



OUT OF THE SADDLE

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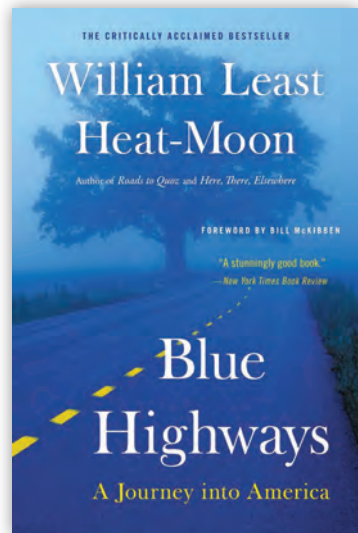
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Published in 1982 and holding its own for 42 weeks on the New York Times Bestseller list, the book still maintains a top-twenty position on Amazon's Road Travel Reference list. The title refers to small, forgotten, out-of-the-way roads connecting rural America. Back in the day, these roads were drawn in blue on the Rand McNally road atlas.

Least Heat-Moon took to the road in 1978 after

losing his job and marriage. He traveled for three months and over 13,000 miles searching for his soul, meeting folks who will never grace the cover of People Magazine but who are much more interesting than those who do. They included an evangelist-hitchhiker, a teenage runaway, a boat builder, a monk, an Appalachian log cabin restorer, a rural Nevada prostitute, a Hopi Native American medical student, owners of Western saloons and remote country stores, and a maple syrup farmer.

I suspect many of my fellow slow travelers have had similar encounters on their road trips. Here's one of my favorites from ten summers ago.



Walking Across America Before Going Blind

Pulling into the Kansas gas station, I saw a man walking through the parking lot carrying a couple of plastic shopping bags. I assumed he was a local and asked if he could recommend, "A place where real people cook real food and serve it on real plates."

The fellow with the plastic bags came alongside my bike and said that he too was

passing through. He had just picked up some supplies and was headed over to his motel for the night. I always ask other travelers about their journeys, and I was shocked to learn that the man was walking all the way from his brother's wedding in Washington state back to his home in Massachusetts.

"I wanted to see America before I go completely blind," he said. He had macular degeneration, an eye disease. A fry cook in a seafood restaurant, he quit his job for a few months so that he could fly to Washington for the wedding and then walk back home.

Averaging 30 miles a day, he must have saved a nice nest egg for the odyssey. I

asked him about his equipment, expecting to learn something about high-tech gear that might work for me on a future trip. I was surprised to learn that he was wearing it: collared shirt, chino pants, and \$15 slip-on shoes he'd bought at Wal-Mart. Everything he needed fit into his soft backpack.

And that's when I realized I did learn something, but not about hi-tech gear. He taught me that I should wring the joy out of the life I'm given (circumstances be damned) and that I can always travel (and live) with less. His spirit stays close to my heart.

I've encountered a number of people who have reminded me that life is short and unpredictable and to allow plenty of time in my itineraries for chance encounters with people and roadside attractions that call to me. Sure, sometimes I have to hustle to my next stop, but I am usually able to linger when and where it suits me. Driving past sunset and into the night is a price I gladly pay for that luxury.

How about you? Are you doing any slow travel this year? I'll be traveling on some blue highways that will carry me from Pittsburgh in the east to the Mississippi River in the west for the entire 981-mile length of the Ohio River. There's so much history, culture, and biodiversity along this river that I consider myself fortunate to give it the slow-travel treatment.

