B.

Maxine Hong Kingston
Her "Woman Warrior" came in No. 42.

The Chronicle's Western 100

1. "Land of Little Rain," Mary Austin
2. "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," Wallace Stegner
3. "Desert Solitaire," Edward Abbey
4. "This House of Sky," Sandra Cisneros
5. "Sea of the Morning Star," Ivan Doig
6. The Western Trilogy, Bernard Dubowski
8. "My First Summer in the Sierra," John Muir
10. "City of Cities," Mike Davis
11. "Debted to Happers," George Rippey
12. "In the Two Worlds," Theodore White
13. "American and the California Dream" (two volumes), Kevin Starr
17. "Arctic Dreams," Barry Lopez
18. "Foraward to Nowhere," David Marquand
19. "The End of the World as We Know It," David Foster Wallace
20. "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," Dee Brown
24. "And the Road Played Flat," Randy Smith
25. "The Big Fix," Oscar Lewis
27. "In the Spirit of a Crazy Horse," Peter Matthiessen
29. Edward F. Ricketts
32. "Great Plains," Wallace Stegner
33. "The Great Train Robbery," George Rippey
35. "Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglala," Rudi Wulff
36. "City of Nets," Oliver Savitch
40. "Water," Rick Bass
41. "Nurtured Genres," Stephen Ambrose
42. "The Woman Warrior," Maxine Hong Kingston
43. "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test," Tom Wolfe
44. "Lolita of the Movies," Paula Kellogg
45. "The Devil's Dictionary," Ambrose Bierce
46. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," Hunter S. Thompson
47. "The Book on the Taboos Against Knowing Who You Are," Fearawaii
49. "Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the Beach," Daniel O'Quinn
50. "This Big Life," Louis Wolf
51. "Rocks in My Shoes," Lawrence Clark Powell
52. "The California Dream," anthologies edited by Dennis Hals, Jonathan Eshen
54. "Love and War," Polly mayo
57. "T. Rex and the Crater of Dreams," Walter Moberg
63. "The Executioner's Song," Norman Mailer
64. "Library of Congress: The Unofficial Part of the American West," Anthony F. C. Wallace
65. "Liking Ulysses Street: Narrative Recollections," Beryl Shipton
68. "Lonesome Traveler," Jack Kerouac
70. "An Autobiography," wild Adams
73. "Twentieth-Century Philosophes Pose on Poetry," Robert Hayden
74. "Still Read an Informal Portrait of Seabright," Murray Morgan
76. "The Kinship Knot," David Ramsay Wallace
77. "Seven Presidential Lands," Robert Lowell
80. "First Cut," Steven Bach
The very real familial clash between Lyle and Mitch in “Mountain Time” echoes the clash between the historic and contemporary West.
Montana has become the In Place among certain members of the cognoscenti, and as an unhappy consequence has suffered a small invasion of writers, film makers, movie stars and other undesirables. But one does not have to be a native to know that the environment they inhabit is a long way from the “real” Montana. A far more accurate depiction of it is to be found in the writing of Ivan Doig, who grew up in that desolate, beautiful state in a family of sheep ranchers and who has devoted himself to celebrating (and preserving) the Montana he knows in the pages of his books.

He has now published nine, of which Mountain Time is the sixth work of fiction. Here as before, his best writing is about landscape and place; he has more trouble with people, especially when he fills their mouths with stiff dialogue, but his abiding love for his home ground carries the day in Mountain Time, as it almost always does in his work.

Not surprisingly, given its central subject, that work has a strongly autobiographical cast, as certainly appears to be the case with Mountain Time. Doig doesn’t do fictional autobiography as it’s commonly practiced these days—gavel-izing, mercifully, is not among the tricks of his trade—but he uses the raw material of his own life as the starting point for exploring the lives of other people and the places where they live. Thus the protagonist of this novel, Mitch Rozier, is a Montanaan now living in Seattle, as Doig himself does, and a man deeply concerned about the preservation of his home state’s natural environment, as Doig himself is.

Mitch is, by his own reckoning, “a fifty-year-old unfeathered biped carrying too much weight,” including “a marriage behind me that I wouldn’t wish on an alimony lawyer.”

