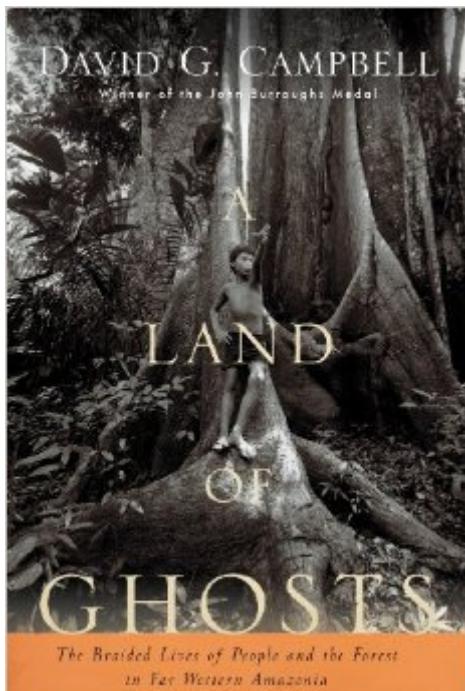


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A Land Of Ghosts: The Braided Lives Of People And The Forest In Far Western Ia



Synopsis

For thirty years David G. Campbell has explored the , an enchanting terrain of forest and river that is home to the greatest diversity of plants and animals to have ever existed, anywhere at any time, during the four-billion-year history of life on Earth. With great artistic flair, Campbell describes a journey up the Rio Moa, a remote tributary of the River, 2,800 miles from its mouth. Here he joins three old friends: Arito, a caiman hunter turned paleontologist; Tarzan, a street urchin brought up in a bordello; and Pimentel, a master canoe pilot. They travel together deep into the rainforest and set up camp in order to survey every woody plant on a two-hectare plot of land with about as many tree species as in all of North America. Campbell introduces us to two remarkable women, Dona Cabocla, a widow who raised six children on that lonely frontier, and Dona Ausira, a Nokini Native American who is the last speaker of her tribe's ages-old language. These pioneers live in a land whose original inhabitants were wiped out by centuries of disease, slavery, and genocide, taking their traditions and languages with them. He explores the intimate relationship between the extinction of native language and the extirpation of biological diversity. "It's hard for a people to love a place that is not defined in words and thus cannot be understood. And it's easy to give away something for which there are no words, something you never knew existed." In elegant prose that enchants and entrances, Campbell has written an elegy for the forest and its peoples-for what has become a land of ghosts.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Though there are many books that describe nature in the , David Campbell definitely is among the

top writers on it. In this book he offers, from start to finish, a very interesting mix between storytelling with lyrical qualities and scientific analysis with social commentary. He is a scientist, focused on botany, and his knowledge of all aspects of science related to the forest are outstanding. We learn about the strategies employed by frogs to reproduce, or by snakes to identify prey, or by trees to attach pollen to beetles. While learning about the science behind such activities and how they evolved, the author leads the reader through his travel log, meeting people and species and learning much about the history of the region he is visiting. Besides all the interesting science, the author also provides a very deep character description of the people who live in this remote frontier. The stories range from rubber tappers left over from a period of abundance, to old Indians who became westernized, to occupants moving there from the south due to government incentives. Each has a story and a way to deal with the challenges of the forest; some have a way to prosper in the exact same circumstances in which others fail. Some characters are presented as integrated in the forest, some as aliens beaten by the forest, some as leaders beating the forest. Most amazing than all the history, social aspects and science however are the narrative abilities of the author. The book is a work of art, as it becomes clear that every word has been hand picked and every metaphor was chosen to provide the reader with the correct image, texture, taste, sound and smell of the forest.

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