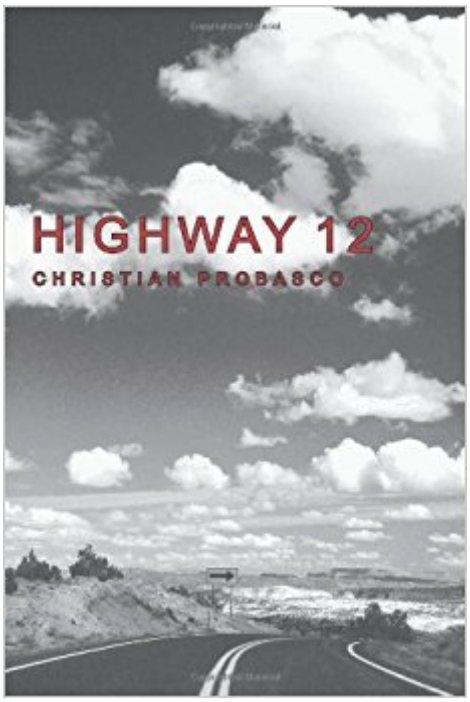
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Highway 12



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Synopsis

Highway 12 is undoubtedly one of not only America's but the world's most scenic highways. From its intersection on the west with Highway 89 south of Panguitch, Utah, it runs up through Red Canyon onto the Paunsagunt Plateau and across Bryce Canyon National Park. It then drops into the Paria River Valley, passes through several tiny villages, crosses some extraordinary (for anywhere but this region) badlands, and descends the Escalante River into Potato Valley. While a driver may justifiably feel she has seen some scenery by that point, the highway is just getting started, for in the next stretch, it crosses a labyrinth of multicolored sandstone humps and corridors, climaxed by a narrow hogback with steep slickrock drops to each side, all within Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Reaching the oasis of Boulder within this desert of rock, the road then climbs across the flank of the Aquarius Plateau, providing spectacular vistas and terminating at the gateway to Capitol Reef National Park. Along the way side roads and trails access the vast wilderness of the Paria and Escalante Rivers and the high plateaus they drain. Congress acknowledged the unequaled splendor of Highway 12 by designating it one of a handful of All-American Roads.To travel with Christian Probasco this road and its spurs, which lead deep into some of the wildest, most broken-up and stunning landscapes anywhere, can put a unique twist on an already singular experience. He knows the region as well as anyone and brings an original, edgy, youthful view to it. His opinions and his language may challenge you. His approaches to and perspectives on the land may sometimes surprise you. His understanding of the area's history and its people will likely teach you a thing or two.

Book Information

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Travel

Customer Reviews

"Interesting throughout and quite well conceived." -- Edward A. Geary, author of The Proper Edge of the Sky: The High Plateau Country of Utah

Utah Highway 12 extends from Bryce National Park to Capitol Reef National Park, and it skirts the northern edge of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. In the words of author Chris Probasco, the land to the south of Highway 12 "is the most broken-up, inaccessible, intractable, inhospitable country on the face of the earth, and it is unlike anything else on the earth."HIGHWAY 12 is based on various expeditions Probasco made in his Jeep along Highway 12 and back-country (and back-back-country) roads that branch off of it -- and sometimes, when the road ran out, along dry streambeds and the like -- and many times, when driving was no longer possible, by foot, or maybe on all fours, or maybe sliding down a precipitous sandstone slope on his backside. In addition, Probasco incorporates into the book relevant material from a fair amount of reading he did about the region. The result is a blend of outdoor adventure, history, and geology, combined with commentary on local issues -- as of 2002 and 2003, when Probasco undertook his expeditions.Most of those local issues involve in one form or other the conflict between environmentalists and the Utahans who want to continue to use the land much as it has been used since Mormon settlers first arrived in the area in the 1870's. Probasco talked with people on both sides of the controversy, and he paints a fairly discouraging picture of recalcitrance on both sides. One instructive quote is from a BLM manager: "[The BLM has] been hunkered down the last ten years. They keep getting sued by the tails of the curve of normal distribution. When I came in as area manager about 1991, every single decision we made was appealed by one side or the other * * * and we were frozen. * * * One side says we want to lock it up for just a few and the other says we want to open all the land up to industry. So the range is being managed to satisfy these two extremes, which means that true range management isn't happening." With regard to these local issues, Probasco's account is no longer current as to details, but the overall stalemate still prevails -- which, as Probasco points out, is tantamount to victory-by-default for the environmentalists.On that and other issues, Probasco himself is basically "middle-of-the-road". In that regard, I like what he has to say about the "Leave No Trace" creed of many environmentalists. If you take that seriously, you should stay out of the wilderness altogether. "Are you going to scratch your tracks out as you go? Reset the twigs you snapped as you struggled through the brush? Carry the rocks you dislodged coming down a

