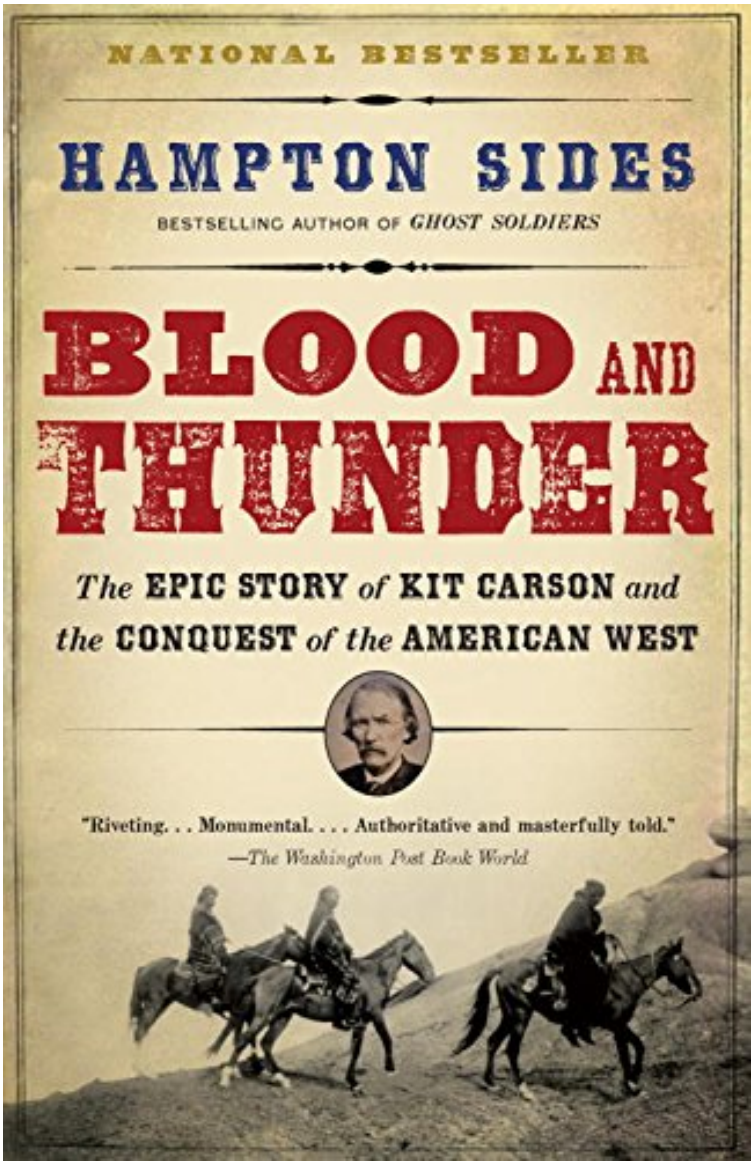
Blood and Thunder



Par Hampton Sides
**Download PDF | ePub | DOC | audiobook | ebooks*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #312734 dans eBooksPubli le: 2007-10-09Sorti le: 2007-10-09Format: Ebook Kindle

Par Hampton Sides : Blood and Thunder before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Blood and Thunder:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA magnificent history of the American conquest of the West; "a story full of authority and color, truth and prophecy" (The New York Times Book).In the summer of 1846, the Army of the West marched through Santa Fe, en route to invade and occupy the Western territories claimed by Mexico. Fueled by the new ideology of Manifest Destiny, this land grab would lead to a decades-long battle between the United States and the Navajos, the fiercely resistant rulers of a huge swath of mountainous desert wilderness.At the center of this sweeping tale is Kit Carson, the trapper, scout, and soldier whose adventures made him a legend. Sides shows us how this illiterate mountain man understood and respected the Western tribes better than any other American, yet willingly followed orders that would ultimately devastate the

Navajo nation. Rich in detail and spanning more than three decades, this is an essential addition to our understanding of how the West was really won.ExtraitChapter 1 Jumping Off In the two decades he had lived and wandered in the West, Christopher Carson had led an unaccountably full life. He was only thirty-six years old, but it seemed he had done everything there was to do in the Western wilds--had been everywhere, met everyone. As a fur trapper, scout, and explorer, he had traveled untold thousands of miles in the Rockies, in the Great Basin, in the Sierra Nevada, in the Wind River Range, in the Tetons, in the coastal ranges of Oregon. As a hunter he had crisscrossed the Great Plains any number of times following the buffalo herds. He had seen the Pacific, been deep into Mexico, pushed far into British-held territories of the Northwest. He had traversed the Sonoran, Chihuahuan, and Mojave Deserts, gazed upon the Grand Canyon, stood at the life-leached margins of the Great Salt Lake. He had never seen the Hudson or the Potomac, but he had traced all the important rivers of the West--the Colorado, Platte, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Columbia, Green, Arkansas, Gila, Missouri, Powder, Big Horn, Snake, Salmon, Yellowstone, Rio Grande.Carson was present at the creation, it seemed. He had witnessed the dawn of the American West in all its vividness and brutality. In his constant travels he had caromed off of or intersected with nearly every major tribal group and person of consequence. He had lived the sweep of the Western experience with a directness few other men could rival.At first glance, Kit Carson was not much to look at, but that was a curious part of his charm. His bantam physique and modest bumpkin demeanor seemed interestingly at odds with the grandeur of the landscapes he had roamed. He stood only five-feet four-inches, with stringy brown hair grazing his shoulders. His jaw was clenched and squarish, his eyes a penetrating gray-blue, his mouth set in a tight little downturned construction that looked like a frown of mild disgust. The skin between his eyebrows was pinched in a furrow, as though permanently creased from constant squinting. His forehead rose high and craggy to a swept-back hairline. He had a scar along his left ear, another one on his right shoulder--both left by bullets. He appeared bowlegged from his years in the saddle, and he walked roundly, with a certain ungainliness, as though he were not entirely comfortable as a terrestrial creature, his sense of ease and familiarity of movement tied to his mule.He was a man of odd habits and superstitions. He never would take a second shot at standing game if his initial shot missed--this, he believed, was "bad medicine." He never began a project on a Friday. He was fastidious about the way he dressed and cleaned any animal he killed. He believed in signs and omens. When he got a bad feeling about something