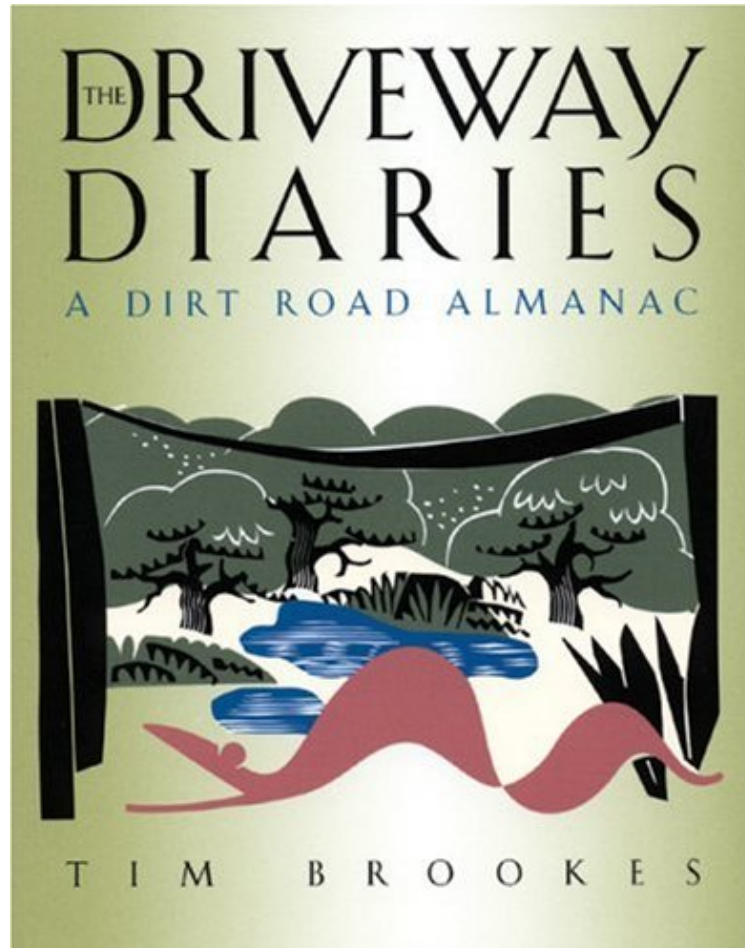


(Read ebook) The Driveway Diaries: A Dirt Road Almanac

## The Driveway Diaries: A Dirt Road Almanac

*Tim Brookes*

*ebooks | Download PDF | \*ePub | DOC | audiobook*



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#3898510 in Books Turtle Point Press 2005-05-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.00 x .70 x 5.50l, .70  
#File Name: 1885586337236 pages | File size: 48.Mb

**Tim Brookes : The Driveway Diaries: A Dirt Road Almanac** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Driveway Diaries: A Dirt Road Almanac:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A Road Less Traveled By Jeff Mannix Tim Brookes, a Brit who discovered America atop a bicycle, settled in Burlington, Vermont with a plumb teaching job at the state university and never left. Now director of the writing program at Champlain College, Brookes has compiled a number of winsome essays about moving with his family thirty-five miles out into the country, to grow intellectually among the pure forces of nature then ultimately rue "the balance of power between order and chaos," as Brookes now ruefully philosophizes. The Driveway Diaries: a Dirt Road Almanac emerged from a regular column Brookes wrote for a local newspaper, and many of his musings about exurbia have been broadcast on National Public Radio's Sunday Weekend Edition, and most recently excerpted in Harper's Magazine. The book chronicles the first seven years of living just beyond the suavities taken for granted in a city, and as the realities of unassisted living supplant the expectations of harmonious enlightenment, Brookes staves off organic dementia by writing eloquently in sixty-three essays about

