



Big Sur Trilogy - Part III - The Road: America's Last Pioneer Family

Lillian Bos Ross, Gary M Koepfel

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The Big Sur Trilogy is the story about one of the last pioneer families in America who lived freely and self-sufficiently in a remote area of the central California known as Big Sur. The Trilogy spans over 100 years and depicts the hard but rewarding life of three generations of the Zande Allan family. The Big Sur Coast extends 100 miles from Carmel to San Simeon and is bordered by the Santa Lucia Mountains and Pacific Ocean. This remote wilderness contains some of the most rugged terrain in the American continent. From the beginning of time the south coast was accessible only by foot, mule or horseback. Although inhabited by three nomadic American Indian tribes, the Spaniards refused to travel along the coast because of the high mountains, steep canyons and deepwater crossings. In the 1870s a wagon road was built from Mal Paso Crossing to Bixby Creek Ranch. The next 74 miles of the Coast was not accessible by auto until 1937 with the opening of Highway One, which took eighteen years to build, mostly by convict labor using dynamite and steam shovels. When completed, it became the only road in the United States that went directly from a horse trail to an auto road, thus bypassing the traditional, interim wagon road. The road changed forever the lives of the Big Sur homesteaders as the mainstream modern American culture motored into their once-private coast. Before the road, few 'outlanders' visited the south coast because travel was strenuous, the trail precarious and the homesteads were few and far between, but those who ventured there were greeted with coast hospitality, lively conversation and ranch grown food. The Big Sur pioneer families worked long hours and full days with little time for frills or fancy things, and they had no patience for what was not plain spoken. A trip to Monterey to buy supplies or to Salinas to sell cattle took three hard days by horseback along narrow trails at the edge of granite cliffs often falling straight to the sea some 2000 feet below. Twice a year the ranchers would gather for a coast barbecue with neighbors on the beach while waiting for the cargo schooner to arrive and winch ashore their load of hard stock supplies too bulky for pack mule or horse. The third novel of the Big Sur Trilogy begins in 1909 on the 21st birthday of the third Zande Allen, who grew up under his Grampa's sharp eyes and stern ways. Zan revered his grandfather as the wisest of men and his Grampa fancied Zan as the finest fruit from his family tree. Enroute to the annual roundup, Zan helps the road survey crew and earns his first three dollars. Zande gives Zan land and stock, if he can fence it in thirty days. Feeling flush, Zan promises to buy his sister, Maria, a bed, but is shocked by the price. To keep his word he earns money working on the road while he also builds fence. When Old Zande discovers his split loyalties, they clash and Zan gives back the ranch and cattle, then goes to work on the road. Maria invites Zan to dinner as thanks for her bed but enroute Zan hears a shot and discovers his flirty young cousin Tillie had killed her beau because she carried his child but he refused to marry her. To save her reputation, Zan confesses to the crime and goes to prison. Seven years later Zan returns and realizes his love for Lara, a child adopted by his parents and ten years younger, but thinking that no respectable woman would want a convict for a husband, he withholds his feelings. Lara's friend is arrested for running rum and leaves the Coast again to help build Boulder Dam. Upon his next return to Big Sur, to his dismay Lara is not there but may return on July 4, 1937 for Pioneer Day, the grand opening of the new road. Grampa Zande, now a hundred, still curses the road and plots to stop it from opening, which conflicts with young Zande's eagerness for the road to be open. The fateful day of opening Highway One brings many surprises for the road, Grandpa and the love between Zan and Lara.

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