RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA
By Ivan Doig

LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK REVIEW . . . Sept. 30, 1990
WASHINGTON POST BOOK REVIEW . . . Sept. 30, 1990
SEATTLE WEEKLY . . . Nov. 7, 1990
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM STORE CATALOG
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SEATTLE TIMES . . . Oct. 21, 1990
ST. PAUL'S PIONEER PRESS . . . Nov. 18, 1990
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR . . . Nov. 20, 1990
SEATTLE TIMES . . . Dec. 30, 1990
Time is a commodity in Ivan Doig's Montana, almost as tangible as a flock of sheep or a fresh-cut crop of hay.

Through his novels "English Creek" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," and now "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" (Atheneum, $18.95), the final volume in his trilogy about the state's Two Medicine country, time loops gracefully, almost casually. Yet it also has the steady, inexorable flow of history, as Doig peels away layer after layer of the lives that pass through Montana from the late 19th century through the state's centennial celebrations last year.

Memory is the force that energizes this commodity, time: "Memories are stories our lives tell us," Jick McCaskill declares near the end of the new novel, after he has taken a long look at his own 65 years. His final speech in the wintry dawn of Montana's 100th birthday, at a stirring flag-raisin ceremony with family and friends in the town of Gros Ventre, provides a moving and eloquent coda to a remarkable trio of novels.

Like "English Creek," "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" is filtered through Jick's cantankerous personality. But while his memories in the earlier novel were corralled into the wide-eyed, golly-gee world view of a naive 14-year-old, "Ride With Me" gives full rein to an adult sensibility that manages to be both curmudgeonly and humane, that is guided by the wisdom and self-deprecating humor that come only with age.

Doig has seen to it that memory and history ride together, 1989-style, in this new novel. It takes the form of a picaresque ramble around Montana after Jick reluctantly agrees to use his Winnebago RV to ferry the Montana Standard's centennial hoopla. Complemen-tary as journalists in a way they never were as spouses, Mariah and Riley are soon producing compelling features, angering Montana chauvinists and, to Jick's consternation, warming up to each other again.

This is no mere Montana travelogue, and unlike "English Creek," whose lively prose was saddled with a glacial narrative pace, "Ride With Me" accelerates to a comfortable rhythm and seems to move along on cruise control. With Jick at the wheel, the "Bago" transports them from a buffalo preserve to the mine-cratered devastation of Butte, from the ghost of Shelby's boxing-match fame to the ghosts of Jick's own ancestors - the "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" generation - at the historical society in Helena.

They steer through Montana's romanticized past and the rocky economics of its present, always guided by Jick's crusty humor and Doig's deft touch with the landscape: "We might as well have been a carload of Swiss trying to sightsee Mongolia," says Jick, when they reach southeastern Montana, a bleak nowhere-land new to them all. "Grassland with sage low and thin on it ran to all the horizons...a surprising number of attempts had been made to scratch some farming into this barebone plain, but what grew here mostly was distance."

But this is a journey through memory as much as landscape, and Doig pulls off a daring but gloriously successful gamble. Midway through, the trio grows to four with the addition of a woman from Jick's past who is as unexpected as she is welcome. She puts time in perspective for him, however, allowing Jick to finally admit that "a person tends to think that the past has happened on that land."

The independent Mariah, who always "seemed to be the only author of herself," wheedles Jick into joining their four-month journey, and although he professes to loath his former son-in-law, the trio is soon plying the interstates and back roads in search of stories and photos that burrow beneath the skin of centennial hoopla. Complementary as journalists in a way they never were as spouses, Mariah and Riley are soon producing compelling features, angering Montana chauvinists and, to Jick's consternation, warming up to each other again.

Finale of Doig's trilogy takes us back to Two Medicine country

Ivan Doig has seen to it that memory and history ride together.
Western author's next book to include Arizona

By J.C. Martin
The Arizona Daily Star

Author Ivan Doig's Arizona fans will see his Montana signs with unabating pleasure when this news: He is about to turn his attention to Arizona.

Doig, born in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., 51 years ago, began his published literary career in 1978 with "This House of Sky," the story of early Montana pioneers. The book was nominated for a National Book Award.

His next effort, "Berneta's Book," will be about his Montana with a girl and a woman who grew up in Wickenburg. There Beerta Doig, who died in 1945 when he was 6, The House of Sky. The Doigs, who did not grow up in Wickenburg, after all, were barred back to Montana. Doig spent most of his literary career portraying Montana life, he hasn't lived there since 1957 when he left home to attend Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

On the other hand, although Doig has spent most of his literary career portraying Montana life, he hasn't lived there since 1957 when he left home to attend Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

For the past 35 years he has lived in Seattle with his wife, Carol, a former teacher who now teaches at Shoreline Community College.

He returns to Montana regularly, however, as he feels the moment just a working writer, "I draw my life with my life, into the turns of phrase, things out loud to hear their rhythm, tapping the eraser end of a pencil in cadence as his lips move. The words lock in his mind when he says them, like putting a word on a page, he doesn't see how every phrase is weighted like a word. Doig says, he has that magical quality," one critic wrote.

Doig will be at The Haunted Bookshop 721 N. Northern Ave., 2-4 p.m. tomorrow to sign books and greet readers.

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written on a "critic's work," "He has that magical quality," one fan put it, "for being able to make you see, taste, feel and smell what he is writing about.

It is not something he acquires casually. Most Doig books have gone through at least three and often as many as seven rewrites. Doig, who bought it, was the 13th publisher to read it. When the rejection slip starts coming, Doig works at what he describes as "sort of a melancholy," "This House of Sky," "English Creek," "Dancing Rascal," say Doig, he is getting close. Doig will be at The Haunted Bookshop 721 N. Northern Ave., 2-4 p.m. tomorrow to sign books and greet readers.

Ivan Doig is in Tucson

A.E. Araiza, The Arizona Daily Star

A.41 Doig is in Tucson

In telling his mother's story, basically that of a girl and a woman who grew up in the middle of the South Pacific during World War II. "She was a clear, vivid writer," Doig says. One of her accounts, he remembers, concerned a Montana cowboy and a Mexican.

"It is a wonderful amalgamation of her life," Doig says. He says he will sign up to take a course in typing. You talk about a career decision.

Graduating from Northwestern in 1961, Doig spent a few years at various journals in Chicago and a newspaper in New York before getting a Ph.D. in Western history at the University of Washington.

