



Boone's Lick

Larry McMurtry

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Boone's Lick is Pulitzer Prize-winning author Larry McMurtry's return to the kind of story that made him famous -- an enthralling tale of the nineteenth-century west. Like his bestsellers *Lonesome Dove*, *Streets of Laredo*, *Comanche Moon*, and *Dead Man's Walk*, *Boone's Lick* transports the reader to the era about which McMurtry writes better and more shrewdly than anyone else.

Told with McMurtry's unique blend of historical fact and sheer storytelling genius, the novel follows the Cecil family's arduous journey by riverboat and wagon from Boone's Lick, Missouri, to Fort Phil Kearny in Wyoming. Fifteen-year-old Shay narrates, describing the journey that begins when his Ma, Mary Margaret, decides to hunt down her elusive husband, Dick, to tell him she's leaving him. Without knowing precisely where he is, they set out across the plains in search of him, encountering grizzly bears, stormy weather, and hostile Indians as they go. With them are Shay's siblings, G.T., Neva, and baby Marcy; Shay's uncle, Seth; his Granpa Crackenthorpe; and Mary Margaret's beautiful half-sister, Rose. During their journey they pick up a barefooted priest named Father Villy, and a Snake Indian named Charlie Seven Days, and persuade them to join in their travels.

At the heart of the novel, and the adventure, is Mary Margaret, whom we first meet shooting a sheriff's horse out from underneath him in order to feed her family. Forceful, interesting, and determined, she is written with McMurtry's trademark deftness and sympathy for women, and is in every way a match for the worst the west can muster.

Boone's Lick abounds with the incidents, the excitements, and the dangers of life on the plains. Its huge cast of characters includes such historical figures as Wild Bill Hickok and the unfortunate Colonel Fetterman (whose arrogance and ineptitude led to one of the U.S. Army's worst and bloodiest defeats at the hands of the Cheyenne and Sioux) as well as the Cecil family (itself based on a real family of nineteenth-century traders and haulers).

The story of their trek in pursuit of Dick, and the discovery of his second and third families, is told with brilliance, humor, and overwhelming joie de vivre in a novel that is at once high adventure, a perfect western tale, and a moving love story -- it is, in short, vintage McMurtry, combining his brilliant character portraits, his unerring sense of the west, and his unrivaled eye for the telling detail.

Boone's Lick is one of McMurtry's richest works of fiction to date.

Boone's Lick Details

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From Reader Review Boone's Lick for online ebook

Bonnie Plested says

This is a short, sweet little book, really nothing more than the account of one of McMurtry's classic eccentric western families as they travel west to find their pa. Some critics dwell on the fact that this book lacks the sweep and drama of "Lonesome Dove". That's so, but it also lacks that book's cruelty and tragedy. The delight here is in the details - Grandpa taking out his fiddle as soon as he meets another fiddler on the trail, the glow off the tip of a burning cheroot smoked by a prostitute as she sits on her wooden stairs on a summer night, the affection and exasperation a young boy feels for the family mules...Once again, McMurtry brings the American west alive, and this resurrection is sweeter and happier than anything in his earlier books. I wish he had expanded the theme somewhat and shown us more of his characters, since they're all such good folks. This book reminded me more of one of those great old sepia photographs of westerners, where the people looked so alive and so compelling that you just wanted to climb inside the picture and get to know them. Brief glimpses are all we get in this book as well, but we get to see some unforgettable characters.

Jeff says

Any "western" novel that Larry McMurtry writes will forever be compared to Lonesome Dove. McMurtry set the bar high with that one, arguably one of the great novels of the last fifty years. Even the sequels that I've read lack the epic sweep of his Pulitzer Prize winner. So how does Boone's Lick match up or should inevitable comparisons even be drawn.

Boone's Lick, narrated by 15 year old Shay Cecil, recounts his family's journey in search of their philandering father, a guy who shows up for a few days every other year. He's busy selling supplies to the forts that are popping up in Indian Territory.

The impetus of the story is how his mother, finally fed up with the present situation, one day just picks up and moves the family west and the trip, as you would expect, is far from smooth. As with most McMurtry historical novels you can expect humor, adventure, appearances by historical figures (Wild Bill Hickock is prominently featured), and some well-drawn interesting characters.

This is a quick and worthwhile read with McMurtry at the near top of his game. Although the novel lacks the grandeur and scope of the Lonesome Dove tetra logy, I would recommend it to anyone who likes a strong heroine, westerns, or historical novels.

Sharon Watkins says

How can you not love Larry McMurtry? I don't think anyone will ever call Boone's Lick his master work. It is, however, an enjoyable read, following the Missouri Cecil family after Mary Margaret decides to take her entire household on the trail to find her straying husband in Wyoming.

