

Cal Poly Land: A Field Guide

EDITED BY STEVEN MARX

Cal Poly Land Centennial Seminar, 2003.
\$29.95, 261 pages.

CAL POLY LAND is the best thing since Bob's sliced cheddar and onion bread. You've got to get to the store early on Wednesdays in my hometown to buy a loaf of Bob's bread. I've been spoiled by its rich flavor, its succulent texture. I suspect you'll be similarly spoiled by *Cal Poly Land: A Field Guide*. This book represents a well-integrated philosophical commitment to honoring ecosystems as a whole, a mindset that weds conservation and preservation, aesthetics and analysis, the bottom line and a full heart. In one bold swoop it's become the gold standard in place-based literature about loved landscapes in North America.

Part Eyewitness Book, part high-tech *Sand County Almanac*, this is a guide to the campus of California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis Obispo. It is an elegant compilation of writing, photog-



Maps in *Cal Poly Land* enrich descriptions of hikes near San Luis Obispo.

raphy, cartography, and graphic design by collaborating administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Intended as a text for a diversity of university courses, it will make you want to start planning a vacation to take advantage of all that this central California campus community has to offer.

Cal Poly Land provides directed guidance to the flora, fauna, geography, and geology—and does it in spades for the campus's ten thousand acres of buildings, farm facilities, and wild lands, promoting a sense of the “seamlessness between the tamed and untamed” aspects of the landscape. The expected fare of birds, soils, ecosystem types, and

archeology is all here in photographic splendor. It's amplified by fascinating chapters on the technological infrastructure (including, for instance, a photo from a sewer cam), architectural study areas, dance sites, art installations, and beautifully narrated guided hikes, complete with full-color topographic maps. My feet itch to hit the trail into Pennington Canyon up to the copse of olive trees where five streams converge.

The details of place are balanced by essays on stewardship and sustainability, and a provocative consideration of ecological economics, which seeks to quantify the economic value of the biological and recreational services provided by open space. Pioneering land conservationist Aldo Leopold said, “When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” *Cal Poly Land* is a profound reflection of just such

love and respect. It will serve as a superior model for campuses and communities that wish to follow in Cal Poly's footsteps.

—David Sobel

Not Just Any Land A Personal and Literary Journey into the American Grasslands

BY JOHN PRICE

University of Nebraska Press, 2004. \$20,
225 pages.

TWO WORKS NOT discussed in John Price's fascinating book informed my reading of it: Henry Thoreau's *Walden* and Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*. Price is attracted to writers who, like Thoreau, find more meaning in non-human nature than in household and community. Like Thoreau, Price tells his story in the first person, but Price's book also owes something to Mailer, who, while

masking his ego in the third person, makes a compelling case that his self-revelations throw light on the Vietnam War. Similarly, Price's account of his Iowa childhood, his marriage, and his family's history illuminates the continuing struggle most Americans feel between staying put and moving on.

Not Just Any Land fo-

cuses on the lives and works of four writers: Dan O'Brien, Linda Hasselstrom, William Least Heat-Moon, and Mary Swander. O'Brien raises raptors near Sturgis, South Dakota, and writes about the West and birds of prey. Hasselstrom, a lifelong rancher, writes about the plains near Rapid City, South Dakota. Price's longest chapter is devoted to Least Heat-Moon's *PrairieErth*, the bestseller that explores the landscape and community of Chase County, Kansas. The most moving chap-



