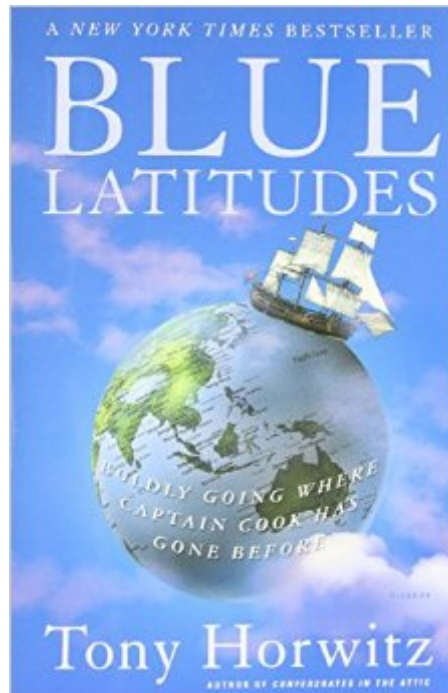


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Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook Has Gone Before



Synopsis

Boldly Going Where Captain Cook Has Gone Before Two centuries after James Cook's epic voyages of discovery, Tony Horwitz takes readers on a wild ride across hemispheres and centuries to recapture the Captain's adventures and explore his embattled legacy in today's Pacific. Horwitz, a Pulitzer Prize-winner and author of *Confederates in the Attic*, works as a sailor aboard a replica of Cook's ship, meets island kings and beauty queens, and carouses the South Seas with a hilarious and disgraceful travel companion, an Aussie named Roger. He also creates a brilliant portrait of Cook: an impoverished farmboy who became the greatest navigator in British history and forever changed the lands he touched. Poignant, probing, antic, and exhilarating, *Blue Latitudes* brings to life a man who helped create the global village we inhabit today.

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Customer Reviews

Horwitz, who is a veteran in the travelogue/history genre, sets about to rescue Cook's threatened reputation from those who view him as the first "conquistador" of the Pacific isles he allegedly "discovered" in his three epic 18th century voyages. Horwitz, while giving ample voice to those inhabitants of these lands who look upon Cook as an unmitigated disaster for their peoples and cultures, and admitting the toxic influence of those Westerners who descended upon the Pacific in Cook's wake, portrays a much more liberal-minded explorer who appreciated the peoples and cultures he met and mingled with, more of an enlightenment figure than we have previously supposed. Indeed, Horwitz argues that one of the reasons that Cook is not celebrated or memorialized in Britain as lavishly as Nelson and Wellington, is that he was not a military hero, was

more explorer than conqueror. Horwitz pays Cook his due, pointing out the sheer difficulty and hardship of his navigations, and meanders around the Pacific in his steps, talking to all sorts of characters that he meets along the way, both about Cook, the past, and the present state of Pacific affairs. And for comic relief he brings along, quite by accident he tells us but one can't imagine making the trip without him, his Falstaffian pal Roger, with a bottle in both hands, and a jaundiced eye and bawdy quip when things threaten to get too serious. Fans of Horwitz, Cook, travel writing, or a yen for the Pacific isles will not be disappointed.

For various reasons, there continues to be substantial interest in great explorers such as Earnest Shackleton, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Robert Falcon Scott, and James Cook. This the first of two books about Cook which I recently read and thoroughly enjoyed. (The other is Vanessa Collingridge's *Captain Cook: A Legacy Under Fire*.) They discuss a common subject but from different perspectives. I highly recommend both. According to Horwitz, Cook set out on various voyages (1768-1789) uncertain of eventual destinations and traveled more than 200,000 miles while dependent (by today's standards) on crude, indeed primitive navigation instruments but sustained by his superior seamanship skills. Of special interest to me is the fact that Horwitz traced many of the same voyages to Bora Bora, Australia, Savage Island, Tonga, Alaska, and Hawaii. He shares his own reactions to what these areas have become, most in sharp contrast to the "pure state of Nature" as Cook once described it. Horwitz's extensive research suggests that many of those whom Cook encountered correctly suspected (and feared) that their lives and communities would never be the same after Cook's "discovery" of them. Beyond the wealth of information this book provides, it is that rare achievement among works of nonfiction: a page-turner.

Tony Horwitz spends a year and a half visiting many of the places Captain Cook visited from 1768 - 1779. The book culminates with Cook's violent death in modern day Hawaii. The book alternates back and forth between Cook's 18th century experience and Mr. Horwitz's modern day travels. Horwitz does an excellent job of interpreting the various sources available and giving an account that the historical layperson can relate to. Key characters include the author, Cook, the colorful Joseph Banks (the Endeavour's Botanist) and Horowitz's even more colorful traveling companion Roger Williamson. Horwitz paints a picture of Cook as an austere, yet fair man-seemingly driven to the edges of the earth. As driven as Cook is to explore the world, Banks is driven to explore the anatomies of females from different Polynesian cultures. Roger is mainly content to explore the bottle and make wisecracks about Horwitz's adventure. If you think *Blue Latitudes* sounds like a dry

historical piece, you're sorely mistaken. Any potential dryness is quickly quenched by Horwitz's wit, Banks's "botanizing" and Roger's boozing. Much to my wife's amusement I found myself laughing out loud many times while reading *Blue Latitudes*. Despite that, I found myself strangely moved after reading the account of Cook's death. While the consequences of Cook's voyages are complex, you cannot help but feel a great admiration for this man who started with so little yet went so far. Great book, highly recommended.

Tony Horwitz had a tough task in following up his massively successful *"Confederate in the Attic."* Give him credit, *"Blue Latitudes"* certainly is no quickie effort to cash in on Horwitz's now-famous name. Instead, the author travelled tens of thousands of miles researching the legacy of Captain James Cook, arguably the greatest of all European explorers. Like *"Attic"* the book is part history, part travelogue and part social commentary. Horwitz includes many more historical information this time out, most likely because far fewer readers are intimately familiar with Cook's voyages than the Civil War. Horwitz starts his journey by sailing on a replica of Cook's first ship *Endurance* to get a feel for 18th Century shipboard life. He then spends most of the remaining time traipsing around the Pacific with his Australian friend Roger, who provides the same kind of narrative counterpoint as Robert Lee Hodge did in *"Attic."* Horwitz documents the changes that have occurred in Oceania because of Cook's "discoveries" and interviews numerous islanders to find out how they feel about Cook's legacy. The results are often surprising and enlightening. Having said all of that, *"Blue Latitudes"* is not a classic on the order of *"Attic."* The narrative is a lengthy at nearly 450 pages and is sluggish at times. Companion Roger is not nearly as interesting a character as was Hodge and the moments of uproarious humor that made *"Attic"* so entertaining are mostly missing this time out. Nevertheless, *"Blue Latitudes"* is still a well-written and worthwhile read for those with an interest in the subject matter.

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