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The Old Iron Road: An Epic of Rails, Roads, and the Urge to Go West

David Haward Bain

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In the summer of 2000, David Haward Bain and his family left their home in Vermont and headed west in search of America's past. From Omaha to San Francisco, Bain and his family retraced the entire route of the first transcontinental railroad. Following abandoned railroad tracks and the traces of old wagon trails, cruising down back roads and main streets, they discovered the deep, restless, uniquely American spirit of adventure that connects our past to our present.

A superb writer and an exacting researcher, Bain conjures up the marvelous sense of coming unstuck in time as he lingers in the ghost towns and battlegrounds, prairies and river ports, train yards, museums, and diners that line the old emigrant routes of the railroad and the Lincoln Highway. As he cruises west to California, Bain encounters a fascinating cast of characters, both historic and contemporary—from Willa Cather to Marlon Brando, from pathfinder John Fre´mont to naturalist Terry Tempest Williams. Here, too, are memories of Bain's own grandparents and the journeys that shaped his own heritage.

Writing in the tradition of William Least Heat-Moon and Ian Frazier, yet with an engaging warmth and a deep grasp of history all his own, Bain has fashioned a quintessentially American journey.

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