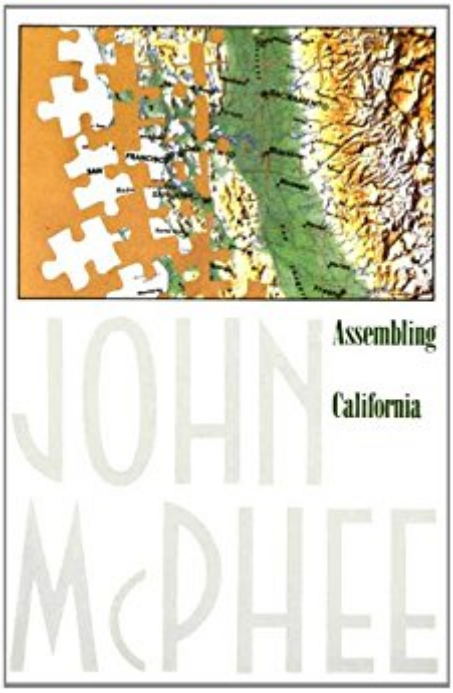
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Assembling California



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Synopsis

At various times in a span of fifteen years, John McPhee made geological field surveys in the company of Eldridge Moores, a tectonicist at the University of California at Davis. The result of these trips is Assembling California, a cross-section in human and geologic time, from Donner Pass in the Sierra Nevada through the golden foothills of the Mother Lode and across the Great Central Valley to the wine country of the Coast Ranges, the rock of San Francisco, and the San Andreas family of faults. The two disparate time scales occasionally intersectÃ¢â ¬â •in the gold disruptions of the nineteenth century no less than in the earthquakes of the twentiethÃ¢â ¬â •and always with relevance to a newly understood geologic history in which half a dozen large and separate pieces of country are seen to have drifted in from far and near to coalesce as California. McPhee and Moores also journeyed to remote mountains of Arizona and to Cyprus and northern Greece, where rock of the deep-ocean floor has been transported into continental settings, as it has in California. Global in scope and a delight to read, Assembling California is a sweeping narrative of maps in motion, of evolving and dissolving lands.

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Customer Reviews

This is a literate, interesting, and in places, a masterful interweaving of gold rush history, a geologist’s personal history, and ultimately, the dramatic approach and suturing of continental blocks carried on ocean crust from who knows where in the Pacific, to be docked with coastal California, taking over 200 million years of such collisions to attain its present outline. An admirable job of depicting the formation of key topographic and structural and origins for well known features of northern California. Notably absent were the closely related geology of far northern California and central and southern parts of the state, which have somewhat contrasting histories. Also, there were very few basic definitions, drawings, cross sections, and maps, making this inherently complex story much harder to understand. Especially missed were graphics of the central theme of this work, showing just how this steadily accreting state built up, crustal sliver by sliver, since Jurassic times.

If you read and appreciated "Basin and Range" by the same author, you should enjoy this book. It gets thoroughly into some interesting gold rush history, and finishes up with a harrowing description of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, along with the plate tectonic information you probably expected. My only question would be whether or not the interpretations are entirely up to date, since plate tectonics is such a relatively new field.

I do like McPhee’s work and I’m glad that I purchased and read this book. But it is not well illustrated and McPhee far too often shifts from good and helpful stories about his experiences in California (and elsewhere) to discussions of types of rocks and rock formations that the non-geologist reader would probably be uncomfortable with. You almost need to read this book with maps of California and with a book on types of rock in hand.

I’ve always enjoyed the books I have read by John McPhee. Perhaps because I live in California,I find this book to be a gold nugget. Doodling from the San Fransisco Bay area to Tahoe, driving the North South to and from Big Sur to Point Arena, living and working in the Napa /Sonoma Valleys these sojourns have been so much more meaningful and interesting as I recall the descriptions of the way these areas established themselves.But even if you live in Greenland, you will appreciate the unique way Mother Earth lilterally patchworked California together.A definite buy!

This was a great read, and I want more from this author. This book made me wish I became a geologist.

Haven’t finished it yet. I keep having to look up geological terms. It is not that technical and it has great stories within the book - such as the Gold Rush in 1848. It is a page turner, also, but I wasn’t expecting that. It sounded interesting when it was discussed on Science Friday (NPR) recently.

An astonishing easy read that reveals the world beneath the feet of Californians!

Superb, and not just for geology geeks.A better purchase would be "Annals of the Ancient World," which includes this book entirely.

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