or someone, he was quick to heed his instincts. A life of hard experience on the trail had taught him to be cautious at all times, tuned to danger. A magazine writer who rode with Carson observed with great curiosity the scout's unfailing ritual as he prepared to bed down for the night: "His saddle, which he always used as a pillow, form[ed] a barricade for his head; his pistols half cocked were laid above it, and his trusty rifle reposed beneath the blanket by his side, ready for instant use. You never caught Kit exposing himself to the full glare of the camp fire." When traveling, the writer noticed, Carson "scarcely spoke," and his eye "was continually examining the country, his manner that of a man deeply impressed with a sense of responsibility."When he did speak, Carson talked in the twangy cadences of backwoods Missouri--thar and har, ain't and yonder, thataway and crick and I reckon so. It seemed right that this ultimate Westerner should be from Missouri, the Ur-country of the trans-Mississippi frontier, the mother state.Out west, Carson had learned to speak Spanish and French fluently, and he knew healthy smatterings of Navajo, Ute, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Blackfoot, Shoshone, and Paiute, among other native tongues. He also knew Indian sign language and, one way or another, could communicate with most any tribe in the West. And yet for all his facility with language, Kit Carson was illiterate.Although he was a mountain man, a fraternity legendary for swilling and creative profanity, Carson was a straight arrow--"as clean as a hound's tooth" as one friend put it. He liked poker and often smoked a pipe, but he drank very little and was not given to womanizing. He was now married to a Hispanic girl from Taos, Josefa Jaramillo. Slender, olive-skinned, and eighteen years his junior, Josefa possessed "a beauty of the haughty, heart-breaking kind" according to one smitten writer from Ohio who got to know her, "a beauty such as would lead a man with the glance of the eye to risk his life for one smile." Only fifteen years old when she married Carson, Josefa was a bit taller than her husband. She was a dark-complected, bright-eyed woman whom one family member described as "very well-built, and graceful in every way." Cristobal, as Josefa called him, was utterly devoted to her, and to please her family, he had converted to Catholicism.Especially now that he was a married man, Carson gave off none of the mountain man's swagger. "There was nothing like the fire-eater in his manner," wrote one admirer, "but, to the contrary, in all his actions he was unassuming." An army officer once introduced himself to Carson, saying, "So this is the distinguished Kit Carson who has made so many Indians run." To which Carson replied, "Yes,

but most of the time they were running after me." His sense of humor was understated and dry, usually delivered with a faint grin and a glint of mischief in his eyes. When amused, he was prone to "sharp little barks of laughter." He spoke quietly, in short, deliberate sentences, using language that was, according to one account, "forcible, slow, and pointed, with the fewest words possible." A friend said Carson "never swore more'n was necessary."Yes, Christopher Carson was a lovable man. Nearly everyone said so. He was loyal, honest, and kind. In many pinpointable incidents, he acted bravely and with much physical grace. More than once, he saved people's lives without seeking recognition or pay. He was a dashing good Samaritan--a hero, even.He was also a natural born killer. It is hard to reconcile the much-described sweetness of his disposition with his frenzies of violence. Carson could be brutal even for the West of his day (a West so wild it lacked outlaws, for no law yet existed to be outside of). His ferocious temper could be triggered in an instant. If you crossed him, he would find you. He pursued vengeance as though it were something sacred, with a kind of dogged focus that might be called tribal--his tribe being the famously grudge-happy Scotch-Irish.When called upon to narrate his exploits, which he did reluctantly, he spoke with a clinical lack of emotion, and