Roberta says

Funny, funny book filled with chuckles in spite of the hardships. The audiobook version was perfect and had a great reader (Will Patton, an instantly recognizable American actor)!

Nikki says

I have one question. Is the Cecil family he writes about the same Cecil family that later appears in the 20th century in the series starting with "The Last Picture Show" or does he just really like the last name Cecil?

Another descriptive and imaginative tale about life in the old west. I'm not really cowboyish type of person. However, I can't get enough of Larry McMurtry's western stories. This was a fast read and rather short compared to his other books. However, it was so well written that I found myself at home watching the characters not just reading about them. There is something about a book that makes you see it unfold as compared to just reading the words.

I was really annoyed that he did dwell into Neva's character a little more and give her anything else to say rather than "Oaf." That is the only part that bothered me.

Maybe it is too late to live in the West before it was settled but as long as I can read these books, its still alive with me!

Buck Storm says

McMurtry for president.

Marcel says

I discovered Larry McMurtry when I listened to the audio version of Lonesome Dove on my iPod. I was captivated by the characters and the settings of that long Western classic. I recently discovered Boone's Lick in my library, where I had apparently bought and placed it a long time ago. I thought, "Why not"?

This is a much shorter western than Lonesome Dove, but is almost as entertaining. McMurtry lived out West for many years (according to his somewhat autobiographical novel "Books"), and he clearly conveys to the reader how cowboys and their women thought and talked during those tough, trying years of the last half of the nineteenth century. I loved it when I came across one of my personally overworked but much loved Southern words--"lollygagging".

Reading a McMurtry western will make you love at least one or two of his characters. In Lonesome Dove it was Gus. In this book it is the narrator's mom, Mary Margaret. Never has a tougher woman crossed the plains of the West in search of her man. Events seem to occur in a non-stop stream in McMurtry's novels, and Boone's Lick fits that mold.

If you enjoy Westerns, you will enjoy this short work.

Jim says

I felt like reading a Western and no one does them better than Larry McMurtry. His "Lonesome Dove" is my favorite Western. This one of his is similar to that book, as it involves a journey across the Western frontier. In this case, the journey is from Boone's Lick, Missouri to Wyoming. The main character of the story is the strong-willed Missouri woman, Mary Margaret. She determines to take her children in a mule-drawn wagon and go West to find her husband, reportedly working at one of the US Army forts being established on the Bozeman Trail in Wyoming. She is accompanied by her husband's brother Seth, her half-sister Rose, and "Granpaw." Along the way, they are joined by a French priest who has been walking barefoot around the West and a "Snake," a Shoshone returning to his tribe. The story is wonderfully narrated by "Shay," a 15-year old boy. Little do the travelers realize that they are heading into an Indian War, as the Sioux have decided to fight the Army and force the removal of the forts from their hunting territory. It's a story beautifully told and told with some humor. It's another story by McMurtry, which brings the West to life, with all its unforgiving wildness and incredible beauty.

Mikey B. says

A delightful novelette describing a single mother uprooting her family from Missouri and moving to Wyoming. The characters are interesting and a few more are encountered on the journey. It's romantic and gritty at the same time. There is good portrayal of tension between characters. The Western settings are a typical McMurtry product and well done.

Sue says

OK, so I read an article this week about Larry McMurtry selling most of his book collection. So of course I had to find a McMurtry I hadn't read yet. Found two, so I was feeling pretty great. He is incredible, what can you say? Character development like so few authors can really do. The only reason it's a four and not a five is I guess I wish it were longer. It is a great little story, and Shay was a super narrator, keeping things going and explaining as best his 15 year old eyes and experience could explain.

Denise says

Family, so many different ways to describe one, today and yesterday. The main bulk of the story involves a feisty woman, Mary Margaret packing her kids, including the baby up along with other family members and take the trail with wagon and mules to find her husband who hasn't even met the baby. Her husband's brother Seth is with them along with her half sister and life in not easy along the trail and walking right into Indian land will make is all that more adventures.

This was a great old west adventure with a woman guide in the back ground with her presence never forgotten. That was a take away for me, this story is about the choices and life of a strong willed pioneer woman. Choice is another strong subject, and where those choices take you. Mary Margret started life with

her mother making choices and then as with all human the effects of those choice with Mary Margret then too making choices in life that now lead her and others down a hard trail. However the harshness of the trail does not override the life lessons of humanly adventure and even day to day living.

In the end after a long journey the family arrives at the fort her husband is residing at, along the way they have found they have more family involved and at the husband and fathers location, there is more family to be found. The amazing factor is that human love prevails with the families, while Mary Margret makes final voice to choices she has made all along the way, the family goes on.

