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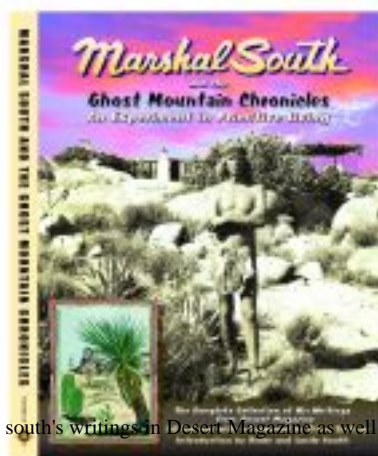
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Marshal South and the

Ghost Mountain Chronicles

James

- Skills and guides - Library -



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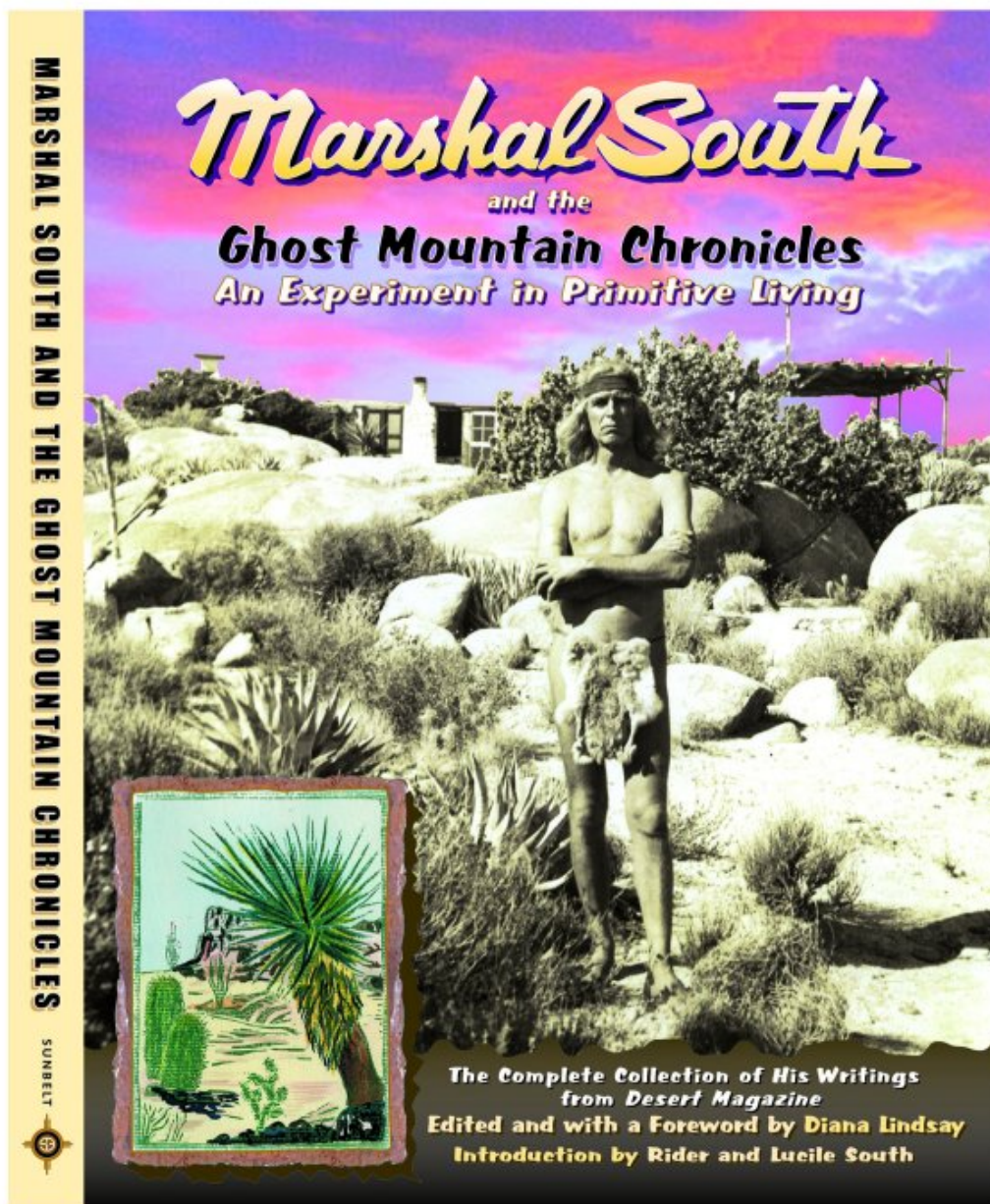
Description :

This is a collection of Marshal south's writings in Desert Magazine as well as an excellent biography by Diana Lindsay.

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It is not very often that one has the privilege to read a biography of an author and his work simultaneously, and this is what this book is about.



Front cover Here is the book cover, ISBN 0-932653-66-9

Roy Bennet Richards, an Australian citizen became Marshal South, North American western stories writer, and later author of the Ghost Mountain chronicles, in the 40ies.

Marshal and his wife, Tanya, during the great depression decided to move and live on the top of a wind ridden mountain in the Californian desert.

