

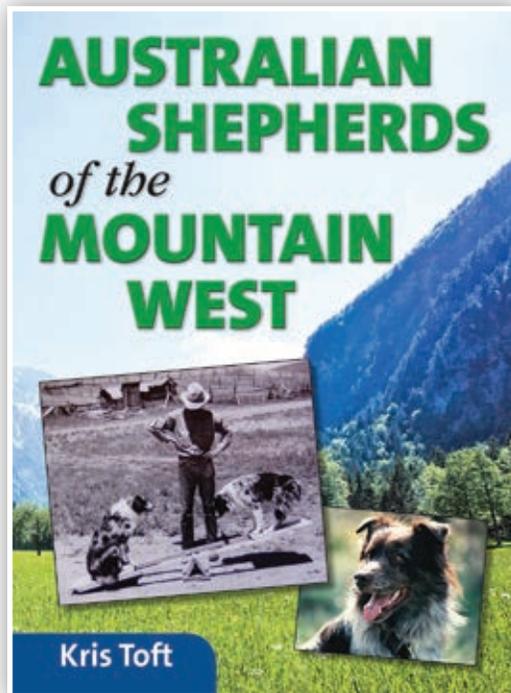
Australian Shepherds of the Mountain West

I heard about *Australian Shepherds of the Mountain West* several years ago before the final edits had arrived at Rowe Publishing. I remember getting all giddy about the prospect of reading and reviewing it. After all, it is a book about Australian Shepherds. But time got away from me, as it often does, and I carried on reading and reviewing other books. Last week a copy arrived from the publisher and all that giddiness is back!

Wow!

This hardcover book with 665 pages and 1500 photographs, diagrams, and legacy charts—many never before published—is a must read for herding enthusiasts, anyone interested in the Australian Shepherd breed, and especially those readers who love canine history.

Originally, author Kris Toft, a long-time Australian Shepherd enthusiast who lost her battle with cancer before the book was published, had anticipated this book to be a recounting of the Wood's-type dog—a specific bloodline created by Fletcher Wood. However, as Toft's research unfolded, it became clear that Wood was being credited with many more dogs than actually traced solely to his program. Wood's type was so firmly set that many dogs with very little actual Wood's blood, but closely resembling the Wood dogs,



were credited to this origin.

“This identity has become a general reference term in the breed and includes many dogs of similar type—some with similar bloodlines, some with different bloodlines, but all with a common look and character,” writes Toft.

As a result, Toft's focus shifted to include dogs with a similar type, common look, and character, and for the purpose of this book, “Wood's” and “mountain-type” are used synonymously.

Chapter One, *Emergence of an American Breed*, lays out the history of the breed. While you may think you have heard all of the accounts before, I'm certain you will be captivated by the groundwork laid out by Toft, as well as the breeding programs of Jay Sisler and other foundation breeders, and the specific characteristics that defined

the Wood-type dogs and the early dogs of the mountain west.

The early Aussie was a working dog on ranches but his work included more than just herding stock, and you will read all about *Defining a Type* in chapter two. You will read about the characteristics—size, color, performance, temperament, etc.—that distinguish the mountain-type dogs from other lines (including today's breed-ring/conformation dogs) and their ability and willingness to take charge when nobody else will, as well as their uncanny alertness and degree of judgement born of experience and proper education.

Chapters three through six set the early history of Jay Sisler, his dogs, and their influence throughout the breed. You will read about his early days as a horse trainer, his training methods (he never used a choke chain or punishment), and you'll grin ear to ear at the stories of Sisler's visits to Fletcher and Mary Wood's Colorado ranch, as recounted by Mary Wood.

Chapter seven takes you through the history of Fletcher Wood, his foundation sire—Wood's Jay—and his breeding system, which not only cemented Jay's type and genes, but also would reveal any genetic weakness he might have. You'll read about the breeding of Jay to Trump's Stubbie, and how Wood's concentrated

breeding produced Wood's Specks, Wood's Slate, and eventually Wood's Stubbie, which propelled the Wood's-type into the future.

Despite the overall lack of knowledge about the breed at that time, you will no doubt be enlightened when you read how Wood's equine and bovine breeding practices influenced Jay's breedings, and how his ruthless culling of litters (a contentious topic today) and only breeding the best was the ultimate road to his success.

"If Jay Sisler was the Australian Shepherd's greatest PR man, then Fletcher Wood was its greatest banker," write Toft. "His masterful horseman's eye was equally astute when it came to developing a bloodline of Aussies which would not only influence nearly every other bloodline in the breed but also define the mountain-type Aussie as his own."

The remaining chapters take you through the Aussie history as told through humorous, inspiring, and heart-felt stories shared by the owners of the breed's foundation bloodlines, including Dr. Kenneth and Lela (White) Green, Tom and Charlene Jeffreys, Dick and Leslie Sorensen, Jerry and Sharon Rowe, Jean Taylor, and others—breeders who were around during these historic times and provided first-hand accounts of these amazing dogs and the preservation of the bloodlines that defined the Aussie breed more than half a century ago. You get first-hand knowledge from breeders who knew so many of these early dogs and realized how rare they are today.

No doubt you'll smile when you read how the Jeffreys' dogs were frequently tasked with removing "hippies" from high country barns, and how after a successful

"hippie hunt" the dogs would be driven to a local bar and were allowed inside to accept their praise.

You'll read how Joe Piz produced a line of tough cattle working dogs by adding crosses with the original Sorensen (J Bar D) dogs. You'll revisit the outstanding legacy and prodigy of Jeffreys' Shade, including Jeffreys' Little Pooh Bear, Shady Mountain Mity Miss, and many others.

You'll learn how and why Fletcher Wood sought out a dog of supposed Basque background, the results of introducing these dogs into his breeding program, what he thought of the offspring, and why he finally selected this blood out of his line.

And the pictures! What can I say about the pictures? More than 1500 photographs and legacy flow charts will certainly paint a photographic story of the mountain west dogs, their legacy, intelligence, good judgment, common sense, self-determination, and how these dogs have influenced the breed we know today.

Toft finishes the book with The Sprog Chronicles recounting her first encounter with Sprog, owned by Casey Masterson Newman. No spoiler alert, but I bet you won't be able to finish the story without grinning ear to ear as you recognize some of the traits—superior intelligence, good judgement, discipline, self-determination—many of us still cherish in our dogs today.

Published in 2013, *Australian Shepherds of the Mountain West* is available through Rowe Publishing \$89 (US orders), \$109 (International orders) <http://rowepub.com/australian-shepherds-of-the-mountain-west>. Also available on amazon.com - although a quick check shows a much higher price of \$137 via Amazon.

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