



NOTES from THE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

AGS Signs Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History

Jerome E. Dobson, President, AGS, Professor of Geography, University of Kansas

The AGS Council recently approved a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH). On July 13, 2006, President Jerry Dobson visited PAIGH headquarters in Mexico City to sign the document along with Secretary General Santiago Borrero.



President Jerry Dobson, Secretary General Santiago Borrero, and Bowman Expedition Leader Peter Herlihy at the MOU signing in Mexico City.

PAIGH is a specialized organization of the Organization of American States, officially an Inter Governmental Organization of consultative and technical nature comprising more than 21 member states. Its objectives include encouraging, coordinating, and publicizing cartographic, geographic, geophysical, and historical studies and related sciences of interest to the Americas. PAIGH promotes and conducts studies, projects, and training in geography, history, archaeology,

anthropology, geophysics, and related disciplines and promotes cooperation among the institutes of such disciplines in the Americas.

The purpose of the MOU is to provide a framework for a continuing liaison between the two organizations. Subsequent to the signing, AGS provided information on two topics resulting from action items brought home from the meeting: one on geographic education and another on land mine symbology. We are especially interested in Secretary General Borrero's proposal for AGS to join in an effort to remap the Americas. We

are well positioned to begin in Mexico and the Antilles, through projects that are already funded, and later expand to other countries with sponsors yet to be identified.

Bowman Expedition to the Antilles

Jerome E. Dobson

President, AGS, Professor of Geography, University of Kansas

Last issue I wrote about our Bowman Expedition to Mexico in 2005 and 2006. This time I'll write about our new Bowman Expedition to the Greater and Lesser Antilles.



As you may recall, the existing Mexico Indigena Project was established as the prototype for a much larger concept whose ultimate purpose is to combat geographic ignorance in all sectors of society. At full funding, AGS would send a geography professor and two or three graduate students to every country in the world for a full semester each year, with teams rotating on a five-year cycle so that

each country is understood by five separate teams. Each team would collect open source GIS data and conduct one research project of the investigator's choice. Allies at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, marketed the concept and funded the prototype. Now, a

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Op-Ed Program

Over the past three years the American Geographical Society has developed a Writers Network and a way of distributing opinion pieces by them to newspapers around the country.

The articles are in the form of op-ed pieces by geographers that AGS sends via email to a continually growing list of more than 400 newspapers. Newspapers as large as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Chicago Sun Times* and as small as the *Calhoun [Georgia] Times* have published the articles.

AGS Councilor Deborah Popper was the creator of this program. She continues to be the driving force behind it. The goal of the program is to make readers aware of the importance of geographical factors in critical contemporary issues.

On average AGS is now distributing one article every other week.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors, not of the American Geographical Society. - Mary Lynne Bird

See Sample Op-Ed Articles, pages 2 & 4



Reading (about Cuba) is Fundamental by Joseph L. Scarpaci

Reading is fundamental. So is academic travel to foreign lands, even ones with whom we are at odds. It is an essential part of academic inquiry. People-to-people cultural exchanges humanize an ‘enemy’ who is otherwise too easily demonized.

There is rich precedence for this belief. The late Senator Fulbright’s pioneering program, President Richard Nixon’s ping-pong diplomacy with China, and President Ronald Reagan’s cultural visits to the former ‘Evil Empire’ embraced these ideas.

As Fidel Castro approaches his 80th birthday this August and continues to rule during this, his now 8th American presidency, it is time to rethink our relationship with the ‘Evil Empire’ in the Caribbean.

Between 1990 and the summer of 2004, I led 22 legally-sanctioned classes to Cuba which amounted to more than 500 students earning undergraduate and graduate credit issued by Virginia Tech. A half dozen master’s theses and 4 Ph.D. dissertations stemmed from this travel. Students were not there to, gasp! dance salsa or sip mojitos on the beach. I collaborated with Cuban academics to produce a book on urban development in Cuba.

In 2002, however, the already onerous process of license review by the U.S. Treasury Department became even more complicated. For the first time in more than 20 years as a college professor, someone other than a tenure and promotion committee questioned the academic and cultural value of my programs in Cuba. My application materials to the US Treasury were returned several times. Treasury told me that I had to document the number of “regular Cubans” that would have contact with my students. I needed to include more information about the nature of conversations at visits to planning offices, public housing complexes, farms, and other venues where the exchanges are—to some extent—semi-structured and spontaneous. I complied unhappily with these mandates, because I knew the students’ experience would outweigh the violations of academic freedom.

