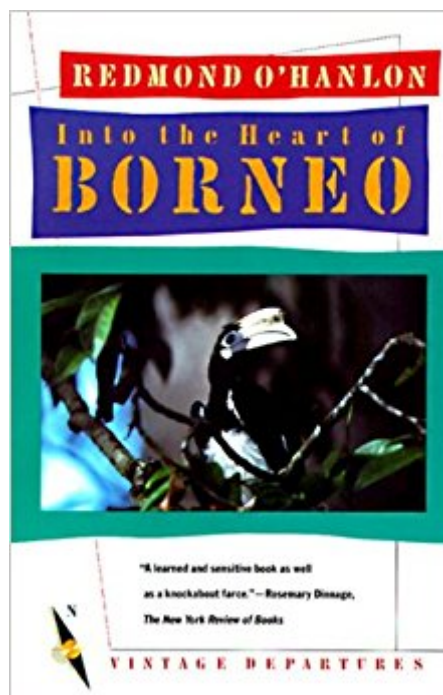


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Into The Heart Of Borneo



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.

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Customer Reviews

"Ye Gods, old man--don't do it!" you're bound to shriek on page 1 of this hilarious travelogue, on which the author lists the hazards that may befall him--vipers, cholera, crocs, ticks, tuberculosis, malaria, rabies, and 1,700 types of parasitic worms among them. After all, portly, over-the-hill London Times literary reviewer Redmond O'Hanlon hasn't done anything more aerobic than flip the pages of a book for decades; he wasn't even a Boy Scout. It's hardly reassuring that his colleague, poet James Fenton--who had the big idea to trek in Borneo--was a Boy Scout. He hated it, and besides, aged, balding Fenton, whom O'Hanlon describes as rather worm-like, sounds like he's a likely lunch for a swooping black eagle. But on they trod--with the much-needed help of three Iban natives and an unseen, though oft-quoted river god--through jungle, across rivers whose height may rise seven feet overnight, and via native villages (where they often have late-night parties), with one goal in mind: seeing the fabled Borneo rhino. Fenton is nearly swept away in a whirlpool, they subsist on jungle-worm gruel, and ripping off sucking leeches is a near-daily occurrence, but cultural and natural insights and adventures abound in this rip-roaringly funny and deftly written travelogue that will have you chortling out loud. --Melissa Rossi

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.

In the Heart of Borneo opens up in a Chinese hotel in a river town, a jump off point to the heart of Borneo. Redmond first wrestles with a giant cockroach. He takes a neat nip of malt whiskey before an afternoon siesta. And dreams of his old schoolmaster. He thinks he's under some kind of Borneo spell. When he questions his travel companion who reports negative on a similar dream, thus starts the book. It's a trippy start to a very trippy book that's fuelled with local rice whiskey and a keen observation for the absurd. Redmond is a throwback from the 19th century. And his prose is a joy to read. He doesn't mind taking the piss out of himself. He plays the intrepid traveler Alfred Russel Wallace throughout the trip who spent many years traveling around the Indonesia archipelago. It's what travel writing should be like. But who has time to trek in the jungle in Borneo for two months. Unless of course it's Redmond O'Hanlon. He's an eccentric for sure. At the Redmond lodge, literary luminaries drink at O'Hanlon's table and wonder when they will be asked to accompany him on his next adventure. A poet isn't spared. Ian McEwan is. Two months traveling in primary rainforest in Borneo, Redmond dishes up a unique perspective, peppered with 19th century writers from Alfred Russel Wallace to Charles Darwin. James Fenton the poet has his head in Les Misérables, and Redmond plays interlocutor between the guides, the poet and the reader. Redmond won't travel without his bergan - a travel bag on wheels - that's packed with his guidebooks. Birds of Borneo by Smythies is dog eared and a point of reference throughout the book. This book should appeal to anyone with a bird watching bent. James is always musing and sometimes is forced into being court jester in the long houses. He's the poet from England and quite distinguished. He can even teach the Ukit the seven step disco. Their real quest is the search for the Borneo Rhinoceros. They risk their lives down Borneo rapids. The description of James falling out of the boat and nearly drowning is both farcical and an indication of the perils of their trip. "James's bald head, white and fragile as an owl's egg, was sweeping round in the whirlpool below, spinning, bobbing up and down in the foaming water, each orbit of the current carrying him with inches of the black rocks at its edge." He's eventually rescued by Leon the heroic guide who is always dishing up cultural gems. Leon competes with James as muses for Redmond. Near the end of the book Redmond climbs a mountain and James rests at the base. James is getting fed up with all the hiking. His excuse is he doesn't want to trespass on the spirits of the mountain. Redmond has crossed over into Indonesia's Kalimantan side. His guides cut away some foliage, which gives him a grand view of the river he

