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A special bond between man and place

By Darren Marcy/**Outdoor editor**

David Petersen if you haven't already discovered his books and other nature writing needs space on your bookshelf.

An avid outdoorsman and naturalist, Petersen is part liberal environmentalist and part redneck freezer-filling bowhunter.

Joining with friend, neighbor and renown nature photographer Branson Reynolds, Peterson takes readers for a walk in the southeastern Utah desert.

In "Cedar Mesa: A Place Where Spirits Dwell," Petersen and Reynolds are tour guides, taking readers to a place they desperately love.

He doesn't tell you where to go, or even how to get there, but he leads the way as you follow his boot prints in the sand and over the slickrock through arches and around hoodoos into Cedar Mesa.

To find Cedar Mesa, turn south at Canyonlands. Petersen's directions aren't much more precise, simply because he loves the place too much to want to lead the masses in to trample it to death.

It's not that he wants to keep everybody out, but there are plenty of places for the ATV riders and eco-tourists to litter with Powerbar wrappers and beer cans.

Cedar Mesa is one of the few places left that takes a little work to reach, and that is worth reaching after the work.

The last thing Petersen and Reynolds wants to see is yet another visitor's center and trailhead leading away from a paved access road.

By distinguishing "Cedar Mesa" from what Petersen describes as "hand-holding, give-it-all-away, chamber-of-commerce style guidebook," the pair have paid tribute to a land that borders on the magical.

"This little tome ... is intended to honor, celebrate, and in whatever measure possible to help to protect one of the most palpably spiritual natural places remaining on the American continent not to lay it open to accelerated ruin by encouraging recreational overuse and ... commercial exploitation," Petersen writes.

Who won't like this book? Anyone who is offended by an opinionated writer passionately defending nature against greed and overuse, along with anyone who likes cattle on their public lands or enjoys the drone of an ATV engine over the sound of the wind blowing through a large lot of nothingness.

But if you appreciate nature writing at its finest, a strongly worded ecologically-based defense of all things wild in their natural environment, and anyone who finds beauty in the rocks and dirt of the desert Southwest, should snatch this one up and share it with a friend.

Reynolds' black and white photography and Petersen's descriptive and emotionally evocative (and provocative) words will allow you to close your eyes and imagine you are there.

And if it works just right, maybe you'll put the book down, load your pack and camping gear and lace up the boots to explore a little yourself.

"Cedar Mesa" is a small book, clearly keeping the cost down, I wish it were twice the size to allow Reynolds' photos to be more powerful. But no complaints. At 85 pages, this little gem is perfect to be reread whenever the need for nature hits.

Information: (800) 426-3797.

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"Cedar Mesa: A Place Where Spirits Dwell"

By David Petersen

6 X 7, 85 pages

University of Arizona Press, \$13.95

Information: <http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/> or (800) 426-3797



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