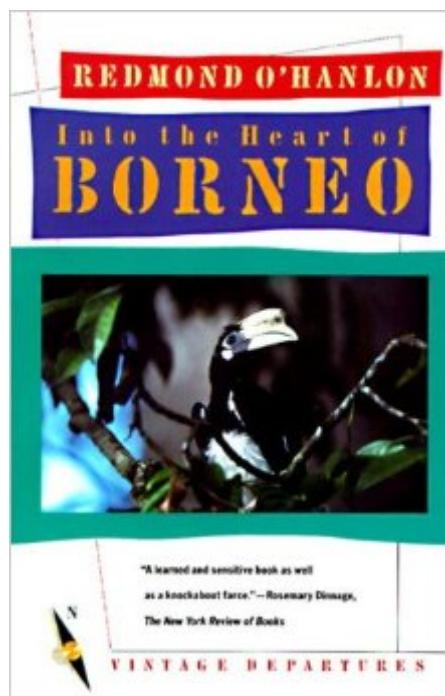


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Into The Heart Of Borneo



Synopsis

The story of a 1983 journey to the center of Borneo, which no expedition had attempted since 1926. O'Hanlon, accompanied by friend and poet James Fenton and three native guides brings wit and humor to a dangerous journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Naturalist and adventurer Redmond O'Hanlon's first travel tome is a timeless classic. His well-observed descriptions of nature are charmingly lyrical and his dry wit (and that of fellow traveller, reknowned poet James Fenton) will leave you laughing on every page. Think Bill Bryson meets Charles Darwin and you might approximate O'Hanlon's writing style. I have read all three of his travel books - this one twice - and though "No Mercy" - his Congo odyssey, is the most breathtakingly ambitious and epic in scope, "Borneo", a lighthearted romp, remains my sentimental favorite. The reader should have a healthy taste for nature and anthropology to fully appreciate any of O'Hanlon's works. Birds, insects and trees share equal billing with the human cast. But O'Hanlon's infectious enthusiasm for flora and fauna, his deprecating humor, his gift of hyperbole and capacity for capturing the nuances of character are enough to keep anyone glued to the page. Also in this book (and even more so in the ribald "No Mercy"), there is a surprising amount of sexuality, as the libidinous habits of the Ibans are often as frankly observed as the mating habits of the Hornbills, Kingfishers and rhinos, adding voyeur to O'Hanlon's talents as naturalist and humorist.

The book is about two educated Englishmen who venture to the island of Borneo determined to

capture the sights of a rare albino rhino. The author sets the humor rolling straight off, and in his sardonic wit, recounts his adventures into the rainforest of Borneo. Duly noted are the risks to life and limb (and appendages) he must be aware of during his adventure. These lessons are given to him by his good natured guides who taunt and tease the overweight white (very white) man. All in good fun, the banter flows both ways. Descriptions of their meals may take a tough stomach on the part of the reader. He spared the reader nothing when it came to describing the delights of dinnertime. The recollection of some repasts, especially the gourmet monster lizard meals were among the more memorable (unfortunately). It was amazing what they scrounged up to eat. I will not spoil all the little surprises they had at mealtime, you will know soon enough when you read the book! Aside from the culinary experience, I found the travel journey delightfully funny and educational. While I know this is NOT the kind of trip I would care to have, I appreciate that the author had the guts to do it. At times, he doubted his stamina, but that is what made the novel work - he was a regular guy doing something outrageously difficult, not to mention dangerous. I can see that this kind of adventure would appeal to many others, but for me, I took his trip in an armchair where I was safe and knew what I was eating for lunch! He is a charming writer, hooking the reader with teasing references. I admit I learned a lot about their culture and some of their more sensitive political and social issues. A quick read, I went out and bought more of his books and look forward to a similar experience.

This the fifth book I've read on traveling in Borneo, and in certain ways it rivals my favorite (Eric Hansen's "A Stranger in the Forest"). O'Hanlon is not only literate and well-informed on the subject (Borneo), but he's one of those highly-educated writers who doesn't take himself (or his elderly, unathletic) traveling companion (a famous poet) too seriously. The screamingly funny parts are when O'Hanlon is either making fun of himself sweating like a pig, covered with flies and falling down or up one muddy trail or another while his Borneo native guides are laughing themselves silly at his ineptness. O'Hanlon is fat and out-of-shape and his small, powerfully strong, local guides never let him forget it for a minute! O'Hanlon is able to describe characters so well, one feels as if you are on the boat with them; the three guides are lovingly drawn (unlike other travel writers who don't view their local guides as complete people). For those with an interest in the ecology of Borneo, birds, or river journeys, there is much to learn through this engrossing read. I recently saw a documentary that filmed the "remote" areas where O'Hanlon's journey took place and I am sad to say it has been totally deforested by the Indonesian timber industry; huge corporations that are destroying the Borneo rainforest due to graft and a lack of enforcement by the Indonesian

goverment... Subjects that O'Hanlon writes about in this book. Think twice about buying teak furniture, much of it comes from poached wood that is illegally cut from Borneo's rainforest, a sad coda to this funny book.

If a book has Redmond O'Hanlon's name on it, buy it. While reading this book, when I wasn't laughing out loud (and I never laugh out loud) I was enthralled with the subject matter. I hate to compare writers, but think Paul Theroux (but not mean), David Quammen and throw in a little Tim Cahill for good measure and you come close to Redmond O'Hanlon. I've read a quite a few travelogues and Redmond O'Hanlon represents the very best of the genre.

I picked this book up while I was vacationing in Holland several years ago. I found it to be one of the funniest books I have ever read. It tells about two friends looking for the elusive albino rhino in Borneo. The first few pages were completely riotous - how they were getting ready for the rigors of jungle travel made me fall out of my chair from laughter. This book is written by a funny guy! It tells his own story, in his own words from his point of view. It is sincere, hilarious and sensitive. A very good story! If you do not want to laugh, do not read this book. If you want to experience some humor in life about a place the majority of us will never go, read it and enjoy! Lighten yourself up a little!

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