

ENVIRONMENT

Travel Diaries of a Naturalist, Volume 3: Japan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, China, Mongolia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand

By Peter Scott. Edited by M. Weston-Smith. 1987. Collins, Toronto. 223 pp., illus. \$34.95.

In his last letter from the Antarctic, Captain Scott urged his wife to "Make the boy interested in natural history". The boy was his son Peter, then two years old. Now 79, this famous son of a famous father has more than fulfilled that last wish. An eminent artist, naturalist, and conservationist, he is now Chairman of the Wildfowl Trust in Great Britain.

This is the third volume of Peter Scott's travel diaries. They are not conventional chronological diaries, but rather accounts of travels in different groups of countries over several years, and the arrangement gives us a complete picture of an area and developments in it. This particular volume covers travels in the Far East from 1976 to 1981 including China, Japan, Mongolia, the Antipodes, Malaysia, Hong Kong, The Philippines, and Indonesia. [Volume I covered Africa, Antarctica, Australia and New Zealand, 1956-1979; and Volume II, Hawaii, Romania, Siberia, Iceland, Greenland and the United States 1956-1980.]

The text is written with a good deal of subtle humour, particularly about local politicians, and is quite uncomplaining about traveller's woes — cancelled flights, outdated visas, exotic foods (or no food at all), and the resulting stomach upsets. The journeys were undertaken on behalf of World Wildlife Fund (of which he was a founder and is now Honorary chairman of the International Council), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) of which he is Chairman of the Species Survival Commission, and several other international organizations. Some of the journeys were made as resident naturalist on Lindblad Explorer tours.

In spite of heavy official schedules, the author managed to spend time in the field. He particularly enjoys fish-watching by scuba diving and he is enthusiastic about butterflies, flowers, and mammals. He even comments on wildlife and plants along roads to airports. A measure of his lifelong interest in waterfowl comes towards the end of China section. After many years of searching, he finally saw some Chinese mergansers (*Mergus squamatus*). This left only one species of waterfowl he had not yet seen alive: the Brazilian merganser! However, Peter Scott is far from being exclusively a bird watcher.

The diaries reveal how prominent "naturalist ambassadors" persuade kings, princes, and governments to join world organizations such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and ratify international conservation agreements such as CITES and the International Whaling Commission treaties. There are some interesting entries about the WWF project in Wolong Reserve, China to set up the Giant Panda breeding station. It took some diplomacy to obtain permission for George Schaller to carry out the basic field research on the wild population.

The wide margins allow for a profusion of paintings and drawings of species seen on the diary day — there are so many that the book could be used as an auxiliary field guide for the more remote areas of the world. This volume can stand by itself as a unique, interesting, and handsomely illustrated book. All three volumes are a feast for anyone interested in the global effort for conservation, and for the preservation of species.

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The Maine Woods

By Henry David Thoreau, with introduction by Edward Hoagland. 1988. Reprint of 1864 edition. Penguin Nature Library, Penguin Books, Markham, Ontario. xxxiii + 442 pp. \$10.95.

Good nature writing is a complex amalgam of art and science, fact and feeling, dispassionate observation and personal interpretation. Great nature writing transcends the boundaries of classification, being first and foremost great literature. The writings of Henry David Thoreau

have endured for these reasons. As the author of such acknowledged masterpieces as *Walden* and *On Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau left a literary legacy that has influenced millions, including such disparate luminaries as Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi. As Edward Hoagland states in the introductory pages of this edition, "... Thoreau made of the close observation of bits of nature a lever to examine life in many ways on a large scale. Yet nature writing, despite its basis in science,

usually rings with rhapsody as well . . . One reads Thoreau for his foxy grace and crystalline precision, his joyful inventories and resilient spirits." To the naturalist, Thoreau's keen perceptions of the natural world are the principal delight of his writings, a recurring theme against which his ideas and philosophies are played in counterpoint.

