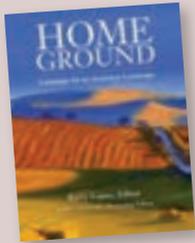


Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape

edited by Barry Lopez (Trinity University Press, 2006). Lopez and Debra Gwartney asked fellow writers to expand on common (and not so common) landscape terms, matching authors such as Barbara Kingsolver, Robert Hass and Luis Alberto Urrea with rich words like *tidepool*, *midden*, *buffalo jump* and *kiss tank*. The land comes alive in the pages of this one-of-a-kind book.



Grow: Stories from the Urban Food Movement

by Stephen Grace (Bangtail Press, 2015). The urban agriculture movement has to be one of the most positive and exciting developments over the past years. Our absolute favorite is Grace's generously written story about Denver's urban farmers. It's about food, yes, but community, too!

The Walk by William deBuys (Trinity University Press, 2007). Why does the Western landscape affect us so deeply? Writers from N. Scott Momaday to James Galvin have shared their personal geographies, but we find ourselves returning to this book — a northern New Mexico memoir of home, community and the small patch of land that deBuys keeps walking through.

Oil and Water by Stephen Grace (UCRA Publishing, 2016) and **The Man Who Thought He Owned Water** by Tershia d'Elgin (University Press of Colorado, 2016) remind us that we all need to pay attention to who is doing what with the Colorado River if we want to have a sustainable future.

—Patricia Rettig, reader

Rocky Mountain Land Library connects readers and landscapes

A vision takes shape for rural and urban branches, book clubs and workshops

BY GLORIA DICKIE

At Buffalo Peaks Ranch in Colorado, a cluster of whitewashed buildings and tin-sided barns, aspiring and accomplished illustrators have gathered around the main house's front porch in camp chairs on a late summer morning. Clutching cream-colored sketching paper and blue enamel mugs filled with lukewarm coffee, they're participants in an illustrated field journal class. A cool breeze flips pages and coaxes the old rocking chair on the porch into motion. Down at the ranch's southwestern edge, past barbed wire fences and prairie dog burrows, the South Platte River bubbles by.

It's been eight years since Jeff Lee and Ann Martin first laid eyes on this ranch, built in 1862 on the golden plains of South Park, 90 miles southwest of Denver. For years, the couple, who met in 1986 while working at Denver's famed Tattered Cover bookstore, had been searching for a home for the Rocky Mountain Land Library — their "residential" library of more than 35,000 books, many dedicated to wild Western landscapes. Now, with a 95-year lease on the ranch from the city of Aurora, the library, which hosts monthly summer book clubs and workshops for poets, artists and naturalists, is slowly taking shape.

The ranch is a far cry from the project's inspiration — Gladstone's, the old "Harry Potteresque" residential library

in Flintshire, North Wales, which Lee and Martin visited 20 years ago during a book-buying trip for the Tattered Cover. Unlike American libraries, it allows patrons to stay overnight in barebones dormitories on site, never far from the legendary book collection of the longtime Victorian prime minister, William Ewart Gladstone.

"We went away thinking, 'God, wouldn't that be wonderful if something like this was in the Southern Rockies,'" says Lee, now in his 60s. "We had always gravitated towards natural history books — books about the land."

For years, Lee and Martin visited properties all over Colorado, looking for a suitable home for the many thousands of books they had collected from bargain bins and donations, ranging from the usual suspects — paperbacks by Wallace Stegner and Ed Abbey — to rarities such as original clothbound volumes of Theodore Roosevelt's *Hunting Tales of the West*. But something was always missing; the place's connection to the West's history wasn't strong enough or the location wasn't right. Then, a friend recommended Park County, known for its investment in heritage tourism. Buffalo Peaks Ranch, located near the ghost town of Garo, was just what they had imagined: a place that reflected the region's cultural history—ranching, mining, Native American settle-

ments — as well as its natural history. "It's not just nature that defines a land library," says Lee; "it's how people have interacted with the land over millennia."

Phase one of the renovations, now underway, will see the property's seven buildings converted into year-round lodging, workshop and classroom spaces, a welcome center and a commercial kitchen, with a number of themed library spaces — from ranching to women in the West — scattered throughout. The main focus right now is fundraising, says Lee, who says they need to raise about \$6 million from private donors, federal and state grants, and membership fees. Already, they've received a \$60,000 grant from the South Park National Heritage Area.

The project is partnering with the University of Colorado Denver's Graduate School of Architecture, whose students have come up with designs for the library as part of their coursework, and a pro bono architect. And for the past two summers, volunteers from the historic preservation nonprofit HistoriCorps have painted buildings and replaced three roofs.

The library is already looking to expand beyond the ranch, Lee tells me with soft-spoken enthusiasm, perched on a stool in its makeshift main room. Behind him, tables teem with railroad history tomes. Already, 3,000 books from the couple's collection are housed at Denver Water's Kassler Center southwest of the city, where they comprise the Waterton Canyon Kids and Educators Library. And just days earlier, Lee and Martin had found the perfect location for the final component of their vision — an urban branch in downtown Denver.

"It's the old Puritan Pie Company building in Curtis Park. It's just one of those beautiful old Denver factory buildings," he says. Though Curtis Park is gentrifying, the neighborhood has always been one of the most diverse in the city. "There's a very strong African American foothold there in both history and culture."

As part of what the pair dubs the "Headwaters-to-Plains" initiative, the Denver branch will focus on urban homesteading (beekeeping, gardens and backyard chickens), and feature a kids' nature library. Now, they have to raise another \$1 million to get that branch fully up and running. "Philosophically, if we really want to tell the story of the land," says Lee, "having both the rural and urban is so important." □



The modest cluster of buildings at Buffalo Peaks Ranch houses the Rocky Mountain Land Library, a collection of books related to natural history and western landscapes. GLORIA DICKIE