switchback to their former position?" Probasco’s motto, instead, is "Don’t make too much of a mess."In writing about some of the most alien land on the planet, Probasco ran smack dab into the limits of language. About one place, behind Dance Hall Rock, Probasco writes that "the schizophrenic slickrock [was] molded into shapes beyond the normal vocabulary of landscapes." "What do you call a massive mound of solid serpiginous rock risen out of some basal mental recess? You could call it a bornhardt or inselberg, but those don’t communicate the deep emotional resonance of such places, or the logic bent ninety degrees, or the rock octopus tentacles I witnessed at its edges, slinking back into the sagebrush plain. Where are the names for such things?" Sisyphean task though it may be, Probasco nonetheless tries mightily to communicate the otherworldliness of southern Utah above Lake Powell. And, surely, he comes closer to succeeding than most, although, in the quest he resorts to numerous words unfamiliar to me, some unknown even to the "American Heritage Dictionary" I keep by my usual reading chair (for examples, see the comment).To help bridge that gap, the book also includes over one hundred photographs, but as printed in black-and-white they are not wholly satisfactory. (One of Probesco’s anecdotes concerns a book on the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument printed in Hong King for which the Chinese initially had de-saturated the colors of the photographs because, to the Chinese, they seemed too intense and didn’t look real.) Also unsatisfactory is the absence of a useful map of the area Probasco writes about. Nonetheless, HIGHWAY 12 is an engaging book, and for those who aim to thoroughly explore the area it is a nigh-essential book.

More than a travel book, Christian Probasco’s Highway 12 blends awesome accounts of scenery with unforgettable interviews and then adds a dash of controversy for a book that suprises the reader with every turn of the page. Illustrated by Probasco’s stunning photography, the book is a must-read for anyone who has memories of traveling the Utah back country, and it is a should-read for anyone searching for that "road less traveled."

Arrived quickly. Book is out of date . Interesting geologic information lost in lots of personal, excessive stories. Gave to library for their book sale.

If you are looking for an unusual trip with a myriad of options as to the degree of challenge then this book is worth a look.Utah Highway 12 runs 124 miles in length from just southwest of Capitol Reef National Park in the north through Red Canyon in the west and passes through two national parks, a national monument, two state parks and literally thousands of acres of nationa forest and BLM

land. It has recently been designated an All-American Road by the Federal Highway Administration, one of only 20 in the U.S. The lure of this trip is you can traverse the entire route in your car and still view some of the most spectacular scenery in North America or you may elect to get off the highway and explore the myriad canyons and side roads that are as much a part of the book as Highway 12 which really serves as the unifying theme of the book. Whether you spend a day or a month exploring this road and its environs, by foot or vehicle, you are guaranteed a memorable trip. I would have prefered more maps but still found the text informative and accurate. I have traveled this road a number of times and have gone "off-road" and can attest to a number of the sights noted by the author. As the author notes this trip can be as difficult or easy as you choose. A good introduction to a most interesting Highway.

Utah’s Highway 12 is easily the most scenic byway in the continental United States. I’ve travelled it many times, but until I read Probasco’s book I had no idea what a rich and variegated wonderland I was passing through. The author has done a really thorough investigation of the territory. Do not venture out on Highway 12 without first buying this book! Second best thing: Read the book in the comfort of your own home, with a good glass of wine and a dictionary near at hand. Probasco’s prose won’t insult your intelligence, and you will definitely learn a lot!

The book arrived on time and as good as expected. Thanks

Wish I could write like this; "deserticulous" is certainly the right word for Probasco.Have had many adventures and misadventures in the very spots Probasco writes so well about, ah but never enough. Must load truck and go...

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