

Review of *Lost Angel Walkabout* by Linda Ballou

by Barbara Milbourn, a writer and editor in Nashville, Tennessee

In roughly twenty short stories, travel writer Linda Ballou takes us with her up active volcanoes in Costa Rica, down hundred-mile rivers in the Yukon Territory, over combination jumps and oxers in Ireland, beneath the Sea of Cortez, and along unforgettable jaunts through deserts, woods, peaks, and valleys in both hemispheres. Her tales span years of traveling—sometimes alone, occasionally with her mother or life partner, and often with others in search of soft adventure. Brimming with action, intelligence, regional history, funny mishaps or tight squeezes, each story is set against a backdrop of nature’s jaw-dropping beauty. Ballou aims to share her world view, and through her Eco-alerts make the reader care more deeply about our vanishing resources and places of wild beauty.

Living in greater Los Angeles among millions of other lost angels keeping pace in a hurried world, Linda Ballou makes no bones about her need to seek equilibrium, solitude, and salvation in the sublimity of nature. Forget thousand-thread count sheets at luxury hotels or shopping for the latest bling. Like the great figures liberally noted in her pieces—Robert Frost, Jack London, John Steinbeck, John Muir—Ballou prefers the great outdoors and is intimately acquainted with it. She is a naturalist, a thoughtful traveler, one caring toward the environment and sensitive to local populations both near and far. And, she is a meticulous researcher.

Lost Angel Walkabout is richly detailed and poetic. It gifts the reader with the depth of observation in the clear and careful naming of the world around us—places, peoples, plants, birds, mountain ranges, animals, and sea creatures. More satisfying than naming is storytelling the authentic connection made with the inhabitants of land, sea, and sky; ravens and great spirits, fin whales the size of city buses, or Native Americans forced to flee their land. Because the author has connected deeply, so does the reader. Something is gathered from every place visited, and it seems impossible not to connect with our own highest and best self through Ballou’s experiences—not to mention wanting to get up and go there.

Linda Ballou keeps good company too and includes interviews with renowned travel writer Tim Cahill and endurance rider Lari Shea. Like her travel writing hero Tim Cahill, Ballou sees humor in many of the predicaments she stumbles into, or out of, or overboard after.

Don’t be surprised to find her on the back of a galloping horse yelling “Yee Haw!” and let out a yell yourself.

