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Journeys To The Past: Travels In New Guinea, Madagascar, And The Northern Territory Of Australia

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Synopsis

No one writes more consistently entertaining travel books than David Attenborough, and this new collection will be widely welcomed and richly enjoyed. In Journeys to the Past David Attenborough tells of four expeditions in search not only of animals but of unusual people and remote tribes who retain their ancient rituals and ways of life. In New Guinea he attended a sing-sing performed by over five hundred dancers gloriously adorned with the multicoloured plumes of birds of paradise, and trekked for days into the Jimi Valley, then little explored. He watched a tribe making stone axes and met a pygmy people who wore extraordinary bulbous hats made from their hair clippings and woven to their scalps. On the island of Pentecost he marvelled at the courage of the sensational land-divers who jumped head first from a tower over eighty feet high with vines tied round their ankles. On Tanna he observed a cargo cult and talked to its leader, and on Tonga he filmed the Royal Kava ceremony, the most important and sacred of all the surviving ancient rituals. David Attenborough describes Madagascar as 'one of Nature's lumber rooms, a place where antique outmoded forms of life that have long since disappeared from the rest of the world still survive in isolation'. Here he observed many species of lemur, including the enchanting snow-white sifakas and the 'dog-headed man', the indris, about whom there are many legends; he collected fragments of the largest eggs in the world laid by the now extinct Aepyornis, and saw the ritual of the turning the dead. Finally, in the Northern Territory of Australia he filmed the aborigines' way of life, examined the remarkable rock paintings which parallel the first drawings made by mankind, learnt about the legends in which they describe their myths of the creation of the world, and met an old man who lived a hermit's life in a remote part of the outback in an upturned water tank. Vivid descriptions, hilarious incidents, and extraordinary encounters makes this book superb family reading. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

"David Attenborough has been interested in natural history for as long as he can remember. As a child he had a succession of pets - grass snakes, salamanders and tropical fish among them - and explored the countryside around his home in Leicester, watching birds and collecting fossils. Eventually, he won a scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge, where he took a degree in natural sciences. After doing his national service in the Royal Navy, and a brief spell in educational publishing, he joined the BBC Television in 1952. There he produced a wide variety of programmes - archaeological quizzes, short stories, political discussions among them - but eventually he persuaded the Corporation to let him go to the tropics to make films about animals and so started the series of Zoo Quest Expeditions, three of which are described in this book. In 1965, he abandoned programme-making to become Controller of BBC 2 which at that time was less than a year old. For four years he was responsible for the network's editorial policies and for turning it into the first colour network in Europe. In 1969, he was appointed Director of Programmes, responsible for both BBC Television's networks, but in 1972, after eight years behind a desk, he resigned and returned to programme-making. Since then he has produced several remarkable series, Eastwards with Attenborough, The Tribal Eye, and most recently, Life on Earth." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

David Attenborough's book JOURNEYS TO THE PAST is aptly named. Reading it is an enthralling trek back in time. He headed expeditions to New Guinea, Madagascar, etc. when sections of these huge islands were still largely primitive (between 1954 and 1964).He is not only a daring naturalist and adventurer, but a first-rate writer. He transforms what could be dry documentary coverage (of his quests for surviving ancient rituals and exotic fauna) into vivid and often gripping narrative. For example, his chapter on the land divers of Pentecost, who perform in a kind of Olympian sky-jumping ceremony, is the most fascinating account of a bizaare tribal ritual that I have ever read. It makes our modern "extreme" sports seem utterly tame by comparison. Attenborough's chapter "Cargo Cult" is a shocking and enlightening glimpse of the affects of the European culture invasion in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Figi and New Caledonia. This book has my highest recommendation.

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