Beginning in 1970, Doig spent the next 10 years, "twice the length for human stamina," as a full-time freelance writer. Doig says he had turned out a couple dozen articles a year when he was "crawling along in the downtown geezer community," he says. He continues to do "really well-written but we don't see any commercial prospects," Doig says, he was getting close. Doig is that magical quality," one critic wrote. He has been known to sit at his desk reading aloud, tapping the eraser end of a pencil in cadence as his lips move. Things out loud to hear their rhythm, tapping the eraser end of a pencil in cadence as his lips move.
'The Last Best Place' in America

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA
By Ivan Doig
(Atheneum: $18.95; 384 pp.; 0-689-12019-2)

Reviewed by Judith Freeman

When does a farmer or rancher finally give up on making a living from his land and sell out to some distant corporation or resign himself to foreclosure? When does the small-town grocer, undercut by malls, do the same? And what about the young people in rural America, whose best prospects lie in the big cities? What happens to our collective spirit when we pull up roots and dissolve communities, when families find themselves separated?

"How and when should we leave our own roots?" each of the main characters in Ivan Doig's new novel asks. In doing so, they voice an issue on the minds of many Americans.

"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" is the last volume of Doig's Montana trilogy, which covers 100 years of Montana history as viewed through the eyes of the fictional McCaskills, a Scottish immigrant ranching family. The first volume, "English Creek" (1984), was set in the 1880s when the first McCaskills arrived in Montana. The second volume, "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987), took place during the Depression years. Last year, Montana celebrated its centennial, an event that provided the perfect theme and setting for the concluding story about the McCaskills, in which a father and daughter set out in a Winnebago during the centennial summer in order to "get the true story" of the state.

Jick McCaskill, a recently widowed rancher, is talked into making this journey by his daughter Mariah, a photographer for a newspaper that has assigned her to do a series on the centennial. Joining them is Mariah's ex-husband, Riley Wright, a wise-cracking reporter who is to provide the text for Mariah's pictures. Jick, Mariah and Riley—a reconstituted family largely at odds with each other—set out in the mobile home, criss-crossing the state in search of stories.

The novel has a lively tone and a quick pace. Doig has a perfect ear for colloquial speech, and he is both eloquent (in passages where he simulates Riley's journalism) and funny (when he sets the trio to verbal sparring). They encounter old-timers as well as new immigrants such as the Vietnamese waiter enthusiastically struggling with the new language. The trio visits historical monuments, battlefields and preserves where they gaze wistfully at the remaining buffalo—once so thick "the country was one robe." Inevitably their own personal histories unfold. The trip jars memories, of Riley and Mariah's acrimonious divorce, of Jick's own unhappy first marriage and his deeply satisfying second one.

Doig uncovers both the beautiful and the tattered sides of Montana: the dump heaps and earth poisons left by strip mining; the mobile missiles—"blue taxis to Armageddon" (there are 200 Minuteman missile silos across Montana). He writes of the defeated lives on Indian reservations, and the "bottom-wage way of life" that drives young people elsewhere.

Freeman is the author of "The Chinchilla Farm," a novel, and a collection of stories, "Family Attractions."

More WASPs in the Ivy

THE LADY OF SITUATIONS
By Louis Auchincloss
(Houghton Mifflin: $20.95; 275 pp.; 0-395-54411-4)

happens is a bit of polite adultery rocking the walls of the "monastery," plus some milder breaches of honor.

Characters speak operatically. Aunt Ruth, the struggle to hold a moral standard against the pressures of modernity holds up as a contemporary morality play. Indeed, he pretty much managed this Jamesian feat...
She portrays a family that cuts a swath of destruction around itself and leaves a trail of battered psyches in its wake. Out of this wasteland of a 1960s dream family gone bad steps a narrator, the daughter, Maureen Emery Lannier.

"By the time I went to college I hated my name so much I dropped it altogether. Emery, my grandmother's maiden name, felt right. I liked the idea of grinding and polishing, a hard abrasive substance. I grew to see myself like that; grinding and polishing myself to remove the traces of Frank and Nina from my life."

However, Emery can neither scrape away her parents, Frank and Nina, nor get them to call her anything but Maura.

The narrative begins when the 40-ish Emery goes to her parents' house hoping to find the home she has never had. After spending the last 25 years trying to run away from her parents and her past, Emery is looking to make peace with them (her mother has written that Emery's father is about to die) as well as with herself. Soon after

Our scars weren't identical," says Emery. "We all grow up differently, learn different lessons. Tattoos. Scars. Scars don't tan. Scars don't heal. Scars don't care."

Regardless of how much Emery would like to turn her back on the past and its scars, she can not. On one level, the narrative deals with Emery's attempts to deal with present-day life, the effort to find her parents new housing and the like. In a subtext, driven by her frequent flashbacks as she metonymically skips between past and present, she attempts to deal with the past. She knows, however, that "reinventing the past is as impossible as skating on hot water."

The Lanniers resemble the self-contained, eccentric, virtually friendless families that Anne Tyler creates. However, with the Lanniers, eccentricities shade into pathologies. "My family must be terminally marginal," Emery thinks. "We were a normal, middle-class family. On the right track in a wrecked car."

The parents, Frank and Nina, drink themselves into stupors nearly every night. Nina, who

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...But he also celebrates the beauty of the land and the tenacity of spirit found in Montanans "who've been perpetually game to outwork the levels of pay here because they can love a mountain with their eyes while doing it," people who see life as "an up-and-down proposition." In the great expanse of Montana, man is given "much room and inclination to do both our worst and our best."

The question of how and when to leave one's roots becomes more pressing as the journey progresses. Jack, who has left his sheep ranch in the hands of caretakers, must decide what to do with an operation he can no longer manage alone and which neither of his children wants to take over. Riley and Mariah, who have effected a tumultuous reconciliation, begin planning to move to the West Coast once the centennial is over. The future hangs in the balance: Will the last McCaskill leave the land or find a way to remain rooted in what has become known as "the last best place?"

In certain ways, Montana has come to embody what's left of the "West" as it once was known. But the history of the American West was written as a romance, and the romance has run its course. A more shameful picture has emerged, a story of despoliation and genocide, of exploitation, corruption and greed. As America enters the 21st Century, the West looks more and more like a big theme park. The outdoors has become little more than a backdrop for commercial, recreational activity.

Doig understands these issues better than most. He has steeped himself in Western history and written the sorts of books that don't romanticize the experience as much as present it in small-scale, human terms. He has written beautifully and with tenderness and humor of simple people who love the soil.

