



Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, Vol 1

John Lloyd Stephens , Frederick Catherwood (illustrator)

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Volume 1 of 2-volume set. Classic (1843) exploration of jungles of Yucatan, looking for evidences of Maya civilization. Extensive accounts of 44 Maya sites as well as of Yucatan folkways, manners, dress, ceremonies, amusements—all of which makes this a great travel book. Total in set: 127 engravings. 1 map.

Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, Vol 1 Details

Date : Published June 1st 1963 by Dover Publications (Mineola, NY) (first published 1843)

ISBN : 9780486209265

Author : John Lloyd Stephens , Frederick Catherwood (illustrator)

Format : Paperback 317 pages

Genre : Travel, History, Nonfiction, Anthropology

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From Reader Review Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, Vol 1 for online ebook

Richie says

Couldn't finish this book. Too much detail in artifacts not enough momentum to hold my attention. Not quite what I was expecting.

Lee Paris says

I had the good fortune to visit Uxmal and Palenque in 2015 and Quirigua and Copan in January of 2017 - all are sites visited by Stephens and his artist companion Frederick Catherwood in the 1830s. This book is highly recommended by the Maya archaeologist who conducted the tours. Stephens has a very unadorned style of writing which no doubt explains the popularity of the book since 1841. I have been told that it was second only to the Bible in sales when first published and I can certainly understand the romance of "lost" cities and vanished civilizations for the American public in the 19th century and right to the present. Stephens has a very sensible approach to the ruins and his point of view has been substantiated by subsequent scholars. Although he could not read the glyphs he was correct when he stated that likely they were accounts of the history of the people who carved them. He also was correct when he surmised that the buildings and sculptures were created by the people in the region and owed nothing to the Chinese, Egyptians or East Indians. He also observed that the decay was more likely to be caused by environmental factors than remote antiquity. At one point he observes the close physical resemblance between a Maya he encounters and the carved face on a relief. Anyone who reads this must stand in awe of the physical stamina of both men as they confront heat, torrential rainfall, mountainous terrain and above all the mosquitoes. Stephens is also fully aware of the debt he owes to his beasts of burden - the horses and mules, and is quick to condemn any mistreatment he witnesses. The provision of adequate food for his animals is a constant theme. Sadly, Stephens did not long survive his travels; no doubt succumbing to some pathogen acquired during this trek. My only criticism is that for my taste too many pages are devoted to the political turmoil plaguing Guatemala, but it's understandable that given his official credentials he would feel obliged to fully report on the violence and civil unrest.

Uglyoldwitch says

It takes a lot for me to give a book five stars. I'd give this one six, if I could. First, however, let me state that this book isn't for everyone. I read it because, as a student of Maya history for 25 years, it's required. I should have read it sooner. It's the true story of two men who traveled through the Maya world in 1840 and brought their information back to the masses. I believe that we care today because of the passion they had for the ruins all those years ago.

After visiting some of the places John Lloyd Stephens writes about, I can honestly say that this book - after 150 years - is still relevant today. Stephens' easy style, his adventurous spirit, and his friendship with Frederick Catherwood (the artist who traveled with him) all made this an extraordinary read. His excitement at seeing the ruins for the first time, his way of describing them without judgment - is something all of us strive for in the archaeology field.

Okay, so his crazy passion for crawling down inside volcanoes was a bit odd. As was his adoration of his "macho", his mule. But when he described a thunderstorm one night - the flashes of light illuminating the ruins around him - I could see it. I was there. It's one hundred and fifty years later, and I was right there with him.

At one point, (I read the complete set of books - 900 pages) I wanted to write both Stephens and "Mr. C" a letter to tell them how much I appreciated what they did and that they captured it - both in their own way - on paper. And then I remembered that they'd both been dead for years. So, these five stars are my fan letter to them both. I want to shake your hand. Thank you for letting me see these exquisite buildings through your eyes. And mostly, I want to write something today that touches another person one hundred and fifty years from now.

David says

I read the book, then made the trip to the Yucatan and used the book as a guide. Okay, not really as a guide but it was fun to use as a resource.

Nancy says

I have always wanted to read John Lloyd Stephens' account of his travels through Central America with artist Frederick Catherwood, whose drawings of the Mayan ruins they "rediscovered" and documented have become iconic. This book is sort of a sequel to Stephens and Catherwood's first book, which covered more territory. That expedition was cut short when Catherwood became ill with malaria while investigating the ancient Mayan city of Uxmal. In this book they return to Uxmal, setting up camp once again inside the ruins. But it isn't quite what I expected. Howard Carter's mesmerizing three-volume account of the discovery and opening of the tomb of Tutankhamen has become my touchstone I guess. Sure, Carter had great material to work with, but so does Stephens, and yet there seems throughout this account a lack of excitement or wonder -- it feels listless even at times. Maybe I need to go back and read *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, where it all began...

