

# A Road Runs Through It

## Reviving Wild Places

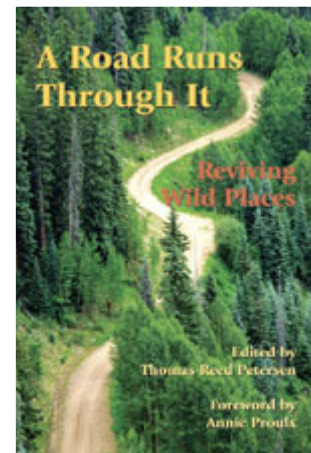
EDITED BY THOMAS REED PETERSEN

*Johnson Books, 2006. \$17.50, 240 pages.*

IN HER FORWARD to *A Road Runs Through It*, Annie Proulx equates road-ripping—the removal of roads from public wildlands—with the crusade of seventeenth-century pueblo dwellers against the Spanish conquistadors who repressed their culture and desecrated their sacred objects. Road-ripping, writes Proulx, “is a meaningful ritual that seeks to reestablish the correct order of the world.” The twenty-nine writers within this collection, including Barry Lopez, Derrick Jensen, and William Kittredge, contribute to this revolt by recalling and imagining natural landscapes, neither repressed by a windshield nor desecrated by the sound of motors.

Our national forests now have a 430,000-mile network of roads—ten times longer than the U.S. interstate system. These roads slice and dice wildlife habitat (and wildlife), facilitate the logging of our forests, choke our streams and watersheds with sediment, accelerate the spread of invasive weeds, and encourage trespass of ATVs into wilderness. This fragmentation of America’s public lands not only separates elk from wintering grounds and trout from spawning beds but also disconnects people from wild landscapes.

In Janisse Ray’s essay, “Roadbed,” a eulogy for the paved-over red-dirt driveway to her rural Georgia family home, the writer points out that before the internal combustion engine, “road was a verb meaning ‘to join.’ Now it connotes ‘divide.’” She continues, “Most roads are wasteful. Most are unnecessary. Dare me to say it: all are contrary to environmental ethics, and all are enemies of wild America.”



The most compelling essays within the book are those that seek to understand the public zeal for backcountry roads and the draw of motorized recreation. Katie Alvord, a cofounder of the Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads—the Montana-based nonprofit dedicated to road-ripping and which receives proceeds from the sales of the book—tells the story of a showdown with a belligerent ATV rider on the edge of a Lake Superior nature preserve. In “The Entitled,” Alvord persuades the rider to turn off his motor, get off his rump, and walk onto the beach to watch nesting birds. In the absence of a growling engine, there isn’t just silence.

—Joshua Zaffos