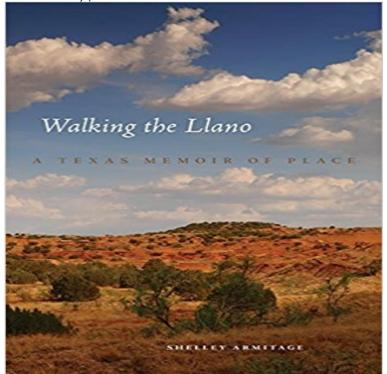
Walking the Llano: A Texas Memoir of Place



When American explorers crossed the Texas Panhandle, they dubbed it part of the Great American Desert. A sea of grass, the llano appeared empty, flat, and barely habitable. Contemporary developmentscell phone towers, oil rigs, and wind turbineshave only added to this stereotype. Yet in this lyrical ecomemoir, Shelley Armitage charts a unique rediscovery of the largely unknown land, a journey at once deeply personal and far-reaching in its exploration of the connections between memory, spirit, and place. Armitage begins her narrative with the intention to walk the farm thirty llano from her family meandering miles along the Middle Alamosa Creek to the Canadian River. Along the way, she seeks the connection between her father and one of the areas first settlers, Ysabel Gurule, who built his dugout on the banks of the Canadian. Armitage, who grew up nearby in the small town of Vega, finds this act of walking inseparable from the act of listening and writing. What does the land say to us? she asks as she witnesses human alterations to the landscapeperhaps most catastrophic the continued drainage of the lands most precious resource, the Ogallala Aquifer. Yet the llanos wonders persist: dynamic mesas and canyons, vast flora and fauna, diverse wildlife, rich histories. Armitage recovers the voices of ancient, Native, and Hispano peoples, their stories interwoven with her own: her fathers legacy, her mothers decline, a brothers love. The llano holds not only the beauty of ecological surprises but a renewed realization of kinship in a world ever changing. Reminiscent of the work of Terry Tempest Williams and John McPhee, Walking the Llano is both a celebration of an oft-overlooked region and a soaring testimony to the power of the landscape to draw us into greater understanding of ourselves and others by experiencing a deeper connection with the places we

inhabit.

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