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Learning Andean landscapes through travel Review by Mark Aldenderfer

Incidence of Travel: Recent Travels in Ancient South America.
Jerry D. Moore. University Press of Colorado, 2017.

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Some people are said to have a special affinity with certain species of animals and have the ability to understand their feelings and even what they think. These people are known as whisperers, and among the best known of these are horse, dog, cat, and even ghost, whisperers. Alright, the latter is the title of a now-cancelled television show, but I hope you get the point. Some people just *understand* animals and yes, things. So, I think Jerry Moore is a landscape-whisperer. I mean this with all respect so please let me explain. He understands landscapes at a deeply personal level and shows a remarkable ability to describe them and their cultural nuances to people who might otherwise find them wholly alien. ***Incidence of Travel: Recent Travels in Ancient South America*** amply displays his whispering abilities.

Moore has had a long and distinguished career as an academic archaeologist. He is broadly interested in South American prehistory, has published widely in the journals of the field, edited one of the premier regional journals (*Ñawpa Pacha*) and has authored a very important (and successful) textbook—*A Prehistory of South America: Ancient Cultural Diversity on the Least Known Continent* (2014).

In this book, however, he forgoes a purely academic or technical presentation and swerves personal, adopting a narrative style. The result is a *mélange* of his experiences, aspects of his career, and his finely-honed insights into the past. He clearly defines his vision for the book: “...(it) is about journeys and what I have learned in the course of travel about the archaeology of

South America, particularly by looking at the creation of ancient cultural landscapes. My journeys are lines of movement—sometimes planned, often diverted by unforeseen events—that intersect with the lives and acts of other humans, past and present” (5).

The result is a combination of autobiography, memoir, and travel narrative. The book is unusual because, at least in my experience, there are relatively few similar books written by *archaeologists*. There are, of course, plenty of autobiographies penned by our intellectual ancestors. Prominent examples among many include Sir Mortimer Wheeler’s (1966) *Alms for Oblivion: An Antiquary’s Scrapbook*; Mary Leakey’s (1984), *Disclosing the Past*; and Michael D. Coe’s 2006) *Final Report: An Archaeologist Excavates His Past*. Memoirs are somewhat less common. Although the line between autobiography and memoir is often blurred, a memoir usually does not have a fairly strict chronological ordering and tends to emphasize personal experience and emotional reflection on a set of themes. Jesse Jennings’s (1994) *Accidental Archaeologist* has been reviewed by colleagues as a blend of memoir and autobiography. A more recent example of a memoir that is thematically organized is Anna Marie Prentiss’ *Field Seasons: Reflections on Career Paths and Research in American Archaeology* (2012). The archaeological travel narrative, however, remains quite elusive but one that compares well to Moore’s book is Denis Byrne’s (2007) *Surface Collection: Archaeological Travels in Southeast Asia*. Byrne, a specialist in archaeological heritage conservation, focuses his attention, as does Moore, on the intersection of landscapes and people.

Understanding these literary variants helps to place Moore’s book into a fuller context and shows just how unique it is. This book is a pleasure to read because it is a deftly written travel narrative about Andean landscapes that wraps around deep scholarship about these places and which is leavened not only with personal reflection but anecdotes, some funny, others tragic, that most field archaeologists will find familiar.

In nine chapters Moore takes us traveling through the present and the past. In Chapter 1 we are in central Peru at the *Qoyllur Rit’i* pilgrimage; Chapter 2 finds us in northern Peru via a discussion about archaeological research on mound cultures in central Chile; we return to a ritual procession in Ecuador in Chapter 3 which he uses to discuss ancient pilgrimages in the Andes; in one of my

favorite entries (Chapter 4), Moore takes us to the Cueva de las Manos in Patagonia to discuss how foragers in the region inscribed their identities in it more than 10,000 years ago; the geoglyphs of northern Chile and southern Peru are the subject of Chapter 5; we swing to northern Colombia in Chapter 6, which is devoted to his long, arduous journey to visit the famous “Ciudad Perdida” of that region; Chapter 7 takes back south again to the volcanic zone of Ecuador where Moore describes how eruptions over the millennia shaped the cultures of the past and those of the present; once again starting in Ecuador we veer south to Cusco in Chapter 8 where Moore describes the *ceque* system of sacred stones of the Inca and relates a narrative of the differences between how the Inca in the 15th C and French scholars in the 18th C attempted to measure the cosmos; Chapter 9 has us back in Ecuador but eventually returns us to the Cusco of the Incas via the *Qhapaq Ñan*, the Inca imperial road which Francisco Pizarro followed in his effort to conquer the Inca polity.

Finally, in the Epilogue, one of the most engaging chapters of the book, Moore concludes his travels on the continent with a delightful but rather trying story of a recalcitrant Land Cruiser which only seems to favor moving when in reverse and an epic odyssey to seek a mechanic or anyone else who can repair the vehicle. He failed to find one but in so doing, that failure offered an insight, one that he characterized thusly: “I drove in reverse toward La Paz, the past was there in front of me, but the future of this particular journey was invisible and behind me—as it always, actually is” (269). For Moore, the journey is how he has made himself a landscape-whisperer. His journeys and travels molded both his intellectual rigor as an academic while simultaneously expanding his empathy to think about how meaning has been variously inscribed across the continent over thousands of years of prehistory. He makes no claim to *know* how these ancient peoples thought, but through his stories and tales, he invites us to reflect on the past and how these reflections can help us understand our common humanity.

I don’t know of a single archaeologist who does not have tales to rival those that Moore describes. But I think few of us can emulate his skillful narrative and the way in which he has woven his experiences, reflections, and stories into a readable and deeply engaging tapestry of Andean landscapes and their meanings, not only for those people who live upon them, but for readers who seek to catch a whisper of their pasts.

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Mark Aldenderfer is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus and the Edward A. Dickson Emeriti Professorship Endowed Chair at the University of California, Merced. Although his current archaeological research is the Himalayas of Nepal, he worked in the highlands of southern Peru for more than 20 years.



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