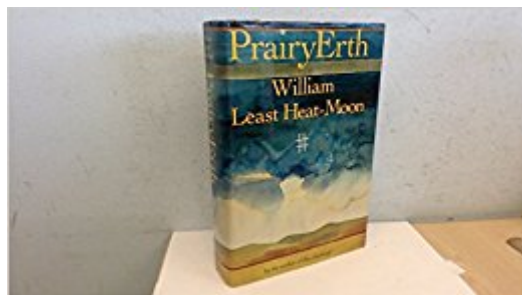


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# PrairyErth



## Synopsis

Eight years in the making--a new American classic from the author of *Blue Highways*. William Least Heat-Moon's genius in *PrairyErth* lies in constructing a "deep map" of the Great Plains by penetrating time and space within a tiny portion of it: Chase County, Kansas. This story of Chase County's history, legends, heroes, and its extraordinary people looms as large as the universe itself. Maps, drawings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Whereas *Blue Highways* dealt with Heat-Moon's auto trip across America, *PrairyErth* (an old term for heartland soils) records a journey mostly on foot across the tallgrass prairies and grasslands of Chase County, Kans. In a great cornucopia of a book, a majestic, healing hymn to America's potential, Heat-Moon attempts to penetrate the spirit of the land, a land which explorer Zebulon Pike and later white settlers stole from the Kansa (Kaw) Indians. There are now only six full-blood Kaw survivors, most of whom live on a reservation in Oklahoma. Heat-Moon writes of a feminist rancher who hires women primarily, of a farm couple swept aloft by a tornado, of abolitionists who wanted slaves free but not equal. He pauses to ponder fence posts, arrowheads and the nesting habits of pack rats. He talks to conservationists and coyote hunters, excerpts pioneer diaries and recreates the 1931 airplane crash that killed football hero Knute Rockne. Each chapter is prefaced by a map and by pages of quotations ranging from Thoreau to Frank Lloyd Wright. First serial to the Atlantic; BOMC selection. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This new work from the author of *Blue Highways* ( LJ 11/1/82) is an immersion into the past,

present, and future of Chase County in south central Kansas. Located in the heart of the Flint Hills, the sparsely populated area contains one of the best remaining tracts of tallgrass prairie that once covered much of the Midwest. ("PrairyErth" is an old geologic term for prairie soils). Having spent six years engaging in "participatory history," Heat-Moon creates a feel for the land and a rural way of life that seems to be dead or dying across America. Dividing his book into quadrangles, he presents a verbal map that examines the county's geological, natural, and human history. This is a fascinating book that could be improved only with the addition of an index. Highly recommended, especially for local, natural, and Western history collections. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 6/1/91; BOMC selection.- Tim Markus, Evergreen State Coll. Lib., Olympia, Wash. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Having read his excellent "Blue Highways" (twice, though thirty years apart), I thought I would give "PrairyErth" a chance. About five years ago, I dived into it, but got only a third of the way through before bailing out. I admired his fine writing, but I couldn't grasp his subtleties and the arc of what his project was trying to accomplish. Fast forward to two weeks ago, when my friends and I did a road trip through Kansas, culminating in the Flint Hills and the Tallgrass Prairie of Chase County. The experience in nature was so profound that I just had to give "PrairyErth" a second chance, especially after talking with folks at the Chase County Historical Museum in Cottonwood Falls. Well, NOW I get it! This book is a masterpiece of its own, perhaps even unique, genre. The details, the people past and present, the history, the flora and fauna, the geography and geology -- it is all there, and more. This book reminds me of the Terence Malick movie "The Tree of Life", in that you either love it as an completely new, insightful experience, or you turn your back on its magic in frustrated bewilderment. So must you visit Chase County first to understand this book? Hard to answer...I believe that if you read this book slowly and carefully, you will glean its worth even without making the actual pilgrimage. But try to come for a visit afterwards if possible, because the full marvel of what WLHM was trying to say will reveal itself to you in a fulfilling and remarkable way...

This book shouldn't have been written by an American. We're used to passing things at 70mph: to stop and notice things wastes time. But there is beauty and life and history everywhere if one is willing to look, and this book does so by taking a very deep look at a very small place. The people who live here should be proud to have such a book written about them...

Least Heat-Moon is a true Rambler and describes our American landscape with care and nostalgic

detail.If you didn't love the prairie before you read this book, you will love it after.

If you're not from Kansas, or have never stepped through prairie, you might be tempted not to tackle reading the lengthy PrairyErth. That would be too bad. Least Heat-Moon's description of Chase County prairie, it's people and history, and it's importance to America is fine reading. Clearly he has invested in this book years of research and soul. As vital to American fabric as Yosemite or the Grand Canyon, this tough prairie deserves the time it will take to understand it through this book.

My family left Kansas in the 1880s so the history, geography and characters were all of great interest to me. Mr. Heat-Moon is among my favorite narrators and did an excellent job as usual!

This book changed my worldview on what a "history" book should contain. Anything short of this scope is inadequate to begin to look at an area. I loved the epicness of this telling. I really felt like Heat-Moon was a voice for the silent grasses. I was sad when I came to the end of the book and plan to begin it again soon.

I was anticipating the same kind of elevating experience that I had when reading Blue Highways, but it didn't happen. Language was excellent but subject matter seemed to bog down somewhat.

Great Book

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