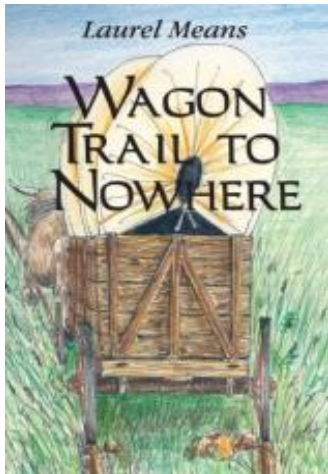


Wagon Trail to Nowhere

by Laurel Means



About the Book

Laurel Means, known as the "Green Prairie Trials" author, finds her inspiration in the stories and imagery of the Minnesota prairies of pioneer times, especially when it involves a journey coming into contact with the supernatural. **Wagon Trail to Nowhere** is her first young adult novel, and she grew so fond of Sarah Pearl that she continued her story in its sequel, **Spirits of the Surging Waters**, out shortly. Her young adult novel, **Runes Beyond the Edge**, is also about a journey across the prairies, but set in 1362. What? You might say? Who was there *then*? Norse explorers, of course, who left a rune stone as a record of the voyage of discovery. And we haven't seen the last of Harald Bjornson, either, when his sequel journey takes him far, far, beyond the prairies.

Discussion Guide

1. What circumstances force young Sarah to abandon her farm and head west with unknown and possibly suspicious strangers?
2. Why does she dislike them?
3. Describe some of the difficulties you might experience traveling in a covered wagon.
4. Can you describe the route they take from Minnesota to Montana?
5. Who's voice does Sarah hear? Is it a real ghost? What is it telling her to do?
6. Do you like Michael Kerber? Why do you think Sarah dislikes him?

7. Is the Widow Kerber really a witch?
8. Is Sarah doing the right thing in escaping? What problems does this cause for her? For the Kerbers?
9. What really happens in the Shakota village? Whom do you think Walahata really is?
10. What is the turning point in Sarah's relationship to the Kerbers, to Michael especially?
11. Describe the "haunted cave." Do you think it's really haunted? What happens there?
12. How does Sarah save the family? Could you have thought of another way out?
13. Would you like to have had Tom as your little brother? Does he really know "ox talk"?
14. Horses, oxen, and buffalo play a large role in this story --- why?
15. What would you guess the future will be like for Sarah and Michael?

Author Bio

Laurel Means, known as the "Green Prairie Trails" writer, finds her inspiration in the stories and imagery of the Minnesota prairies and her own French-Canadian background. A former professor of writing, literature, and linguistics, her enthusiasm for writing is reflected in her skillful use of language and in-depth characters who shape her tightly woven plots. In addition to her first novel, **The Long Journey Home**, she has recently published two young adult historical novels, **Wagon Trail to Nowhere** and **Runes Beyond the Edge**, both set on the prairies, with sequels forthcoming. She has also published in the areas of drama, short fiction, and inspirational material. She lives with her extended family in Chaska, Minnesota, along with an extended animal family of three cats and two dogs.

Critical Praise

"This story of a young girl left on her own and drawn into a westward journey with a strange and uncongenial family takes us through a rich variety of landscapes and of human encounters, and through very real hardships and dangers. I particularly like the scenes in the native village, drawn with knowledge and tact --- a reminder that not all threads started in a novel need to be wound up. We share in Sarah Pearl's discoveries and inner growth, as privation, struggle, and responsibility open her way into a wider world."

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