



Riding The Transcontinental Rails: Overland Travel On The Pacific Railroad, 1865-1881

Bruce C. Cooper

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The unmistakable new "aura of adventure" created by the opening of the first Transcontinental Railroad in May, 1869, soon fostered an almost insatiable public appetite for information about Pacific railroad travel in much the same way that man's first footsteps on the moon would do for the interest in space travel a century later in 1969. And what America's Nineteenth century "armchair adventurers" most often sought out and devoured with the greatest of passion were the colorful "first person" accounts of transcontinental railroad travel, authored by so many of the era's most popular writers, which soon began to appear in the pages of newspapers, monthly literary magazines, and travel books of the day.

Included within the pages of "Riding the Transcontinental Rails: Overland Travel on the Pacific Railroad 1865-1881" are some of the best of these contemporary accounts of overland rail travel in the West. These gems of travel literature have been culled from the works of such acclaimed writers as the noted adventurer and New York Tribune correspondent Albert D. Richardson, the widely traveled Springfield (MA) Republican owner and Editor Samuel Bowles, Scottish novelist, poet, and essayist Robert Louis Stevenson, former New York Evening Post Managing Editor and world traveler Charles Nordhoff, onetime Chicago Evening Journal military correspondent Benjamin F. Taylor, American novelist Helen Hunt Jackson, and her close friend and frequent traveling companion Sarah Chauncey Woolsey, herself a popular author of children's novels. These accounts first appeared between 1865 and 1881 in these authors' own books as well as in the pages of such widely read periodicals as Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Scribner's Magazine, The Overland Monthly, the New York Times, and the New York Tribune.

Also included are two fascinating first person accounts by nonprofessional writers. James H. Kinkead, a former Under Sheriff of Washoe County, Nevada, tells the story of how he solved and captured the perpetrators of the first train robbery in the west, that of the CPRR's Overland Express which took place near Verdi, Nevada, in November, 1870. Perhaps most remarkable of all, however, is a never before published 1872 letter from a 34-year old Boston businessman named Walter Scott Fitz relating a colorful day-by-day account of his harrowing 36-day winter transcontinental rail passage from Boston to San Francisco — which he describes as "the most eventful journey in the history of railroading" — during which he and his fellow passengers were often snowbound throughout Wyoming over a period of more than three weeks.

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