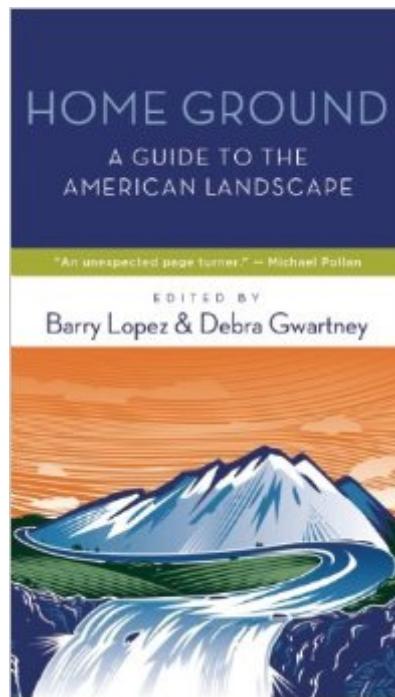


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# Home Ground: A Guide To The American Landscape



## **Synopsis**

Hailed by book reviewers as a "masterpiece," "gorgeous and fascinating," and "sheer pleasure," Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape was published in fall 2006 in hardcover. It was met with outstanding reviews and strong sales, going into three printings. A language-lover's dream, this visionary reference revitalized a descriptive language for the American landscape by combining geography, literature, and folklore in one volume. This is a totally redesigned, near-pocket-sized field guide edition of the best-selling hardcover. Home Ground brings together 45 poets and writers to create more than 850 original definitions for words that describe our lands and waters. The writers draw from careful research and their own distinctive stylistic, personal, and regional diversity to portray in bright, precise prose the striking complexity of the landscapes we inhabit. Includes an introductory essay by Barry Lopez. At the heart of the book is a community of writers in service to their country, emphasizing a language suggesting the vastness and mystery that lie beyond our everyday words.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 672 pages

Publisher: Trinity University Press; Reprint edition (August 20, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1595341757

ISBN-13: 978-1595341754

Product Dimensions: 4.5 x 1.3 x 7.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (22 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #36,123 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 inÂ  Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography > Regional #43 inÂ  Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Reference #54 inÂ  Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Linguistics

## **Customer Reviews**

I took Home Ground home and set it on the dining room table two weeks ago. I open it over breakfast and feel a visceral pleasure--the robin's egg blue sky on the cover, the ample space on each page, the quotes lining the margins, the sketches of landforms. But the sensual reality of the book wouldn't do much for me if the definitions were boring. They're exquisite. This is more than a dictionary--no one else has tried such a project, so it's hard to describe. I tell people about it, but I don't know if I convey how much fun it is to read the definitions, and how lyrical and evocative and

often playful they are. I can read them just for pleasure, but I am also learning those words I've always glossed over, the words I vaguely knew but which I thought belonged to the experts, words like "playa," "swale," "gooseneck," and "glade." The more technical phrases are explained in lucid, simple terms. And then there are the ones that are pure fun, like "thank you ma'am," "looking-glass prairie," "hoodoo," "painted desert," "milk gap," and "chickenhead." The definitions make me want to get out and notice the country. They make me believe in the beauty and specificity and continuing power of the American landscape. I feel a sense of loss for all the local folk knowledge that is now obscure. But it's also heartening to think that Americans have not only been looters; we've known the ins and outs of the land, paid attention, made it come to life in our words. And we can still reach for those words and for that clear-eyed, delighted way of seeing the land around us. This is a book to give and a book to keep in the family. I may not take it off my dining room table for a while. It's a good companion.

When I first got my hands on this beautiful book, I'd barely read a page before I started to cry. Barry Lopez, Debra Gwartney, and more of the best writers of our day have saved what I didn't even realize I was losing. I've often felt, when near an exotic Asian or spicy islander that being an American, especially a Midwesterner, meant I had no culture. The United States was developed under the influence of a vast wild land, a land to conquer. We tore down and built up, paying little attention to what we destroyed. I wonder if that accounts for empty Americans trying to fill themselves up with stuff? But the U. S. isn't only about development and acquisition. Home Ground preserves the culture and language of our landscape. "we will conserve only what we love we will love only what we understand we will understand only what we're taught" Baba Dioum, Senegal The marginalia literature quotations and the descriptive entries bind place to culture. Because I do feel a connection to the landscapes I have known, this book reminds me that I am a part of a culture that has a language. A language we might have lost.

This is a very interesting book and should be in every bookcase along with an encyclopedia, dictionary and atlas. The brilliant idea of having great writers briefly define geological and geographic terms works beautifully.

Quite a big book, with much in it. All sorts of geographic terms for many parts of the country. Most enjoyable to get into. The design is like an expanded dictionary: terms listed alphabetically, with brief encyclopedic descriptions by writers from many states and areas. Including from Maine to the San

Francisco Bay area, from New York City to New Mexico, and more. Every Marine (myself being an ex-) has spent a few marches in the "boondocks" (p43), which I always thought somehow came from Dan'l Boone. Not quite: "Boondocks is an American adaptation of the Tagalog word bundok, meaning "mountain." Okay, if they say so!"Eye" (p129) is one phenomenon I happen never to have seen: "The point where an underground spring suddenly bursts to the surface . . . a place of mystery, where dry ground becomes soaked with life-giving water, and nature gives us a glimpse of all that happens out of the realm of human vision." On second thought, there is an "Eye of Water" at famous Longwood Gardens outside of Philadelphia, but next time I visit I'll have to check whether it's a spring. The Dutch word kill (p199) in English is literally brook, which applies also to other streams and rivers. Hence, Catskill (Cats Creek) in New York State and "the mighty Schuylkill River (or 'Hidden Channel River')" in Philadelphia. Having lived for many years in New Jersey across the Delaware River from there, I have long known the name Schuylkill, but for me the meaning was hidden. Now, for the pronunciation, you'll have to get help from the locals. You'll probably find insights for your own "neck of the woods" (Oh, see p144). Enjoy!

I'd recommend this book to anyone who reads widely and loves to discover the derivation of geographical terms pertaining to nature. What is unique about this book is the input from 45 well known writers to define unique American landscape terms. I ordered 3 copies for all my family located in the Pacific Northwest and they agree that this book is a great resource.

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