

NEW COUNTRY

BY WALT GASSON

One of the problems with having really deep roots in a place is that you don't go anywhere else. Our home place is in the Upper Green River country. We go back for generations there. We know and love it intimately. We've ridden and hiked it top to bottom for more than half a century. We're comfortable there. We fit it and it fits us. It's like having a pair of boots that you love, that fit you perfectly and that you have worn for years. Why look for another pair?

But this year, we're trying some new boots. We're in new country. We wanted to learn some places closer to our new home. We wanted to see some new trails, fish some new water, and generally check out the lay of the land. I'm glad we did. It doesn't take seven hours to get there. You don't have to face 50 miles of gravel road after you leave the blacktop. To us, this new country is as fresh and new as if the dew of creation was still on it.

That's not to say it's perfect. There were more Colorado people there over the Fourth of July holiday than there were in Colorado. There are a lot of roads and not all that much backcountry. No grizzlies or wolves, either. I'm not sure if that's a plus or a minus. But that's the trouble,



Photos by Dillon Hanrahan



you see. You can't evaluate new country—or old country either for that matter—by ticking off pluses and minuses like it was a cupcake on some weird British TV cooking show. A landscape either speaks to your heart or it doesn't.

Different landscapes speak to my heart in different ways. I love the redrock country of Utah, especially in the spring when I'm weary of cold and wind and I want to be warm and sit by a juniper fire at night. I love the sky island mountains of Arizona where the ghosts of Cochise and Geronimo ride the canyons of the Chiricahuas and the Pinaleños. I love the waters of Montana from the Little Missouri to the Kootenai. These places are all different, but they're all special. I connect with them in different ways.

The country just above us feels old. The north-slope spruce and fir forest goes on for miles, with a carpet of grouseberry and moss. It's dark in there, even at midday. There are dusky grouse and goshawks and

the sound of small things that you can't see scurrying on the forest floor. There are streams—mostly small, but not always—with trout that are mostly small, but not always. We are learning our way around here. We're learning where to pick mushrooms in the summer and where to hunt elk in the fall. Maybe most important, we're learning the places that speak to our hearts here.

If you can, get out there and find a place that speaks to you. Near or far, new or old—just get out there and fall in love with it. Maybe for the first time (or maybe for the hundredth), but go. You'll be glad you did. **W**

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