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Rough-Hewn Land: A Geologic Journey From California To The Rocky Mountains



Synopsis

"Unfold a map of North America," Keith Heyer Meldahl writes, "and the first thing to grab your eye is the bold shift between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains." In this absorbing book, Meldahl takes readers on a 1000-mile-long field trip back through more than 100 million years of deep time to explore America's most spectacular and scientifically intriguing landscapes. He places us on the outcrops, rock hammer in hand, to examine the evidence for how these rough-hewn lands came to be. We see California and its gold assembled from pieces of old ocean floor and the relentless movements of the Earth's tectonic plates. We witness the birth of the Rockies. And we investigate the violent earthquakes that continue to shape the region today. Into the West's geologic story, Meldahl also weaves its human history. As we follow the adventures of John C. Frémont, Mark Twain, the Donner party, and other historic characters, we learn how geologic forces have shaped human experience in the past and how they direct the fate of the West today.

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Customer Reviews

As a retired geologist with a 30-year old degree, I approached *Rough-Hewn Land* by Keith H. Meldahl as a refresher of geologic processes both past and present of the western US. Turns out, the book was all that and more. Dr Meldahl has an informative yet anecdotal writing style that clearly conveys his passion for the wildness of the west and the geology and history that defines it. From topics such as mountain building, deep time, the Cambrian explosion, ore deposition, tectonics, early exploration and the frenzy of the gold rush days, he makes this book hard to put down. Especially helpful are the provided locations of many of the discussion topics and photographs presented in the book. Coupled with books from the *Roadside Geology* series, *Rough-Hewn Land* would be a great travel guide throughout the western states. It will certainly be with me on my next photo safari, but I won't be driving on the Golden Gate Bridge again (thanks to Dr. Meldahl).

An excellent, very well written book. This is really the book for someone interested in the geology of the earth but does not have a background in geology. The author weaves the human history into the geological history in a very understandable manner. In all of my reading on the California gold rush, I had frequently wondered why gold in California, why not in other places? With this book I have the answer. The concept of 'deep time' is brought up frequently in the book and it is something to try to get your head around. I am not sure if I fully grasp the concept of how old the earth is and the number of years it took to arrive at its current state; but at least after this book I have a framework to start with. The Appendix I on Deep Time is excellent.

I am thrilled to have this book. I got it after reading about it in my newspaper. It is exactly what I was hoping for, it explains the formation of California; in language and imagery more vivid than I was expecting from a scientist. Professor Meldahl has a real exuberance, I want to run out and check out the formations he is talking about! But today it will just be Google earth. I love the little personal tidbits thrown in to humanize the subject. Like the miners grave planted with four cedar trees now a hundred and fifty years later, the trees bowed out as they grew since they were planted too close to accommodate their size. Turns out that the grave was for a relative of professor Meldahl! I really get a sense of the author and think I would like him in person. If the subject interests you I Highly recommend this book. One warning - I don't know if it is just my old eyes, but the text seems pretty small. I got the hard copy thinking that there would be great color photos, alas they are all black and white. So Kindle might be better so you can have a more readable font size. I had to stop at chapter 4 to give my eyes a rest.

Well written and has great pictures and diagrams. This is a geologic resource of incredible value for all those interested in the science of the natural world. This book answers some age old questions, and clarifies former fuzzy areas. The author ties the book to actual locations, so you can "see for yourself," and to historical events. A must read.

This book explains the geology in ways that I have never understood before. In the book, Keith Meldahl uses a style that makes it understandable and interesting. He explains geology in current terms, recent history (usually westward exploration and gold rush), and deep time. I found this technique helpful. I could relate to the current and recent history and then followed his reasoning with the deep time explanations. I never understood the "gangplank" in Wyoming until I read Chapter 13, "At The Frontier" in this book. Now, for the first time, I can explain the gangplank to my wife. Since retiring and moving to Colorado, I have become a student of geology and read every book in the library on the subject. McPhee's books have been eye-openers and are excellent but do not compare to this book. This is the best book on geology that I have ever read. I highly recommend this book.

Rough-Hewn Land: A Geologic Journey from California to the Rocky Mountains can be differentiated from most other geology books in several senses. Firstly, the science is interwoven with narrative of human historical events, thus making for a very engaging read. Secondly, author Meldahl has a gift for simplifying otherwise difficult or esoteric concepts, primarily by comparing them to everyday objects or processes, thus helping the reader to make immediate connections. Finally, the illustrations are copious, well-drawn, and appropriate to the various subjects. This is the type of book that could and should supplement, or in some cases replace, textbooks that are used in some geology classes. It is a cogent introduction to "the big picture" for the non-geologist and a clarifying work for the geologist who was trained prior to the advances in geological science over the last several decades.

Having majored in Geology, and a veteran of the petroleum industry, it has been astonishing and exciting to see how many major geological ideas and concepts have changed over the past 50 years. Professional journals have covered this material piecemeal, but this is first book that I have found that brings many of these ideas and concepts together in a thoroughly readable narrative that a non-geologist can easily follow, enjoy and understand. I say non-geologist, but I thoroughly enjoyed it too! It is rare and gratifying to find a geologist who can discuss a subject with the clarity,

interest and excitement that Dr. Meldahl brings to this book. The diagrams and photos add immensely to understanding the ideas discussed. If you are curious about geology, you will find the vehicle for exploring it with a trip from the Golden Gate to the plains of Wyoming in this book. If you have enjoyed John McPhee's books on the Geology along the 40th parallel (brought together in "Annals of the Former World"), you will find this book just as enjoyable and informative. I've recommended this and McPhee's books to many friends and family.

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