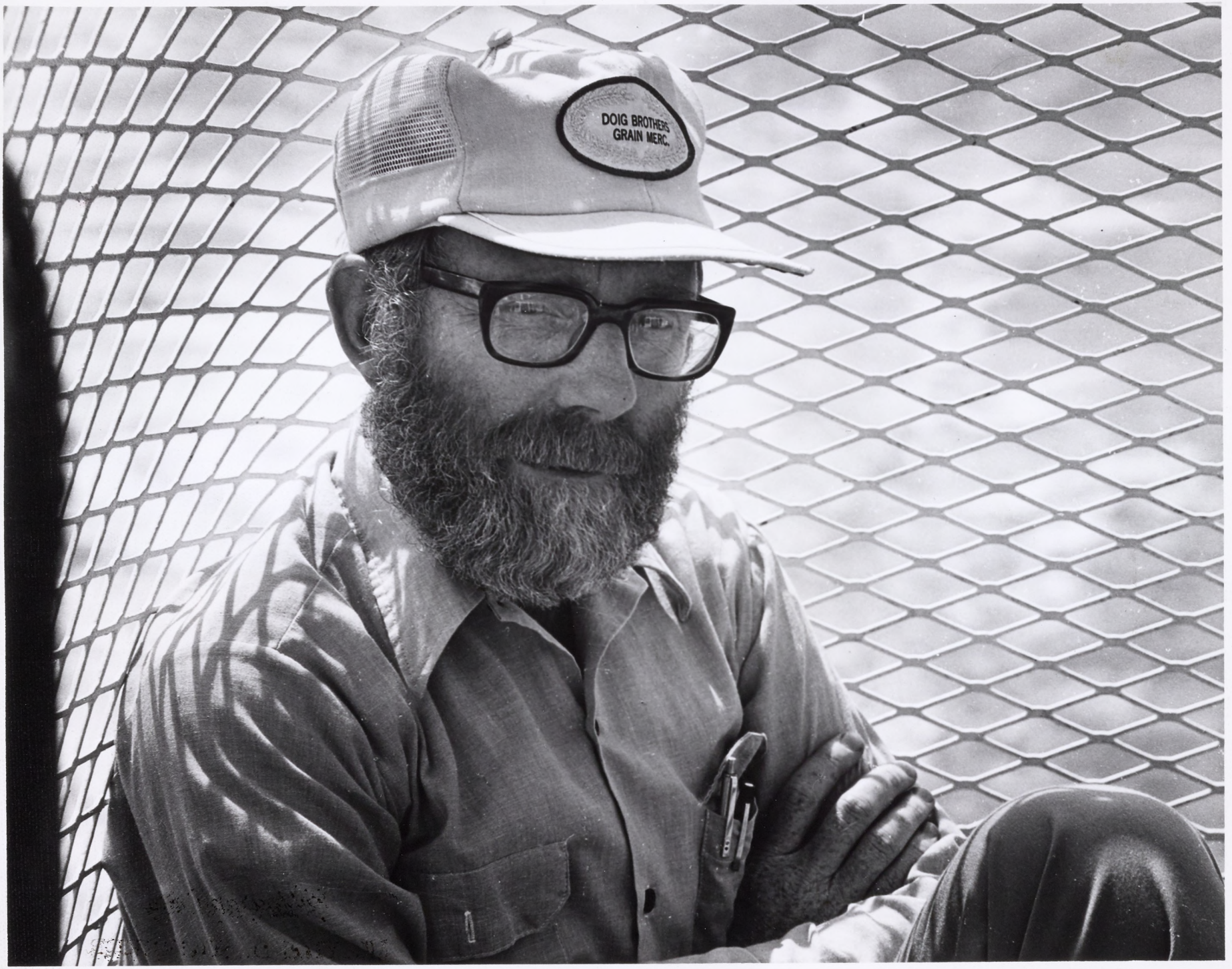
DOIG BROTHERS
GRAIN MERC.

taken during KCTS/9 filming
of Winter Brothers, aboard
a Washington state ferry;
photo was cinematographer
Wayne Sourbeer.

1982

Photograph By
WAYNE D. SOURBEER


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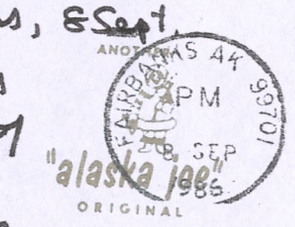
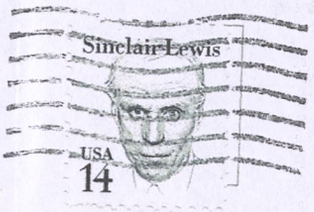
For Doig archive

Fairbanks, 8 Sept.

Hey, look! Animals right off the cover of Winterhill! And those must be the Blue Mtns, or maybe just an Oregon hill, in the background!

Ann & Carol





The Lesleys
3034 NE 15th
Portland OR
97212

MCM-23
Mt. McKinley, towering 20,300ft (6194m.) dwarfs Caribou on the Tundra. A common sight transfixing many a visitor.
J & H Sales Anchorage Ak.
Printed in Australia by Colorscans.

22 April '86

El Craigo--

Saw thex coverx (and as you can see it staggered my typing ability) of the Laurel WINTERKILL, and was much gratified to see you have abandoned caribou country for the Missouri River. We'll make an honorary Montanan out of you yet.

If the NY Times ever deigned to list this year's NEA winners--evidently several cuts down from last year's superb bunch, in their opinion, huh?--I'd appreciate a copy when you get a chance. Also, out of curiosity, did you get a word processor along with the dough?

