



Travels in the White Man's Grave: Memoirs from West and Central Africa

Donald MacIntosh

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In the 1950s, the interior of West and Central Africa was still known as 'The White Man's Grave'. Its forests were primeval and inhabited the minds of Westerners as places of foreboding. But to Donald MacIntosh, a 23-year-old Gaelic-speaking Scottish forester, it was a dream come true when he found himself posted to the hot, cloying humidity of those fabled lands. During the next 30 years he was to work and live as a tree surveyor, prospector and forest botanist. He listened to the tales of ancient Africa from the lips of hunters, fishermen, chiefs and witch doctors from a vast diversity of tribes in myriad encampments and also had many encounters with the creatures of the forest, from the magnificent leopard to the homicidal buffalo, and from the indolent but horrendously venomous gaboon viper to the agile, irascible and instantly fatal spitting cobra. His odyssey contains a host of characters with exotic names like 'Old Man Africa', 'Magic Sperm', 'Famous Sixpence' and 'Pisspot', whose stories are all told here. But the Africa that MacIntosh describes is no more. The forests have been decimated, and with them have gone the people and the creatures that lived in them long before the coming of the white man's chain saw. This is a rare, poignant and sometimes hilarious glimpse into a vanished past by one who was part of it.

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