In the long run, all the "sad behavior" of man over the last hundred years can't erase hope for the future. Jack McCaskill doesn't sell out but manages to find a way to ensure that his ranch will pass to future generations in an unspoiled condition. Even Mariah reconsiders California and makes a continuing commitment to her roots, thus tying the McCaskills' attachment to the soil.

It seemed right that "Ride With Me" should have ended on such a hopeful note. After all, Ivan Doig is the most hopeful of writers—not blindly optimistic but deeply humanistic. "He who owns the soil," he has written, "owns up to the sky."

In Montana, that's a big piece of heaven, something worth hanging on to. 

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The Big Sky's the Limit

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA
By Ivan Doig
Atheneum. 324 pp. $18.95

By Susan Dodd

I

VAN DOIG is a writer whose work makes readers recall why they love to read, reminds writers why they ever wanted to write in the first place. Doig's characters befriend you. His landscapes bowl you over. His novels lay whole worlds at your feet and invite you to make them your own.

Ride With Me, Mariah Montana is the final (alas) installment of a trilogy begun with English Creek (1984) and followed by Dancing at the Rascal Fair (1987). Readers of the first two volumes will likely find this ride worth the wait, but those who missed the earlier books shouldn't have any trouble keeping up with Mariah, either. This novel stands on its own.

And it stands, as well, apart. Ride With Me, Mariah Montana continues Jick McCaskill's account of his Scottish family, of their fruitful and spirited inhabitation of Montana's Two Medicine country. But it is 1989 now. McCaskills have lived within sight of Phantom Woman Mountain for about a century, Jick for 65 years, and the state of Montana is getting ready to make the most of its 100th birthday. English Creek, lined with willows, still curves down out of the mountains, but it lingers on the edges of a changed world, a world afflicted by "the longest epidemic of all, loss." You can still watch buffalo roam in Montana, provided you're willing to track them "from a motorhome the size of a small boxcar." You can still spot a bull elk, but it's mounted over a pasty-faced city editor's desk. Grizzly bears die of relocation. Entertainment is provided by "Montana's homegrown C- and-W group, The Roadkill Angles," and by the latest in t-shirt slogans—"Keep Montana Green, Shoot a Developer."

No wonder, then, Jick McCaskill has grown a little irritable, loss around him everywhere he looks: His beloved wife has recently died, and Jick is starting to suspect the hard business of ranching is getting to be too much for him. A nearby corporate ranch is licking its chops over the McCaskill land. Jick's hopes of keeping the ranch in the family were shot down three years ago with the divorces of his daughter Mariah and her husband, Riley Wright. 

Feeling the reins of present and future slip from his hands, Jick is, more than ever, haunted by the past. ("Doesn't time know any statute of limitations, for Christ's sake?") And he is still trying to reassemble a rather crochety family history:

"Every family is a riddle ... People on the outside can only glimpse enough to make them wonder what in the name of Jesus H. Christ is going on in there ... while those inside the family have times, sometimes lifetimes, of being baffled with one another ... parent and child ... eyeing each other like foreign species. Knots in the bloodline. The oldest story there is, and the freshest."

Preoccupied, perhaps, with a lifetime of bafflement, Jick gets himself into a real predicament: Before we quite know what's got into him, he has signed on for a crisscross centennial tour of the sorry state of Montana with his daughter and her ex-husband. Riley and Mariah, still more than half in love with each other, work for a Missoula newspaper, he as a columnist ("Wright Angles"), she as a photographer. Their assignment, hard-won and loosely defined, is to piece together a portrait of Montana in all the rich contrarieness of its hundredth year.

Jick's Winnebago makes for mighty close quarters, as Riley and Mariah follow their noses. Such bickering, such chemistry ... it's a scenario for Tracy and Hepburn. And there is Jick—"letting myself get just exactly where I knew not to get, between the pair of them"—digressing a blue streak and sputtering like Walter Brennan.

It is the sputter of Jick McCaskill's voice—cranky, confused, honest, stubborn and lovelorn—that orchestrates the journey, reconciles past and present and makes the whole novel sing. Ride With Me, Mariah Montana is, like its narrator, not without flaws. Old men tend to ramble, and this particular would-be codger has a weakness for one-liners that occasionally get him in the back of Jick. Doig is so opinionated, especially where his daughter and her ex-husband are concerned, that Mariah and Riley remain a bit dim for a reader, overshadowed by the narrator's anxiety, aggravation and love. And these poetic columns of Riley's in a small-town paper? Such gloriously over-shot writing hasn't been seen since James Agee left Fortune magazine.

But Ivan Doig is a writer committed to plenty, and maybe plenitude always involves a touch of excess. Ride With Me, Mariah Montana is an extravagant celebration and, above all else, a love story. It is filled with devotion and passion for its locale, its people and their history, and smitten with the very language from which it is fashioned. It is, as journeys tend to be, a little episodic. But some of its turns and destinations are wonderfully surprising. And what a ride. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.
Meet Ivan Doig
tomorrow on the Ave.

Meet this bestselling Northwest author at a book signing from 3 to 4:30 PM Friday, October 5, at our Main Store on the Ave.

His new book, *Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*, is the final novel in a trilogy which includes *English Creek* and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*. It is also available at our store in Bellevue.

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Ridin' in the 'bago with Jick

T'S 1989, MONTANA'S CENTENNIAL SUMMER, and Jick McCaskill, familiar in a younger incarnation to readers of Ivan Doig's English Creek, is on the cusp of senior citizenship. A recent widower, he's reflecting on his past and trying to make peace with his loss and muster heart for whatever future he's got left. Jick reluctantly allows his photographer daughter, Mariah, to persuade him to accompany her and her former husband, Riley Wright, a newspaper columnist, on a monthlong odyssey criss-crossing the state in a Winnebago to collect material for a series of centennial articles. The journey is a contrivance designed to bring the reader and the characters into contact with the paradoxes of Montana's past and present, and to function as a springboard for Jick's "memory storms," as he calls his reminiscences. As such, we get a lot of McCaskill family history, and a Charles Kuralt-like sampling of vignettes from the road as the mismatched trio makes its sojourn.

