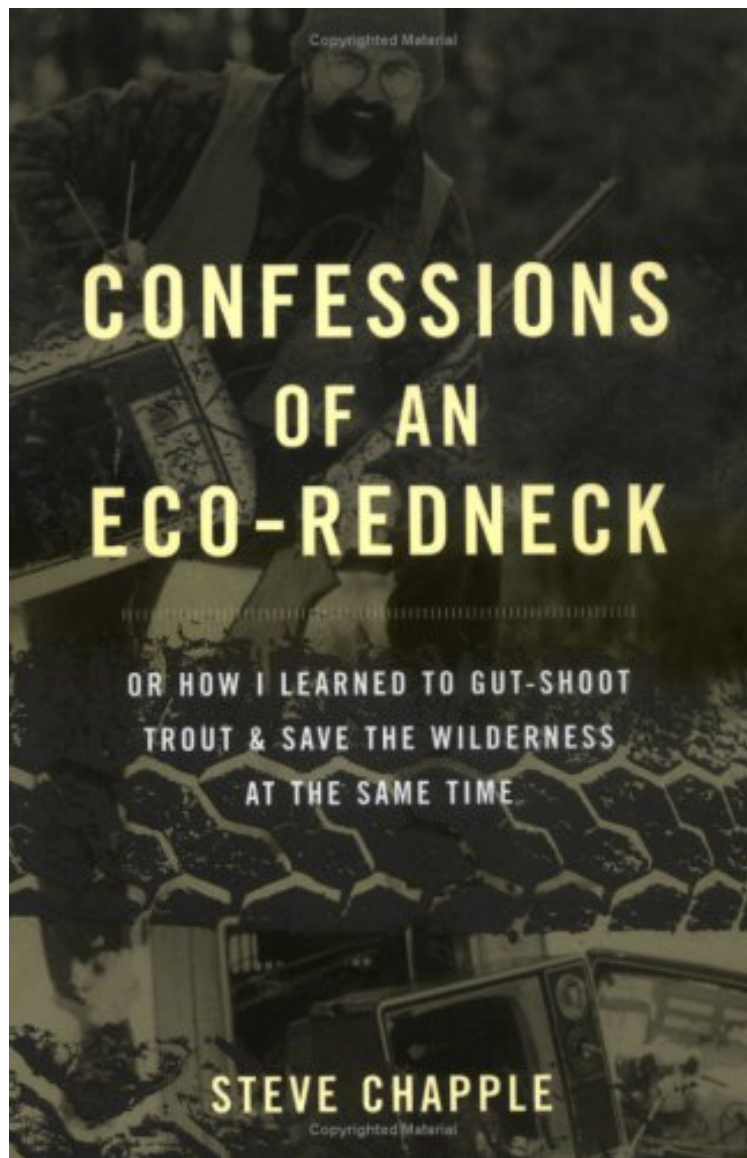


(Library ebook) Confessions of an Eco-Redneck: Or How I Learned to Gut-Shoot Trout Save the Wilderness at the Same Time

Confessions of an Eco-Redneck: Or How I Learned to Gut-Shoot Trout Save the Wilderness at the Same Time

Steve Chapple, Stephen Chapple
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Steve Chapple, Stephen Chapple : Confessions of an Eco-Redneck: Or How I Learned to Gut-Shoot Trout Save the Wilderness at the Same Time before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confessions of an Eco-Redneck: Or How I Learned to Gut-Shoot Trout Save the Wilderness at the Same Time:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Fun Defense of the Real Conservationist Movement By Fritz R. Ward

