

Edge Effects

THE BORDER-NAME PLACES

Robert D. Temple

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Contact: Robert D. Temple, Author

edge-effects@fuse.net

Texarkana? Too easy. Just try to find
Artex, Carotenn, Alaga, Oklarado, and Monota.

A quirky idea took over this writer's life and led him on a ten-year journey across the continent.

Heading north after winter travels in Mexico and Central America, Bob Temple noticed that the next day's drive would take him through Texarkana. Interesting — a town on the state line and named for the two states. Any more of those? Ten years later, here is the answer.

Travel narratives need some kind of structuring device — the author is in quest of something, following the footsteps of someone, seeking the essence of some region. In this case, the (admittedly eccentric) objective of identifying, visiting, and learning the history of every “border-name place” became a defining structure. The process of exploration and discovery — locating, finding out about, and getting to these places — was often an adventure in itself, but more importantly, the theme of boundaries led the author into considerations of many types of barriers and frontiers, physical and metaphorical.

The account of each place covers present reality and details of local history. The emphasis is on how the border location influenced things — why the place came to be there, how it developed, why it thrived or (more often) failed. A border-line location can produce curious side effects for the residents, which the author explores through interviews.

While declining to make comparisons, Temple admits his approach in writing this book was influenced by Theroux, Chatwin, and Heat-Moon, with occasional humorous glances toward Bill Bryson. *Edge Effects* is also in the long tradition of books about place-naming and peculiar place names, tracing perhaps to Mencken's *American Language*. It is in no way a travel guide — do not expect advice on attractions, charming B&Bs, or dining options. Indeed, the author's descriptions of many of the places would not please the local Convention and Tourism Association.

Does the author have any of these border-name places that he particularly liked? There was something memorable about every one, but some places and experiences stand out. Mondak,

once the “The Baddest Town in the West,” its ruins still littered with shards of broken whiskey bottles. Finding Leadbelly’s grave at a place called Latex. In Penowa, having beers with the locals in the tavern where Communists ran a depression-era soup kitchen. Discovering the one-time post office hidden in the roadless Mississippi-Alabama backwoods. The railroad crossing in Tennaga where a four children died in a school bus. Meeting the rice farmer with the restored Moark railroad depot in his back yard. Arriving in Alsask the day they burned the grain elevator. The trip down Truckee Canyon in search of Calvada. Finally untangling the separate identities of the two Uvadas and the two Calors, garbled in just about all the sources. Being alone in the great empty spaces where thriving towns once stood.

What’s next on Robert D. Temple’s writing agenda? Another ten-year quest? Probably not, but the amazing things that happened in all these obscure places are leading to follow up stories and new directions.

Edge Effects is available through on-line retailers and local bookstores.

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