Ride with Me, Mariah Montana—the final volume of Doig's Montana trilogy, following Dancing at the Rascal Fair and English Creek—chronicles the McCaskill family history from 1889, the year the territory became a state, to the present. Doig's romantic and sentimental affection for Montana is tempered with a wry acceptance of change: memories of haying with horse-drawn equipment play counterpoint to the present, where Jick "nukes" his dinner in the microwave oven in the Winnebago "camped" in an RV park. Riley jogs at dawn in a Lycra suit while Jick mourns that "maybe people from now on are going to exist on bean sprouts and wear polyester all over themselves, and lamb and wool belong behind glass in a museum. Maybe what I have known how to do in life, which is ranching, simply does not register any more."

Jick's narrative is occasionally interrupted by snatches of Riley's journalism, pieces the reader infers to be Doig's own voice. On the subject of Jick's Centennial Day speech, Riley writes, "His words climbed as he threw his head back to outpeak a gust.... Up through the black canyons of space, the sparks we utter; motes of wordfire that we glimpse leaving on their constellation flight, and call history."

The three principals are sometimes hard company to keep; they bicker incessantly in a sideshow of put-downs and wisecracks, pretending to downplay vulnerability and tender feelings for each other—sentiments barely discernible behind their wordplay. Riley and Mariah have declared an uneasy truce as an expedient to a choice assignment, but as the miles roll by they argue themselves back into love. Jick worries about the wisdom of this re-alliance, and broods about the uncertain future of his ranch. The Winnebago is already crammed with conflict when Leona, Riley's widowed mother, joins the party and puts a new spin on Jick's reflections.

Still, Doig is so affectionate and good-natured, so patently fond of his characters, and is having such a field day with the language—turning nouns and adjectives into verbs (to travel in a motor home is to "bago"); writing for a newspaper is "piecing")—that the reader succumbs and goes along for the ride. The essential optimism that the book is imbued with leaves us hopeful that Jick, and Montana, will successfully adjust to the exigencies of change and loss.

Victoria Jenkins is a Seattle writer and screenwriter. Her book Relative Distances was published in August by Peregrine Smith.
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Books

DONN FRY
Times book editor

Time is a commodity in Ivan Doig's Montana, almost as tangible as a flock of sheep or a fresh-cut crop of hay.

Through his novels "English Creek" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," and now "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," the final volume in his trilogy about the state's Two Medicine country, time loops gracefully, almost casually. Yet it also has the steady, inexorable flow of history, as Doig peels away layer after layer of the lives that pass through Montana from the late 19th century through the state's centennial celebrations last year.

Memory is the force that energizes this commodity, time: "Memories are stories our lives tell us," Jick McCaskill declares near the end of the new novel, after he has taken a long look at his own 65 years. His final speech in the wintry dawn of Montana's 100th birthday, at a stirring flag-raising ceremony with family and friends in the town of Gros Ventre, provides a moving and eloquent coda to a remarkable trio of novels.

Like "English Creek," "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" is filtered through Jick's cantankerous personality. But while his memories in the earlier novel were corralled into the wide-eyed, golly-gee world view of a naive 14-year-old, "Ride With Me" gives full rein to an adult sensibility that manages to be curmudgeonly and humane, that is guided by the wisdom and self-deprecating humor that come only with age.

Doig has seen to it that memory and history ride together, 1989-style, in this new novel. It takes the form of a picaresque ramble around Montana after Jick reluctantly agrees to use his Winnebago RV to ferry his older daughter and her former husband Mariah is a photographer and Riley a columnist for the same Missoula newspaper he is emotionally. His sheep ranch along Noon Creek, under the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, is soon plying the interstates and back roads in search of stories and photos that burrow beneath the skin of centennial hoopla. Complementary as journalists in a way they never were as spouses, Mariah and Riley are soon producing compelling features, angering Montana chauvinists and, to Jick's consternation, warming up to each other again.

This is no mere Montana travelogue, and unlike "English Creek," whose lively prose was saddled with a glacial narrative pace, "Ride With Me" accelerates to a comfortable rhythm and seems to move along under the control of Jick at the wheel, the "Bago" transports them from a buffalo preserve to the mine-cratered devastation of Butte, from the ghost of Shelby's boxing-match fame to the ghosts of Jick's own ancestors - the "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" generation - at the historical society in Helena.

They steer through Montana's romanticized past and the rocky economics of its present, always guided by Jick's crusty humor and Doig's deft touch with the landscape: "We might as well have been a carload of Swiss trying to sightsee Mongolia," says Jick, when they reach southeastern Montana, a bleak nowhere-land new to them all. "Grassland with sage low and thin on it ran to all the horizons... a surprising number of attempts had been made to scratch some farming into this barebone plain, but what grew there mostly was distance."

But this is a journey through memory as much as landscape, and Doig pulls off a daring but gloriously successful gamble. Midway through, the trio grows to four with the addition of a woman from Jick's past who always was distance."

Much earlier on, Mariah explains her photographic ambitions as the hope that in...
Montana frontiers fall in novels of past and present

MARY ANN GROSSMANN STAFF WRITER

Contemporary Montana, rich in scenery but troubled by economic woes and racism, is the setting for highly praised new novels by award-winning authors who visited the Twin Cities recently.

In "The Indian Lawyer," American Indian author James Welch explores the ways a reservation-born lawyer responds to living as a success in the white world and the loyalty that draws him back to the tribe.

Ivan Doig gives his readers a state that is losing its heritage through urbanization in his novel, "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana."

"I miss the wonderful landscape of Montana, the arc of the big sky. But I don't miss the economic climate," says 51-year-old Doig, who lives in Seattle. "The entire Rockies are the poorest region in the United States today."

In "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," the last of a trilogy, 65-year-old Jick McCaskill reluctantly agrees to drive his daughter Mariah (a photographer) and her former husband (a columnist) around Montana in a recreational vehicle as the journalists cover the state's centennial for the Chicago Tribune. From the "radical" college town of Missoula to the capital of Helena, across the Chief Joseph battlefield and down the Blackfeet reservation, they're easier to railroad into cutting a plea bargain that will put them in prison, he says.

Yet Doig, who is praised for the beauty of his language, says he tried "not to have the beautiful myth nostalgic creep in" because not everything is worse than it used to be.

One myth he does lay to rest, via a hilarious mock cattle drive, is the widespread myth of Montana as historically populated by "Lonesome Dove"-style cowboys driving cattle north.

"I've always tried to write as though (Western history) is a great deal more complicated than slapping a hat on your head and strapping on a gun," he says. "More cattle came to Montana in boxcars on Jim Hill's railroad than from Texas."

