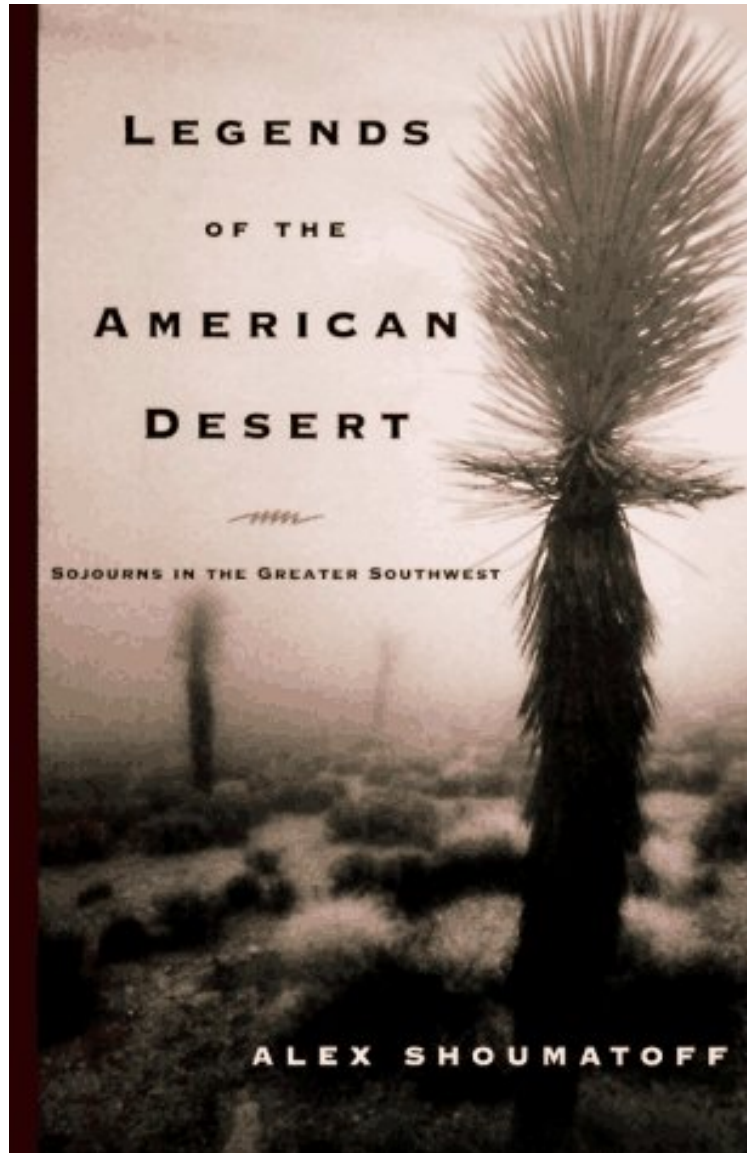


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Legends of the American Desert: Sojourns in the Greater Southwest

Alex Shoumatoff

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Alex Shoumatoff : Legends of the American Desert: Sojourns in the Greater Southwest before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Legends of the American Desert: Sojourns in the Greater Southwest:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Stories.By Elaine E. WebsterAfter borrowing this book from the library, I decided I wanted to own it.1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy oldcatWonderful. Being from the Southwest it's a very interesting perspective from the 70's,0 of 0 people found the

following review helpful. If you're interested in the Southwest, read this book! By whistler Really surprised to see all the negative reviews here. The author certainly could have used a fact checker and most of the errors other reviewers have noticed I picked up as well, but their vicious reaction to the book is a curious surprise; the errors are, after all, a minuscule portion of the book. I wonder if Shoumatoff strayed too far from the "land of enchantment" theme most writers use when dealing with the Southwest. My own opinion is that this book, warts and all, is a very worthwhile read. It covers a huge range of Southwest history, sociology, anthropology etc. and etc. I was fascinated, for example, to learn that up on the "mesa of doom" (Los Alamos) the scientists are known as "cones" (coneheads), the technicians as "plumbers" and the security people as "creeps." There's a sign over a low ceiling in a stairwell, "Watch Your Cone." Worth the price of admission alone. The history of Albuquerque, ("El Burque" to the locals), Tucson, Phoenix, the characters like Mabel Dodge Luhan, Dennis Hopper, Oliver LaFarge, the time Shoumatoff spent with the different Southwestern tribes (I missed the Apache), his extensive digging into the death of Navajo activist Leroy Jackson, the environmental disaster of the Black Mesa coal mine, the imprisonment of Navajo marine Clayton Lonetree, the insights into Taos, the supposed paradise ("Taos ain't for amateurs"), the Mormons, the mines, the conquistadors. It just goes on and on. A fascinating book. Don't be put off by these character-assassinating reviews.