Ironically, our research has been validated externally. When the first edition of our book (*Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*, with Roberto Segre and Mario Coyula) was published in London by John Wiley in 1997, I was uninvited to a conference in South Florida. Unbeknownst to us, the book-jacket designer selected red, white and black as colors and did not know they were also the colors of the July 26th Movement. Alas, some groups judged our book by its cover. Later, a south Florida book representative told me that book vendors would reject a book of this nature. Fortunately, the

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Expedition to the Antilles...

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major step has been taken toward implementing the concept beyond its initial prototype.

First, let’s give credit where it’s due. We are able to proceed mainly because of the phenomenal success of the prototype led by my KU colleague Peter Herlihy in collaboration with Derek Smith of Carleton University and Miguel Aguilar Robledo of the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí. Last year they conducted fieldwork in the Huasteca Region of Mexico, this year in Oaxaca State. I’ll report on their project again later. For now, I’ll simply say that their results stunningly prove what geographers can do anywhere in the world to learn about foreign lands and people, establish relationships with people and institutions, collect unclassified information, and build open source geographic information systems (GIS) that can be employed by any other investigator, regardless of discipline.

Now, we are pleased to announce that a partnership led by the American Geographical Society has won an award for fieldwork throughout the Antilles Region. The proposal was submitted competitively to the Department of Defense. The award amounts to a total of \$255,598 and covers funding for one year with renewal likely for a second year and possibly for a third.

The project will be designated as the Bowman Expedition to the Antilles in honor of Isaiah Bowman, the Society’s Director from 1915 to 1935. The region presents an unusual challenge because it contains so many island nations. We have addressed this need by engaging experts from eight different universities. Over three years, recipients of Bowman Expedition funds will include the following institutions and tasks:

- Kansas State University has accepted primary responsibility for building and maintaining a multi-resolution, open source GIS database for the entire Antilles Region.
- Virginia Tech will conduct a comparative analysis of water resource issues in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.
- LSU will focus on land use and land cover dynamics as they relate to tourism, the dominant economic sector in the Leeward segment of the Lesser Antilles.
- Miami and Hofstra Universities will compare and contrast rural economic conditions, land use change, and job prospects in three independent countries of the southern Lesser Antilles.
- Indiana University will conduct field-based research to investigate the consequences of rapid urbanization in Trinidad and rapid coastal zone tourism-related development in Tobago.
- The University of Kansas will coordinate the effort among participants, report to AGS, and interface onsite with the sponsor.

Additional proposals have been submitted and others will be submitted for Bowman Expeditions to other world regions. We’ll keep you posted as the program advances.



THE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY UNITES JOB SEEKERS & EMPLOYERS WITH GEOjobs

Getting lost in the shuffle of large online job boards? You're not alone! In an age of information technology where instant gratification to our need for news and information is increasing, online job boards are becoming more and more popular. When you use one of the large online job boards, you are mixed in with Accountants, Sales, and IT. At an association job board, such as GEOJobs, you can connect with job seekers and employers specifically related to your industry.

The American Geographical Society (AGS) in 2006 launched GEOJobs, the premier electronic recruitment resource for Geography related jobs. With GEOJobs, employers and recruiters can access the most qualified talent pool with relevant work experience to fulfill staffing needs. Active job seekers can showcase their skills and work experience to prospective employers to find the best job opportunities. With GEOJobs, it's a win-win situation for both job seekers and employers alike.

Employers can enjoy online job management, resume searching access, and enjoy competitive pricing at a fraction of the cost of the large job boards. By posting your job with GEOJobs, you can also build company awareness among industry professionals.

Job seekers reap the rewards of free access to job searches and resume posting (confidentially), and receive automatic job notification. For more information, or to post your job or resume today, check out <http://geojobs.amergeog.org/>. Be on the look out for package incentives and marketing tips!

GEOjobs...Bringing employers and job seekers together! <http://GEOjobs.amergeog.org>.

