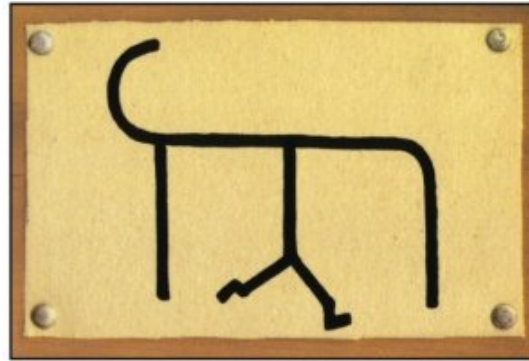


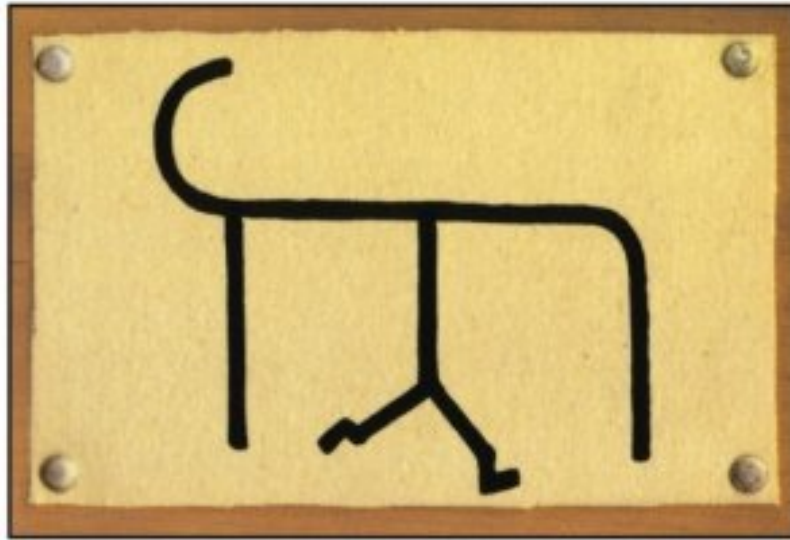
IRONS IN THE FIRE BY JOHN MCPHEE



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Amazon.com Review

Master essayist John McPhee heard about vehicles in Nevada that resemble police cars, but the cop inside was actually a "brand inspector," a lawman charged with tracking cattle rustlers. Ever curious, McPhee left his home in New Jersey for Nevada and spent a few weeks in those cars. The title essay of this collection is, as we've come to expect from McPhee, well-reported and beautifully written. Also included are essays based on McPhee's observations of a stand of virgin forest in the middle of New Jersey, a huge pile of automobile tires in California, and a long and fascinating look at forensic geologists and how stones tell a story.

From Library Journal

Most people think cattle rustling belongs to the past or to Wild West movies, yet, as McPhee informs us, the practice still presents problems for cattle ranchers in Nevada, necessitating the state position of brand inspector. In addition to this title essay, McPhee's collection features other unusual topics, such as repairing the crack in Plymouth Rock and tracing murders through geological clues. McPhee, a prolific writer best known for his best-selling *Coming into the Country* (1977), employs an accessible journalistic style and a scientific sensibility that stimulate interest and understanding in his somewhat esoteric subjects. In the Plymouth Rock essay, for instance, he surrounds his description of the actual repair with a social and geological history of the famous landmark. This book will appeal to curious readers looking for something unusual, especially those interested in the West and the geological sciences. McPhee's essays are entertaining as well as enlightening. For all libraries. ?Nancy R. Ives, SUNY at Geneseo
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From Booklist

