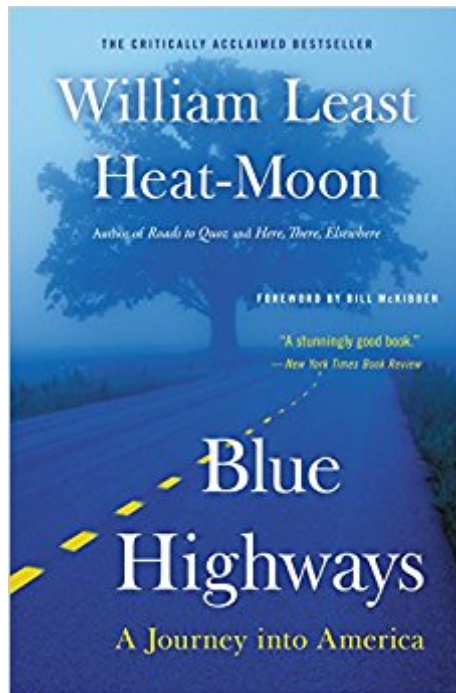


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# Blue Highways: A Journey Into America



## Synopsis

Hailed as a masterpiece of American travel writing, *Blue Highways* is an unforgettable journey along our nation's backroads. William Least Heat-Moon set out with little more than the need to put home behind him and a sense of curiosity about "those little towns that get on the map-if they get on at all-only because some cartographer has a blank space to fill: Remote, Oregon; Simplicity, Virginia; New Freedom, Pennsylvania; New Hope, Tennessee; Why, Arizona; Whynot, Mississippi." His adventures, his discoveries, and his recollections of the extraordinary people he encountered along the way amount to a revelation of the true American experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

First published in 1982, William Least Heat-Moon's account of his journey along the back roads of the United States (marked with the color blue on old highway maps) has become something of a classic. When he loses his job and his wife on the same cold February day, he is struck by inspiration: "A man who couldn't make things go right could at least go. He could quit trying to get out of the way of life. Chuck routine. Live the real jeopardy of circumstance. It was a question of dignity." Driving cross-country in a van named *Ghost Dancing*, Heat-Moon (the name the Sioux give to the moon of midsummer nights) meets up with all manner of folk, from a man in Grayville, Illinois, "whose cap told me what fertilizer he used" to Scott Chisholm, "a Canadian citizen ... [who] had lived in this country longer than in Canada and liked the United States but wouldn't admit it for fear

of having to pay off bets he made years earlier when he first 'came over' that the U.S. is a place no Canadian could ever love." Accompanied by his photographs, Heat-Moon's literary portraits of ordinary Americans should not be merely read, but savored. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"Reading Blue Highways made me go back and look at Jack Kerouac's On the Road to see if Mr. Least Heat-Moon does as well. He does far better . . . Maybe twice a year I read a book I wish were even longer. This is one of them. I could wish Mr. Least Heat-Moon had driven every blue highway in America." (The New York Times)"Blue Highways is a splendid book, outstanding Americana, which I rank above the next best thing preceding it in the genre, John Steinbeck's Travel with Charley." (The Wall Street Journal)"Better than Kerouac." (The Chicago Sun-Times) --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I learned about this book after reading Ian Frazier's "Great Plains" and "Travels In Siberia," both which are similar to Blue Highways. Blue Highways is a brilliant read. Excellent story telling, observation and research of the places along his route. The book flows. His writings about some places could have been a bit shorter, but the length didn't lower the quality of the book. I hope there are still people in this country who are willing to find the people like Heat-Moon did. And I hope there are still the kind of people who interacted with him.

If you love this country, and can put his writings from before 1980 in context with today's social climate, you will love the book. It should be read with an atlas close by or, better yet, Google maps. It is richly rewarding to follow on a map or even aerial photograph exactly where the author travels. The interaction and dialog with fascinating people is rewarding. Much has changed in the almost 40 years since "the drive" was made but this only makes the contrast more poignant. A beautifully crafted book.

In the late seventies, William Least Heat-Moon (it's a native-American name) lost his job as a professor at a Missouri college and took off in his van to discover America. What he did was quite interesting: During his journey he avoided the interstates and traveled only by back roads and two-lane highways. He encountered a great country filled with kind, thoughtful and hard-working people; a country that is worth saving in other words. This isn't a travelogue. This is great literature. In some ways it reminded me of Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond, the difference being that,

while Thoreau's observations were written within the confines of a pond in the New England wilderness, Heat-Moon covered a continent. Another difference is, to be completely frank, Blue Highways is a lot more readable. At times, Walden seemed the literary equivalent of drinking saltwater taffy out of a paper cup. Blue Highways is one for the ages. Tom Degan

I've heard this heralded as an essential travel read for van dwellers. It's prettily worded and is sometimes reminiscent of Beat poetry and is generally fun to read. It can, however become tedious in its worship of "the small town working man," even if it is the central focus of the book.

An absolutely beautiful recounting of a spur-of-the-moment adventure that turned into a life-changing examination of his life and the lives of those he met on the highways. The author journeyed across the nation using "back roads" and small towns, interviewing people he met along the way and quoting them as they spoke of their lives and their communities. The lessons he learned and then shared through his manuscript are descriptive of the land, the citizens and the personal maturation of the writer -including his discovery of his talent/ mission to become a published author. This gift for the author is also a gift to readers who can follow his work through ensuing published books.

Incredibly well written book, and now I know why. In the afterward, he said he rewrote drafts 8 times. And that people think a book should be able to be written in 6 months, or maybe a year (it took Mr. Heat-Moon upwards of 4 years), "and it shows". I agree with that; the contrast between his artistry in every sentence of this book with some other junk out there is almost too much to bear, haha. The Audible version which I listened to almost entirely (I read the book many years ago and wanted to hear it again on my long commute) is well done; the reader does a good job with the huge variety of regional and ethnic accents that a book like this requires. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

Maybe I am too stingy, as it seems I give fewer stars than people who liked the book less. It is a nice, solid journey through America. Better than Travels with Charley, but not up to Calvin Trillin (to name two authors whom this author seems to feel he is in competition with). I was a bit put off the book by the reviewers who wrote about "two books" -- his inner journey vs. the actual one; these reviewers pretty much did not enjoy his sufferings, and I was nervous about a self-absorbed whine-fest. Actually, it is nowhere near as dramatic as the reviews suggest. The book is a fine balance of the author's internal struggles and his travels; never did I get the feeling that one was out

of place or too dominant. The book is not stunning, and has less insight than it promises. However, it is intelligent, interesting, and an enjoyable read.

William Least Heat-Moon knows how to write. I've read lesser writers who tried to describe a scene and ended up using about three times as many words as they needed. Heat-Moon makes description look easy and sound pitch perfect. In every place he stops, he makes your mind's eye see what he saw and your ear hear what he heard. He took this trip in the late 1970s, so the prices he mentions are a lot lower than the ones we see today. In addition, he met and talked with people who fought in or remembered World War I, which sounds a little jarring if you don't take the time into consideration. I also couldn't help wondering whether some of the places he visited still exist and what has happened to the rest. All the same, he shows us a recognizable America. This is travel writing as it should be. Highly recommended.

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