AGS to Co-Sponsor Race, Ethnicity, and Place Conference III

The American Geographical Society is a proud co-sponsor of the third international Race, Ethnicity, and Place Conference at Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas, November 1- 4, 2006. AGS Executive Director, Mary Lynne Bird, has organized a special session on "Teaching Race and Ethnicity at the Collegiate Level."

This conference follows successful conferences at Binghamton University (SUNY), one of the nation's top fifty public universities, and Howard University, the "Harvard" of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Founded by Binghamton University's Geography Department, it has expanded to include partnerships with Howard, Texas State, and The Association of American Geographers, and more recently, with British Petroleum and St. Phillips Community College. The AGS has joined with a number of other organizations to become co-sponsors.

Nearly 500 people, including students, faculty and professionals from over 80 universities and colleges and more than twenty-five public and private agencies, and representatives from 15 nations, have pre-registered for the conference. This conference includes distinguished elected officials and university presidents, including Binghamton University President Lois DeFleur, and individuals from multiple disciplines who will discuss contemporary diversity and equity issues, particularly those affecting Latinos and African Americans. Major themes are quality education, healthcare accessibility, affordable housing, and immigration.

Conference highlights include:

- The latest research on the connections of race/ethnicity and place
- Interdisciplinary setting with participation by scholars, researchers, professionals, and students from geography and other disciplines
- Concurrent sessions with papers, posters, panels, workshops, and an ethnic art show
- Free registration to student participants
- Dining includes a welcome BBQ with entertainment, two breakfasts, two lunches, and a closing dinner with entertainment – All Free to first 300 registrants
- Workshops – Free on first-come, first-served basis:
 - Diversity Workshop
 - GIS Workshop on Race and Ethnicity
 - Measuring Race/Ethnicity Disparities
- Five Fieldtrips throughout Central and South Texas – Free on first-come, first-served basis:
 - Culture Groups of the Texas Hill Country
 - Ethnic Landscapes of the San Marcos and Guadalupe Rivers of Texas
 - Ghettos, Enclaves, and Citadels in Austin
 - Hispano San Antonio
 - A Taste of Hill Country German Culture
- Free transportation from/to Austin and San Antonio Airports and Free shuttle service from/to San Marcos Conference Hotels

The conference program is available through the AGS website.

John W. Frazier, Conference Founder and Director, AGS Councilor, and Professor of Geography, Binghamton University

Lawrence A. Estaville, Local Director, REP III, Professor of Geography, Texas State University



IN MEMORIAM

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wife, Ellen K. Sperry Brush (an anthropologist) and his daughter Karen Alexandra Brush (an archeologist) were among the first women to join. Dr. Brush's final word on the matter was, "It was highly bizarre to call ourselves an explorers' club and exclude half the world."



One-time AGS Councilor **Francis L. Kellogg** died in New York City on April 6, 2006 at age 89.

Kellogg, who served as a special assistant to two secretaries of state, William P. Rogers and Henry A. Kissinger, was a member of the AGS Council from 1984 through 1989. In his diplomatic posts he worked on refugee and migration affairs and at one time was chairman of the executive committee of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Ambassador Kellogg served as chief of protocol for the U.S. Mission to the United Nations at several different times.

Kellogg's interest in ecology and environmental issues drew him to AGS. It also led him to the presidency of the World Wildlife Fund and resulted in his becoming a founding member and president of the Charles A. and Anne Morrow Lindbergh Foundation, established in 1977 to promote a balance between technological advancement and environmental protection. On his farm in Bedford, New York, he raised several exotic species of cattle and chickens.

Salvatore J. "Sam" Natoli died on July 4th at age 76. He had been in failing health for several years.

Sam was a decades-long Fellow and supporter of AGS. As educational affairs director at the Association of American Geographers for almost three decades, he worked with all the other organizations in the geographic community, including AGS, to encourage stronger geography education programs in the nation's schools. Sam played a key role in the establishment of the Geographic Education National Implementation Project (GENIP) in 1985, which brought the American Geographical Society, the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for Geographic Education, and the National Geographic Society together to work on issues affect-

ing K-12 geographic education. That task-oriented consortium continues to this day.