McPhee's twenty-fourth book is a vigorous collection of essays on topics as diverse and intriguing as readers have come to expect from this veteran observer and master of lucid prose who remains as unfailingly curious now about the world as when he first put pen to notebook. An ardent admirer of accomplished geologists, McPhee devotes the most space to "The Gravel Page," an exposition of the meticulous art of forensic geology. As he profiles various experts, he enhances his usual eloquence with some superb procedural crime writing, describing how the subtlest of geological evidence was used to solve the tragic abduction and murder cases of Adolph Coors III and DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar (essays that have appeared in the *New Yorker*). Cattle rustling is the subject of the title essay, an eye-opening investigation into the demanding, sometimes dangerous work of Nevadan cattle-brand inspectors. In "In Virgin Forest," McPhee describes how 65 acres of untouched forest remain in, of all unlikely places, New Jersey. It is people who

fascinate him the most, however, and so touched was he by Robert Russell, a blind writer who works on a talking computer, he declares: "To watch Russell at work, writing, may be the closest thing to a miracle I have ever seen." Thanks to McPhee, we've seen many wonders, if not miracles. Donna Seaman

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This acclaimed collection of essays begins with the title essay and a trip to Nevada, where, in the company of a brand inspector, John McPhee discovers that cattle rustling is not just history.

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Cattle, cars and cobbles

By Stephen A. Haines

What could be more presumptuous than attempting to sit in judgment of writings of John McPhee? Essayist of the American scene for the New Yorker magazine, McPhee is a lodestone for people unheralded, forgotten or simply unknown. When you read his accounts of their lives and work, his use of language, image, empathy will instill them in your memory. There, they will be cherished, later re-examined to be reflected on, or valued, or best of all, emulated. All his subjects are worthy role examples, but that is only a part of the value of reading McPhee's accounts of their lives. His scope is vast, bringing together personalities, history - often at some depth, and other related information. All this seems to pale in the light of his ability form sentences that lead you into novel worlds, elevate your interest in something unexpected, or simply describe an otherwise mundane event.

This book starts with a shock - cattle rustling isn't a practice limited to Hollywood's false sense of history. Cattle duffing remains an active practice in Nevada. Branding, the symbol of ownership, is still subject to the "running iron" in shifting title without accompanying cash exchange. Law enforcement is not applied by gun-toting marshals, but by a Brand Inspector marking tallies in the palm of his hand. McPhee escorts one across vast stretches of the Basin and climbs thousands of feet over the Range to "take attendance" of cattle like a country schoolmarm. There's little limit to how far he must travel - tracking moving cattle may lead him to California or southern Utah. McPhee's descriptions of the country are more than matched by his relation of successful apprehensions of rustlers. His account brings the action into sharp focus and you are beside the Inspector staking out a mountain hideaway.

McPhee raises the term "investigative journalist" to fresh levels of excellence. Other topics in this collection include word processing for a blind author, understanding gravel as evidence, exotic automobiles and the travels and travails of a glacial boulder - a special one. His guidance through these topics is sure, keeping your interest at a peak as he conveys a wealth of information and character description. As with any McPhee book, this one remains timeless. It's worth your attention - and retention.

12 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

A collection of engrossing short pieces, perfectly written.

By A Customer

Mr. McPhee again turns his discerning eye on the work people do, what it entails, what it means to the worker, and (usually), how the author feels about it. Then he expands the context to outline its national, geophysical, geopolitical, economical, or other relevant influence, always in human terms. **THIS MAN CAN WRITE!**

Here, he ranges from current-day cattle rustling in Nevada, to computers for the blind, to the content of a virgin forest in New Jersey (!), to the mortal hazards faced by high-tech soil-analyzing crimesolvers, to the sheer scope and methods of used tire disposal, to a short piece on an exotic auto auction in Pennsylvania, to the likely origins and the repair of Plymouth Rock. All, thanks to the author, are wonderful to read. But then, so is everything he has published.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Masterful McPhee

By Donald E. Gilliland

This collection contains some of McPhee's masterful essays and reportage. McPhee's natural curiosity and probing questions always lead to interesting takes on seemingly mundane subject matters. Forensic geology and cattle rustling are just a few of the subjects that are given the McPhee treatment. As the jacket says, these are stories about "real people in real places." Anyone who has enjoyed McPhee's writing in the past will find plenty to like in this collection.

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