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The Woolly West: Colorado's Hidden History of Sheepscapes

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Andrew Gulliford, *The Woolly West: Colorado's Hidden History of Sheepscapes*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018. xiv, 402 pp. \$40.00.) Heavily Illustrated.

Cowboys and cattle ranching have long dominated the historiography and myths of Euro-American settlement of the West. Sheep and the people who tended them have received far less attention, even though recent scholarship suggests they were every bit as important if not more so, especially in certain places and times. Andrew Gulliford's *The Woolly West* adds to this growing body of scholarship, with a specific focus on western Colorado and adjacent areas in New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

The book comprises nine chapters, each preceded by a short, first-person vignette—Gulliford calls them 'sheepscapes'—recounting his travels in search of remnant traces and contemporary successors of Colorado's sheep herders of yore. Drawing heavily on local newspapers, government records and memoirs, the first five chapters provide a fine-grained and rather circuitous narrative history of the period before World War II. The dominant theme is a familiar one: the sometimes brutally violent conflicts between 'cattle men' and 'sheep men,' in which herders were usually victims and cowboys usually hired thugs. Gulliford's account is long on details—colorful and occasionally grisly—but short on interpretation and analysis. He makes no attempt to explain the extent, persistence, and moral depravity of anti-sheep sentiment (which routinely verged from vigilantism into what would now be termed hate crimes or even terrorism), other than that sheep were often more profitable than cattle and many flocks were owned and tended by Hispanos, Basques, Greeks or Mormons. The problem is that Gulliford's own research turns up countless exceptions—cattle men who embraced sheep production, and

Anglos who hired and befriended minority herders—and he misses a chance to test the overlooked but compelling hypothesis advanced by John Perkins (1992) that sheep were despised by erstwhile Southerners as symbols of the antebellum North.

Chapters six through nine transition from history to cultural geography and from there to present day debates and transformations. Gulliford explains how herders from northern New Mexico came to be supplanted by Peruvians, and he provides fascinating details about sheep herding and the intimate knowledge of weather, plants, sheep, dogs and predators that it requires. Clearly inspired by J. Mallea-Olaetxe's wondrous 2000 book, *Speaking through the Aspens*, he uses arborglyphs—herders' carvings on venerable aspen trees—not only as evidence and illustration but also as a trope for the whole book: recovering stories before they vanish to decay. The last two chapters take up the paradoxical place of sheep in the New West: culturally revalidated and no longer environmentally destructive, but economically obsolete and imperiled by political and regulatory challenges.

Gulliford clearly loves western Colorado's history, landscapes and people, and *The Woolly West* has both the strengths and weaknesses of a very personal project. For scholars, it fills an important sub-regional gap in the story of sheep raising in the West, complementing Mallea-Olaetxe, Weisiger (2009), McGregor (1982) and others, without otherwise breaking new ground. For lay audiences and especially Coloradans, it offers memorable stories and an affable historical perspective for a time of rapid change.

--Nathan F. Sayre, University of California-Berkeley

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