Sam's contributions to geographic education extended beyond this country with work on the U.S./U.S.S.R. history and geography textbook exchange program in Moscow and Leningrad 1989 and as a delegate to the International Society for Educational Information Inc. Conference in Japan in 1990.

Although Sam was basically retired for many years, he continued to apply his editorial skills to special publications for the National Council for Geographical Education and the National Council for the Social Studies until very recently.

After a long illness, long-time AGS Fellow **William A. Withington** died on January 5, 2006, just a few weeks short of his 82nd birthday.

Bill's association with the American Geographical Society began in 1961 with the publication by the *Geographical Review* of an article by him on resorts and tourism in Indonesia, followed in 1962 by an article in *FOCUS* on Cambodia. In 1971 he wrote another piece on Cambodia for *FOCUS* as well as one on Indonesia and a third on population issues and economic development.

Bill became an AGS Fellow shortly after he earned his PhD from Northwestern University in 1955 and remained a Fellow and loyal supporter of AGS for the rest of his life. Bill and his wife Anne were among the first to join AGS's Galileo Circle. They took full advantage of the opportunities given that group to accompany the AGS Council on annual site visits to important institutions where geographers play key roles in the core mission of the host organization. As a result, they became acquainted with many of the Councilors. Bill was an enthusiastic photographer, and our files are full of pictures he took on those visits.

After Bill retired from the geography department at the University of Kentucky in 1989, he and Anne, always enterprising travelers, spread their wings and set out to cover as much of the globe as they could each year. Upon returning from each trip, Bill would send us detailed journals about where they had gone and what they had seen. A little thing like retirement could not overcome his lifetime habit of taking field notes. Surely Bill Withington was a geographer to the end.



IN MEMORIAM



Roman Drazniowsky, 1922-2006

By Harvey Flad, Vassar College

Roman Drazniowsky was one of the foremost map librarians in geography. He joined the American Geographical Society in 1962 as map curator and later moved with the AGS collection of maps, atlases and books, as well as the editorial office of *Current Geographical Publications*, to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1978. While at AGS, he taught courses on map librarianship at Columbia University and continued to lecture at UWM's School of Library and Information Science until his retirement in 1993. Shortly after joining AGS, he developed a manual for cataloguing and filing rules for maps and atlases that became a standard in the field (Drazniowsky, 1964).

Roman was a fierce nationalist and vocal advocate for his native Ukraine. After migrating to North America after World War II, he continued his interest in Eastern European geopolitics through his professional work and his personal efforts in the Ukrainian émigré community. Along with Lee Podra, his assistant at AGS, and a number of other eastern Europeans who worked in the cartography department and had also emigrated to the United States after the war, Roman never lost his passion for his former homeland, nor his antipathy towards the Soviet Union.

He had received his doctorate from Graz,

Austria. With his penetrating eyes from under his dark and pronounced eyebrows, and a professorial smile, "Dr. D", as he was known, would talk at length about European and American issues with great fervor, mixed together with his inimitable pronunciation of geographical terms (Flad, 2004). Cataloguing maps published in journals or by foreign governments was never a quiet task with Dr. D. For example, when Bob Dickson, an undergraduate student from Kalamazoo College came to work as an intern in the map library for a semester, Dr. D considered it an opportunity for him to lead a seminar in political geography, always interjected with his strongly held opinions. After retirement he taught and served as rector at the Free University of Ukraine in Munich, Germany.

Drazniowsky, R. 1964. *Cataloguing and Filing Rules for Maps and Atlases in the Society's Collection*. (Mimeographed and Offset Publication No. 4, Revised). New York: American Geographical Society.

Flad, H. 2004. Audubon Terrace, The American Geographical Society, and the Sense of Place. *Geographical Review* 94 (4): 519-529.

Charles F. Brush III died on June 1, 2006 at age 83. An archeologist who mixed mountain climbing with high altitude scuba diving, rock climbing, and running marathons (beginning at age 54), Brush was a Councilor of the American Geographical Society from 1972 until 2004, when he became Councilor Emeritus.

Brush earned his doctorate in archeology at Columbia University in 1969. He discovered some of Mexico's most ancient pottery as well as evidence of very early alloying of bronze in Mexico. When he turned to other challenges, at the bottom of a volcano crater lake in the Andes, he discovered a new species of crustaceans, dependent on sulphur instead of oxygen.

