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Incidents Of Travel, Central America, Chiapas, Yucatan Vol. 2



Synopsis

This book has been formatted for the kindle with chapters links and is text only. In 1839, President Martin Van Buren commissioned Stephens as Special Ambassador to Central America. While there, the government of the Federal Republic of Central America fell apart in civil war. His Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan gives a vivid description of some of those events which Stephens witnessed. Stephens and his traveling companion, architect and draftsman Frederick Catherwood first came across Maya ruins at Copán, having landed in British Honduras (present-day Belize). They were astonished at their findings and spent a couple weeks mapping the site. They surmised that this must have been built by some long forgotten people as they couldn't imagine the native Mayans as having lived in the city. Stephens was actually able to buy the city of Copan for a sum of \$50 and had dreams of floating it down the river and into museums in The United States. They went on to Palenque, Uxmal, and according to Stephens, visited a total of 44 sites. Stephens and Catherwood reached Palenque in April 1840 and left in early June. They documented the Temple of the Inscriptions, the Temple of the Cross, the Temple of the Sun and the Temple of the Foliated Cross. Of even greater importance, their book provided descriptions of several ancient Maya sites, along with illustrations by Catherwood. These were greatly superior in both amount and accuracy of depiction to the small amount of information on ancient Mesoamerica previously published.

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Customer Reviews

This classic account of John Lloyd Stephens' journey through Central America and Mexico in the 1830s has never been cheaper, but at the "cost" of missing the Catherwood illustrations. What do you want for 99 cents, I know. The text was obviously scanned but not proofed as there are numerous typos. Despite its faults, Stephens' indomitable spirit--persisting through revolution, horrendous roads, stubborn animals, malevolent natives, and the political convulsions endemic to the region--can only leave lesser mortals in awe. Note that this is Vol. 2, and Vol. 1 is not available on Kindle at this time. Vol. 2 opens in the midst of a revolution in Central America, and Stephens refers to characters and events assuming the reader is already familiar with them. Once past the first few chapters, though, we are carried along by unfolding events.

This is Stephens' and Catherwood's classic account of the ruins that lay abandoned in the wilds of Central America and Southern Mexico for over a millennium. It not only makes for a fascinating read in and of itself (describing not only the ruined cities, but also the customs of the inhabitants of the area, the political situation and providing a very vivid window into Western mentality regarding exotic cultures at the time, among many other things), but it happened to be the book that placed the Maya in the Western public's awareness for the first time, and also the trigger for the systematic study of this important ancient civilization. While Stephens is not an archaeologist (a profession that almost didn't exist at the time), he has a fine eye for detail and deduction and reaches many conclusions that continue to stand to this day (i.e., that all the ruins he visited were the product of the same culture and that their age was not as great as some had stated in great flights of fancy). Aside from that, Stephens is an entertaining, agile writer, so much so that even people who do not have a special interest in the Maya or ancient cultures will enjoy this fascinating book, which turned out to be a bestseller in its day, providing Stephens with a handsome return on his uncomfortable and (at times) dangerous adventures. By the way, it is the first of two books, having published a chronicle on a second journey of his, undertaken 2 years after the first, this time dealing only with the ruins in the Yucatan peninsula.

President Van Buren sent the author on a mission to Central America in the 1840's to establish

diplomatic relations with the government of the newly independent state of Guatemala. Due to a power struggle there, Stephens could find no government and spent a lot of time evading the two warring armies. Reporting on that situation, is somewhat interesting, but when Stephens and his traveling companion become engaged in exploring the ruins of ancient Mayan cities, the narrative gets really fascinating. At that time, little if anything was known about the complex civilization and the massive monuments that were then being subsumed by lush jungle growth. Stephens is a talented writer, and, though he is unable to understand the meanings of the glyphs they encounter, he does stimulate sufficient curiosity to attract others to follow in his footsteps.

it is a good book.

Very Interesting

This is one of three books he wrote on his travels. It is hard to imagine the hardships he had to encounter in the early 1800's to make such a trip. His discoveries had to be mind blowing.

Easy to read. Humourous moments. Surprisingly easy to read. Also read his other travel books. He was a best seller of travel books 170 years ago.

This book was not what I expected. Never finished reading it. It was very boring. Couldn't get through it. Only my opinion though. Guess its worth a try for someone.

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