Now that his trilogy is complete, Doig wants to write about his parents' move from Arizona back to Montana after World War II.

"I found a little cache of letters my mother wrote to my uncle during the last six months of World War II," he says. "My father was German, born in Wisconsin, but her family moved to Montana when she was a baby. Why did she and my father leave Arizona, where they didn't have kiddies, and return to Montana where they had even less? Part of the book will be trying to figure out what was the pull back to Montana."

James Welch, who's Blackfeet and Gros Ventre, has different memories of growing up in Montana. Going to the movies in Browning, for instance, with other American Indian kids.

"We'd cheer the cavalry when it came around the mesa. At that time, even Indian people felt almost compelled to root against themselves," he recalls.

In "The Indian Lawyer," the 49-year-old Welch gives his readers a protagonist named Sylvester Yellow Calf, who has left the Blackfeet reservation to become an all-star basketball player and outstanding law school graduate. He's assimilated into white American life until, as a member of the state parole board, he dies release to a criminal. When Yellow Calf is the focus of a blackmail scheme planned from jail, and becomes emotionally entangled with the prisoner's wife, he finds he must confront his native legacy.

Welch, who lives in Missoula, served on the Montana parole board for 10 years and learned hard lessons about why American Indians, who make up about 12 percent of the state's population, are 22 percent of the prison population.

"Indians often can't afford counsel, and they're easier to railroad into cutting a plea bargain that will put them in prison," he says.

Like Yellow Calf and many other American Indians his age, Welch is the first generation in his family to go to college. He graduated from the University of Montana, where his teachers included poet Richard Hugo, and he's written three previous novels, including "Fools Crow," which won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction and an American Book award.

"That book got national attention because it was the first purely historical novel written by an Indian person," Welch says. "Its success was due to the fact that it told the story from the point of view of the Indian people and made white people the invaders."

Although Welch is pleased that the dominant culture is finding values in the traditional American Indian belief systems, he agrees with other American Indian authors such as Gerald Vizenor and Thomas King that American Indians are periodically re-romanticized.

"In the early 70s, there was a great deal of interest in Indian culture, but in the early to mid-80s that fell away. I think people got tired of hearing about Indians and their problems," he says.

"People are coming back to an appreciation of the native belief system. But most people don't think of the reality of the Indian experience, except in broad terms of alcohol and drugs as being a problem. That's why it's important we have Indians writing drama, literature and poetry. By doing that, you open the way to younger writers who can learn to adopt this European way of writing to tell the story of Indian people as truly as they possible can, to show we can break out of stereotypes. All Indians are individuals, not these exotic creatures on reservations that government takes care of as though they were on a game preserve. We're more interested all the time in controlling our destiny."
Big-Sky Country Ride

By Jon Remmerde

JOHN ANGUS McCASKILL (Jick), his daughter, Mariah (Mariah Montana) and her ex-husband, Riley Wright, explore Montana in Jick’s Winnebago, looking for stories to illustrate Montana’s centennial, 1989, for The Missoula Montana newspaper. Riley writes the stories. Camera-toting Mariah shoots them. Jick is chauffeur, chaperone, and narrator of the book, the third in a trilogy.

Jick is a Montana rancher trying to integrate his wife’s recent death into the rest of his life. He is almost 65, and his past presents itself to him again and again, and he fights it. He hasn’t come to terms with the people and events that led to his brother’s death in World War II. Jick was wounded and immediately out of the war, and he hasn’t understood how that experience fits into the totality of his life.

It is time to understand any pattern that knits together his life, because it’s time to make decisions. Should he sell the ranch to the modern, full-speed-ahead enterprise that accumulates ranches and exploits their financial capability to bare, blowing-in-the-wind soil? He hates what they’re doing, but they are offering him a lot of money. He doesn’t want to run the ranch anymore, and neither does any family member to whom he might give it.

We see parts of Montana in images so well crafted that we might be looking at Mariah’s photos, the countryside, the people, towns, mines, places, the very air of it, with some 1989 smog in the big sky.

Montana’s assessment – how were the state’s first 100 years, where is there to go in the next 100 years? – backdrops Jick’s story, the way the Montana scenery backdrops the highways they travel and the places they stop.

We travel with the Winnebagos to the edge of the Bearpaw Mountains, along Snake Creek, where, in 1877, the United States Army ended the attempt of the Nez Perce Indians to escape into Canada. In this story about the Chief Joseph battleground, Riley describes a rifle pit dug by one of the Nez Perce as “a pock in the earth.” He goes on, “Combat pits nowadays are greatly deeper in the prairie south of the Bearpaw… Missle silos, we let the Department of Defense … call these … as if what they store is lifegiving … Enough gofer-holed megatonnage to incinerate people by the million …”

When Jick and the Baloney Express Riders talk to the young man in need at a highway rest area, Jick thinks, “I now was furious. When I was not much younger than him, other pickups were on the road, passing through the Two Medicine Country from the droughted-out farms of the High Line with the bitter farewell GOODBYE OLD DRY painted across the boxboards… Two rages balanced in me; that here 50 years later there was still no goodbye to that grief of being driven from the land…”

After one of two heart-stopping encounters between grizzly bears and humans, Riley writes, “... two tribes in what is no longer enough space for two.” Jick wonders, “But I could not get over wondering how contagious the past is.”

Ivan Doig doesn’t push these themes too hard. They are just there, as they are in the modern world, background to a story of people who lead essentially joyful lives and come to acceptable terms with themselves, each other, their past, the environment.

This is a very readable book. The only problem is the same problem Tonsil Vapor encounters when he tries to interview Good Help Hebner for a centennial story for television. It’s an interesting story the man has to tell, but his language is such that you can’t put it on the airwaves.

Many Montanians do talk the way Doig quotes them, so it may be legitimate characterization, but I haven’t been comfortable with saying yes when my daughters ask if they can read the book. I think I’ll decide they know people talk like that; they’ve seen and heard the words; it’s a good and pertinent enough story, so start it and see how it goes.

Jon Remmerde is a freelance writer who lives near Bailey, Colo.
Calendar begins year with Johnson book signing

Having out from the pre-holiday doldrums - and blizzard - Seattle's literary calendar warms up again next month with a wide range of events, including a book signing by local author Charles Johnson, who recently won the National Book Award for his novel, "Middle Passage." He will autograph copies on Saturday.