with a hit man's sense of aesthetics. He liked to call his skirmishes pretty--as in "that was the prettiest fight I ever saw." He spoke of chasing down his enemies as "sport." After participating in a preemptive attack--others called it a massacre--on an Indian village along California's Sacramento River, Carson pronounced the action "a perfect butchery."By the macabre distinctions of his day, he was regarded not as an Indian killer but as an Indian-fighter--which was, if not a noble American profession, at least a venerable one. But Carson did not hate Indians, certainly not in any sort of abstract racial sense. He was no Custer, no Sheridan, no Andrew Jackson. If he had killed Native Americans, he had also befriended them, loved them, buried them, even married them. Through much of his life, he lived more like an Indian than a white man. Most of his Indian victims had died in what he judged to be fair fights, or at least fights that could have gone the other way. It was miraculous he was still alive: He'd had more close calls than he could count.Because Carson's direct words were rarely written, it's hard to know what he really thought about Indians, or the violence of his times, or anything else. His autobiography, dictated in the mid-1850s (and turned into a biography by a tin-eared writer who has charitably been described as an "ass"), is a bone-dry recitation of his life and leaves us few clues. It was said that Carson told a pretty good story around a campfire, but his book carefully eschews anything approaching an insight. His refusal to pontificate was refreshing in a way--he lived in a golden age of windbags--but at the same time, his reticence in the face of the few big subjects of his life was remarkable. He was, and remains, a sort of Sphinx of the American West: His eyes had seen things, his mind held secrets, but he kept his mouth shut.*Christopher Houston Carson was born in a log cabin in Madison County, Kentucky, on Christmas Eve of 1809, the same year and the same state in which Lincoln was born. A year later the Carson family pulled up stakes and trekked west from Kentucky to the Missouri frontier, with little Christopher, whom they nicknamed "Kit," facing forward in the saddle, swaddled in his mother's arms. The Carsons chose a spot in the wilderness near the Missouri River and hacked their farm from a large tract that had been part of a Spanish land grant bought by the sons of Daniel Boone, prior to the Louisiana Purchase. It was known indelicately as "Boone's Lick," for the salt deposits that attracted wild game and which the Boone family successfully mined. The Boones and the Carsons would become close family friends--working, socializing, and intermarrying with one another.Kit was a quiet, stubborn, reliable kid with bright blue eyes. Although he had a small frame--a consequence, perhaps, of his hav...From Publishers WeeklyAlthough delivering little in the way of new information, Sides, an Outside magazine editor-at-large and bestselling author (Ghost Soldiers), eloquently paints the landscape and history of the 19th-century Southwest, combining Larry McMurtry's lyricism with the historian's attachment to facts. Inevitably, Sides's main focus is the virtual decimation of the Navajo nation from the 1820s to the late 1860s. Sides depicts the complex role of whites in the subjugation of the Navajos through his portrait of Kit Carsonan illiterate trapper, soldier and scout who knew the Native Americans intimately, married two of them and, without blinking, participated in the Indians' slaughter. Books about Carson have been numerous, but Sides is better than most Carson biographers in setting his exploits against a larger backdrop: the unstoppable idea of manifest destiny. Of course, as counterpoint to the progress of Carson and other whites, Sides details the fierce but doomed defense mounted by the Navajos over long decades. This culminated in their final, desperate "stand" during 1863 at Canyon de Chelly, more than a decade after a contingent of federal troopsoperating under a commander whose last name of "Washington" seems ironic in this contextkilled their great leader, Narbona. (Oct. 3)