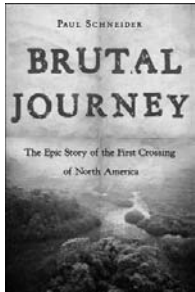
Dr. Brush was active in the Explorers Club and when he was president, from 1978 to 1981, carried on a successful campaign to admit women to membership. In the end, he cast the deciding vote on the club's conservative board of directors that allowed the members to vote on the matter. When the members decided firmly in favor of admitting women, Dr. Brush's

EARTHWORKS

By Peter Lewis



The worst journey in the world will never be known, because an important part of its worstness is that no one is aware it ever happened. The peerless horror of it all dies with the traveler; there will be no book deal, no movie rights.



But for grinding misery of Sisyphean duration, consider the journey of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, as Paul Schneider so artfully does in *BRUTAL JOURNEY* (Henry Holt). Cabeza de Vaca was a man of dignity and parts, Charles V's imperial treasurer attending Panfilo de Narvaez's expedition to Florida in 1528. He wound up eating spiders in the nude. For eight years.

Well, not only spiders. He also ate plenty of nothing. And he wasn't always nude, though he sure seemed to be at inopportune moments. For eight years.

Schneider's polished narrative draws on two firsthand narratives of the debacle, but he also tries to square them with archaeological reports, dissertations, and academic debates. He puts some flesh on the story's bones by inferring details from other, better-documented Spanish intrusions into the region. "The end result is a mosaic of pedigreed 'facts' that when viewed as a whole bring a plausible rendering of the story to life," Schneider writes. His thoroughness and skepticism lend credence to the assertion.

Cabeza de Vaca's tale is, simply, a doozy. Narvaez had been granted a contract by Charles V to conquer what makes up today's gulf coast from Texas to Florida. Cabeza de Vaca was along to make sure Charles got his cut of the action.

At landfall, off Florida, the local Indian population knew trouble when they saw it. In what was to become time-honored fashion, they pointed to the horizon when Narvaez pressed them about a city of gold. "That way. Ten, eleven days," their gestures suggested.

Narvaez went north toward fool's gold. Weeks later the starving army found itself stranded in a soggy, disease-bearing nowhere without a plan. They broke for the coast, which proved to be a nightmare of endless tussocks. Schneider captures the terrible urgency of their situation with a smooth, professorial voice that mingles color with reserve.

Calamity tripped over folly, which stumbled headlong into disaster. At one point, having stripped to relaunch their boat, which promptly sank, the men watched their weapons, what little remained of their food and barter goods, and their clothes disappear into the surf. They would die soon anyway, of exposure, disease, mishap, and warfare, all but Cabeza de Vaca and three others.

Schneider unfurls this horribly ill-fated expedition against the social sensibilities and political designs prevailing in Spain at the start of the 16th century. For instance, it is one thing to be caught nude in public, the fodder of many a bad dream. It was all the more mortifying for someone of the Spanish upper crust, who placed a premium on fine clothing. To be well dressed was to be civilized. No self-respecting conquistador, no bringer-of-the-faith, sallied forth naked. So who's the heathen now, Senor

McCOLL FAMILY FELLOWSHIP

Eight Annual Competition

The McColl Family Fellowship, given by Dr. and Mrs. Robert W. McColl, consists of round trip air fare to any place in the world of the candidate's choosing. The candidate must secure funding for other expenses from other sources.

The only obligation of the Fellow is to write an article based on the visit abroad that is suitable for publication in *FOCUS on Geography* magazine and that is submitted to the editor within six months upon return from the trip.

As is true of all *FOCUS on Geography* authors, candidates must be geographers or others "who think like geographers and write like journalists." Currently, one fellowship is being offered for each year. Selection is by a committee chosen by the AGS Council.

The winner of the first McColl Fellowship was Dr. Joseph Hobbs for travel to Madagascar in 2000 for first hand study of the human use of caves there. His article appeared in the summer 2001 issue of *FOCUS on Geography*. The second McColl Fellowship was awarded to Dr. Kendra McSweeney for work on indigenous response to hurricane damage in the rain forest of eastern Honduras; her article appeared in the Spring 2002 issue of *FOCUS on Geography*. The third award went to Dr. Roger Balm for work in 2002 on early exploration sites in Peru; his article appeared in the Spring 2004 issue of the magazine.

