There Used To Be A Guy... But He Died: and other discoveries on a bike-ride across Nebraska

Alan Wilkinson
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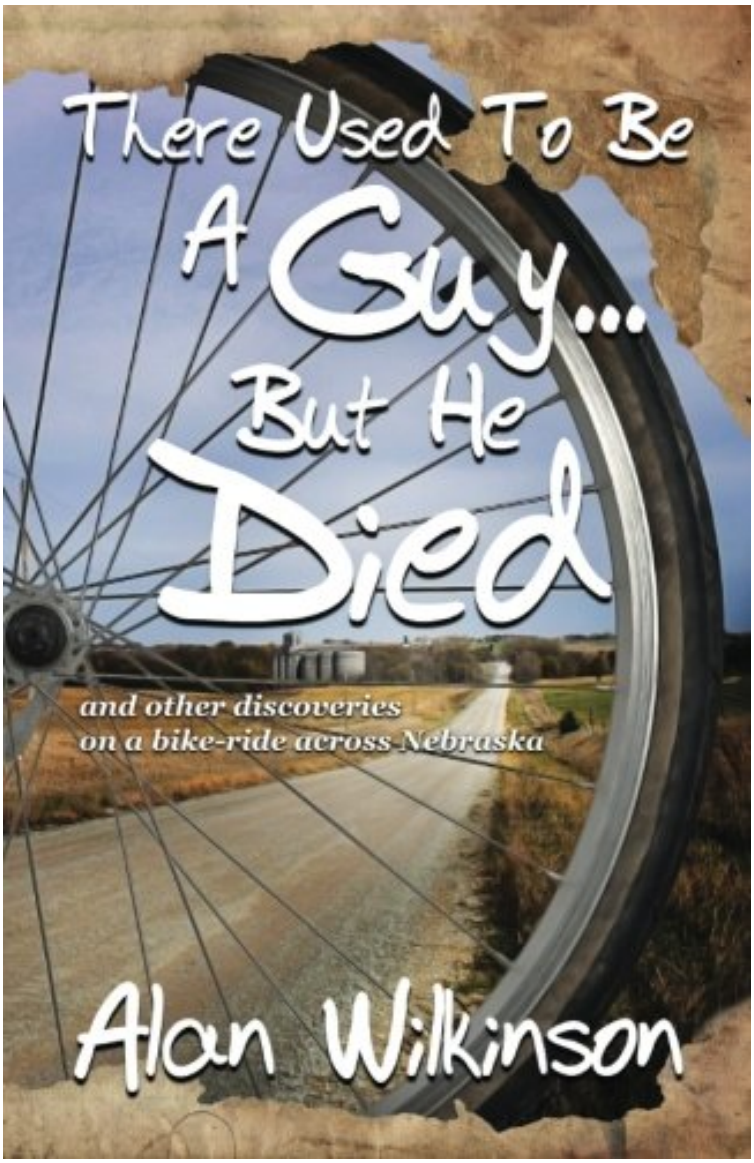

#2242289 in Books 2016-02-26Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.81 x .53 x 5.06l, #File Name: 0953262928212 pages | File size: 27.Mb

Alan Wilkinson : There Used To Be A Guy... But He Died: and other discoveries on a bike-ride across Nebraska before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised There Used To Be A Guy... But He Died: and other discoveries on a bike-ride across Nebraska:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I enjoyed every mile of Alan's storyBy Gertrude M PerroneI enjoyed