Two other big programs come courtesy of Seattle Arts & Lectures: Amy Tan, whose first novel was "The Joy Luck Club," will discuss her development as a writer on Jan. 9, and the great novelist and essayist V.S. Naipaul will discuss his new book about India on Jan. 29. Most tickets are gone for both events, but some may be available at the door.

Here's a selected list of January's book-and-author events:

- Jan. 2: Society of Children's Book Writers: Ted and Gloria Rand, 6:30 p.m., Demaray Hall, Seattle Pacific University (822-9710)
- Jan. 3: National Writers Club: attorney Peter Camp discusses legal- literary issues, 7:30, University Christian Church, 4731 15th Ave. N.E. ($3 for nonmembers; 789-3401)
- Jan. 5: Seattle writer Charles Johnson autographs his National Book Award-winning novel, "Middle Passage," 12:30 p.m., Ballard's, Westlake Center.
- Jan. 6, 13, 20, 27: Red Sky Poetry Theatre: Jan. 6, open mike, Jan. 13, storyteller Robert Gordon, Jan. 20, open mike, Jan. 27, Paul Hunter; all at 7 p.m., Ditto, 2809 Fifth Ave.
- Jan. 8: Eastside Writers: Steve Johannesen discusses freelancing, 7:30 p.m., Kirkland Congregational Church, 108 Fifth Ave., Kirkland (free; 746-9084)
- Jan. 8, 15, 17, 22, 28: Linda Carlson discusses her book, "How to Find a Good Job in Seattle," at Seattle and King County library branches: Jan. 8, 7:30 p.m., Fairview/Renton; Jan. 15, 7:30 p.m., Kent; Jan. 17, noon, Downtown; Jan. 22, 7 p.m., University, Jan. 29, 7:30 p.m., Columbia (all free)

Naipaul

Ivan Doig
"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana"

Charles Johnson
"Middle Passage"

Joyce Carol Oates
"Because It Is Bitter"

Timothy Egan
"The Good Rain"

John Updike
"Rabbit at Rest"


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1990

SEATTLE AUTHORS RANK AMONG THE MEMORABLE

Seattle seemed to reign as the nation's most livable city throughout 1990, as survey after survey listed it at or near the top of choice places to live. If there is any truth to that - and I believe there is - then it is partly due to the fact that we are a city of dedicated readers and talented writers.

The readership aspect is well-known: Our high ranking in terms of book sales, number of bookstores and library usage has been reported often and repeated endlessly, sometimes inaccurately. A few months ago in these pages, I made the case that Seattle ranks as the fifth best book city in the nation, based on statistics from the Department of Commerce.

But what shouldn't be overlooked is that 1990 amply demonstrated that Seattle also is home to a number of our nation's best authors.

Many fine books from 1990 bear a second look. Instead of a traditional "best books" list, I've included a survey list of the best bookcity authors. The Seattle Times / Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Detail from dust jacket

"Age of Iron" by J.M. Coetzee is an exploration of apartheid as seen through the eyes of an elderly white woman.

Malan's pop-culture references have a through-the-looking-glass quality, as he conjures Baby Boom nostalgia (Motown tunes, psychedelia) and places it in a startling political context.

Novels by South Africa's two finest writers put a compelling fictional spin on many of the issues touched on by Rian Malan in "My Traitor's Heart: "Age of Iron" (Random House) is J.M. Coetzee's exploration of a national cancer - apartheid - as seen through the eyes of an elderly white woman who herself is dying of cancer. "Language and its role in politics have long fascinated Coetzee," said Times reviewer Sandra Chait, "and in 'Age of Iron' language itself almost becomes a character; the words swirl with such sure rhythm that the novel seems like a dance, a symphony, a poem." In "My Son's Story" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), Nadine Gordimer sees the nation's contradictions through the eyes of a 13-year-old "colored" boy - a child of mixed race - whose political-activist father has an affair with a white woman who works for a human-rights organization. Said reviewer Michael Upchurch: "(Gordimer) creates divided personalities that live on the page, and in the process, she tellingly evokes a country 'where conflict breaks up all consistency of character'."

"Rabbit at Rest" (Knopf) brought a close John Updike's four-novel series that began with "Rabbit, Run" in 1960 and which provides our best literary portrait of late 20th-century America. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, contemplating his own mortality in his Florida condo, is "an inexorable jerk," wrote Richard Wakefield in his review in The Times, "yet these four novels link seamlessly, unforgettable."


February 1991

Many fine books from 1990 bear a second look. Instead of a traditional "best books" or "Top 10," I've compiled a list of 15 memorable books from the past year—books which either I or reviewers for The Seattle Times found to possess uncommon merit.

"Middle Passage" (Atheneum) won the National Book Award for fiction for Seattle writer Charles Johnson, who is a longtime professor of creative writing at the University of Washington. Johnson's brief but idea-packed novel follows freed slave Rutherford Calhoun, who stows away aboard a slave clipper bound for Africa, to pick up a cargo for a slave ship.

"The Good Rain" (Knopf), by Seattle journalist Timothy Egan, examines our area with a lens provided by the 1853 journal of intrepid traveler Theodore Winthrop. Egan, who is Northwest correspondent for The New York Times, has a smooth and seductive prose style, and he does a marvelous job of playing off our vibrant, unsuppressed past against the troubling environmental issues that haunt our region today.

"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" (Atheneum), by Ivan Doig, brings to a close the trilogy that began with "English Creek" and continued with "Dancing at the Waco Regional Fair." Through the wonderful voice of cantankerous Jack McKiessel—introduced as a youth in "English Creek," but now widowed in his 60s—Doig gives us a rollicking, Winnebago-eye view of some memorable characters in contemporary Montana.

"My Traitor's Heart" (Atlantic Monthly Press), by Rian Malan, is an impressive memoir by a young South African journalist who has a sharp eye for the incongruities of growing up white and liberal in a society riven by apartheid.

BESTSELLERS OF 1990

Hardback fiction

1. "The Plains of Passage," by Jean M. Auel
2. "Skinny Legs and All," by Tom Jones
3. "Crow and Weseal," by Barry Lopez
4. "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," by Ivan Doig
6. "Perfect Health," by Deepak Chopra
7. "You Just Don't Understand," by Deborah Tannen
10. "Men at Work," by George Chopra
14. "Growing Old in the Heart," by Barbara Mandrell

These were the top-selling hardback books, fiction and nonfiction, in the Pacific Northwest during 1990, as reported by Pacific Pipeline Inc., a regional book distributor based in Kent.