The Maine Woods chronicles three expeditions Thoreau made into the hinterlands of the American northeast: the first in 1846 (while his residence was still on the shores of Walden pond) to the summit of Mount Katahdin; the second in 1853 by steamer, wagon, and canoe to the head of Chesuncook Lake and beyond, and the third, in 1857, to the Allegash and East Branch, in the wilds near the Canadian border. Though parts were published in two magazines during Thoreau's lifetime, these accounts did not appear in book form until 1864, two years after his death.

The present volume encompasses all three narratives (*Ktaadn*, *Chesuncook*, and *The Allegash and East Branch*), preceeded by an interesting 33-page Introduction by editor Hoagland. A seven-section Appendix by Thoreau concludes the text. The volume includes a fairly comprehensive general index. The anachronistic style of indexing and the disparity in typeface between Hoagland's 1988 Introduction and the rest of the book seem to indicate that it is a direct reproduction of an earlier edition, but it is unclear whether or not the original 1864 publication by Ticknor and Fields was used as the source. The 13 × 20 cm paperback is unillustrated save for the front cover, which bears a photograph of the author's stiffly-posed, rather rumpled countenance superimposed over a background of maple trees.

The Maine Woods is in many regards a "conventional" travel book outlining points of interest, travel itineraries, conveyances used, guides engaged, and equipment procured. Yet, even these commonplaces provide a fascinating glimpse into the realities of backwoods travel in the mid-19th century. (In spite of his disdain for Yankee pragmatism, Thoreau went as far as to include, in the appendix, a detailed list of accouterments for a twelve-day long excursion into the Maine woods — including such essentials as sixteen pounds of pork "in an open keg, sawed to fit", twelve pounds of sugar, a check shirt, one

pair drawers, a neck ribbon, two bosoms and collars "to go and come with", three or four old newspapers, much twine, a pint of salt, six lemons "good to correct the pork and warm water", one quart Indian meal, plant-book and red blotting-paper, small pocket spy-glass for birds, pocket-microscope, tape measure, and insect-boxes). All three accounts burst with Thoreau's characteristic wealth of detailed observation, from depictions of the woods, the logging camps, the Indian villages and the woodsman's way of life, to carefully-crafted descriptions of the rainbow flash of trout for the frying pan and other minutiae of the campfire breakfast menu. Thoreau the naturalist is evident in the meticulous lists of plants, birds, and terrestrial fauna interspersed throughout the text and collated in the appendix. Thoreau the anthropologist provides accounts of the twilight days of the native Abnakis, forever changed by contact with the whites, and includes a brief glossary of common Abnaki words and phrases gleaned from Indian guides and acquaintances. And Thoreau the transcendentalist philosopher is everywhere in evidence; insightful pronouncements on the rapid despoilation of the American wilderness and on the isolation of man (native *and* white) from the natural environment echo many of the themes found in *Walden*, and elevate this book far above the rank of other 19th-century travelogues.

Yet *The Maine Woods* remains an absorbing, convivial, often buoyant chronicle of the natural history, native culture, and settling of the American northeast, as well as an entertaining and informative guide to roughing it, 19th-century style. Though perhaps less profound than *Walden*, the *Journal*, or the important expository essays, it adds flesh and substance to the popular caricature of "Thoreau-by-the-pond", and provides further opportunity for contemplating the thoughts of one of the most important natural philosophers of the New World.

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Churchill: Polar Bear Capital of the World

By Mark Fleming. 1988. Hyperion Press, Winnipeg. 94 pp., illus. \$25.00.

Each year, particularly during the brief summer period, thousands of southerners flock to

Churchill, Manitoba — a small dot of civilization set against endless reaches of muskeg on one side, and desolate Hudson Bay on the other. Arriving by commercial jet service or the slow train that creeps hesitantly over tracks built over permafrost or



Brown, David T. 1989. "The Maine Woods, by Henry David Thoreau [Review]." *The Canadian field-naturalist* 103(4), 629–630. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.356272>

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.356272>

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