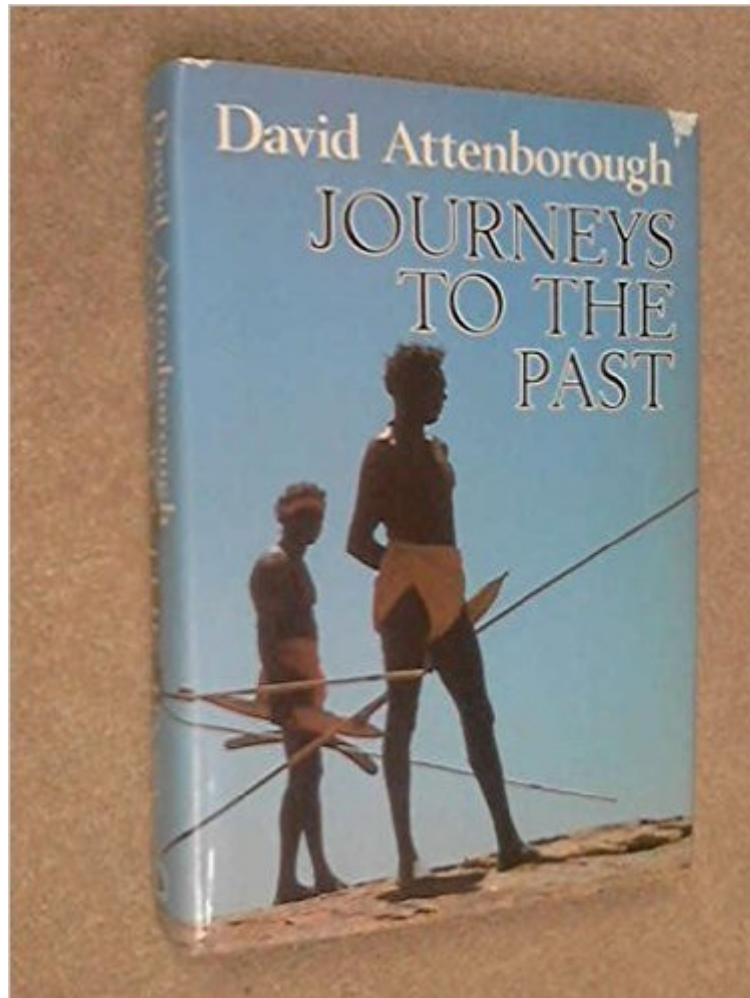


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Journeys To The Past



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 the Digital edition.

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Customer Reviews

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 bizarre 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, Fiji and New Caledonia. This book has my highest recommendation.

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