I was interested in how to sum up the past year in books. I realized that three of the best books I've read were written by Seattle authors—and this, I think, is not the standard for hometown buffoons, just the standard for Seattle. Consider this trio: "Middle Passage," by Charles Johnson; "The Good Rain," by Timothy Egan; and "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," by Ivan Doig.

Just last month, Johnson's novel won the National Book Award, a prize that ranks with the Tony, Pulitzer, and Nobel in the pantheon of top literary awards—and "Middle Passage" surely will be a contender for the Pulitzer, too. In the spring, Egan's lyrical work of nonfiction, subtitled "Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest," is just about the best book I've read this year. And Doig's novel was a big-hearted finale to a trilogy that beautifully captured a century of life in Maine. But 1990 also saw a number of other milestones: At the beginning of the year, "Vineland" marked the reappearance of Thomas Pynchon's byline on a mainstream street. And "Middle Passage," briefly the scene of the year, John Updike's "Rabbit at Rest" brought to a close one of the longest-running lives in American literature.

The controversy is interesting because the various parties frequently speak with one voice on artistic matters: Many feminists are outraged at what they see as Egan's misogyny; some literary critics predict that its willingness to indulge it, while the Auditors Guild and others are charging Simon & Schuster with censorship for dumping the book in the first place.

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Many fine books from 1990 bear a second look. Instead of a traditional "best books" or "Top 10," I've compiled a list of 15 memorable books from the past year—books which either I or reviewers for The Seattle Times found to possess uncommon merit.

"Middle Passage" (Atheneum) won the National Book Award for fiction for Seattle writer Charles Johnson, who is a longtime professor of creative writing at the University of Washington. Johnson's brief but idea-packed novel follows freed slave Rutherford Calhoun, who stows away aboard a slave clipper bound for Africa, to pick up a cargo for a slave ship.

"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" (Atheneum), by Ivan Doig, brings to a close the trilogy that began with "English Creek" and continued with "Dancing at the Waco Regional Fair." Through the wonderful voice of cantankerous Jack McKiessel—introduced as a youth in "English Creek," but now widowed in his 60s—Doig gives us a rollicking, Winnebago-eye view of some memorable characters in contemporary Montana.

"My Traitor's Heart" (Atlantic Monthly Press), by Rian Malan, is an impressive memoir by a young South African journalist who has a sharp eye for the incongruities of growing up white and liberal in a society riven by apartheid.

BESTSELLERS OF 1990

Hardback fiction

1. "The Plains of Passage," by Jean M. Auel
2. "Skinny Legs and All," by Tom Jones
3. "Crow and Weseal," by Barry Lopez
4. "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," by Ivan Doig
6. "Perfect Health," by Deepak Chopra
7. "You Just Don't Understand," by Deborah Tannen
10. "Men at Work," by George Chopra
14. "Growing Old in the Heart," by Barbara Mandrell

These were the top-selling hardback books, fiction and nonfiction, in the Pacific Northwest during 1990, as reported by Pacific Pipeline Inc., a regional book distributor based in Kent.
Ride with Me, Mariah Montana

IVAN DOIG

A novel by the author of English Creek and Dancing at the Rascal Fair
Ivan Doig
RIDE WITH ME,
MARIAH MONTANA
ON THE ROAD WITH IVAN DOIG

When Ivan Doig set out to put a century of the American West into his Montana trilogy which RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA (Atheneum/September 28, 1990/ $18.95) now completes, the past was almost too cooperative. As he crisscrossed the state in ten years of research and writing, the cycle of drought and hard times that he was exploring in the homesteaders' era of Dancing at the Rascal Fair and the Depression years of English Creek struck Montana again. "People I talked to there in the 1980's echoed what their parents said about the hardships of the 1930's and their grandparents said after the terrible winter of 1919," Doig reflects. "The past has its own voice."

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

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

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA
a novel by Ivan Doig
Publication Date: September 28, 1990
Price: $18.95

May 1990
It confirms his reputation, as Winifred Blevins said in the Los Angeles Times, "as our foremost recorder and interpreter of life in the...American West." The novel is receiving advance praise:

"A paean to Montana and frontiersmanship--but also a casually artful, and triumphant, end to Doig's trilogy."

--Kirkus Reviews

"In this crowning volume of a trilogy, which includes English Creek and Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Doig again displays a masterly skill in depicting the American West which few writers match....This entertaining ramble adroitly blends travelogue, family drama, history and newspaper lore."

--Publishers Weekly

In 1984 English Creek, the first book in the trilogy, was published to wide acclaim. "Ivan Doig has a rare, uncanny skill for bringing history to life," wrote Carol Van Strum in USA Today, "He achieves a flawless weld of fact and fiction." It won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, the Governor's Writers Day Award and the Western Heritage Award for Best Novel from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Dancing at the Rascal Fair (1987) was also honored with the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award for Literary Excellence. Doig's first book, This House of Sky, published in 1978, was nominated for the National Book Award in contemporary thought and received a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. "The language begins in western territory and experience but in the hands of an artist it touches all landscape and all life," Robert Kirsch wrote in the Los Angeles Times. "Doig is such an artist."

Doig is also author of Winter Brothers (1980), which won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award, and was adapted for a public television documentary. His first novel The Sea Runners (1982) was hailed as one of the notable books of the year by The New York Times Book Review.

Ivan Doig lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol.

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA
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Publication Date: September 28, 1990
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May 1990

NEWS OF ATHENEUM PUBLISHERS
SUSAN RICHMAN, Vice President, Director of Publicity
Macmillan Publishing Company
866 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022 212 / 702-2120
For "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987)

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

--Michael Dorris,
The Seattle Times

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

--Richard Critchfield,
The Washington Post Book World

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

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

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

--Pamela Gullard,
The San Francisco Chronicle

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

--Winifred Blevins,
The Los Angeles Times Book Review

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

--Noland Norgaard,
The Denver Post

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

--Jeff Guinn,
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

For "English Creek" (1984)

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

--Reid Beddow,
The Washington Post Book World

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

--George Harmon,
The Chicago Sun Times

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

--The Chicago Tribune

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

--Janice Eidus,
The New York Times Book Review

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

--James Kaufmann,
The Christian Science Monitor

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

--Carol Van Strum,
USA Today

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

--Wendy Smith,
Newsday

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

--The New Yorker

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA
a novel by Ivan Doig
Publication Date: September 28, 1990
Price: $18.95

August 1990
Spurred by the 1989 centennial of Montana's statehood, moody widower Jack McCaskill, turning 65, criss-crosses the state in a Winnebago with his photographer daughter, strong-willed, feisty Mariah, and her ex-husband, Riley, a reporter. In this crowning volume of a trilogy, which includes English Creek and Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Doig again displays a masterly skill in depicting the American West, which few writers match. Instead of patriotic hoopla, the canvas is dotted with falling ranches, oil pumps clanking away in farmed fields, Montanans tensely poised between an uncertain future and a frontier past. Jack, who narrates this road story with brash humor, faces two emotional crises: Mariah precipitously announces plans to remarry Riley; and Leona, Riley's mother, who once had an ill-fated fling with Jack's dead brother, joins the caravan. This entertaining ramble adroitly blends travelogue, family drama, history and newspaper lore.