The fourth fellowship was awarded to Josh Lepawsky for research in 2003 on intelligence technology in Malaysia. The fifth award went to Dr. Susan Mains for research in 2004 on the experiences of Jamaican migrants living in Toronto. The sixth award went to Dr. William G. Moseley for research on the knowledge and attitudes of farm workers about land reform in South Africa. Last year, Dr. Sarah J. Halvorson won the award with a proposal to assess the response and recovery efforts in Pakistani-administered Kashmir after the cataclysmic earthquake of 2005.

The eighth McColl Fellowship is to be awarded for the year 2007. Applications for it must be received in the AGS offices by October 16, 2006. They are to consist of the candidate's curriculum vitae; a covering letter of no more than three pages that describes a) the proposed trip, b) the reasons for selecting that itinerary, and c) the candidate's particular competence for doing field there; and a statement of the sum requested.

Applications should be sent to:

McColl Family Fellowship Committee
The American Geographical Society
120 Wall Street, Suite 100
New York, New York 10005-3904

For further information contact Mary Lynne Bird at (212)422-5456 voice, (212)422-5480 fax, MLBird@amer-geog.org or see the AGS website at <http://www.amer-geog.org>

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EARTHWORKS

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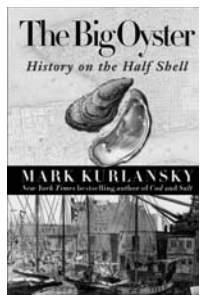
Cabeza de Vaca?

Thank Cabeza de Vaca, though, for his descriptions of life among the Indians. "There is no one alive today who identifies him- or herself as a Mariames or Yguases, or even a Karankawa; no one to add oral history or traditional knowledge to the accounts of the 1530s." Conquistador-bureaucrat turned anthropologist. Not a career move Cabeza de Vaca would have anticipated or appreciated, but, in Schneider's hands, it makes for a great bad trip.

* * *

A daring soul slid that first oyster down the gullet. The shapely clam, the colorful mussel---these aren't challenges, they're invitations. The oyster is weird and warty, and that's before you see the quivering plasm inside.

But oysters were once everywhere. They grew profusely in river estuaries, where human populations also liked to gather. Oysters became a democratic foodstuff: go to the waterside, pick, eat. And they were eaten with gusto, though for sheer oyster bingeing, New Yorkers take the half shell. That is where Mark



Kurlansky enters the picture in this well and sharply told history of a shellfish and its impact on the evolution of a great city: THE BIG OYSTER (Ballantine).

Oysters touched New York City in an intimate, joyful way. They pumped oxygen into the growing burg---gastronomically, socially, economically, architecturally---as surely as they filtered the water of its harbor. Their loss through human malfeasance is as melancholy as it was stupid and foreseeable. Kurlansky gets the ache of the bivalve's tale just right.

Back when, the estuary of the Hudson River was encrusted with oysters, some 350 square miles of beds. It is estimated that New York Harbor was home to fully half the world's oysters. The Dutch of New Amsterdam simply glommed them. They may not have carried pearls as the East India Company fervently hoped, but they figured in recipes that called for "an obscene quantity of oysters."

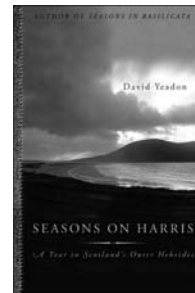
Oysters were social levelers. Loved by all, they could be enjoyed on the street, like hot dogs and pretzels are now. You could descend into an oyster cellar, identified by the red balloon outside, and partake of the Canal Street Plan: six cents bought you all you could eat. For significantly more cents, you could have them at Delmonico's. They were star attraction at the great, handsome waterfront markets, where you could go for a late-night dozen. Prostitutes ate them and so did Diamond Jim Brady; the bigger the better, even if a visiting William Makepeace Thackeray complained that they were "like eating a baby."

