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Review of *The Proper Edge of the Sky: The High Plateau Country of Utah* by Edward A. Geary

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The Proper Edge of the Sky: The High Plateau Country of Utah. Edward A. Geary. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992. 282 pp. Map, photos, and references. \$14.95.

Near the end of his introduction, Edward A. Geary states that “the pages that follow are neither guidebook, nor travel narrative, nor natural history, nor social history, nor literary history, nor personal essay, though they incorporate elements from all these genres” (p. 3). While the work does challenge classification, it presents a massive accumulation of details that vividly portrays the interaction between an extraordinary landscape and a remarkable people. Geary accomplishes this through twelve intriguing chapters.

Geary begins with an overview of the geography and the history of the settlement of the high plateaus of southern Utah. The reader, unfamiliar with

the terrain, may feel some frustration because Geary locates things through route numbers while his map has no roads at all. Geary meticulously analyzes accounts of the earliest explorations of the region, speculating about the actual routes the expeditions took.

In describing the settlement of "the Mormon corridor," the southward expansion from the Great Salt Lake, Geary traces the evolution of attitude toward the plateaus. He suggests a gradual recognition of beauty in the landscape, a cultivated appreciation of what first appeared as fierce, barren, and forbidding. Geary introduces the concept of the typical Mormon village, without defining it. The reader will come to understand the term as gradually as the settlers came to acquire a taste for the scenery. As Geary outlines the movement into the inner valleys of the region, he explains the village design as a necessary reaction to the environment and the availability of water. This typical village was laid out in a grid, with wide streets and irrigation ditches. On the corner of each block stood a house. The owners shared the land between the houses, the out-buildings, gardens, and pastures.

Mormon relations with Native Americans have always been influenced by the Mormon perception that Indians descended from the Lamanites, a lost tribe of Israel. Inevitably conflicts occurred, and Geary presents a remarkably balanced account of the Black Hawk War.

Geary returns to delve deeper into Mormon irrigation practices, showing how scarcity produced both communality and violence. He considers the consequence of pioneer hardship on women, concluding that strength of character often resulted. In describing Boulder Valley and its verdant isolation, Geary refers to its edenic quality and the appeal of that image. Further exploring the effect of isolation, Geary uses the town of Escalante as a classic Mormon village. He ponders, in one of his most interesting digressions, how places get named, and who gets to do it.

Geary examines the history and geography of the Arizona Strip, that portion of Arizona contiguous to Utah but separated from the rest of the state by the Grand Canyon. He points out the damage caused by poor wild life management and overgrazing and the significance of the area as a refuge for polygamy.

Finally, Geary assesses the results of mining and non-Mormon immigration into the area. He concludes by describing an old photograph, which brings back recollections of his childhood, leading him to his title.

Geary inundates with minutiae, providing the general reader with more than he or she ever needs to know about the Utah high plateaus. The over all impact, however, is really quite moving, not unlike Thornton Wilder's *Our*

Town. Geary's great love for his topic commands attention and leaves a lasting impression of the way the land and the people shaped each other.

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