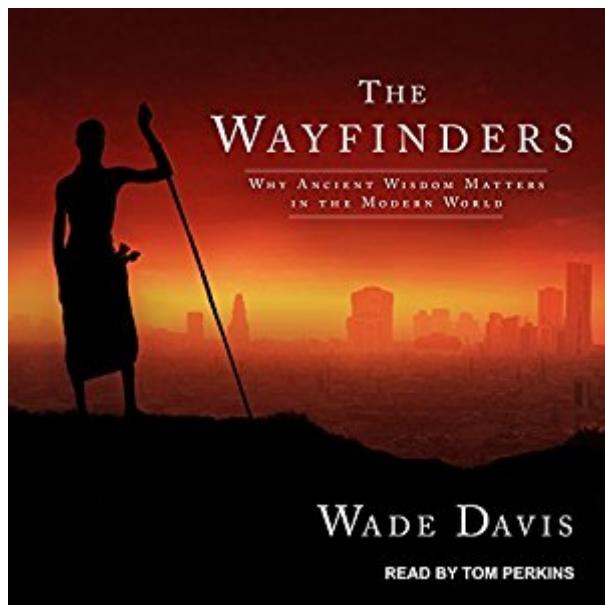


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# The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters In The Modern World



## Synopsis

Every culture is a unique answer to a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human and alive? In *The Wayfinders*, renowned anthropologist, winner of the prestigious Samuel Johnson Prize, and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Wade Davis leads us on a thrilling journey to celebrate the wisdom of the world's indigenous cultures. In Polynesia, we set sail with navigators whose ancestors settled the Pacific 10 centuries before Christ. In the , we meet the descendants of a true lost civilization, the Peoples of the Anaconda. In the Andes, we discover that the earth really is alive, while in Australia we experience Dreamtime, the all-embracing philosophy of the first humans to walk out of Africa. We then travel to Nepal, where we encounter a wisdom hero, a Bodhisattva, who emerges from 45 years of Buddhist retreat and solitude. And, finally, we settle in Borneo, where the last rain forest nomads struggle to survive. Understanding the lessons of this journey will be our mission for the next century. For at risk is the human legacy - a vast archive of knowledge and expertise, a catalog of the imagination. Rediscovering a new appreciation for the diversity of the human spirit, as expressed by culture, is among the central challenges of our time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Birdcalls echo in the rainforests of Borneo as the Penan hunter crouches before a kill. Inuit glide across the wind-scoured ice. Kogi priests traverse Colombian coral reefs and cloud forests to learn contours of the landscape entrusted to their care. In the published edition of his five Massey Lectures, Wade Davis seeks to answer the question "What does it mean to be

human and alive? A book with portraits of culture spanning centuries and terrain. It is a rare work of anthropology illustrating the vitality of human imagination from Himalayan peaks to the southern sea; Davis brings new attention to peoples still practicing ancient arts and writes with the voice of a lyrical novelist. Anything but a detached textbook, it remains a work as fascinating as it is beautiful to read. And in depicting new dreams of the Earth, Davis presents one of his own. Why do we speak the languages we do? How did humanity journey out of Africa millennia ago and come to settle every corner of the habitable world? In examining the planet's constellation of cultures, Davis argues that thousands of languages and millions of lifeways are as threatened as species comprising the biosphere. The loss of either has equal significance for the flourishing of our world. To read his book is to discover a love letter to our species and develop a new understanding of the diversity of human endeavor. The images are robust: San sipping water from ostrich eggs beneath the sweltering Kalahari sun, a steadfast wayfinder aboard the open-decked *Hokule'a* crashing through waves on a journey across the Pacific and into the Polynesian spirit, travels into the jade canopy of the rainforest - realm of the jaguar shaman. A former National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence, Davis writes from firsthand experience based on decades of fieldwork and creates a sense of eyewitness any travel writer would envy while never deviating from scholarly precision. As a historical text, the book is exhaustively researched and includes an annotated bibliography with years of reading material for those interested in anthropology and natural history. While acknowledging Western culture's triumphs and contributions, Davis also explores the consequences of colonialism. Losing connection with other ways of living carries environmental and psychological costs, and the character of culture is inextricably linked to the spirit of place. The Tendai marathon monks of Japan, Andean pilgrimages, or Songlines of Aboriginal Australia represent exquisite achievements in human thought, and Davis interrogates the extent to which a singular culture produces a singular mindset. Yet the book remains hopeful. Why does Davis have faith in our ability to mend ages of destruction? Because of the tenacity and ingenuity of the human journey he himself celebrates. An unforgettable read both for the energy of its author and the poetry of its language, *The Wayfinders* inspired me to pursue anthropology more than any other text.

The profoundity, subtlety and literary brilliance of this book are hard not to extol. "My goal," Wade Davis writes, "was not to document the exotic other, but rather to identify stories that had deep metaphorical resonance, something universal to tell us about the nature of being alive." This goal is the main current that courses through the peaks and

valleys of the book -- the mosaic of stories put together to shed luminous light on the theme of what it means to be alive and to be human. Reading without this objective in mind, I think it is easy for many to lose sight of the purpose of the many stories in the Wayfinders: to challenge through the tools of ethnography, history, and philosophy the belief in the objectivity of certain paradigms of life. The existence of a "paragon of humanity" or an "objective standard of living" or "modernity" -- ideas often taken for granted as being universal across socio-cultural contexts -- are beautifully analyzed in light of the many histories and cultures Wade Davis explores throughout the Wayfinders. His analysis, apart from being beautifully and often poetically articulated, leaves us with a set of penetrating insights that challenge and problematize our all-too-common views of the urban/rural divide, beliefs about who is advanced and who is primitive, and lead us to a conclusion that, I think, we all know in our hearts is and always has been true: "that all peoples ought to have the right to choose the components of their lives," whether that is how they choose to see the world, the way of life they choose, or even the languages they seek to preserve. I sincerely believe that this a book which will be celebrated for decades to come, and one which has made a worthy contribution to the collective consciousness of many societies in a world dominated by the forces of Westernization and globalization. Thank you, Wade.

I personally found the title of this book to be much more interesting than the actual read. Its just a lot of information presented without feeling like it is getting to any point. I feel like a lot of the facts presented don't serve the actual theme and so I become drowned in superfluous information. I was hoping the writing would provide a strong visual of what it was like to think and live as a person from ancient, primal times. I wanted to see the world through their eyes in a sense so I could gain perspective on the modern world and see how a more primal perspective is useful in day to day living. But after reading 60 pages I just felt so bored out of my mind with facts that didn't serve this understanding at all, that I gave up. I just felt like the writing was extremely dull and with an overly academic prose. That said, I couldn't quite get to the point where I felt like I could finish the book. So if someone thinks I am wrong and that the book does in fact portray what I mentioned before later on, then please correct me.

A wonderful and important book that celebrates human diversity while at the same time warning of a rapidly accelerating global loss of culture that threatens our survival as a species, while at the same time transforming the world into a vast Western monoculture driven by industry, consumerism, and

the misguided notion that there is only one true, "progressive" way to live. Highly recommended. Davis reminded me of what got me interested in anthropology over 20 years ago, and why I started travelling

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