unimproved existence. The Driveway Diaries is a good pocket guide for anyone who leaves the pavement for greening pastures, and is especially informative of what is waiting for the ecstatic, rejuvenated immigrants fleeing to La Plata County for a modicum of emotional or financial independence. Open space is lovely, and there are certainly moments of bliss living on the land, but it comes at a cost for which most urbanites haven't budgeted and can ill afford. At first, for Brookes, just finding the quaint old house perched on a hillside overlooking a wooded Vermont valley was paradisaical. "Ten acres. In England, where I spent the first half of my life, you can't have ten acres unless you are an Earl, or are sleeping with an Earl, or the outcome of someone else sleeping with an Earl, Brookes says as he begins his journey. "I barely looked at the house. I looked at the land and saw everything my mother had ever planted in a garden, plus everything that she had always wanted to plant in a garden, but had never had garden enough." Thus starts the infatuation that would creep slowly like a rhizome to envelop Brookes and his young family in a form of intuitive self defense. Precursors to catastrophe begin right away for Brookes and, likewise, for everyone moving to Bayfield or Breen, if they only saw yesterday what they see today. Drought was the first harbinger Brookes saw after closing the deal on his dream life. In Burlington, a city of thirty-eight thousand, rumor had it that Vermont was becoming a drought state, and as Brookes was readying his move from a rented house in town he noticed that the lawn was turning brown and shriveling up, but . . . "Outside Burlington, it quickly became apparent that drought, like serious snow, begins outside the city limits," Brookes observed solemnly. "On closer inspection, all the interesting (if nameless) little bushes and shrubs skirting the house are now slightly less interesting collections of twigs, with an occasional leathery leaf clinging to a twig like an overcooked nacho chip." Brookes immediately figured out what it means to draw water from a well, a well with a falling water table during a prolonged dry spell. The dream tarnishes for Brookes and his wife, but not before putting up the good fight with moments of splendor over ridiculously simple rewards like triumphing over the icy driveway, beating back a wasp invasion, overcoming the urban construct to kill everything that stings or bites, steeling enough nerve to paint the house rafters clinging to a ladder on uneven ground, and even apologizing to the trees the landscaper suggested removing to improve the view shed. As the cuts were scaring and new cuts were forming, Brookes began to write about his curiously absurd experiences, reminiscent of a castaway writing a journal to keep from losing his mind. The best of his essays are about dirt roads, if you can imagine such a contemplation, and reason enough to go right to Maria's Bookshop and pick up a copy of this confessional. In his essay entitled "Seventeen Ways of Looking at a Dirt Road," Brookes puts in perspective why we who live in the country endure the privations. And read as a metaphor, which isn't at all suggested, imparts solid guidance to our county planners who seem determined to over improve with computer generated guidance that which needs no improvement at all. Brookes begins by quoting Blake: "The crooked unimproved roads are the roads of genius." Brookes goes on to discover for himself just what Blake means: "Dirt roads are a light footprint on the land, the most minimal concession to the automobile, the ragged fringe between civilization and wilderness. I love them. This is my gravel cadenza, my ode to inconvenience." "Dirt roads are a communal creation, not suffering from the autocracy of engineers," preaches Brookes. "A dirt road is a long-running experiment in sustainable transportation . . . the perfect hybrid: half road, half part of the landscape." Most dirt roads were never designed in the first place, Brookes discovered from visiting with Vermont's credentialed dirt road expert. We who use dirt roads can see that they followed section lines, cow paths, migration trails, evolving naturally instead of being placed for anticipated traffic mediation. "A dirt road knows its place, and doesn't claim to own all it sees," observes Brookes. "It's still obedient to the rise and fall of the land . . . there's nothing like a dirt road to demonstrate, without condescension, the diversity of the state, to assert its democracy." This is not nostalgic or frivolous conversation; this is seeing the forest for the trees, the means to the end, the single step toward a destination a long way off. "With a dirt road, we are someone: we do not pass unnoticed or unremembered . . . it acknowledges our progress in a cloud of dust, or in the curling lip of a rut." Brookes reminds us seriously. It's hard not to extrapolate our own existence, our small footprints on the ground, from Brookes' eloquent treatise on the simple dirt roads that cause such scorn among county planners and excessively equipped engineers. "Dirt roads are self-policing," Brookes pleads, "you can't go all that fast on a surface that creates its own speed bumps," and, "enforces humility." Still yearning for order among chaos, Brookes proposes that "Dirt roads don't lie. A paved road - a 'good' road - underlies us like a safe assumption, its smooth silence reassuring us that this is where we and our car belong. But a car doesn't belong anywhere. It's only a native species in the fictional world in which we are masters of the earth. A dirt road doesn't respect this fiction. If we want to believe in our ascendancy over our surroundings the last thing we want is a rude series of jolts that remind us otherwise." And yet a dirt road is "a reminder that the intersection between the human world and the natural one is lethal," Brookes demurs. "At the head of the driveway . . . Maddy and I find a garter snake, white belly up, flattened into a treble clef. I've seen at least a dozen dead garter snakes on Chapin Road, not to mention worms, mice, butterflies, peepers, chipmunks, rabbits, cats, groundhogs, birds beyond identification, and insects beyond number. They are the true cost of driving. On a tarmac they look out of place, as if the animal were simply stupid, or a trespasser, and in any case the remains are soon erased. On my road they are unmistakably my neighbors, whom I need to watch out for. Their skin and juices become part of the road." Brookes' insights, especially about dirt roads and driveways and the human intrusion upon nature, inspire reflection upon the importance we place on improvement, how we just may have it reversed. He's very convincing, in

a very charming, humorous manner that will ring true with vicissitudes facing our backwater hamlet: "The road that leads to paradise also provides the means of its destruction," presages Tim Brookes.

While working on a doomed book about commuting, Tim Brookes developed an odd affection for dirt roads. This led him to study his own driveway, a tiny dirt road, a masterpiece of inconvenience, a many-mooded borderlands in the balance of power between order and chaos. The result: *The Driveway Diaries*, a well-balanced mix of poignant and humorous observations about nature, the seasons and family life. Tim Brookes is the author of *A Hell of a Place to Lose a Cow*, which was selected as one of the top travel books of the year by *The New York Times* and *Booklist*. He has lived for two decades in Vermont, where he teaches and writes.

About the Author Brookes was born in England and worked as a singer, songwriter, guitarist, dealer in used instruments, and a tour guide before moving to Vermont. In Vermont he lived for two decades in the college town of Burlington, teaching and writing. Nothing prepared him or his wife and two daughters for life in Essex Center.