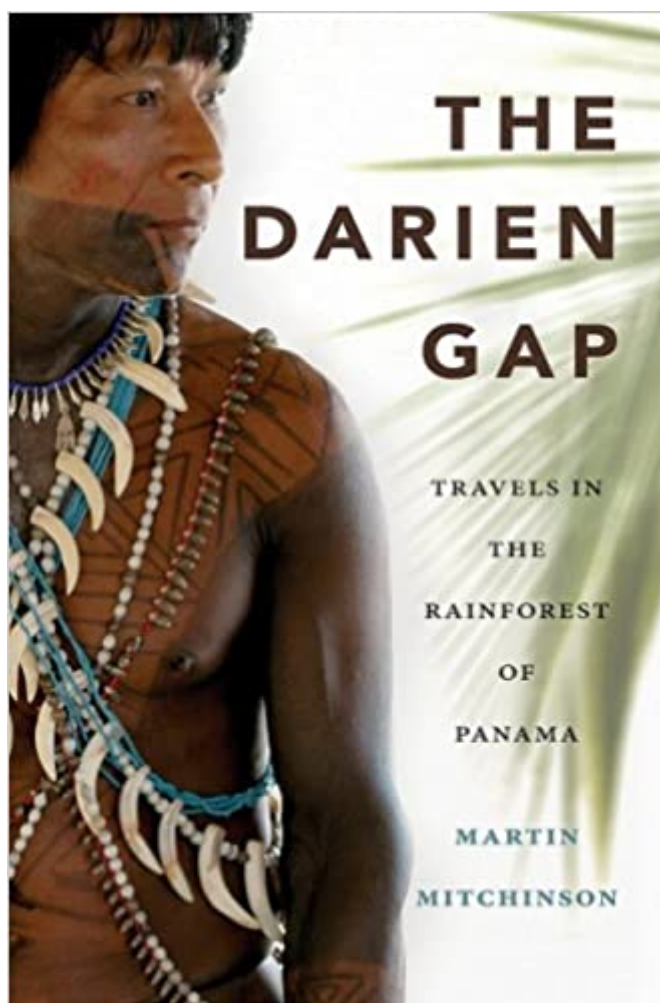


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The Darien Gap: Travels In The Rainforest Of Panama



Synopsis

Finalist for the 2009 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction If you want to drive from North America to South America, you'll have a hard time when you reach Panama's southernmost province, Darien. The Pan-American Highway ends just sixty miles short of Colombia. It's the only missing link in what would otherwise be uninterrupted highway from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. When Balboa marched through Darien's jungles to cross the narrow isthmus in 1513, he was the first European to sight the Pacific from its eastern shores. For the next four centuries, pirates, gold miners, rebels, and political schemers all gravitated to Darien. Scotland failed miserably in its attempt to establish a colony. An American Navy expedition wandered lost in its jungle for two months with seven men dying, and countries fought to control the region's traffic and trade. Yet today, Darien is best known as a roadless backwater, home to native communities, Colombian guerrillas, and the descendants of black slaves and Spanish colonists. For twenty years, Martin Mitchinson has travelled in Central and South America. Fascinated by tales of Darien, he arrived aboard his 36-foot sailboat *Ishmael*, and spent the next 18 months navigating physical challenges, native politics and the constant risk of kidnapping. Mitchinson found temporary shelter in native communities while he followed footpaths through the rainforest, and paddled a dugout canoe along Darien's rivers. With two Kuna guides, he set off to follow Balboa's historic route across the continental divide to the Pacific. Drawing on firsthand accounts and personal interviews to illuminate the history of the region, and recounting his travels with extraordinary honesty and grace, Mitchinson has produced the first of what we hope will be many fine travel narratives.

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Customer Reviews

Martin Mitchinson has been a travel writer and photographer for the past ten years. He was born in Saskatoon and raised in northern Alberta, where he later worked in the oil fields to support his travels to Central and South America. He now lives outside Powell River, BC. *The Darien Gap* is his first book.

