

LOCAL

Book tells of legendary outdoorsman

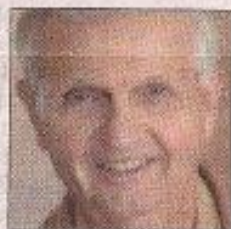
In mid-1961, I was working on the Marvin Ake ranch in the San Agustin Plain southwest of Magdalena.

One morning I walked over to the barn on some errand. Mr. Ake was standing by a strange mud-caked pickup, talking with a big-hatted visitor.

He waved me over and said, "I want you to meet someone." Then he introduced me

to Quentin Hulse. The name meant nothing to me at the time.

We shook hands, exchanged a few pleasantries, and I continued on my errand. After Hulse was gone, the head cowboy filled me in on this man who was known



MARC SIMMONS

Trail Dust

afar and wide throughout the back country of southwestern New Mexico.

Now, after 45 years, the only specific thing I can recall from that conversation is that Quentin at age 10 had witnessed Marvin Ake's father gunned down at the post office in Beaverhead, the outcome of a feud involving land and livestock.

This preamble explains why I was pleased the other day to receive a review copy of the new book *Gila Country Legend, The Life and Times of Quentin Hulse* by Nancy Coggeshall (University of New Mexico Press, hardcover, \$29.95).

Reading it made me wish I'd had at least some of that information when long ago I came face to face with the quixotic Hulse.

This oddity emerges in the pages of the book as one of those rough-hewn frontier individualists who managed to go his own way in the increasingly conformist 20th century.

The author describes Quentin Hulse as springing from hardscrabble, rawhider stock that left him steeped in the macho ethic of the Old West.

When he was 7 years old, his father bought a remote ranch on Canyon Creek just off the northern edge of the Gila Wilderness and took the family there.

Quentin learned pioneering skills from



Book cover photo by Harvey Caplin

his father, who made his living largely as an outfitter and guide for city-bred fishermen and hunters. His father also raised livestock and hunting dogs.

But the senior Hulse was killed in a horse accident in 1940. Quentin's mother, Mattie, thereafter ran the Canyon Creek ranch with the help of her uncle.

In 1944, Quentin went into the Navy, participated in the bloody landing at Okinawa and came away with a Bronze Star. Back home, he would remain close to the wilderness for the rest of his days.

It would be a life filled with adventure, heartbreak, roistering good times (in one of which he got shot in a bar outside Silver City) and an unexpected romance in his waning years.

At the time of his death in 2002, Quentin Hulse had already entered the realm of legend as a guide, mule packer, hunter and hound man. He was also widely known as a humorist and storyteller of the first order.

At gatherings, his off-handed quips drew laughter from everyone within earshot. Asked about a man he considered a jackass, Quentin shot back: "You can't kill

people like that. Even if you drop an anvil on them."

And again, speaking of a newly arrived ranching family: "They were run out of Texas for stealing skunk hides."

Quentin seemed to know his scripture, leading him once to condemn a fellow ignorant of the Bible: "He doesn't know if Christ was crucified or rode himself to death on a bicycle."

Paradoxically, Hulse, the macho man, was an avid reader of books — serious books. At home on Canyon Creek, where the usual civilized amenities were almost nonexistent, he maintained a respectable personal library.

His friend, western artist Grem Lee, once called Quentin "a walking history book." That too became part of the Hulse legend.

An experience-ridden life as extraordinary as this was crying out for a biographer. Then along came Rhode Islander Nancy Coggeshall, who had lived in England and Canada.

While visiting ranchers she knew in central New Mexico, her path happened to cross that of Quentin Hulse, setting off an amazing chain of events, which eventually led to the writing of this book. I am convinced no one could have done a better job.

By letter to me, Coggeshall indicated that in researching Quentin's background, she found few personal papers. In part that was because his rough cabin on Canyon Creek had burned to the ground in 1958 with all its contents.

In overcoming that handicap, she dug deeply into local archives and backruns of old newspapers. Also, "I interviewed more than 200 people in the course of my research," Coggeshall informed me.

The resulting book is engrossing and full of surprises. And it rings true in depicting Hulse as one of those throwback Westerners who found himself more comfortable with the past than with modernity.

The story will linger with you, long after the last page is turned.

Historian Marc Simmons is author of numerous books on New Mexico and the Southwest. His column appears Saturdays.