

BOOKSHELF

Photo-Op: Happy Trails

Richly colored studies in America's regional texture. A photographic review of Nathan Benn's "Kodachrome Memory."

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Nathan Benn/*powerHouse Books*

Road lines and contrails are two constants of America's crazy-quilt landscape. From the thick pine forests of desolate northern Maine to the black-cinder slopes of Hawaiian lava fields, you can see yellow stripes at your feet and white streaks overhead—twin threads that bind the vast, restless country together. But even these familiar phenomena vary by region. In Nathan Benn's 1981 photograph (above), the stubby-winged DC-3 swooping low across an empty road and trailing dense clouds is not carrying passengers but spraying for mosquitoes—a near-necessity for swampy Collier County, Fla., to be habitable year-round. Mr. Benn's **'Kodachrome Memory: American Pictures, 1972-1990'**

(*powerHouse*, 166 pages, \$50) is a study of regional texture, the fruit of two decades as a photographer for National Geographic. Mr. Benn's unshowy compositions and the rich, clear colors of his Kodachrome slide-film make his images seem both timeless and particular. In a 1975 shot from upstate New York, five majorettes parade along a small-town street in the rain; a teenage boy in the foreground straddles a hammock, his pants tucked into wool socks against the cold. In an image of Hickman, Ky., faded lines demarcating parking spots are barely visible along the rundown main street in front of city hall, a brick box identified by a black-on-white rectangular sign. And in another photograph from Florida, a familiar view of parked cars through a windshield is varied by a glimpse, in the distance, of the vintage rockets on display at Cape Canaveral. Or is it Cape Kennedy? As with all Mr. Benn's photos, we know just where we are, if not quite when. —*The Editors*