

Uranium Seekers: A Photo-Essay Tribute to Miners

Craig Evan Royce

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Craig Evan Royce seems to be a man of unbridled enthusiasm. In a previous book, *Country Miles Are Longer Than City Miles*, he examined the mountain culture of eastern Kentucky, focusing on the area's artisans. His latest work brings attention to a little-known group of workers whose fortunes have risen and fallen with the vagaries of the uranium industry over the past century and a half. *Uranium Seekers* is Royce's homage to the men and women who have spent their lives extracting the element from the rugged mountains of the American West.

Subtitled *A Photo-Essay Tribute to Miners*, the book is not a photo essay in the true sense, but a collection of materials about the history of uranium mining, with historic photographs of miners, more recent pictures of the mining landscape, and several individual portraits taken on the Ute (Uinta and Ouray) Tribal Lands in Utah in the 1970s. Sadly, the majesty of many of the photographs is lost in the reproduction. Small and grainy and printed on paperback stock, they lose both detail and impact.

Royce provides a great deal of information and exhibits true passion for his subject matter, but the book's organization is not always clear, and the text meanders. As with the photographs, a chronological presentation would have been more effective. He includes some first-person accounts, written by people familiar with the area's mining operations, that add greatly to his story, offering insight into the miners' way of life. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to tell whether it is the author or someone else who is relating a particular passage. In other instances, Royce's distinctive voice comes through, as he peppers his text with impassioned asides and exclamations: "And the earth was not upset!" he declares. His fervor extends beyond the land to the element itself: "Uranium even smells different...possessing an aroma of our future."

Royce's purpose in publishing *Uranium Seekers* is both to share his many years of research into the history of uranium mining and explain that uranium is not "only" destructive. Following America's use of the atomic bomb in World War II and after meltdowns at various nuclear power facilities, the radioactive element earned a reputation that Royce does not believe should be perpetuated. Uranium's original application was in the medical field, treating cancer, and its byproducts have long been used in industry. According to Royce, the controversial usage of uranium in the atomic bomb, and what he sees as human error in the design and construction of nuclear reactors, should not be all that people know about uranium.

In *Uranium Seekers*, Royce does not discuss the long-term effects of exposure to the element, but he certainly champions its potential positives. His book is uneven but informative, offering a unique perspective on the uranium mining industry.

CHERYL HIBBARD (December 19, 2012)

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