By toshio whelchel. reviewed by arnold r. isaacs

3 Freedom from Fear, ❈ by David M. Kennedy
Reviewed by Michael Kazin

Fiction

2 Mountain Time. ❈ by Ivan Doig
Reviewed by Jonathan Yardley

6 the sexual occupation of Japan
by richard setlowe. reviewed by Janice nimura

6 the climate of the country. by Marnie Mueller
Reviewed by Mary Isihomoto Morris

These are a lot of balls to keep in the air, but by and large Doig is up to the challenge. If human speech presents formidable obstacles for him—the phrase “wooden dialogue” has rarely been more apt—human emotions do not; he understands his characters well, and manages to make them all the more interesting not in spite of their flaws but because of them. Lyle in particular is complex and surprising, especially as he struggles to disguise the fear that the disease inflicts upon him, fear such as he has not felt since he was a young man fighting in the South Pacific. In Mountain Time as in life itself, people are more interesting than causes. Doig is an environmental true believer whose fiction often teeters along the narrow line between story and tract, but this time he successfully resists the temptation to preach. He lets the story tell itself, which is what stories are supposed to do.
**Writer finds discipline in farming, journalism roots**

Author Ivan Doig, born in Montana and raised on a farm, finds the land still inspires him and draws him back for research. He is on a Montana book tour for his newest effort, "Mountain Time."

Farm-boy roots and the discipline of chores gave writer Ivan Doig the ability to rise each morning and work.

The native Montanan and ex-ranch hand says his early days of helping on the farm coupled with his fortitude in graduate school at Northwestern University and later as a book reviewer to teach him deadlines.

"It doesn't matter if you're not in the mood to feed the cows or herd the sheep," Doig said in an interview from his Seattle home. "Do the work."

And "doing the work" has been a matter of course for the 60-year-old Doig since he started half a lifetime ago to become an author. He is usually up by 5 a.m., taking a walk or weeding his lettuce patch while drawing inspiration from Puget Sound. "I've been known to return phone calls at 5:30 a.m.," he chuckles, noting that not everyone rises with the sun. "But I break the work into portions and if I'm having trouble moving the plot forward, I move to a different section of the book and work on weather passages, descriptive parts, or the dialogue."

Doig was 39 when "This House of Sky," his first effort, was greeted with bravos and rapturous reviews. That was a finalist for the National Book Award in contemporary thought and the language of the book was praised as coming from "the hands of an artist...it touches all landscape and all life," said the Los Angeles Times.

Since then he has accomplished a trilogy of novels—"Dancing at the Rascal Fair," "English Creek," and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana." The book tour for his latest novel, "Mountain Time," kicked off this week and ends in Portland, Ore., Dec. 11, after more than three dozen readings and book signings.

"I make sure they take me home after four or five readings, though," he says. "Otherwise, it gets daunting, and I miss the writing part."

Writing nine books and more than 200 articles and book reviews has given Doig a pride in his dedication. "I've never missed a deadline and I think my habit patterns from journalism have served me well in the book writing," he said. But he no longer does book reviews, as he did for years for the New York Times, Washington Post and USA Today. "They simply take too much time from the rest of my writing."

Doig, married to teacher Carol, encourages would-be journalists to take the leap into fiction and novels if that's their hearts' desire. "But I tell people to get the financial part secure first. Have a partner who can help you with insurance. My wife supported me for many years while I was working on the first book — it was actually just over six years in the making and two and one-half years at the keyboard."

The latest effort, "Mountain Time," contrasts mountain time with human time. Doig says it deals primarily with three relationships: father and son, sisters, and lovers. The book is, he says, "a novel of the Baby Boom generation jelly-sandwiched between grown children who've gone their own way and aging parents who are losing control of their lives."

The action takes place in Alaska, in Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, and in San Francisco, among other locales. The attempt, he says, was to connect human and geographical qualities and vulnerabilities.

"I work very hard to make my characters and situations convincing," he says. "In this latest book, I have a very large character — a big guy — whose extra physical dimensions tie him in with the larger landscape."

Doig works a lot with rhythms in his characters' dialogue, and linguistic trademarks, and he works hard to make his names memorable. "I keep files on names, faces, characteristics gleaned from life and observation," he says. "And of course, I make them up too. You have to draw on your own imagination."

Journalists, he says, sometimes have trouble making the transition to novels because "they try to be even-handed, which is a basic principle of journalism. But in fiction, your characters have to have passions and obsessions and you can't be afraid to hold back."

The much honored author also likens his work to that of a sculptor, watercolorist or jazz musician. "I've talked with all of those artists and they all try to make their work real by 'getting it in the fingers' — whether it's the feel of the rock, the effectiveness of the sketch or the feel of the keys under the fingers. I'm trying to do that with my characters, landscape and language."

Doig also has tart observations about being pigeonholed, as many before him have been, "as a western writer."

The best writers often come from regional roots, he says. "Eudora Welty was pegged as a southern writer and she wrote wonderful books about life. Wallace Stegner fought the pigeonholing..." On and on," he says. "Everybody is a regionalist. Tolstoy is a regionalist."

