

takes his knocks. Even his psychoprobes intrigue: how surfing reflects his past, brackets his love life, defines his expectations. Through the foam and riptides, Duane brings back a great ride, wild and elegant.

—PETER LEWIS

YAK BUTTER & BLACK TEA

Wade Brackenbury
Algonquin Books

When he's not floating homemade rafts in Guatemala or serving as an expedition doctor for photographic missions up the Congo River, Wade Brackenbury is a small-town chiropractor in Springville, Utah. Unlike his fellow Mormons, who go off on two-year missions to spread the word of God, Brackenbury's personal mission has always had a somewhat different mandate: adventure.

In southwest China's wild Yunnan province he finds it, along with Pascal Szapu, a silver-tongued French freelance photographer who sweet-talks his way into parts of Asia off-limits to foreigners. The two soon hatch a plan to journey to the Drung Valley, a remote region in southern Tibet's Irrawaddy River basin that Szapu believed had yet to be visited and photographed by Westerners.

Intrigued by descriptions of pristine mountain ranges and vanishing peoples and seduced by the idea of being the first 20th-century foreigners to make contact with the Drung, Brackenbury and Szapu undertake a three-week-long game of cat-and-mouse with Chinese authorities that nearly gets them expelled from China. Wary of Szapu's scams but still longing to visit the Drung, Brackenbury gives it a try himself.

Trading chiropractic adjustments for small quantities of flour and a few apples, Brackenbury goes on an arduous bushwhack. Along the way he reaches the epiphany that adventure isn't always a noble goal. Suffering from pangs of conscience even as he achieves his goal (eventually Brackenbury can no longer bear taking food out of people's mouths), he reflects: "I suddenly saw myself as I imagined they must see me—a selfish Westerner, coming suddenly into their

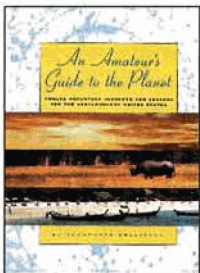
quiet lives, then disappearing, leaving trouble behind and them to pick up the pieces." Discovering that the Drung Valley is no Shangri-La, Brackenbury returns a sadder, wiser man.

Yak Butter & Black Tea is a cautionary tale and an incredible solo mission to a corner of the globe perhaps better left untouched.

—JILL YESKO

AN AMATEUR'S GUIDE TO THE PLANET

Jeannette Belliveau
Beau Monde Press



Amateurs are experts at doing things the pros are too formatted to contemplate. They invent computers in garages, toss surfboards onto ski slopes and, as is the case here, revamp

the travel book into a compelling and relevant new journey. Former *Washington Post* staffer Jeannette Belliveau takes us on 12 sojourns to distant lands in a lively, graphics-juiced 8 x 10-inch volume that goes where few travel writers dare to tread: down a path to thoughtful interpretation and analysis instead of rote description.

No matter where we go, from Borneo to the Yucatan, *An Amateur's Guide to the Planet* is as much about us as it is them. From romping with lemurs in Madagascar, we see the immediacy of environmental damage. The beaches of Tahiti prompt an examination of the ways traditional cultures survive. A Brazilian *candombe* celebration demonstrates the vitality of the rising crescent of New Africa, struggling with its own internal problems of race relations, poverty and education.

Belliveau finds the cultural crossovers and the ironies. "The problem for many poor American children lies in having a videocassette recorder but not a father present," she writes. Yes, the U.S. is at the top of the economic order, but in terms of family, we are third world, or rather, third rate.

Her mix of up-to-the-minute issues and on-the-fly adventure adds up to an expert departure.

—LISA REBUCK

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