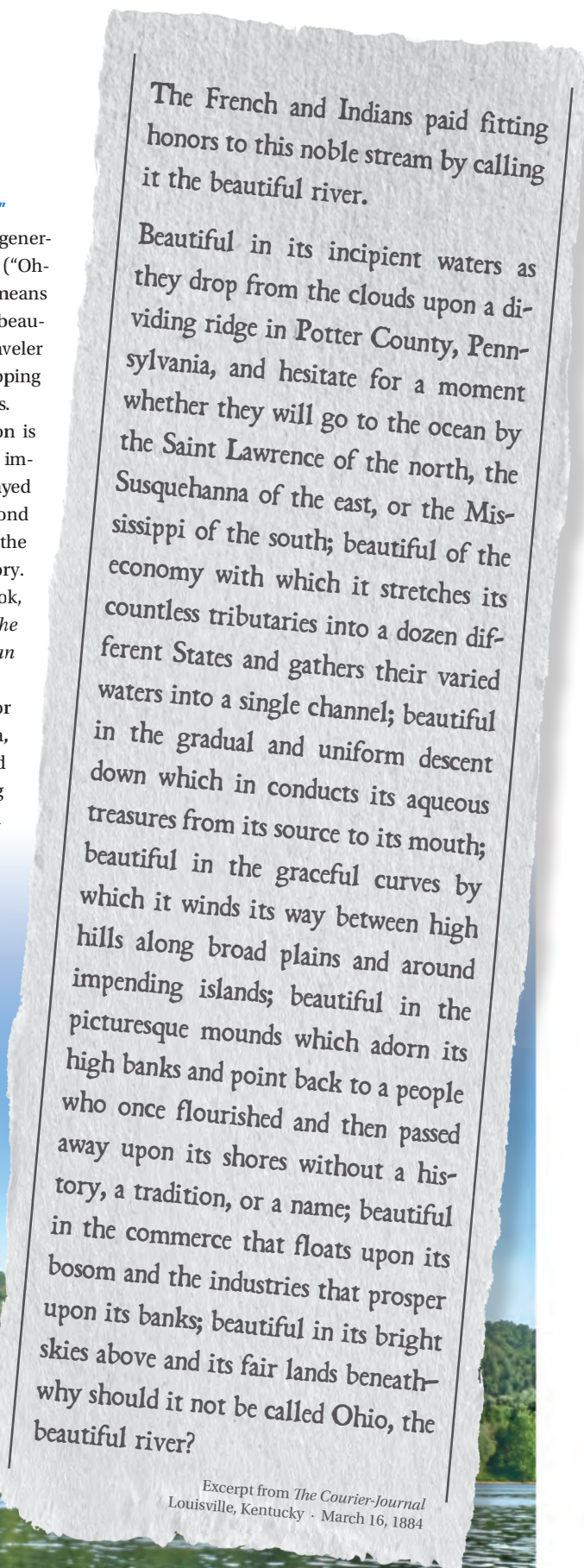
Traveling "The Beautiful River"

The state and river we call Ohio is generally accepted as derived from Ohiyo ("Oh-heee-yoh"), a Seneca word that means "beautiful river." Calling the Ohio "beautiful" might surprise the modern traveler who doesn't get to see its beauty zipping across its bridges at Interstate speeds.

We're so busy, and our education is so shallow, that we don't realize the important role that the Ohio River played in what some have called a second phase of the American Revolution—the opening of the Northwest Territory. Historian David McCullough's book, *The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the American Ideal West*, tells that tale.

The Ohio River flows through or borders six states: Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. It provides drinking water for more than three million people, and over 25 million people—almost 10% of the US population—live in the Ohio River Basin. Ohio is home to the largest number of BMW Riders Association members: 201. I hope to meet a good many of you somewhere along road.

Get in touch or follow my journey on Facebook or Instagram.



The French and Indians paid fitting honors to this noble stream by calling it the beautiful river.

Beautiful in its incipient waters as they drop from the clouds upon a dividing ridge in Potter County, Pennsylvania, and hesitate for a moment whether they will go to the ocean by the Saint Lawrence of the north, the Susquehanna of the east, or the Mississippi of the south; beautiful of the economy with which it stretches its countless tributaries into a dozen different States and gathers their varied waters into a single channel; beautiful in the gradual and uniform descent down which it conducts its aqueous treasures from its source to its mouth; beautiful in the graceful curves by which it winds its way between high hills along broad plains and around impending islands; beautiful in the picturesque mounds which adorn its high banks and point back to a people who once flourished and then passed away upon its shores without a history, a tradition, or a name; beautiful in the commerce that floats upon its bosom and the industries that prosper upon its banks; beautiful in its bright skies above and its fair lands beneath—why should it not be called Ohio, the beautiful river?

Excerpt from *The Courier-Journal*
Louisville, Kentucky · March 16, 1884

