



Up Front

*The truth about
Wandering Scout.*

By C.J. Hadley

Many readers have asked *RANGE* to explain the American Prairie Reserve. The story has been loitering on the fringes since 1987, when academics Frank and Deborah Popper from Rutgers University in New Jersey decided that the American plains, “between the Missouri River and the Front Range of the Rockies,” should become “a buffalo commons” attractive to “romantic environmentalists.” They had no plan for the people and communities that were already settled—and producing. To the elites and coasters like the Poppers, rural westerners are irrelevant.

There are few real journalists left in America. *RANGE* shares two of the best. Both brilliant. Both renegades.

Tim Findley—*ex-Rolling Stone*, CBS and *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter; friend of the Black Panthers and California legislator Willie Brown; and an activist in Students for a Democratic Society—wrote 216 stories for *RANGE*. Findley’s extraordinary work can be found at *RANGEdex.com*.

Much younger than Findley, Dave Skinner earned two degrees in business marketing and management from Montana State, paid for by working summers on the Alaska Railroad as a depot agent. He graduated debt free, then became a ski bum. “I kept up the charade for 14 wonderful winters. Not so wonderful was the long string of crappy summer jobs to support the habit.”

Skinner’s jobs included carpenter, wheat custom cutter and marina dockhand. In Colorado, he paired a good summer job in commercial construction with a winter ski-shop job that allowed skiing every day. He was fired for writing the truth about the ski industry.

“I saw my first computer and got my first desk in 1996,” he says, “working for People for the West in Pueblo.” Later he wrote features for *Evergreen* magazine in the Northwest and built cabinets in his spare time “to buy food and ammo.” He was hired as a “conservative” opinion columnist for the *Flathead Beacon* in Montana, owned by Maury Povich, and has written for *RANGE* since 2000. We asked for more time after Findley died too young in 2010.

Skinner’s stories have won countless awards for “Best Investigative,” “Best Feature” and “Best Critical Writing.” These include “Howling Insanity,” “Hans-n-Harry’s Garden of Astroturf,” “Money

Talks, Freedom Walks,” “The Green Insiders” and “Monumental Megabucks” (via *RANGEdex.com*).

A typical Skinner story (“Octopuses Garden,” Fall 2018) about then-mysterious Western Values Project and its fiscal host, the \$371 million-per-year New Venture Fund, began with Skinner’s discovery that Western Values’ “head office” was nothing more than a cheap UPS Store mailbox in Whitefish, Mont.

After writing “Octopuses,” Skinner said: “Political games by the high-net-worth cadre are actually subsidized by peasants like you and me. The overall trend is toward oligarchy, and that’s a fundamental



SKINNER COURTESY DAVE SKINNER

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threat to the survival of the American idea. If voters have no clue that Kittens and Warm Milk is actually funded by Murderous Fascist Bastards R Us, they vote badly. That’s what our pal Eric Kessler is making millions orchestrating with his New Venture Fund. And it’s working really well for him. Thanks to our pathetic press, nobody’s the wiser except *RANGE* readers.”

For this issue we threw Skinner a big loop—3,000 words—on the American Prairie Reserve. He coughed up 10,000. “Going in, I thought 3,000 would be plenty. Coming out, no way. I honestly didn’t expect to find what I found, threads that nobody else, especially not Montana’s ‘journalists,’ even thought to look for.”

Skinner doesn’t just research articles; he digs and dives so deep it’s tough to drag him out of the hole. He was disturbed to discover that the ranchers most affected by huge, ugly schemes like APR fail to gather to fight their common enemy. “Compared to what they are up against,” Skinner says, “they need to up their game but they are too innocent politically, and too reasonable, when they are up against freaks. If

they did get together with one voice they could kick APR [and others like it] to the curb.”

It is amazing that Skinner—after tough, real journalism for close to two decades—is still standing, albeit bloody from the deep dives he takes against the rabid rich and green. “Most press is too lazy to get the real story,” he says. “They share the same sound bites from liberal or green activists and the DNC, which is why they all sound the same at CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN and MSNBC.”

Rancher LeAnne Delaney, whose family is affected by APR, asked *RANGE* for help last February. Skinner was already on the case. “There needs to be a big voice for us here in Montana,” LeAnne wrote. “They are hell-bent on taking away our way of life to build a petting zoo for bison, grizzlies, mountain lions and wolves and want us to ‘get along’ with their vision of an international park!” She added. “We have to stop this infringement on the legacy of the cowboy and agriculture or there won’t be anything left for our kids and grandkids.”

After a few weeks in, thousands of miles on the road, and halfway through the APR work, Skinner zapped me an email: “This mess is so sprawling, I’m at wit’s end with a monster around my neck. The problem here is, the American Prairie Reserve is probably the most significant and dangerous effort by Big Green to depopulate unwilling communities ever.”

Skinner’s looking for a wealthy patriot who will bankroll him for some more significant deep diving. He relishes it, but it costs a huge amount of time and money. “With some premium services paid for, then I could go to town bigtime, really dredge the guck, really splatter some guts on the ceiling.” No one seems to be hitting the groups that cause the most pain. “These idiots are paid well and anonymously. This is the deep left. They want the power. They know they have to lie to get it. They know the press is not just stupid, weak, inept and lazy, but on their side.”

Our outside editor, writer/novelist/motorcycle racer Steve Thompson, read Skinner’s draft and tried to help me cut. He was no help but was right in saying: “It’s amazing. Brilliant. Leave it alone.”

Dave Skinner has dished up a pure unadulterated beauty. Is our wandering scout strange and surprising? Hell, yes. Is he amazing, talented, unique? Hell, yes. And that’s why he’s perfect for *RANGE*. But if you want to relish all his nuggets, you will need to read his “Special Report: Cowboys or Buffalo?” several times. ■