has been boating up for the past few weeks. When Redmond returns he and the guides sneak up behind James. James has been thinking of headhunters all day and now he thinks it's his number when they spring him by surprise. The usual passive James gets his revenge. He has spotted a rare bird. Redmond is sceptical. James describes it. It's a very rare bird indeed. But James gets him good later, when they are out of the forest. In the hotel he steals his towel Redmond is taking a shower. He invites a room full of hookers next door into Redmond's room who is covering his private parts with a towel. The book ends in a long house, after lots of drinking and shenanigans. The senile elder, the best hunter in his day, confirms he killed eight Borneo Rhinoceros when he was young. But hasn't seen one since. They never actually did see the Borneo Rhinoceros. But that was beside the point. They did find the Heart of Borneo and created a few myths along the way. But the book is quite a serious tome on anthropology. Redmond knows he's a bright spark, but never loses your attention too long with his high brow rambles. Interesting is the debate going on between Darwin and Wallace. Even Redmond knows that Darwin patronised Wallace. Redmond sets the record straight. Into the Heart of Borneo is a tribute to Alfred Russel Wallace, who equally discovered the origin of species.

A great way to experience the worst travel destinations, the most unsanitary accommodation, and the least reliable travel companions within the safety of your own kindle. O'Hanlon refuses to allow logic to moderate impulsiveness in almost every travel decision he makes ... and what could be the harm in that, unless you were in Borneo. His high spirits, intelligence and completely ungovernable drive to complete a quest make O'Hanlon the most delightful, and infuriating, guide to places you just shouldn't visit. I know Borneo is dangerous; I've read about the dangers of dengue, typhoid, malaria, amoebic dysentery and a hundred other things that would stop me from buying a ticket to this destination, O'Hanlon has read the same stuff, but strides confidently through these warnings and urges the unknown to hurl everything it's got at him. Thank heavens for this witty, erudite, and fearless man. Because his writing is so engaging, and his attitude so courageous/foolhardy, he allows wimps like me to see the world that would have been otherwise hidden. O'Hanlon isn't a hero, athlete, champion or adventurer - he's a bit like me, except brave, and funny, and less likely to scream when he's frightened. Truly engaging and funny... a delight.

This twenty-five year old tale of two Brits being transported by their faithful guides into the deepest jungle of Borneo is amusing and interesting. Redmond O'Hanlon and the smoking (as in smoking) James Fenton (improbably) the Queen's Poet Laureate embark on a journey to discover the highest

mountain of Borneo and hopefully the white Rhino, possibly an island dweller and certainly unseen in decades. O'Hanlon takes a whimsical approach to this travelogue. The stars are his faithful tribal guides and the locals he meets as he journeys up river and away from modern life. Particularly enjoyable are the village stops where he and his crew are (usually) met with feasts, libations, dance and the occasional memory from the local chieftain's female relatives. The clash of cultures provides many funny moments without slipping into condescension. Although there is a lot of discussion of birds and waxing about the various properties of rushes, finches, yellow-bellied-sap-suckers and the like, the book is informative and interesting with the occasional chuckle thrown in. Altogether an enjoyable arm chair trip.

Yes and no. Yes, because these two old British stuffies set off on this journey just the way most "inexperienced" travelers would -- by the seat of their pants. No, because I think I would like a better idea of cuisine before I went. This charming narrative of two British amateur travelers inspires humor and awe. Of course they get into all sorts of problems and handle them with dry wit. But they also give stunning and lyrical descriptions of the people and the places they visited. This was a living travel adventure without a tour-guide in sight. Best of all, our intrepid souls showed respect and genuine affection for the native peoples they met. I didn't see any bigotry in this book -- except that which they found in themselves and discarded with ease. Readers should be warned that many of the descriptions of the cultures they visited are very vivid and weak stomachs may not enjoy the unflinching pictures the story evokes.

I just reviewed *In Trouble*, I read *Borneo* first, at recommend of Richard Dawkins, I loved both, please read them in sequence for full effect, great adventure and humor, I esp enjoyed his descriptive expertise and interest in birds and other wildlife.

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