

# Book Review

## **The Geology, Ecology, and Human History of the San Luis Valley**

Edited by Jared Maxwell Beeton, Charles Nicholas Saenz and Benjamin James Waddell

University Press of Colorado, 2020, 518 pages

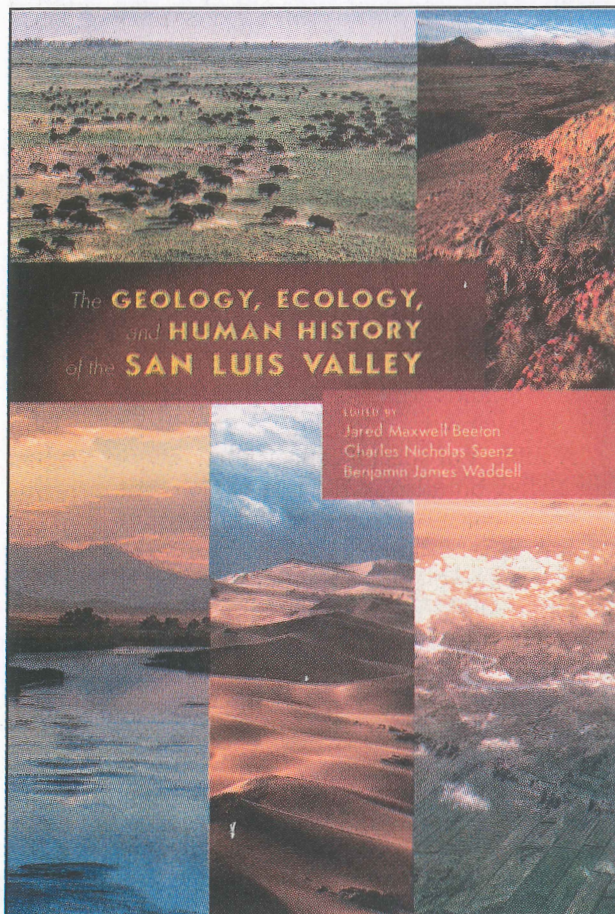
Hardcover, \$96; paperback, \$35; Ebook \$28

**Reviewed by Virginia McConnell Simmons**

**T**HIS VOLUME WILL FIND an essential place on the shelves of universities, public libraries, researchers and general readers who are seeking an authoritative, up-to-date source of scientific and cultural information about the San Luis Valley in Colorado's south-central region and relevant portions of northern New Mexico. The volume is divided into two main sections—the longer one devoted to scientific subjects and the second focusing on cultural topics—followed by a shorter section with chapters about two recreational opportunities.

Brief biographical information about the 27 contributors is listed near the back. Several have been on the faculties at Adams State University and Fort Lewis College or other academic institutions, while other contributors have special expertise in governmental agencies or community life. The foreword is written by Ken Salazar, former United States senator and Secretary of the Department of Interior and descendant of one of the Valley's earliest families of settlers.

The opening chapter, "Geologic History of the San Luis Valley," has numerous figures, charts, and other graphics that provide geological and very useful geographical information, covering 541 million years to the present time. The text of this chapter, however, includes symbols that will be unfamiliar to many general readers. Also, this chapter of 50 pages includes a whopping 13 pages of references.



From that point forward, the text moves along more smoothly for specialists and general readers. In a chapter entitled "Geomorphology and Climate Change," readers will find discussions about the Valley's geomorphology and climate change, including the Valley's four known mammoth sites. Next come chapters about glaciation, Great Sand Dunes, seismology, floods and landslides, and a chapter on mining which provides information about named sites in and around the Valley.



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spring comes, the bear rises out of its den, and the hunt begins all over again.

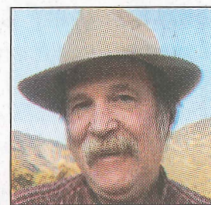
That's what the Great Bear tells us about resurrection, a practice which begins every year about this time when our ursine neighbors settle into their dens. Even now, we don't fully understand the biology that enables bears to survive for months on end (between 100 and 180 days) without eating, drinking, urinating, or defecating ... (don't try this at home). For example, we aren't entirely sure how bears can pull this off without losing more bone and muscle mass (they only lose about 30 percent). And then there is the small matter of the kidneys, liver and heart surviving the ordeal. If you or I were to try this we would be long dead come spring, but the bear emerges biologically intact, albeit a little groggy.

We may not know how to do the biology, but we do know this: in order to live well, we need to go into a liminal world or den from time to time. Why? Because we need to rest up from the trials of this world—and there have been plenty of those lately, politically and pandemically speaking. We need the den because the den is where our creative life is born. Consider the tale about an old mother bear who goes into her den to dream the world into being every winter. She dreams of deer and ante-

lope. She dreams of jays and chickadees. She even dreams of us. And when she emerges in the spring with her young cub, all of her dreamtime creations celebrate her.

What kind of world will we dream into being this winter? ■

*Peter Anderson recently retired from teaching in order to become a full-time word wrangler. He lives in Crestone.*



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