How's life going, when you're not answering my neighborly nosiness? My latest chapter of the Gold Dust Twins for you: a buddy of mine on some kind of NEH gig is teaching my SEA RUNNERS and WINTERKILL at the state reformatory here. I tell you, Craig, we have got a future ahead of us.

all best

Ivan

For Doig Archive

CROWN *of the* CONTINENT

THE LAST GREAT WILDERNESS OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

RALPH WALDT *Foreword by* IVAN DOIG

EWORD

RRIVING AT GLORY

by Ivan Doig

I came into the country that Ralph Waldt so rightly calls "the Crown of the Continent" as someone who was wide-eyed about that vast and glorious geography, but for all the wrong reasons.

My moment of arrival occurred in a highly dubious way—in the black of night, when I was a jittery high school freshman, knowing only that I was on my way into some unforeseen veer of life in a part of Montana where none of my family had ever set foot. My father and my grandmother had taken on a sheep deal which was landing us, sight unseen, onto a small leased ranch somewhere in the vicinity of a Highway 89 map dot with the pronunciation-resisting name of Dupuyer.

Getting in to the place, particularly in the dark along roads that dwindled and dwindled from gravel to ruts, was alarming enough. The ranch itself was more so when we eventually got there. The sheep owner my dad was going to run the sheep for—we were the western version of sharecroppers—either had not known or had not bothered to tell us that the ranch family had retained half the house to store their belongings in, and so the three of us were to live in one gaunt room which had to serve as kitchen, dining room, living room, and everything else, and a tiny bedroom for my dad and me to share, and an even tinier one for my grandmother. The place sat just far enough up on the sidehill of a coulee to give every foot of ground under us a disconcerting tilt; when I say we never quite found our footing in three hardscrabble years there, I mean it literally. Nothing for the eye to catch hold of, either: the total count of trees on the whole damn place was two, both of them, as memory tallied them for me on another occasion, "hunched low in front of the house, evidently trying to cower in out of the wind." And, of course, sited "down in a hole" as this unnerving secondhand ranch was, there was no view of any landform except the identical opposite slope of the coulee.

Came the first dawn after our blind leap northward, though, and my father figured we had better go up on the benchland above the coulee and take a look around to see what else we had gotten ourselves into. And in that morning moment, my eyes widened in another way: "The western skyline before us was filled high with a

FACING PAGE: A stream tumbles off the east face of Clements Mountain in Glacier National Park, giving motion and voice to the high country snowpack from which it was born. Streams within the Crown are among the least polluted in the world. SCOTT WHEELER

*BELOW: The incomparable blue of Howard's forget-me-nots (*Eritrichium howardii*), growing from a thin strip of soil between limestone outcroppings, demonstrates the tenacity of life on the Crown. These wildflowers bloom early in the spring along the Crown's eastern slopes.*

steel-blue army of mountains, drawn in battalions of peaks and reefs and gorges and crags as far along the entire rim of the earth as could be seen. Summit after summit bladed up thousands of feet as if charging into the air to strike first at storm and lightning, valleys and clefts chasmed wide as if split and hollowed by thunderblast upon thunderblast. Across the clear gape of distance, we could read where black-quilled forest wove in beneath cliffs and back among the plummet of canyons, we could make out the beds of scree crumbled and scattered beneath the marching shields of rimrock."

It has been more than a quarter of a century since my entranced first real look at "the Crown of the Continent" reached print in *This House of Sky.*

And it has been a full fifty years since that pilgrimage in the dark brightened into a phase of my life that I have drawn on for book after book. Across that reach of time, I have watched with astonishment as the area of Montana's Rocky Mountain Front that I know best, and write about as my novelistic "Two Medicine country," has evolved into something like a mountain-and-prairie archipelago of conserved nature. The swaths of land now in preservation hands, exemplified by key holdings such as The Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp Preserve and the Boone and Crockett Foundation's nearly neighboring Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch, stand out like Treasure Islands in what geography of hope we have left.

Make no mistake: this is not the way things have generally gone in the use-it-up-and-junk-it American West. What has happened along the colossal watershed of the continent from Montana's Blackfoot River to Alberta's Highwood River is the surprise story—even yet full of suspense because of the gaps between preserved holdings—of an ecosystem that so far has survived fairly intact in the face of everything the forces of exploration/exploitation have tried to do to it. And, wonder piled upon miracle, we have the best possible scribe in the greatest outdoors court of "the Crown of the Continent" in the person of Ralph Waldt, whose pocket tag most of his life has read "naturalist" but who writes like a trailside recording angel.

Waldt's evocative gift of phrase—"the doe leading the procession had walked to within six feet of me, grazing on mouthfuls of tender grass, so close I could hear every sound her teeth made on the forage, so close I could count her eyelashes"—will become immediately evident to the reader, as will his terrific camera eye. Let me point out, however, the valuable longitudinal depth that this lovely and bracing book of his provides us: Ralph Waldt, a man after my own dairying heart, has kept track these past thirty years of his on-foot crisscrossings of the northern Continental Divide country, the "Crownland," so to speak. Where he has been, he has always seen and learned. Once on a Pine Butte trail I listened to him give an impromptu impassioned talk on the marvels of an anthill that would have made a Thoreau or an Eiseley perk up his ears.

So, this Waldtian work of prose and photo takes us, in the company of a guide honed by the country itself, to unsuspected viewpoints of an eco-kingdom that most people have only seen bits and pieces of. This crowning glory of our continent in its still-amazing intrinsic unity can be made to last, but only if we of its human component will widen our eyes—our vision—enough.