

You are here with me now. Its time I take you on a dreamy food adventure. Our trip takes us to the more remote reaches of the American Southwest, and to France and Belgium. But first, I am a man who once sought Roubideau -a ghost town that completely vanished. We will lose our way following a trail of bread crumbs through a maze of sandstone ravines, as iridescent crows hover over our heads. Mountain lions invisible in plain sight will mimic our pace, stalking us step-by-step. - - - The search for any trace of Roubideau became a minor obsession shortly after I moved from buttoned down New England directly to an obscure valley on the high Sonoran desert of the Uncompahgre Plateau in Western Colorado. It was alien to us. We paid in full for the radical change we sought. Uncompahgre is Ute Indian meaning rocks that make water red. At the time the area was an agritour back drop for my familys brand new livestock, goat cheese and grass fed meat business set on a well kept pioneer farmhouse property with pasture and woods. We lived on a section of the plateau called the California Mesa. And on this, a multi-hectare farm that sat on a sweet, dry, flat, geological rise called a bench. The snow capped views were stunning with no lights of civilization. - - - Roubideau became our handle, the adopted name of the farm and company. By natural extension, Roubideau became synonymous in my search for the collective soul of memorable food. It became my choice metaphor for everything missing in human taste... Each new discovery became a Roubideau Moment. - - - I count food as an engram that appears, disappears and reappears from our memory like a mountain summit in the fog. Its hard to ask yourself, but you know. Somewhere inside, do you remember foods you havent eaten for eons like baked Clams Casino or the memory of the first mouth watering bite of a real, genuinely sun ripened tomato that was picked deep red and plump right off the vine? (As a child on my parents farm I would take a salt shaker right out into the rows.) Your taste memory cataloged and stored --your moments. I pose the questions. Was all this merely the electrical impulses of the senses, or was it more? I think its got to go deeper. When was the first time you tasted smoked meat? Was it the first taste of Easter ham or the bacon you were given as a child? Or were your engrams sourcing stored code? Could that first recorded moment reach back to our ancient ancestors who ate over camp fires 40,000 years ago and its all still locked in your genetics? The blessing is your taste catalog. It awaits near infinite sensory playback... Welcome to Skin Side Down, The Search for Roubideau in the American Culinary Outback. Ive been keeping food journals since an early age. Theyre personally important to me, and my story is the way I want to share them with you. Oh, as for, Skin Side Down: when sauteing a piece of fish or duck. Youve got a fast moving collection of short stories. - - - In our inevitably short, variable subjective lives, with a shared desire to reacquaint ourselves with great emotional food stuffs, a magic place like Roubideau floated in and out of reality, in and out of my own collective consciousness, in and out anywhere on earth. Like those mountain bends on the road in Midi-Pyrenees France with hidden treasures like perfect trout, tiny goat and sheep cheeses and sips of wine from bottles without labels. In and out of my very own western farmhouse with mud on my boots and glaring dogs at my feet while I made dinner. This novel is about making Roubideau solid and informative for a little while longer -- before it disappears for good in the vanishing world. - - -Joseph V. Coniglio -- Ides of March

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