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Winter 2007

## Review of *Wild Prairie: A Photographer's Personal Journey* By James R. Page

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Schwarm, Larry, "Review of *Wild Prairie: A Photographer's Personal Journey* By James R. Page" (2007).  
*Great Plains Quarterly*. 1530.

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*Wild Prairie: A Photographer's Personal Journey.* By James R. Page. Foreword by Candace Savage. Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2005. vii + 135 pp. Photographs. \$35.00.

The landscape of the prairie is often overlooked in favor of more dramatic mountain ranges and wild forests, yet it is an ecosystem teeming with life and beauty. Grasslands are the backbone of our planet, but to appreciate the prairie takes time. Photographer James R. Page immersed himself in the prairie to observe and understand its vastness and subtleties, using his camera to record his vision. He shares these photographs, and thoughtfully written observations, in his 135-page book, *Wild Prairie: A Photographer's Personal Journey*.

Early in the text, Page states that "Everything on the prairie seems either huge or impossibly small." This is the approach he has taken with his camera. We are shown the seemingly infinite vistas one sees while gazing at the horizon, juxtaposed with the microdetails you might notice when your attention shifts to examine the ground where you're standing. The book is divided into four chapters, each devoted to a season. Beginning with summer, we journey through a year of changes, made even more dramatic as our range encompasses 1,500 miles of grasslands from Texas to Saskatchewan. We see the plants grow, die or go dormant, and sprout again. We see birds, animals, insects, and reptiles. We see the light change. We begin to realize how beautiful and complex the prairie can be.

The original North American prairie once stretched south from around modern-day Dallas, 1,500 miles north to southern Saskatchewan, and east to west from Indiana to the Rockies, covering approximately 896 million acres. The plow and urban development have claimed much of the land, and today less than four percent of that prairie remains, with much of that broken into small isolated parcels. It is sometimes easy for a photographer to romanticize or give a slightly prejudiced viewpoint. This book mentions that humans have profoundly altered the prairie, yet there is a con-

spicuous absence of them, except for the occasional abandoned ruin of a building, or a road without a trace of traffic. Likewise, there are photos that make you question if this is really the prairie—exceptions rather than the typical. Perhaps this is to make us aware that surprises exist, that the more we look the more we will see.

*Wild Prairie: A Photographer's Personal Journey* gives a glimpse of the prairie. The photographs are beautiful, the prose is descriptive. No photograph can ever completely duplicate an experience, but an effective one can give a sense of that experience and make us more aware. Page's photographs encourage us to take it upon ourselves to explore, embrace, and cherish the land.

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