

Book Review

California's Eastern Sierra, A Visitor's Guide, by Sue Irwin. 1991. 144 pages. Cachuma Press, in cooperation with the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association. \$15.95, paper.

Here is another beautiful but affordable book published by Cachuma Press. It has 165 color photos, many of which were taken by famous photographers such as David Muench and Galen Rowell. Without question, this will be a volume against which other travel guides will be measured.

When I first saw it, I assumed that this was going to be a colorful guide to Sierra Nevada backpacking. That is not what the book is at all. Rather, after two introductory chapters on natural history and traditional history, the book divides lands east of the Sierra Nevada, between Fossil Falls and Sonora Pass, into six geographic regions and describes the scenic wonders that can be reached by road or short hikes. Each regional chapter begins with a brief history of the area and then describes its significant landmarks or natural wonders. Although I wonder why she omitted the area around Kennedy Meadows in the southern Sierra Nevada, locations in the Inyo and White Mountains east of Owens Valley are also included. In total, over 100 such destinations are described. Seven full-page color road maps, without unnecessary clutter, depict the access routes.

Sue Irwin has done a wonderful job on the text for this book. In a clearly written, efficient style she has packed a wealth of information into this volume. In addition, at appropriate locations, short contributions from other well known experts are inserted into the text. For example, a beautiful section on Wildflowers of the Eastern Sierra is authored by Mary DeDecker, herself an Owen's Valley resident.

When I realized that this was actually a road guide, my first reaction was, "Oh no, someone is actually going to reveal my secret places to the unappreciative masses." I have been visiting the area for nearly 40 years, and I have a house at about 8500 feet elevation on the South Fork of Bishop Creek. The main thing I appreciate about the eastern Sierra Nevada and its environs is the uncluttered space, the grand vistas. To visit the area, unquestionably one of the most beautiful in the world, a person does not have to drive through a single city the likes of Fresno or Phoenix. I didn't like the thought that such a beautiful book in its thoroughness would attract hordes of visitors.

A sentiment similar to mine is eloquently expressed in the introduction by Gordon Wiltsie, a respected native of the Owen's Valley. He aptly points out that most of the acreage is either public land or owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and that there simply isn't enough private land in the area to support much development. He also points out that by fostering appreciation for its scenic beauty the book helps to preserve the eastern Sierra in its present wild state. He explains that appreciative visitors can bring more life to the area's economy than all the boom-and bust mining, ranching, and hydroelectric power the region has ever produced.

So, I put aside my selfish interests. I encourage everyone to buy this book and visit the country that my friends and I simply call "The East Side." Spend some money there so the shakers and movers of Inyo and Mono Counties will realize that tourism is the most important long-term aspect of the region's economy. Anyway, Sue Irwin did fail to mention some of the places I find particularly special. But the truly appreciative visitors will find those for themselves because an important part of the eastern Sierra experience is exploration.

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