



Whitefish photographer creates new book on Crown of the Continent

Recommend 193

[Print](#) [Email](#)



Steven Gnam

Meltwater pool atop the Salamander Glacier in Glacier National Park.

[Buy Now](#)



[News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Lifestyles](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Shop](#)

[Classifieds](#)

[Homes](#)

[Cars](#)

[Jobs](#)

“Guard, protect and cherish your land, for there is no afterlife for a place that started out as Heaven.” – Charles M. Russell

The Crown of the Continent just got a new jewel.

Millions of people think they’re familiar with the landscape straddling the U.S.-Canada border between Missoula and Banff, Alberta. Whitefish photographer Steven Gnam forces readers to reassess that memory. Backed by writers Douglas Chadwick and Michael Jamison, Gnam’s “Crown of the Continent: The Wildest Rockies” stretches the boundaries of Glacier-Waterton International Peace Park just as it reimagines how that region looks.

“This project was born so that we could share the treasure of the Crown and invite others to join us in this work,” Gnam wrote in his introduction to the 191-page large-format book. His vision proved compelling enough to entice the 108-year-old Mountaineers of Washington organization to add it to its library of Braided River outdoor publications.

“I see thousands of images from photographers, all committed to using their work to preserving wild places,” said Braided River publisher Helen Cherullo of Seattle. “Steven is able to bring a kind of intimacy to this enormously broad landscape.”

Cherullo said the book melds both the natural wonders of the region with the people who make their livings and grow their history there.

“It shows there are people engaged with trying to come up with long-term solutions that take care of the land, and people who want to live sustainably,” she said. “His photos make them consider what’s at stake in terms of development for a lot of these public lands where we are invested for future generations to care for.”

Gnam includes most of the checklist subjects found on any postcard rack: Grinnell Glacier, craggy horizons, wildflowers. But like the difference between a Mazda and a Maserati, his images bring power and style where others deliver the predictable.

For example, many have shot the icebergs floating in the meltwater below Grinnell’s icefield. Gnam brings you to ice level looking up, or gets above the nearby Salamander Glacier for an almost abstract shot of blue snow surrounding a silver melt pond.

Not many have the patience to catch a grizzly bear napping. Or the endurance to stand eye-level with a trio of mountain goats as they casually wait out a cliff-clearing avalanche. Few peak-baggers think to memorialize their vista from the perspective of a hoary marmot.

While the book has a definite appeal for protecting the Crown of the Continent, former Missoulian



reporter Michael Jamison of the National Parks Conservation Association said Gnam's tranquil style helps it avoid stridency.

"It's a communication tool, not simply a beautiful coffee table book," Jamison said. "But not in an alarmist way – more in a celebratory way. We're not saying the world's coming to an end, but saying look at this beautiful place and read about its wonderful attributes in a whole new way."

In his essay, Jamison crystallizes the hold this landscape exerts on its residents, recalling a community meeting where he watched "back-to-the-land ponytail"-sporting John Frederick nearly get in a fight with "tobacco-stained finger"-jabbing property rights advocate Larry Wilson.

"I worried they might throttle each other, that maybe they should put a few seats between them," Jamison writes. "At which John looked might perplexed. 'Well,' he said slowly, 'you see he is my ride home.' And in that moment, I understood perfectly how we would get from here to there."

Chadwick has written numerous stories for National Geographic as well as full-length natural history books. Crown of the Continent Geotourism Council manager Dylan Boyle contributes a helpful list of adventures (including maps) to be had in the 18 million-acre area. And Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative director Karsten Heuer offers a final appeal for support of the Crown's preservation.

But Gnam sums it up in his own statement when he connects the history of people like George Bird Grinnell and Teddy Roosevelt a century ago to the opportunities available today.

"The Crown of the Continent remains intact because a handful of people saw its natural resources and its beauty as something that should stay untouched for generations," Gnam writes. "In defiant acts of self-restraint, they chose to forgo the short-term rewards of using the land as however they saw fit and instead laid the groundwork for the long-term rewards we enjoy now: wide-open space, abundant wildlife, clean water."

Reporter Rob Chaney can be reached at 523-5382 or at rchaney@missoulian.com.

Copyright 2014 missoulian.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Tags

Steven Gnam, Michael Jamison, Douglas Chadwick, Whitefish Photographer, National Park Conservation Association, United States, Canada, Banff, Grinnell Glacier, Glacier-waterton International Peace Park, Crown Of The Continent, Photography