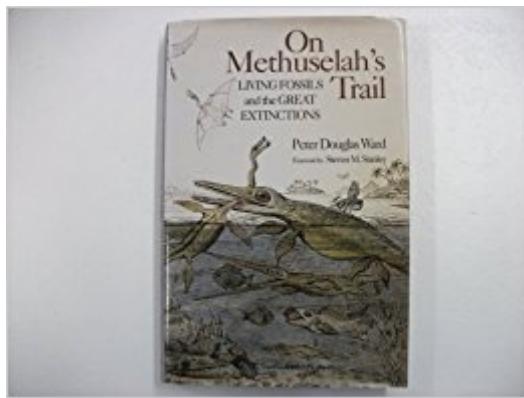


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On Methuselah's Trail: Living Fossils And The Great Extinctions



Synopsis

On Methuselah's Trail tells the story of some of the Earth's most remarkable inhabitants living fossils. Labelled 'living fossils' by Darwin, the ancient animals and plants Peter Ward explores have survived with little or no change the cataclysmic events that transformed life on earth. These 'Methuselahs' can tell us much about the history of life and about the great extinction periods in which so many other species died out. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Living fossils are species that have survived nearly unchanged since prehistoric times. For scientists they are a window to the past. Ward, an expert on the nautilus, tells us a fascinating story of scientific discovery through a combination of personal narratives and examples of how the study of living creatures helps to interpret the fossil record. Some of the episodes are even dramatic, like the discovery of the lobe-finned coelacanth that had been thought to be extinct also recounted in Keith Stewart Thomson's Living Fossil , LJ 5/15/91, or Ward's struggle to save a living nautilus for an aquarium. In Wonderful Life (LJ 9/1/89), Stephen Jay Gould made the point that it is impossible to guess from fossils alone which creatures would survive to the present and which would become extinct. The study of "Methuselahs" such as brachiopods or horseshoe crabs shows how different sets of circumstances allowed a few species to endure. Good, entertaining popular science.- Amy Brunvand, Fort Lewis Coll. Lib., Durango, Col. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

On Methusaleh's Trail is a story about the search for fossils of long extinct species and how they are related to some living species which have changed very little in tens or hundreds of millions of years. Modern Homo sapiens left Africa maybe 50-75,000 years ago and our closey related ancestral hominids date back maybe 2-3 million years. However, animals such as the nautilus, the coelacanth and the horseshoe crab are some of the last remaining species of genera that were once prolific and numerous and they have persisted to this day, largely unchanged, for tens or hundreds of millions of years. In reading this book one really gets the sense that the author, Dr. Peter Douglas Ward, is reflecting back on a long, interesting and successful career, perhaps even feeling a bit like a living fossil himself. What is clear on every page is the author's passion for his work and his mastery of the subject matter. His search for fossils has taken him all over the world to some of its most remote corners. The book is an excellent overview of the world's geological and biological development. It describes the major periods and epochs and some of the great cataclysmic extinctions that have occured in the past, wiping out 50-90% of all life on the planet. What is also evident from this book is that paleontolists must also be expert geologists in order to identify the right type and age of rocks in which the fossils they are looking for are most likely to be found. For those of you who found this sort of thing interesting in high school or college and have since found yourselves working in an office the last few years, get a copy of this book and Your Inner Fish by Neil Shubin and rekindle your interest in science. You might even be inspired to go fossil hunting or rock hunting with your kids as a way to engage their interest (plus, do you really want to go to the "Happiest Place on Earth" for another summer vacation?).

great book, fast service.

Peter Ward is one of the best writers in this genre - personally I rate him with Wilson, Dawkins and Gould - at least when it comes to the art of telling a good story, creating a good picture."On Methuselah's Trail" is one of the best books I have read about fossils and evolution. Not revolutionary, challenging or very complicated - just well written, charming, and - most important - it makes you want go right out in the bush to look for your own fossils!

a simply amazing book. it has created places for my wife and i to go and explore . addy, washington. testa's pile of rocks near chicago.just wonderfully written and wonderfully informative.

I wish this book had been around when I was in high school because it brought the field of science

in general, and geology/biology in particular, alive for the first time. I honestly looked at my natural surroundings differently after reading it. I have also purchased and enjoyed the hard cover copies of Professor Ward's other two books. Some of the passages he writes especially with regard to bringing you back in time give you shivers.

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