every mile of Alan's story. Having ridden the Bicycle Ride Across Nebraska (BRAN) 25 times and a few of those were in the location of this book and during the same years. He really captured beautiful Nebraska, the friendly people and our never ending wind. His problems with the bike were difficult for me to read because nothing is more frustrating to a bike rider then to have to deal with mechanical problems when you do not have proper tools or knowledge of the problem. His problems surprised me especially since he had rented the bike from a very reputable shop. Also enjoyed the parts of Nebraska history that he included. Fast and Fun read.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerA real down to earth book on bike touring across the state of Nebr.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The lone stranger rides through the sagebrush. . . . .By Linda M. HasselstromThere Used To Be A Guy But He Died. Alan Wilkinson. (Injury-Time Ltd., 2016).How could anyone resist a title like that? I couldnt, and the title justifies itself in the first few pages of this saga of Alan Wilkinsons 630-mile bicycle ride across Nebraska, from the lowest point to the highest in the state. The lone stranger rides into town as the wind blows tumbleweeds across the dusty street. Taciturn as any hired gun, and saddle-sore, hes looking forwell, I wont ruin the surprise.Wilkinson is English, and has visited Nebraska many times since developing a fascination with the west as a child; he speaks regularly at gatherings to discuss the work of Mari Sandoz in Chadron. But despite my own heroine-worship of Sandoz, weve never met. Through his writing, however, Ive come to enjoy his wry and muted sense of humor, and his deft way of picking holes in American conceit.Why would anyone ride a bicycle across Nebraska? The author says hed like to emulate the experience of the Oregon Trail as pioneers saw it, pitting myself against the elements and attempting to compare the actual experience of crossing the Plains with the feelings I might have when it was over.He gets his wish; hes blasted by heat, scoured by dust, and worn out by the sheer effort of propelling himself across the plains. Like those pioneers, he writes, To be honest, I wanted to surrender. But there was nothing to surrender to; nowhere to go. . . . It was only by pressing on, that I was able to keep my spirits up. If we Americans could talk to those among our ancestors who followed the Trail, surely they would say the same.Along the way, though, Wilkinson accomplishes something I didnt expect: brought me to tears. He attends an event where more than a hundred middle-aged Americans join together in singing Over There. For the honorary Limey in the crowd, dressed in cowboy boots and denim jeans, the song is ironic: Sure, the Yanks are coming, Chewing gum and silk stockings and chasing our women. Muscling in. Hearing those voices, though, Wilkinson realized more fully the heroic and self-sacrificing nature of the commitment. Through his eyes, I could see those Great Plains farm boys, one of whom was an uncle I never knew, cheerfully putting on his uniform to fight for an ideal.This book is subtle; no car-chases, lightning strikes or other drama. He even downplays a dog bite. If I hadnt already been a fan, Wilkinson would have won me over when he said hed been tempted to slip in some incidents from more dramatic trips, but he resisted. What the book does offer is an honest assessment of Western people. Wilkinson used to be a freight train guard, so he pays particular attention to trains, but he also he provides a considerable amount of Nebraska history, and recommendations on the best books to read about the subject, all the while suffering from the heat and exposure.When he finally jolts down gravel section line roads to arrive at Panorama Point, at 5, 424 feet the highest point in Nebraska, Wilkinson triumphs:Here for the first time I could see what it must have been like to arrive in an ox-drawn wagon and at last, after all those hundreds of miles, start looking around for a place to settle. It would be a feeling of true freedom, simultaneously exhilarating and terrifying. With no reference-point, no neighbor, in those days no crossroads, a pioneer would have a very real sense of what liberation meant: not just alone-ness, but total self-reliance. Its this self-reliance that makes westerners such dyed-in-the-wool conservatives.Many writers have written travel tales that, as the hackneyed phrase goes, share with me, a lot more than I want to know about the writers sexual preferences, fears, triumphs or problems. Wilkinson lets me far enough into his mind so I can appreciate his reason for riding, but he doesnt drag me down into a personal abyss. Hes honest; getting this book ready for publication some years after the ride, he says hes tried, to stick to the way it felt then, rather than the way it looks now. Back to my journals and maps, and no fabricating.A conscientious reviewer always proves her perspicacity by mentioning something negative about the book, so here goes: I wanted a map. Sure, I have a perfectly good Atlas, but Rulo, Wilkinsons starting point, isnt on it, nor are some of the other towns he mentioned. Sure, I could find Red Cloud, Willa Cathers home town, but my map doesnt tell me exactly where Dix is.As long as Im here, Id like to applaud Wilkinsons The Red House on the Niobrara, the book in diary form he wrote while experiencing life in a hundred-year-old hunting lodge, also in Nebraska. Hed barely moved in when he was hit with a genuine April blizzard as only the Plains delivers them; then his road washed out. Wanting to live like a pioneer, he planted a garden. In true Plains style, hail destroyed his first effort and grasshoppers his second. Still, like the real pioneers, he persevered, getting acquainted with the locals by helping them with their work and drinking in their bars. He probably made the neighbors nervous by camping out at the gravesite of Mari Sandoz, but he also wrote a fine book demonstrating his real relationship with the land and its people. Find it on Kindle for $4.95, paperback for $13.95.There Used To Be A Guy But He Died is available in Kindle for $4.95 or paperback for $10.95; and if you want to read more of this deft writers work, look for walkingonnails.blogspot.com.

The sun blazes down on Main Street. The little old feller sitting outside the barber-shop hears a dry rhythmic

squeaking and sees the stranger riding into town. On a bicycle. The stranger lowers himself to the ground, grimacing. The old feller pauses, cigarette between his lips and a match in his hand. He pushes his hat back on his head, wondering what kinda darned fool is out in this heat.The stranger asks, Any idea where I can get this fixed?The old feller strikes the match on his boot-heel. Lights his cigarette. We-ell, he says, and inhales deeply, there used to be a feller. He lets the smoke out in a long slow plume. But he died. For British travel writer Alan Wilkinson theres only one way to get to know a place, and thats the hard way. Here the author of The Red House On The Niobrara recalls his 630-mile trip across Nebraska on a borrowed bicycle. Heading west from the banks of the Missouri river, he makes for the Wyoming line and the states highest point, 5,426 feet above sea level. Its an elemental experience as hes broiled by a September heatwave, stopped dead in his tracks by a 55 mph wind, scarified by flying dirt, then chased by dogs and rescued by a cowboy. Along the way he considers the history of this Great Plains state, and his reasons for being drawn to it.

About the AuthorAlan Wilkinson was born, in England, into a family with Wild West connections. His great-great uncle captained the Mohawk, the ship that brought Buffalo Bill and his troupe back to New York from their European tour of 1892. He sat down to dinner with Annie Oakley and Frank North. So the British writer has always been fascinated by the American West. He has lived in New Mexico and Nebraska, has visited the West on many occasions and made close to twenty major road trips though every one of the trans-Mississippi states. In 2011 he spent six months alone in a dilapidated hunting lodge, observing day-to-day life on a remote cattle-ranch. But by far the hardest of his many trips was his bicycle ride across the Plains, from one end of Nebraska to the other in a fierce September heat-wave.