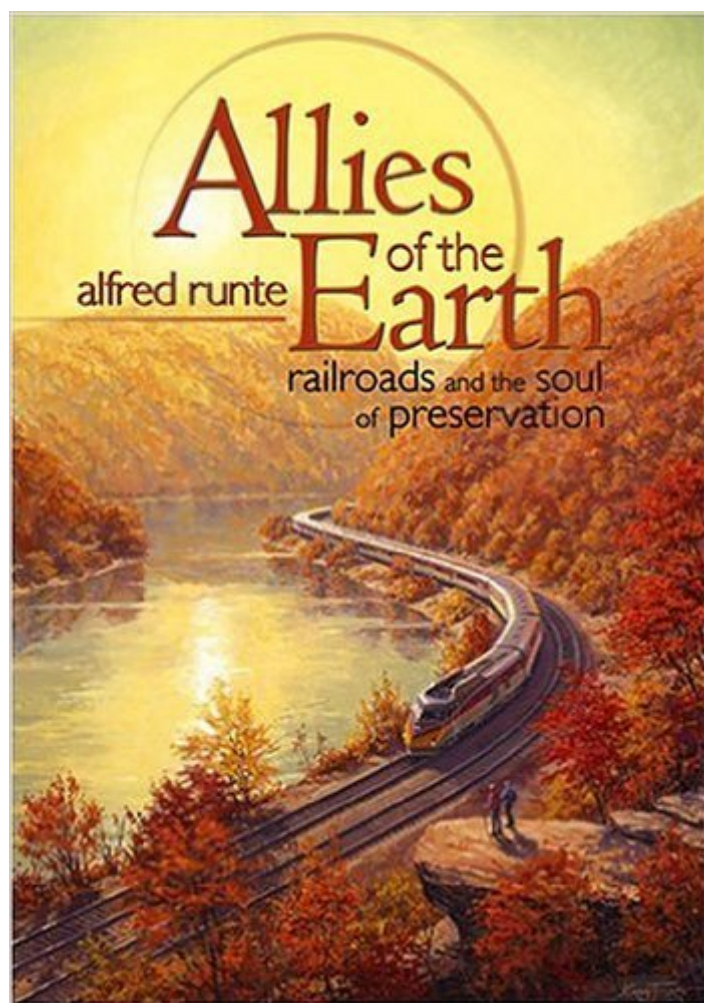


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Allies Of The Earth: Railroads And The Soul Of Preservation



Synopsis

What did America lose with the decline of the passenger train? Much more than most Americans think. The greatest loss is the alliance between technology and the land, according to public historian Alfred Runte. Once abandoning railroads would have been unthinkable, but we have virtually forgotten the importance of trains for our country and for ourselves. Now the landscape suffers in our mindless rush to get rid of old technology and blindly embrace the new. Runte asks us to reevaluate existing modes of transportation and to recognize the need for railroads--not just as a safe, efficient, and interactive means of travel, but also as effective stewards for our dwindling landscape. Challenging the notion that speed is the only way to conquer our nation's expanse or that beauty does not matter, Runte reminds us of our love for distance, and the joys of open space. Travel is not only about arriving at our destination quickly, but is also what we experience along our route. Recalling train travel experiences of his own, Runte invites us to interact as we travel, to look out the train window at our country, and to care passionately about the landscape we see. Noting our own history as well as Europe's, Runte points out what has gone wrong with the U.S. railroad system and calls us all to task: railroad companies, Amtrak, the U.S. government, environmentalists, economists, politicians, railroad historians, and ordinary citizens. As a true visionary with a deep respect for the land and its people, Runte asks us to open our eyes and our minds to the idea that beauty could once again be part of our daily lives. He gives us hope that railroads we so carelessly threw away may still be restored to preserve the remaining glories of our continent.----- Although few Americans use passenger trains today, we still love railroads. We say we want to preserve our national parks, countryside, and urban landscapes, yet we keep tearing into the best of them every day. Once abandoning railroads would have been unthinkable, but we have forgotten the importance of trains for our earth and for ourselves. Alfred Runte challenges our notion that adding highways and airports will help us reach our destinations more quickly, or meet our transportation and environmental goals. He dares us to care about what we see as we travel and to believe railroads hold a key to preserving our national landscapes. As a true visionary with a deep respect for the land and its people, Runte gives us hope that by restoring our trains, we can save our nation's imperiled natural beauty.

Book Information

Hardcover: 216 pages

Publisher: Truman State University Press (January 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1931112525

ISBN-13: 978-1931112529

Product Dimensions: 10.2 x 7.2 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,354,563 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #600 in [Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > History > Railroads](#) #935 in [Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > Railroads](#) #64364 in [Books > History > Americas > United States](#)

Customer Reviews

This well researched, written and handsomely illustrated book makes the case that the environmental, historic preservation and even the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, missed the boat in not seeking to preserve the private passenger rail network.

Runte, who has written extensively about national parks, applies the same reasoning that supports their existence and preservation to the case for passenger trains as common carriers and agents of preservation. A rail-based transportation network, he argues, is a key component to maintaining the American landscape and fostering sustainable development and historic preservation. Written with authority and clarity, as well as a touch of the poetic, Runte shows how the US has failed to learn the lessons of its own past and Europe's present. It is an easy but thought-provoking read that will turn any environmentalist into a passenger rail advocate.

Allies of the Earth: Railroads and the Soul of Preservation challenges America to rethink why it has all but abandoned its railroad systems for fuel-devouring automobiles and air travel - while these other machines may be faster, their toll on the environment and fuel resources is also higher. There are also less tangible boons to rail travel, such as the opportunity to look out the train window, and the pleasure of absorbing the journey rather than simply hustling to the destination. Surveying both American and European rail history, author Alfred Runte makes a call for renewed interest in experiencing the beauty of the countryside, and restoration of the railroads that America has foolishly disregarded for too long. A thoughtful and thought-provoking account written from the soul, Allies of the Earth postulates some interesting ideas about the role railroads could play in promoting national conservation and economic sustainability.

At one time, railroads served as the connective tissue of America, tying its far-flung communities and large cities together with safe, no-hassle travel. All of that changed upon the advent of interstates and cheap gas. Fast-forward to the current day where Alfred Runte, author of many environmental histories, tells of railroad's heyday, its slow decline, and its emerging renaissance. ALLIES OF THE EARTH is filled with nostalgic photographs and illustrations that whisk readers away to bygone days. In addition to Mr. Runte's arguments for a return to good, affordable passenger service, he carries readers across the decades with stops at Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks. If you have been searching for an attractive tome containing compelling arguments for a return to reasonable American rail service, then ALLIES OF THE EARTH is for you. I highly recommend it.

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