Dale says

Wonderful first-hand TRUE account of the discovery of Mayan ruins. If you haven't seen the ruins, you owe yourself an exciting trip. Book is excellent, perhaps a tad bit dry, but really tells you the story.

Jill says

I picked this up years ago after a trip to Cancun. I recently reread excerpts while I was in Cancun. He provides a great history of the area/ region of Mexico. I enjoyed hearing about the pirate hideaways in the area like Cozumel and Isla Mujeres and reading that "Kankun" was just a den of "moschitos". Certainly takes you somewhere other than the lounge chair at your beachside resort.

Janie Buck says

At times, a very difficult read. But my love for all things Mexican encouraged me to finish it.

Brenda Clough says

This book (and vol. 2) is a classic of its type -- the Victorian travel account. Stephens was in fact the American ambassador to Central America. But because the region was convulsed by revolution he spent a lot of time traveling around in search of someone to submit his credentials to. And, for want of any official duties, he was able to indulge his mania for Mayan ruins. British artist Frederick Catherwood traveled with him and captured some of the most iconic images we have of Mayan bas-reliefs. It is these volumes that convinced archaeologists that the Maya were their own culture, and not Egyptians or something.

I find the exploring-ruins bits far more fascinating than his tedious treks through the countryside, dodging revolutionaries, looking for food or shelter, or eying local maidens. And I am not alone in this; there are 'greatest hits' editions of these books made up of only the archaeological sections. It is also frantically un-PC, and if it bothers you to read casual slurs of persons of color or gender, then you should skip this. However, it is a work of its time and for that alone is invaluable.

Richie says

A good olde-fashioned rollicking picaresque colonialist travelogue. Like *A Handful of Dust*, but real.

Persephone Abbott says

Definitely more of a great read when in the Yucatan. I was not in the Yucatan, however, at the time of reading this classic tale of intrepid Victorian travellers, nor have I ever been in the the Yucatan. And yes, the account is subjective to 19th century expectations, yet has that Indiana Jones feel about it, funnily enough, I can't locate online any of the original daguerreotypes that the explorers took of their travels. But this suite of books (volume one and two) should thoroughly to be recommended when in the Yucatan, just be forewarned that it is now rumored that, in general, cocoa bean currency is no longer accepted.

Erik Graff says

Stephens two books about his early nineteenth century travels to the Yucatan are much cited in studies of the Maya, his speculations about their civilization and Catherwood's illustrations of their monuments and inscriptions being epochal for their accuracy and thoroughness. Planning a trip to what was still the territory of Quintana Roo (NE Yucatan), I read up on the area ahead of time, works by Thompson and Coe leading

me to Stephens' groundbreaking chronicle. Despite its age, the narrative read well, conveying much of the excitement of their adventures in what was then still a region contested between the Republics of Texas and Mexico (a contestation, incidentally, inherited by the USA and only resolved under Franklin Roosevelt's administration upon negotiations with the Cardenas government).

Leonide Martin says

John Stevens and Frederick Catherwood's travels in the Maya lands became famous as soon as they were published in the mid-1850s. These travel stories intrigued readers with their detailed descriptions of exotic landscapes and enigmatic people. Stevens (US) was the writer and Catherwood (Great Britain) the illustrator. Together they created books of enduring fascination and brought ancient Maya culture to the attention of the world. This spurred an onslaught of adventurers and explorers who wanted to find ruined cities in tropical jungles, and endure the grueling primitive conditions of travel in undeveloped areas of Mexico and Central America. Stevens writes with wry humor and picturesque detail, capturing innumerable crusty and sinister characters while encountering unexpected kindnesses. Catherwood's drawings are charming and mysterious; the first accurate accounts of many glyphs, monuments and buildings. There are essentially four volumes, two of Central America, Chiapas & Yucatan and two of Yucatan. Each covers their travels to different Maya sites, and all are eminently readable.

Michael (Mike) says

This is travel, the old way. I recommend this book for the modern traveler who is serious about chronicling his adventures. While the methods are old, the author's techniques are easily adapted to our modern times with a camera and journal. This is for the traveler who takes the time to meet the people, as opposed to rushing through a series of exhibits and/or cultural sites. Of course this is really only possible when one has the luxury of time. I expect to chronicle as such on my next solo motorcycle ride into Mexico.

(the free kindle edition does not come with the plates/illustrations, so best to buy the paper reprint)

Evan Albright says

BOOKS ABOUT YUCATÁN: The best book of any kind about the Yucatán Peninsula, and it's more than 150 years old. This is the book that made the Maya ruins of the region famous to the world. John Lloyd Stephens, a lawyer who found fame as a writer, wrote a series of travel books, including two about his travels in Central America and Mexico. I think his earlier volume, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán*, is superior to this later volume, but both are probably the most perfect travelogues ever written, filled with history, local culture, social observation, and wit and charm. The drawings by Frederick Catherwood are stunning, although this edition, a cheap paperback version, skimmed on the quality of the graphics. It's worth it to search the Internet for original editions and view the illustrations closer to how they were originally presented in the 1840s.