They were not only a cheap source of food, but a readily available means of income for the city's poor. They provided work for shuckers and barrel makers and carters. African Americans were a significant presence on the oyster trade, from tongers to tavern owners. With the coming of the steamboat, then the Erie Canal, then the railroads, fortunes were made in marketing oysters. Abraham Lincoln, as an aspiring politico, liked to throw oyster parties.

Oysters are born environmentalists, cleaning their habitat, and serve as indicator species reflecting a decline in water quality. And, boy, did the water quality decline. While overharvesting was an ever-present threat, it was pollution that smoked the oyster. As human population increased, so did the flow of raw sewage into the waterways. Industrial sewage soon joined the household waste: heavy metals, polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, pesticides, PCBs, asbestos and solvents, Agent Orange for goodness sake. It's no mystery where the oysters went, or the fish for that matter, including the sharks, whose keen sense of smell warned them off.

Kurlansky's point that "the history of New York oysters is a history of New York itself---its wealth, its strength, its excitement, its greed, its thoughtlessness, its destructiveness...its filth," is bright, original, and convincing, unlike the ballyhoo of civic boosters claiming the waterway has returned. Consider the sharks. They still live in great number right outside the harbor. Outside the harbor. As for the oyster, it is only a shadow, and inedible at that.

* * *



David Yeadon's SEASONS ON HARRIS (HarperCollins) chronicles a garulous, well-spent year on the Outer Hebridean island of Harris.

Harris is tailor made for Yeadon, a writer whose affinities have always veered toward wild, remote, and wracked landscapes. "So what is the lure of Harris?" he asks. "Try silence, wilderness, solitude, dramatic soul-nurturing scenery, and a sense of coming home to something bold, basic, and honest."

Be that as it may, there is also lots of good talking in these pages. Yeadon can sing the glories of Harris tweed's look and feel, but he won't know about fixing lichen-colored dyestuff to the wool with fermented urine unless he talks to the source, the weaver. And though his "randoming" drives will allow him to unfurl his formidable talent in describing a landscape---Harris possesses a fantastic array of scenery, from Caribbean-blue waters to lunar moorlands, and a quality of light, from pearl to lemon-silver, that would make Paris envious---he wouldn't be able to explain the art of poaching unless he spoke to the poacher, or what it is like to lobster The Minch unless he shared the fisherman's boat, or that chinks are appearing in the Island's Sabbath armor unless he was sharing a wee dram on the very day.

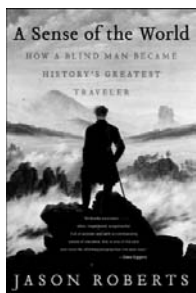
There is much beauty in the details: tiny dark lochans, wild glens and corries, the inside of a "black house," the call of a corn-crake, a song by a peat fire. But it is in his chats with people who live on the isles, be they crofters or painters, shopkeepers or boat builders, fishing guides or writers, that emerges the hopeful sense of resolution that Harris will not lose its distinctiveness, that it will remain a place central to its own existence, with its stories and whiskey, fitful weather, standing stones, and cottage-based tweed industry. Nike recently placed an order for 9,500 meters of the cloth, and hold the fermented urine.

Yeadon takes in all the plights and possibilities of traditional island life through an exquisitely sensitive, wide-angle lens.



* * *

From Jason Roberts comes the first and very welcome, full-scale biography of James Holman---A SENSE OF THE WORLD (HarperCollins)---the great, early-19th-century world voyager, who also happened to be blind.

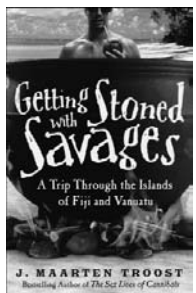


Holman was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy when he inexplicably lost his eyesight. He was fortunate to be admitted to England's Naval Knights, a sanctuary at Windsor Castle. With his half-pension from the navy and the small financial benefit from being a knight, he made eighty-four pounds sterling a year (at a time when a government clerk earned 600).

But as Roberts---a smooth, thoughtful, and atmospheric writer---so ably chronicles, Holman was not about to let the business of life pass him. He wanted to travel and it would be on a shoestring. Sightless, yes, yet Holman was a wizard at haptic perception, or touch-based understanding. "Where vision gulps, tactility sips," observes Roberts, "successively over time."