It's hard, Steve Chapple complains, to be a real redneck in Montana. You just don't get enough sun in the winter months. But that doesn't prevent the author from doing the best he can in this collection of columns from the late 1990s. Whether hunting television sets (literally) in the wilderness ("No bag limits") or recounting all the possible excuses for coming home empty handed from a fishing trip, Chapple has a lot of insights to offer for outdoorsmen and women, and those irreverent enough to appreciate slaying sacred cows with a 30.06. A jacket blurb compares Chapple to Hunter S. Thompson and Ernest Hemingway. But the truth is, he is far more coherent than the former and far more readable than the latter. He is closer to Patrick F. McManus, but without the slapstick and with a lot more edge. Despite the subtitle, a significant portion of the book does not deal with environmental issues or saving wilderness. A large number of essays simply examine one or more topics vaguely related to wilderness or redneck life and drawing some very perceptive conclusions about what these topics say about society at large. Essays on tavern animals and the state fish in Hawaii fall into this mode. These are some of the more thoughtful columns I have read and I heartily recommend the book for these essays alone. Nonetheless, it was the title and essays related to saving the wilderness that attracted my attention to this book. The introduction and initial essay deal with what should be obvious, but which comes as something of a shock to many of my left coast conservationist friends, namely that hunters and fishermen are, in fact, sympathetic to environmentalist issues. So, one might add, are ranchers. It's actually rather amazing that this observation should even be controversial. Early conservationists were hunters. James Audubon, the famous bird painter, used to shoot and eat the very animals he painted. (This little tidbit of history was somehow left out of the California 4th grade story about Audubon in the state authorized Houghton Mifflin reader.) And Teddy Roosevelt was a famous big game hunter. National Park Service officials at Roosevelt National Historic Park do their best to brush over this inconvenient fact with an almost painful presentation about different historical "values." But the fact of the matter is that those who enjoy recreation in the wilderness are those often most concerned with protecting it, not various wealthy liberal city residents. Chapple's book is almost an apology to these latter people. He wants to assure them that, whatever the cultural differences, rednecks and liberal donors to wilderness groups have a lot in common. It's an interesting argument, but I'm not convinced by it. In fact, most of these essays suggest that "eco-rednecks" and today's environmentalists actually do not have a lot in common. Chapple's "Animal Rights" activist essay, for example, comments on the famous "I'd rather wear nothing than fur" campaign. While frankly admiring the bodies of the various 1990s supermodels who strategically covered various significant (for male rednecks) body parts with live animals, he nevertheless correctly notes, "Nobody who ever placed a terrier over their privates has yet managed to save a swatch of elk habitat." And that, ultimately, is because a large portion of those politically committed to "environmentalism" are simply clueless about how actual environments work and how complicated the real issues are. Two essays that explore just how complicated real environmental issues can get are "Dinner Bell Grizzlies" and "Snowboarding Waikiki." Grizzly Bears, of course, are listed as threatened, and this limits hunting. But, as bears are considerably smarter than spotted owls, they have now come to associate gunshots with dead elk and food and have taken to running off hunters from their kills. Meanwhile, their numbers are growing and they seem to be losing their fear of people. Is the solution to reintroduce hunting? Strong arguments can be made either way. Chapple tries to split the difference by suggesting a hunting season with spears. I'm sure there are people who will sign up for such a hunt, but I won't be joining them. Similarly, eco-tourism (talk about oxymorons) in Hawaii is trying to restore coral reefs off Waikiki beach. The promoters correctly argue that fertilizer pollutants have killed reefs in the area. Surfers, led by the legendary George Downing, note the artificial reefs are attracting fish which in turn attract sharks and increase the dangers surfers face in one of their best locations. Again, there are no easy solutions and Chapple does not offer any. But these are the real environmental issues that "eco-rednecks" (and eco-surfer dudes?) face. And pretty much left unsaid is the fact that these issues are hardly touched upon by the growing environmentalist lobby. Of course not. The lobby, largely an affiliate of one political party, likes "black and white" issues: evil corporate polluters v. community recycling centers and the like. Environmentalism is for these people a religion, not a real concern. Chapple seems to understand this. Commenting on the animal rights movement, he ultimately argues that groups like PeTA are not about saving wilderness. "They're about spiritual arrogance." (p. 155) The vast majority of global warming alarmists also fit into this category. They want some sort of material absolution for "lifestyle" changes and they vaguely relate their cause to "saving the earth." But they have nothing to contribute to real environmental issues. Indeed, I would argue that they are counterproductive. So why does Chapple think some sort of agreement can be reached between today's environmentalist movement and the eco-redneck culture he cherishes? A large part of the answer is found in what is perhaps the best essay in this collection, "Now or Never for American Rivers." In this essay, Chapple recounts the successful struggle to save Yellowstone River (a river that "runs through" much of the book) from a gold mine proposed by the Canadian mining company Noranda. This effort involved not only eco-rednecks but also various political interest groups. A coalition of concerned citizens was successful against a large commercial interest, precisely the model that many of today's environmentalists believe summarizes the whole movement. Except that, when you look at the details, even this instance doesn't work quite that way. In the first instance, rather than simply prevent Noranda from mining, a compromise was reached in which the company was

compensated with other lands. In other words, this particular movement was not "anti-mining." Indeed, they actively promoted it, but just not at that location. Commenting on the coalition, Chapple notes, "It is probably well that the leadership of American Rivers seems about one part populist Democrat, one part rock-ribbed Republican, and one part those who would rather be fishing,..." (p.229) Indeed, it is safe to say that real environmental causes will always enlist such a coalition. But the "coalitions" of today's environmentalists hardly resembles that. And, as this book so skillfully demonstrates, today's wildlands are the worse for it.

Confessions of an Eco-Redneck collects the best of outdoor writer Steve Chapple's short pieces. This is outdoor adventure writing at its best, in a league with Tim Cahill, Randy White, or PJ O'Rourke, and the essays range from fishing: for tigerfish on the Zambezi, tarpon in the Keys, trout on the Yellowstone; to hunting: the "Bambi Syndrome" (Hollywood's bias against the sport), "Dinner Bell Grizzlies," and stalking televisions in Montana; to the larger questions: "Now or Never for American Rivers," and the great unasked question about the Lewis Clark expedition: "How were the bugs??" Underneath Steve Chapple's laugh-out loud wit there's a serious plea to environmentalists to remember that sportsmen (the eco-rednecks of the title) are among the most passionate and effective advocates for conservation of the environment that we've got.

"Steve Chapple teased the first spring belly-laugh from a long brutal Montana winter. Confessions of an Eco-Redneck demonstrates good humor and the wisdom to know that the modern American conservation movement is in real danger from disengagement with the natural world." --Doug Peacock, author of Grizzly Years