

Colorado Museum and Parks Thrill Texan

Source: This from Sunday Source Post will be in interest where needed - Tex N

Writer Charmed by Chipmunks, Lore and Nature's Beauty at Rio Grande's Headwaters

J. FRANK DOBIE is what might be called a "professional Texan," but in the following article he waxes lyrical about Colorado. A noted folklorist and writer, Dr. Dobie is professor of English literature at the University of Texas. He served as visiting professor of American history at Cambridge university in England.

By J. FRANK DOBIE.

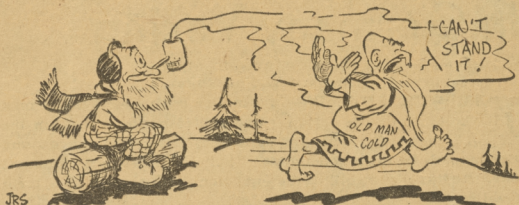
I WRITE this from a log cabin in a grove of aspens, overlooked by spruces and crags, beside the rushing waters of the Rio Grande del Norte, miles above the South Fork junction. It is not far

from the canyon to its head, and it is not far from the head to the continental divide. When, years ago, I read Harvey Ferguson's "Rio Grande," I recognized it as an outstanding interpretation of the southwest, but I wondered how a man could write a book about the Rio Grande country and its people and never get down as far as El Paso—to say nothing of the thousand miles of the great river between El Paso and Brownsville. Now it is coming home to me that a person might write a highly interesting and important book about the Rio Grande and never get below the Colorado-New Mexico line.

The Rio Grande reservoir impounding the river's headwaters high in mountains just under the twisting continental divide is nearer to Denver than to Santa Fe. A patriotic citizen of the Lower Rio Grande valley might stand at this reservoir, dip up a bucket of the cold, clear water, pour it back and imagine that some drops, mixed with mud, would help irrigate an orange tree at McAllen, Texas. Very likely, however, not a single drop of that bucketful of clear water would ever get below the widespread irrigated fields of potatoes, alfalfa, and winter fields for sheep in the wide valley, more than 7,000 feet high, out from the thriving town of Monte Vista here in southern Colorado. Within a month from this mid-August day,



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flurries of snow in the mountains above our cabin will stir elk to move downward, and the striped ground squirrels sunning themselves on rocks and logs will be drowsing towards their long winter sleep. The striped ground squirrels and the mighty elk are a long, long way from the colored pecarities of tropical nature that will be gnawing lush prickly pear leaves all winter long in Hidalgo county, Texas.

FROM head to mouth, however, the Rio Grande and the lands it divides have certain common denominators. Coming down to it after a month in Montana and Wyoming, we felt that we were coming into the southwest—coming home.

When, seventy-five miles or so southwest of Denver, we drove through Kenosha pass (9,000 feet high) and overlooked South Park (Bayou Salida) of the South Platte, where the mountain men used to rendezvous and where George Frederick Ruxton spent the winter of 1846-1847 hunting elk and antelope and was saved from freezing in a snow storm by his pipe, I experienced a leap of joy.

Bayou Salida is Spanish-Mexican. Nobody yet has written a better book of travel in both Mexico and New Mexico than Ruxton's "Adventures in Mexico." Not far below Bayou Salida we came to a town of adobe buildings, to Mexican faces and Mexican talk. In all Wyoming just to the north there are only two place names of Spanish origin. That is Far West, though ranching lies Wyoming to Texas.

Like every other town in this country, Monte Vista was so crowded that we could not find a hotel room. The only way to travel with assurance of finding shelter is to telegraph ahead for a room, and the telegram had better be several days ahead. The

hotel clerk at Monte Vista was exceedingly obliging, however. "Will you take a room in a private home?" he asked. Of course we would. The big room was in the home of a Baptist preacher. He wanted to talk.

"I wish you could meet an old mountain man I know," he said. "Maybe he would tell you something that he won't tell me. He tells me just so much and no more. He has found the place where a party of Spaniards returning from California were besieged by Indians. They buried their mule-loads of gold. They built a kind of circular stockade of rocks and held it while one by one fell from Indian arrows. Finally a few escaped, leaving the gold behind them, but when they got down into the Rio Grande valley all but one of the escapees were killed. A descendant of the sole survivor lives on down the river and has a map. This mountain man I am telling you about got the map from him. He says he can take me to the circular stockade. There he has excavated some holes containing human bones covered by ashes. He has located other bones, bones of the escaped Spaniards, strung across the Rio Grande valley. He has found everything according to the map and according to tradition but the gold itself. He won't show anybody the stockade, not yet. If the right man came along and talked with him he might reveal this place—and there might be the gold itself."

THERE might be, certainly, there would be more details to the story. The lead made me feel like old times in Texas. Only lack of time prevented me from following it—just as only lack of time will until the end prevent the mountain man from digging up those mule loads of California gold dust.

There are some fine things in Denver that could be in Texas.

The Denver civic center is one of the most beautiful in the world. Back from a magnificent arrangement of trees, lawns and avenues stands the noble building housing the state's historical collection as well as art. On the lawn are two masterpieces of sculpture by A. Phimister Proctor—a cowboy on a bucking bronco and a mounted Indian warrior.

What a pity that this Texas museum was made so small, even if the proposed wings are ever built! It seems illogical that the immensely wealthy and vast state of Texas, with its incomparable heritage of land and things that grow on the land, has as yet barely started a museum of natural history. Nowhere else in the world is there such a fine and beautiful representation of wild turkeys as in the Colorado Museum of Natural History at Denver. A Texan must travel to Denver to find his own prairie dogs, coyotes, wolves, buffaloes, prairie chickens, hawks, eagles, antelopes, deer, flowers, grasses—hundreds of specimens of nature—displayed in so superb a manner. This is not to discount the creditable beginnings of natural history museums in Austin, Dallas and San Antonio, but they are in no way commensurate with the wealth, pride and life of Texas.

LAST year more than one million human beings went through this Colorado Museum of Natural History. To see the throngs of people enjoying the magnificent cases of nature, enlarging their own understanding, laying up treasures of memories and having windows opened for them that will enrich all their after lives makes one rejoice. I had the same kind of joy at this Museum of Natural History that I felt in the Rocky Mountain National park while we shared with hundreds of other tourists pleasure in feeding peanuts to herds of striped chipmunks and Say's ground squirrels. Where cars stop along the highway on the mountain ridges, these charming creatures appear from the rocks. They help make the whole world kin. That 15 cents spent for a bag of peanuts was absolutely the best investment of my life.

When will the burgeoning wealth from Rio Grande-bordered Texas construct a natural history museum so beautiful, so delightful, so civilizing to humanity as Colorado of the Rio Grande's head waters has constructed?