Years ago, he says, the New York Times did a roundup piece on what they stereotyped as "Writers of the Purple Sage." They misspelled Wallace Stegner William Stegner. Doig laughs at another writer's comment that "Out here, West of the Hudson, we've always pronounced the name 'Wallace'."

He is fond of quoting poet William Carlos Williams who said, "the classic is the local fully realized." Doig says he "rocked back in my chair when I first came across that. The finest words of many a good writer are marked by place."
People in Billings

Insurance agent recognized

Mark D. Sorlie of Billings received the Emerald Award in July during the 119th annual meeting of agents of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Co. in Milwaukee.

Mr. Sorlie was recognized for selling more than $9.3 million in insurance for Northwestern. He is associated with the company’s Samuel P. Pella District Agency in Billings, of the Mike M. Anderson General Agency in Bozeman.

Community Band picks conductor

Ken Boggio, longtime band conductor in Hardin, has been chosen to direct the Billings Community Band in the coming year. Rehearsals begin at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 1, in band room at Senior High School. No auditions are required to join. Call Carmen Gait at 259-3476 for information.

Billings teacher honored

Richelle R. Selleck, a kindergarten teacher at Drive Elementary School, has been selected for a Disney’s American Teachers Award.

Ms. Selleck and Glasgow High School teacher Gordon P. Hahn were among 39 teachers selected from more than 75,000 nominations. They will be honored in Los Angeles in an awards show that will be shown on the Disney Channel on Nov. 15.

By JIM LARSON

The Billings Outpost

“Low grade fishing,” the author called it. Real “tin and bait fishing,” he said.

These were the words that author Ivan Doig used to describe the passage that he was about to read from his new novel, “Mountain Time.” He added, “I tremble to read this scene in the home of Norman Melman.”

Mr. Doig speaks as well as he writes. He amused and entertained a large group of admirers last week at the Alberta Bair Theatre.

Before plunging into the reading, Mr. Doig spoke of the things that "fuel" his writing. Often praised for his excellent ear for dialogue, the author noted that "every work has its own vocabulary." He said that he works consciously at developing the vernacular of each book. He listens for "the poetry of the working class."

When asked if he knew how his stories would end when he started them, Mr. Doig said that he knows when the story will begin and end, but not the exact plot. He said that his "workings with the "are of time.""

"I have a notion of where the plot is going, but I am often guided by the language," he said. He also noted that the characters provide some of the plot.

An audience member asked Mr. Doig how he felt about rewriting. He answered, "I am a ferocious rewrite. I'm more of a rewriter than a writer." He said that he revises until he makes the work "start to dance."

Looking the part, the writer from White Sulphur Springs mentioned that too much is made of the geography that a writer chooses to set his stories in. All writers are regional writers, he said. All use a sense of place as a tool of their trade. He argued that place is "a seasoning, not the whole recipe."

Mr. Doig said that the setting of his reading was drawn from a trip that he and his wife, Carol, had made into the Bob Marshall Wilderness in 1977. The author read the passage like a seasoned actor and left listeners wishing for a little "Mountain Time" of their own.

Doig rewrites until work ‘starts to dance’
Meet IVAN DOIG at a book signing of Mountain Time on August 19th... 12:00 p.m.

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The Bozeman Public Library & MSU Libraries

COUNTRY BOOKSHELF
Coming Home

Author Ivan Doig returns to his native Montana with a new book

what else?
George Winston performing at the Baxter/page 3
Livingston hosts last gallery walk of the summer/page 6
Outdoor quilt show set for next weekend/page 13
Living on Mountain Time

Ivan Doig is coming home, well almost. He’s coming to Bozeman, which is, as the crow flies, just about 68 miles short of White Sulphur Springs, where he was born 60 years ago, and where generations of his family are buried.

Driving into the Gallatin Valley from the west, the first thing he and his wife, Carol, will see is the Bridger Range. “The Bridgers come on the horizon as we come down that valley. I can’t not see them,” he says. “There is a lot of the story of my life there, great turns in my life, of my mother dying back there in the mountains and my dad beginning to raise me. And two books I’ve been born of events there.”

But Bozeman is about as close as he’ll come to home on this trip. “White Sulphur Springs is a bit of a different case for me,” he says, his voice slowing. “It is striking, the power of the land where your people lie, under those headstones. It is a place you don’t go back to lightly when you’re trying to do some other stuff.”

And this time, the “other stuff” includes a book tour. He will be here to read from his newest book, “Mountain Time,” and deliver the Siegner lecture at Montana State University.