There is no doubting that Holman took in great draughts of sensory input, which coalesced into well-honed senses of place. And places were what Holman was all about. His feet were rheumatic, but they itched. His first journey was a Grand Tour-style circuit about Western Europe, resulting in a well-received book about his adventure. Then it was off to Russia, crossing to Siberia in a cart with a Tartar postilion, shadowed by police, through the "path-swallowing marshlands known as the Baraba Steppes," into the dark and cold. Fernando Po is the next stop, where he works to thwart the slave trade.

On he fares, returning with reports of soy sauce, hunting kangaroos, plastering walls in the Indian fashion, to Brazil and Zanzibar, New Zealand and Ceylon and the Levant, three or five or six years in duration. Probably 250,000 miles worth, writes Roberts, who himself deserves readers' admiration for not only making each step a pleasure to read, but for opening our eyes to so remarkably forgotten an individual.



* * *

In GETTING STONED WITH SAVAGES (Broadway), J. Maarten Troost returns to the South Pacific---where he had previously spent a couple years on Kiribati---when the sensory overload of life in Washington, D.C., gave way to a gilded weariness.

His existence as a well-paid drone for the World Bank got to Troost. He yearned for his days on Kiribati, at their wonder and mystery, of water so blue it made him gasp. Forget the human feces on the beach, ringworm and dengue fever, the unrelieved diet of rice and rotten fish, and the dreadful time the beer delivery went to the wrong island. Living on a South Pacific island could be grim, horrifying and revolting, Troost writes, but never less than interesting.

So off he packs with his wife to Vanuatu, where the earth is alive and well and reminds you of it everyday, as volcanoes perk and gnashing crustal plates shimmer with earthquakes, not to

mention the cyclones and shark-infested waters. Fear not, for Troost works hard to find all that is fine and weird on the former British-French condominium. There will be coconut shells filled with kava---the local recreational intoxicant wrung from a masticated spitball of pepper bush root---and pondering the impulse behind cannibalism ("while I may not have completely understood what holy communion was all about, Catholicism did allow me to see the nuances in cannibalism"), delving into the spectacular governmental corruption of the island, and confronting a foot-long centipede as he prepares to meet the lashes of his first tropical storm.

Troost is a travel writer who delivers the gratifying, old-school goods: curious cultural practices; encounters with venomous, nay murderous, creatures; plus a smart reading of recent history, with all the mayhem wrought by European interlopers.

* * *

The past as prologue: The story of Hurricane Camille, which until recently defined the apex of tropical energy and fearsomeness, as told by Stefan Bechtel in ROAR OF THE HEAVENS (Citadel).

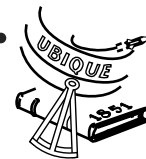


During the summer of 1969, nature opened her Pandora's box and released Camille. She perhaps took her first steps as a tropical wave of energy out of the Ethiopian Highlands, made a lazy parabolic arc through the southern Atlantic, then hit the cauldron of warm sea air in the Caribbean.

Bechtel follows nimbly on her heels and issues moment-by-moment reports. He provides a skillful, basic understanding of hurricane science---readers walk away with a firm grasp of orographic effects, the nature of the tropopause and the fluid mechanics of storm surges---as well as the "disaster culture" that spurs people to take the storm head on, a culture of cataclysmic ignorance.

What drives that point home is the vivid reconstruction of what it was like to be in the storm, fashioned out of interviews with a few principal actors and dozens of bit players. The storm made landfall to the east of New Orleans with winds that at times approached 200 mph and carrying a storm surge three stories in height. Survivors talk of darkness and howling, being raked by flying glass, having their clothes stripped off. Entire communities were obliterated, while farther to the north, the Woodstock Music Festival was being pelted by rain from all the atmospheric disturbance.

Bechtel relates how then the storm started to disintegrate as it moved up the Mississippi Valley, falling off the radar, only to gather itself once more, dropping biblical rains---perhaps thirty inches in a nightlong deluge---on a confined area in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Once again, Bechtel's storytelling power takes on a terrifying clarity. Scores would die as towns were scoured clean away, the rain so heavy it was nearly impossible to simply breathe. A mountainside sloughed off, writes Bechtel, leaving the eerie "smell of deep time." Camille was a meteorological event of the first order. So is Bechtel's recreation.



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