--Publishers Weekly

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

Jack McCaskill, at 65, has lost his wife Marcella to cancer. His daughter Mariah, a photographer, has "a chance that'll never come again," invites him to travel in a Winnebago with her and ex-husband Riley, a 支lustful, eccentric journalist, as they explore Montana as a Charles Kuralt. In a sometimes shrill, sometimes nostalgic tone, Jack narrates the ensuing journey to publication and to love. Jack has been grieving, but in the Winnebago he witnesses daughter and son-in-law seemingly fall in love again as they endlessly argue over destination, story angle, and almost everything else.

We get a lot of McCaskill family history, a Blue Highways-like sampling of Montana's old geezers, grizzlies, mining country, and "true grit"; and, as Mariah looks for the right pictures and Riley builds a following that is more than regional, Jack does in fact move forward again, with the help of a heart-to-heart with Leona, Riley's mother and a widow herself. Riley proposes again to Mariah and asks her to accompany him to California, where a big paper has made him an offer. Mariah waves but finally realizes that "you and I love just some of each other." So things go, in a book where the narrator wisely realizes that "Enumerating is one thing and making it all add up is another."

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

--Kirkus Reviews

To conclude his Montana trilogy (see also English Creek [BKL:O 15 84] and Dancing at the Rascal Fair [BKL J 87 84]), Ivan Doig moves forward in time—and then looks back. What narrator Jack McCaskill calls "memory storms," unprovoked assaults from the past, drive the action in this ruminative look at growing up and growing old, western style. A 20-year-old photojournalist at the time of the events in English Creek, McCaskill is 65 in 1989, a recent widower, and struggling to hold on to his beloved ranch in the face of massive societal change ("Maybe what I have known how to do all my life, which is ranching, simply does not register any more"). Reluctantly, he agrees to accompany his daughter, Mariah, a photographer, and his ex-husband, Riley, a reporter, as they tour Montana, on assignment for a newspaper, gathering human-interest stories relating to the state's centennial celebration. Personal history mixes with Montana history as the trio dodges buffalo, visit the site of Chief Joseph's surrender, and deal with unresolved familial and marital discord. Doig continues to excel at creating a sense of place, and, as before, the grandeur of the West is effectively set against the melancholy address of human love—the misjudged motives, the coming together and the breaking apart, the private sorrows and the unrealized hopes.

--Booklist

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

--Library Journal

(starred review)

Publication Date: September 28, 1990 ($18.95)
His novels of the American West benefit as much from his painstaking research as they do from his poetic imagination.

BY WENDY SMITH

For just under a decade, in five books resonant with the echoing spaces of the American West, Ivan Doig has examined the ways in which history and geography interact to shape individual and national character, demonstrating our membership in a "community of time" that links Americans to those who preceded us in the landscape, as well as a community of place that knits us together in a complex weave of familial and social obligations.

In *This House of Sky*, his sensitive memoir of growing up in Montana in the 1940s and '50s, and in *Winter Brothers*, an exploration of the Pacific Northwest coastline through the diaries of a man who first ventured there in the 1850s, Doig mingled past and present in discontinuous narrative that skipped around in time yet presented coherent, moving visions of human possibilities against two very different backgrounds. He turned to fiction—but not away from the past—in *The Sea Runners*, which chronicled the escape of four men from a Russian prison in 19th century Alaska and their daring canoe journey down the Pacific coast.

Doig is delving deeper into his Montana roots in the McCaskill family trilogy on which he has been at work for the past six years. *English Creek* took up the family's story in the middle with the tale of 18-year-old Jick McCaskill's coming of age in the summer of 1939. His newest novel, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (*Fiction Forecasts, July 31*), which *The Dictionary of American Regional English* is launching with its 50,000 first printing, goes back to the beginning: the arrival of young Scotsman Angus McCaskill in Montana’s Two Medicine Country in 1889, the year the territory became a state. Doig expects to complete the third volume—and carry the McCaskills into the present—in time for the statehood centennial in 1989.

Why has the American past laid such a hold on this writer's imagination? "I think it helps us to know what we are and where we are by knowing where we came from," he says. "Also, I grew up with people in Montana who had a great link to the past. They weren't educated enough in classroom terms to know factual history, but they had a lot of lore in their heads. And it was in the language, too, the sayings that showed up in my father's and grandmother's talk. Going back to Scotland three summers ago to research *Rascal Fair*, I found some of the turns of phrase originated there." Doig came to the Seattle area, where he has lived for 21 years, to get a Ph.D in history, and his training is evident in the way he works. An energetic, friendly man of 48 whose glasses and gray-red beard give him a vaguely professorial air, he shows PW the file-card boxes his father arranged the slides on a light table, grouping the pictures together to get a sense of what a given street might have looked like in 1889 or 1919.

The language of Doig's books is also carefully researched. "Language led me to the McCaskill trilogy as much as anything else. I was interested in using the language of my Dad's generation in *English Creek*, which is narrated by a character roughly his age. Then it followed that Angus would narrate *Rascal Fair* in his Scottish-born voice. It was a big decision, because it takes a long time to accumulate the language for these three books. I have a file-card box called 'Montana Lingo,' and I'm working my way through *The Dictionary of American Regional English* to find out how language forms itself, how it comes out in everyday dance and prance—"the poetry of the vernacular, because often people who don't have much else in life are very rich in language. I think what I'm up to is an attempt to write a trio of books in some of the West's own language."

The West itself—Montana in par...
It seems to me there's a new kind of eloquence that is not just an eloquence of the West, but an eloquence of the edge of the world.