For his brilliant reportage ranging from the forested recesses of the Amazon to the manicured lawns of Westchester County, New York, Alex Shoumatoff has won acclaim as one of our most perceptive guides to the oddest corners of the earth. Now, with this book, he takes us on a kaleidoscopic journey into the most complex and myth-laden region of the American landscape and imagination. In this amazing narrative, Shoumatoff records his quest to capture the vast multiplicity of the American Southwest. Beginning with his first trip after college across the desert in a station wagon, some twenty-five years ago, he surveys the boundless variety of people and experiences constituting the place--the idea--that has become America's symbol and last redoubt of the "Other. From the Biosphere to the Mormons, from the deadly world of narcotraffickers to the secret lives of the covertly Jewish conversos, Shoumatoff explores the many alternative states of being who have staked their claim in the Southwest, making it a haven for every brand of refugee, fugitive, and utopian. And as he ventures across time and space, blending many genres--history, anthropology, natural science, to name only a few--he brings us a wealth of information on chile addiction, the diffusion of horses, the formation of the deserts and mountain ranges, the struggles of the Navajo to preserve their culture, and countless other aspects of this place we think we know. Full of profound sympathy and unique insights, *Legends of the American Desert* is a superbly rich epic of fact and reflection destined to take its place among such classics of regional portraiture as Ian Frazier's *Great Plains*. Alex Shoumatoff has created an exuberant celebration of a singularly American reality.

From *Library Journal* Shoumatoff (*The World Is Burning*, LJ 8/90) has a great deal of fine writing to his credit, so it's a disappointment to find his latest--and longest--effort to be such a scattered, uneven work. His work misleads with its title and confuses as Shoumatoff changes roles--from raconteur to scholar to "hip" journalist. The book is divided into three loosely themed parts, beginning with water (or the lack of it) in the Southwest and ending with the author's acknowledgment of his self-serving attachment to Native American causes. In between, the subjects Shoumatoff covers range from the travels of Cabeza de Vaca to contemporary society in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Shoumatoff provides an explanation for the book's lack of cohesion in his acknowledgments (he's worked with eight different editors and three publishers since beginning the work in 1985). This title is easily enjoyed in bits and pieces but not as a whole. Recommended for larger public libraries. Janet N. Ross, Sparks Branch Lib., Nev. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Shoumatoff has accrued a considerable reputation for varied and perceptive travel writing, and his latest book will not disappoint his avid fans. His focus now is on the American Southwest, where "everything comes down to the dryness." Through the many but fast-moving pages, the author immerses his fortunate readers in "hydrohistory," which charts the evolution of the southwestern environment, a place where water is at a premium, from prehistory to just yesterday. Shoumatoff focuses on past and present conditions of human, animal, and plant habitation--all in the face of the need to adapt to the scarcity of water. Elevating his account to superior travel writing, Shoumatoff smoothly blends geology, geography, history, economics, and even paleontology into a complete course in the American desert's story from the time of immigrant Native Americans coming over from Asia on the frozen Bering Sea to the kingdom of the cowboys in the nineteenth century to today's influx of retirees. Much richness to be mined here. Brad Hooper From *Kirkus* A masterfully written study of a region that is at once familiar and utterly foreign, by a journalist who has written for the *New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and other magazines. Little eludes the grasp of Shoumatoff (*The World Is Burning*, 1990, etc.) in this roughly chronological account of the Southwest's earliest peoples, its conquest and settlement by Spain, its later flood of Anglo immigrants and its most recent incarnation as a region of water-guzzling "urban oases." While the history has already been told (and Shoumatoff acknowledges as much), the author here puts it into a highly vibrant context as he crisscrosses the land, pursuing its ancient and more modern history. Shoumatoff travels to the remotest precincts of northern Mexico's Sierra Madre, whose spectacular silver-veined canyons are now ruled by violent drug lords who have routinely murdered

scores of uncooperative Tarahumara Indians. He journeys to the ruins of one of the supposed Seven Cities of Cibola in New Mexico, where the Zuni people, who wiped out a Spanish expedition over four centuries ago, still reside. With the mother of Navajo and former marine Clayton Lonetree, he visits the young man incarcerated at Fort Leavenworth. Frequent asides happily intrude throughout this sprawling volume: In no specific order, short chapters are devoted to such arcane subjects as the history of the chile pepper; the hidden Jews of New Mexico; a stretch of Route 66. But of greatest saliency in this remarkable work, and what stitches its widely spaced locales together, is the nearly atavistic struggle among the Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo cultures for access to resources, a competition in which the latter has appropriated most of what is valuable in the Southwest, especially water, permitting the wasteful, extravagant lifestyles of metropolises such as Phoenix and Albuquerque, and the exclusive enclave of Santa Fe. Shoumatoff's book is a definitive accomplishment--an entertainingly informative read that must rank among the preeminent works on this region. -- Copyright 1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.