An honest book, concise and well written. After reading you get an insight on that tropical area full of history. A risky trip for the author happily ended.

excellent book. what a remarkable adventure. Martin sacrificed comfort of home to explore and study the life of the Jungle.....I recommend it to anyone with an adventurous spirit.....phil brown

Martin Mitchinson's "*The Darien Gap*" is a wonderful book, a great collection of histories, mythologies, and personal adventures and reflections. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in traveling in Central America, as well as for anyone who loves good, and thoughtful travel writing. In a place that is infamous for kidnappings, Colombian Guerrillas, and thick jungles, Mitchinson performs the unthinkable act of remaining in the region for a year and a half to gather together Darien's many stories into a book that is a pleasure to read. In a series of wonderfully-crafted vignettes, Mitchinson writes with a very personal voice to bring Darien's jungle to the reader - from the 65 million years of ancient geological formation, to native histories, pirates, eccentrics, and ridiculous canal schemes that are part of Darien's past and present. This book has just been released, but I've found a handful of early reviews: "What Mitchinson has produced, with bugs, mud, graces, dangers, superstitions and all... is a wonderfully entertaining book full of close observation and flourishes of poetry." - Garry Geddes, poet and author of "*Kingdom of Ten Thousand Things*"... "impressive and compelling..."... threading the history of the area, with accounts of its indigenous peoples and early explorations, into a dramatic and involving tapestry. There is much humor here,... passages of genuine suspense, including a harrowing account of a near-drowning in a jungle river..." - *The Vancouver Sun*... "the summer's best read." - *The North Island Midweek*... "hairy enough to scare even the most intrepid armchair traveler. But the stories that he tells of this wild barrier make his book come doubly alive. Combining one part history with one part travelogue... escape reading at its best." - *The Sun Times*... "personal anecdotes are lush with honesty and sparse with reservation... it sucks you from your reading chair only to plant you in the mangrove swamps of the

Darien Gap."...intriguing tale connects the reader to Mitchinson, the people of Darien and the Darien province itself."- Comox Valley Record

This is a marvellous read and a marvellous exploration. Author Martin Mitchinson takes us through a remote corner of the Panamanian rainforest on a journey that is paradoxically both leisurely and exhausting. At his side we undergo a full range of jungle miseries, both grim and entertaining, dipping pleasantly all the while into byways of history, geography and legend. Whether he was enduring perilous hours in a dugout canoe or trekking painfully across the continental divide, Mitchinson held me captivated. By turns I laughed out loud at encounters with endearing characters or was moved by rippling passages of poetry and philosophy. At its best, and in common with the best of books and journeys, *The Darien Gap* transforms one's vision of life and of the world. Highly recommended.

Martin Mitchinson's "*The Darien Gap*" is a wonderful book, a great collection of histories, mythologies, and personal adventures and reflections. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in traveling in Central America, as well as for anyone who loves good, and thoughtful travel writing. In a place that is infamous for kidnappings, Colombian Guerrillas, and thick jungles, Mitchinson performs the unthinkable act of remaining in the region for a year and a half to gather together Darien's many stories into a book that is a pleasure to read. In a series of wonderfully-crafted vignettes, Mitchinson writes with a very personal voice to bring Darien's jungle to the reader - from the 65 million years of ancient geological formation, to native histories, pirates, eccentrics, and ridiculous canal schemes that are part of Darien's past and present.

THE DARIEN GAP: TRAVELS IN THE RAINFOREST OF PANAMA is a fine pick for any who would read adventure travel at its most gripping, and for general-interest libraries catering to armchair travel and adventure audiences. It tells of the author's twenty years of travel in Central and South America, fascinated by tales of the Colombian outpost Darien, a sanctuary for guerrillas and a long-time haven for spies, pirates and treasure hunters.

The Darien Gap beautifully weaves together the local politics, geological and colonial history with native folklore in a personal voice. Finally, a travel book not focused on some hero conquering a new land. Mitchinson brings honesty and humor at his own discomfort. He offers a well researched story of a patch of jungle that "is the only missing link in what would otherwise be 16000 miles of

uninterrupted highway from Alaska to Tierra Del Fuego". The book is brilliant!

His book "The Darien Gap" has just been shortlisted along with three other books for the 2009 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction, administered by Wilfred Laurier University.[...]Congrats, brother and good luck!

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