What strikes me is how all the choices effect not only current actions and events, but the lives of the families for years. We find out great deal about the children Mary Margret has and what happens with them, as the story is told from one of those children we gain great insight to the happenings of this family. I do wish we had more insight to future events of the other family we meet along the way, but perhaps we do in other books.

I enjoyed this story, it was just the right mix of western life and personal story. As I say it leaves me wanting more, but not in a bad way, just what authors should do, is 'invite' you to read more of their stories.

sarg says

"Bones Lick" by Larry McMurtry

Written in Will Rogers vernacular as told by her oldest son kept my interest. Mary Margret of Boones Lick Missouri uproots her siblings and brother in law to travel to Fort Phil Kearny on oregon trail in Montana. To find her wayward husband that she only sees every two years to tell him that she's leaving him. The adventure of the journey and the characters they meet keep this a fast paced read.

Shelly Mundy says

Boone's Lick is a backwater town in Missouri . The setting is the American West during the Civil War. Mary Margaret Cecil and her growing family are living off the land the best they can. Her husband Dickie is a supplier for the forts of the US Army and travels far and wide securing himself with an Indian wife and family at every fort on the Oregon Trail. Mary Margaret has had enough of his never-do-well ways and decides to pack up her family and her beloved brother-in-law, Uncle Seth, in a wagon and travel up the Missouri River to find her husband Dickie and put an end to his gallivanting ways. Along the way they procure an old Indian who guides them and a French traveling minister who sort of helps guide them. They lose old Grandpa Crackenthorpe in a storm, they meet several bands of Indians, including Pawnee, Comanche, Sioux, and the terrifying Blackfoot, as well as three Indian families of Dickie's. When they finally reach Wyoming and find "Pa", Mary Margaret delivers him his walking papers.

Among the characters are the shy but ambitious son Shay, his tempered brother G.T., their fearless little sister Neva, baby Marcy, Mary Margaret or "Ma", crazy and delusional Grandpa Crackenthorpe, the family caretaker Uncle Seth, Ma's whore sister Aunt Rosie, Wild Bill Hickok, Sheriff Baldy Stone, the all-knowing Indian Charlie Seven Days, father Pere Villy, and the infamous Dick Cecil himself.

This book is so humorous, I found myself giggling at every turn of a page. The frontier life and Civil War era is luring to me and I enjoyed it very much. Larry McMurtry is at his very best and cannot be out-written

when it comes to westerns. The book was published in 2000 by Simon & Schuster Inc. Go get it right away, you won't be sorry!

Judy says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, although I find Hoopla to be very frustrating to use for audio books. It was a funny, sad, and at times tragic story which was very well narrated by Will Patton.

Dollie says

Although this short book was no Lonesome Dove, that doesn't mean it wasn't a great story. I loved the story and the writing was perfect. Mary Margaret Cecil lives in the period following the Civil War with her four children, her father and her brother-in-law, Seth, in Boone's Lick, a hole in the wall along the Missouri River. She's buried four of baby sons who died. Her husband, Dickie, is a woodsman, who works for the military so far away that he can only come home every couple of years, when he gets Mary Margaret pregnant again and then leaves – Mary Margaret suspects that he goes back to another wife. Everyone in Boone's Lick is poor, except, perhaps, for Wild Bill Hickok, who lives in the area. Mary Margaret is so poor, one day she shoots the sheriff's horse, telling him she thought it was an elk, to feed her family. One day soon after that, she gets it into her head to go find Dickie because she's got something to tell him. She packs up everything in the cabin and off they go. They don't even have horses, just mules, and ornery ones at that. They meet some interesting characters along the way and have a few adventures. Not everyone makes it to the end of the journey, but Mary Margaret knows she's got to find Dickie, so they continue west. When they do get close to where her husband is reported to be living, she meets a young Indian woman and sees her small child – who could be a twin to her own toddler, Little Marcy. Sure enough, this woman has a pack of Dickie's children. Mary Margaret doesn't hold it against her. Mary Margaret knows Dickie too well. Then when they approach the fort where Dickie is living, they see him talking to a young, very pregnant Indian woman with a passel of little ones. This is another of Dickie's wives. I don't want to tell any more of the story because it's a tale that should be read and I don't want to spoil the story for anyone. This is a well-written story that had me chuckling a few times. It's told by Sherman, "Shay", Cecil, the oldest son. All of the characters in this story are larger than life and well-developed. I loved Sherman and Mary Margaret and hope that I would have been a woman like her if I had lived the life she lived.