Also Marshal had come to accept Tanya's Rosicrucian beliefs about the ability to move closer into the spirit world as one surrounds himself with silence, peace, harmony, the rhythm of a disciplined life, natural foods, the resolve for spiritual connection. They had already connected with the desert through years of camping, and this particular desert was reminiscent of Marshal's boyhood home in South Australia.

They had 3 children while in the desert, and lived a very primitive life, based Indian technology and customs, making the best out of the surrounding desert. They walked nude, had to collect rain water, built their house themselves, made potteries, waving, collected their own fire material, lived using what was at hand.



The desert house Kids and goats.

In the 40ies, Marshal went into writing his Ghost Mountain chronicles in Desert Magazine, a series of poetic and inspirational texts.

While the texts are certainly a romanced version of their life in the wilderness, they remain of great value. One may think that it was a harsh life for the children, as it was later reproached to Marshal, but it not sound painful to his children:

My little sister and brother were able to carry some of the smaller items up the long winding trail. They could not carry much since they were so much smaller. It was almost more trouble than it was worth to watch over them as they tried to help with this chore. I was bigger, so I usually helped father carry things up to the house while Mother stayed with Victoria and Rudyard. None of us was ever left alone.



Gathering wood Marshal carrying his load of fire wood.

This book, exposes the whole life of the man, as well as his writings, both poetry and prose, and very appropriately never gives an opinion. Having read so many biographies that are partial, I find this extremely refreshing.

Marshal South is an interesting character, with his contradictions, like all of us, a hero in his stubbornness to live the life as free as he wanted it, which will eventually lead him to his failure to totally succeed in family life.

Behind the character, there are the superb texts about the Desert and the daily struggle of a family for living.

Emerging from all his texts is this deep respect for the land and the Desert life, in some ways a prophet of the ecologists movements that came much later in the century.

It is true enough, as Kipling said, that "Smells are stronger than sounds or sights to make your heartstrings crack...." But of all the scents that can stir up haunting memories and sheer delight for the human nostrils I know of none half so potent as the fragrance of the desert after rain.

Prophet is the right term, as I can imagine that at the time these text were written, from 1940 to 1947, his poetic narration of the Desert life, and his beliefs in the Great Spirit, may have made him a guru of his time.

So , As there had to be another needle, we raided the nearest Juniper tree for a likely twig, and whittled out a new one. Reflecting, as we sat there in the drowsy shade about the long, long road humanity has trodden from the time of the first primitive wooden needles to today's roaring machines. A long road. Humanity has lost something during that long trek. Something of incalculable value; something the loss of which is now driving it into insanity and red ruin. It has lost the knowledge on how to live. It has lost its faith. It has lost his sense of kinship with the Great Spirit. Dazzled by a greed for material things it has sold its birthright for a "mess of pottage." Pottage that is now, alas, red with torrents of blood.

Certainly some of his reflections are also a mirror of his time, and so terribly accurate in our times:

The ancients slew with an arrow or a club. We in our vaunted civilization hurl death from skies. But death is death. And grief is grief. It makes no difference what the setting or the period. Or how "barbaric" or "civilized" the actors in the drama. Man is commonly reputed to have come a long way upward of savagery. Sometimes it gives one pause to wonder if he has not forgotten, in his scramble for culture, the most important ingredient of life. We have electric iceboxes and radios; we have airplanes and marvelous cannon. We can shout the price of soap or the latest quotation of the stock exchange around the world. But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

But indeed, not all of his writings are so philosophical, real life is well present:

Tortillas toasted to toothsome savoriness upon the flattened strip of thin metal that once surrounded five gallons of kerosene. Primitive? Yes but of course not everyone yearns to cook tortillas. The tortilla is a primitive, the friend and mainstay of primitive peoples and those "semibarbarians" who prefer deserts and waste places for their habitations. Yet the tortilla is not without sterling virtues.

His narration about the Mescal roasting, the pottery firing, his trips in the desert with his children, their encounters with animals, and about the desert life are just stunning, and you will find here and there the explanations needed in

case you want to experience something similar.

I like this book a lot, I like it because it carries in the same time history and poetry, has many practical or even philosophical sides. Life in one book is what you get. It is a large book and deserves to be read a few times.

Marshal in a lot of ways could be the grand father of the hippie movements of the seventies, and just that makes him extremely interesting.

Do not misread me, Marshal was certainly a good outdoorsman, One does not live ten years in the desert, nude with wife and children without being good at it. His chronicles are a treasure of primitive technology, as they certainly had to use, re-discover, or re-invent some of the old Indians ways.

It does prove that one does not have to be Indian to live like one, and that men are at the end what they desire the most to be, that dreams that are lived are wonderful for the time they last.

The extremely complete research on the character and his writings are complimentary help demystify the character, and expose a man, a man with his contradictions, but a man of great will. I wish there were more persons in this world like Marshal South, with his sensibility toward life, and concerns about environment, and fortunately there are and there will always be people like him, that do what they believe they should, in all freedom. I recommend the reading, and I am pretty sure everybody, from the historian to the outdoorsman can find something of interest in this book.

May we all follow his respect for the wild land and their inhabitants!

Post-scriptum :A more traditional review and resume of the content of the book is to be found in [Desert USA magazine](#)