He will be greeted by an extended family of fans and friends who have felt the tug of his tales about the Montana landscape, a place that has forever stayed with him “in terms of the material in the powerspot of my memory,” he says.

“The people I heard tell stories, my father and my grandmother and my dad’s buddies in the bars in White Sulphur Springs and so on, all this forms a very vivid landscape of the mind for an impressionable child, which I guess I must have been.”

The grandson of Montana homesteaders and son of Montana ranch workers, Doig left Montana for college at Northwestern University, where he earned a journalism degree. Over the years, he has been a ranch hand, a newspaperman, a magazine editor and a writer. He earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington and settled in Seattle with Carol, whom he met at Northwestern.

But his memoirs and novels draw on his personal history, the seductiveness of pioneer independence peppered with an honesty about the ups and downs of real life.

“He is important here because he writes so eloquently about a place that means something to us,” says Cindy Christin, a librarian at the Bozeman Public Library. “He writes about a way of life and people that, if we are not familiar with people like that, we would like to be; people who work really hard, on ranches, with sheep, that struggle with daily life on a regular basis. He brings those people to life for the rest of us. There are a bunch of people who are important to Montana but get kind of lost sometimes.”

“Mountain Time,” his sixth novel, starts in Seattle’s coffeehouse and computer culture, but is an epilogue of sorts to his earlier fictional trilogy about the McCaskill family. The protagonist this time is Mitch Rozier, a Montana-born, divorced, 50-something environmental columnist for an alternative newspaper. His partner, Leza McCaskill, is a Montana-born, carthy, divorced caterer.

Doig takes the two back to Montana, where Lyle Rozier, Mitch’s exasperating father, wants his environmental son’s help with some exploitative endeavor before he dies of leukemia. The two inevitably clash.

Mike Malone, MSU’s president and Doig’s friend for nearly 20 years, says, “He’s one of the great observers of the West, of people and place, that’s the fundamental thing. ... In his books you learn what was happening, in many ways, but you also get the meaning of...
Author Ivan Doig continues his observance of the West in new book

The books of Ivan Doig

The author Ivan Doig, Montana-born and bred, has written six books of fiction and three non-fiction titles — all of which have a taste of Montana or the pioneer adventure. Listed in chronological order by date of publication, they are:

- "This House of Sky" (1978) is a memoir. Doig has said he wrote the book because he felt his family had become relics of a culture that had disappeared. Nominated for the National Book Award.
- "Winter Brothers" (1980) is nonfiction.
- "The Sea Runners" (1982) was his first novel. Story of four Swedish men who fled from their indenturement to the Russian-American fur trade. They had signed on for seven years' service at Sitka, Alaska, but stole an 18-foot Indian canoe and escaped. They were found near Astoria, Oregon, three of them nearly starved to death. He was inspired by a newspaper clipping saying only that the three had been found.

His acclaimed Two Medicine trilogy:
- "English Creek" (1984) introduces Jick McCaskill as a 14-year-old boy and the look and mood of Montana ranch country between the Depression and World War II. Doig says McCaskill is not his literary alter ego, "not by a long shot," but the Two Medicine country of Montana "for an important time was mine." English Creek and its valley are actually the Dupuyer Creek area on the Rocky Mountain Front where Doig lived during high school and was a ranch hand for several summers.
- In "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," (1987), he goes back in time to the homesteading era. Angus McCaskill and RobBurcky emigrate from Scotland to forge new lives as shepherds and farmers in the Two Medicine Country. The book begins in 1888, Montana's year of statehood.
- In "Ride with Me Mariah Montana," (1990), the final volume in the trilogy, Jick is back, crusty and widowed at 85 years. He winds up chauffeuring his daughter, Mariah, and her obnoxious ex-husband, Riley Wright on a three-month driving tour of the state in honor of the 1989 state Centennial celebration.
- "Heart Earth," (1993) is a prequel to "This House of Sky," written after Doig found letters his mother had written to her brother, Wally, while he served in the Pacific theater during World War II. "I wrote once, of the pull of the past and childhood landscape, that you can't not go home again. The story I found compressed there-in that half-year of my mother's last letters proved that to me again."
- "Bucking the Sun" (1996) deals with the building of the Fort Peck Dam over the Missouri River in the 1930s. He introduces a family of men, the Duffs, and wives, all of whom live in the dam town of Wheeler. And he tells their stories of near-death experiences, love, childbirth, pain, and the dam construction.
- "Mountain Time," (1999), Doig's sixth novel, is an epilogue of sorts to his earlier trilogy.