

The Man From the Cave

By Colin Fletcher

"In this extraordinary book an American life slowly takes shape, rescued from anonymity through the casual discovery of a few mysterious objects. While backpacking in an isolated part of the Nevada desert in 1968, Colin Fletcher came upon an old wooden trunk standing at the mouth of a cave. Inside the cave he found what appeared to be a man's possessions, coated with the dust of years. These personal but anonymous effects - among them fragments of a 1916 newspaper - stirred Fletcher's imagination, and a year later he went back and lived in the cave for ten days. The experience inspired in him a determination to piece together the life of the man who had preceded him. After his article describing the discovery and the beginnings of his investigation appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, Fletcher heard from Grace Mazeris, an elderly woman who told him she believed that the cave dweller was a prospector named 'Chuckawalla' Bill Simmons - a man she had once lived with. Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Mazeris died and Fletcher, realizing that time was running out, began in earnest to reconstruct Chuckawalla Bill's life. Using records from the National Archives and from Simmons's home town of Braddock, Pennsylvania, Fletcher meticulously and persistently tracked the man's first wanderings as a youth, his service in the Philippine insurrection after the Spanish-American War, and his restless movements - often under an alias - across the western United States. The trail led Fletcher to people who had known Bill Simmons at various times in his life - family members, other men and women who had prospected, played cards, and drunk with him in the desert towns of California. Their encounters are intensely moving as memories of Bill, dormant for decades, are affectionately aroused...." Illustrated with numerous black and white photographs, map endpapers.

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