



## Behind the Bears Ears: Exploring the Cultural and Natural Histories of a Sacred Landscape

**R. E. Burrillo**

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Challenging dominant narratives, R. E. Burrillo's playful, fierce, reverent, and sarcastic book covers twelve thousand years of the history of the Bears Ears area, revealing why it has been so important to so many for so long, and why it remains so today.

When asked why the Bears Ears—named for mountains that resemble the tops of bears' heads, with rounded ears pointing skyward—a Native man replied, "Because it is 'The Place.'" For him and his people, nothing more needs to be said. It is home, as it has been to many different tribes, each calling the area "Bears Ears" in their own tongue. They came, left, and came home again time after time, long before boundaries and fences were ever thought of, not imagining that one day their homecomings would be threatened.

The book reflects a deep respect for Native people and their ties to the land, and brings to light the degree to which the attitudes and worldviews of the Bears Ears' Indigenous occupants and those of Anglo Europeans conflict. For Indigenous people, it's about reverence for, and cooperation with, the land; for those who came later, it's all about domination, money, and exploitation.

The narrative is powerful in bringing that difference to the fore, asking those who loot Native graves (yes, archaeologists included) how *they* would feel if someone ran off with their grandfather's skull. It questions the motivations of those who examine the remains of once thriving ancient cities and wonder where the people went without ever looking at their descendants, now forced to live in deplorable conditions on reservations.

*Behind the Bears Ears* is an epic story of endurance that reaches back into prehistory and casts a line into the future with the hope that all people can come to know and love this sacred land, and work together to preserve it.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2020)

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