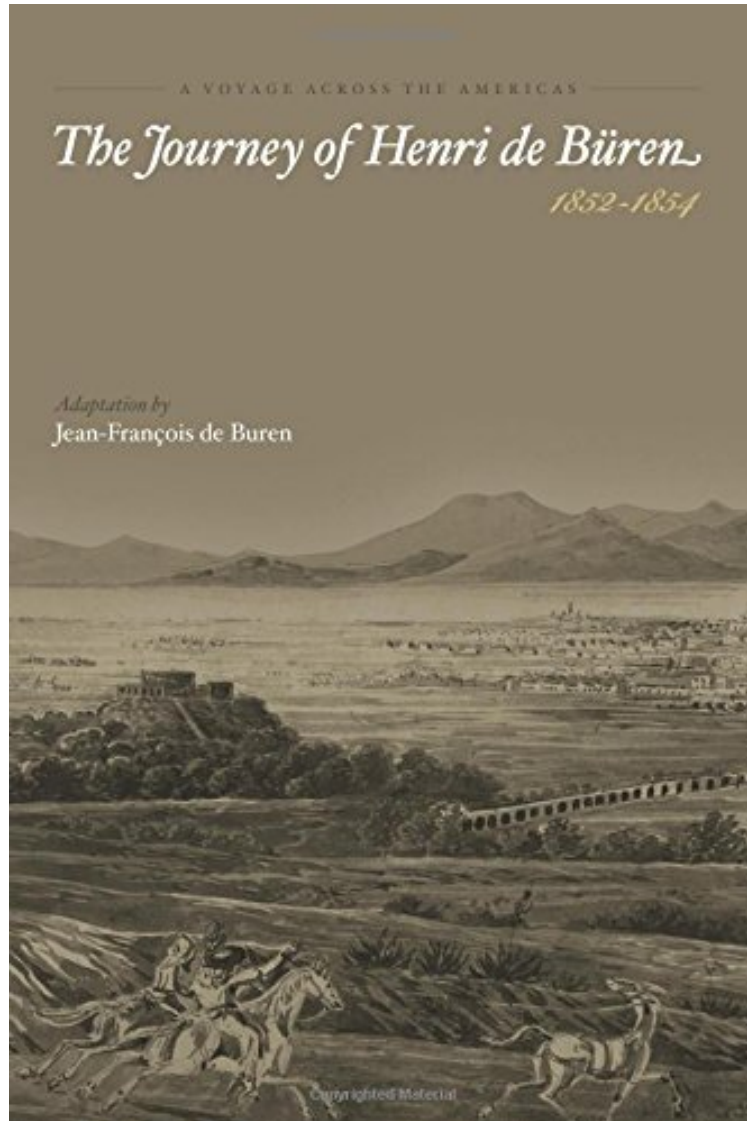


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A Voyage Across the Americas - The Journey of Henri de Buren

Jean-Francois de Buren

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Jean-Francois de Buren : A Voyage Across the Americas - The Journey of Henri de Buren before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Voyage Across the Americas - The Journey of Henri de Buren:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Inspiring adventureBy Francis TaponI've traveled to 100 countries and walked 20,000 km in the mountains, so I understand the rigors of travel. However, doing it in the 1800s is another story. That's why I loved this book.The author takes you on a stunning journey through the Americas during a time where there was no tourist infrastructure. This Swiss travelogue provides a window of that era and inspiration for your

own adventures. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A valuable piece of history

By Christopher In 2007, Jean-Francois de Buren found an old journal in his parent's house, written in French and filled with descriptions and illustrations of exotic 19th century locales. It turned out to be a travel journal written by his great-great-grandfather, Henri de Bren, a titled Swiss ("Swiss" is apparently the demonym for a person from Switzerland, not "Swissman," I looked it up!). I'm not sure if the author previously knew much about his great-great grandfather but he spent the next six years researching and collecting more information about his explorations and produced this book that is not only packed with first-hand historical observations of a time-gone-by but it's also a very fun read. Henri de Bren's journey took him from Switzerland to Canada, southward through the growing United States, to Cuba, Mexico, Panama, and across the incredible natural landscapes of Peru and Brazil. A treasure of insights were recorded not just in his journals and the letters home to his family but also in the magnificently descriptive drawings and paintings of plants and landscapes that have been located and added to the work (Henri a trained Botanist and artist). Though only 15 drawings were included in the book, the author found out that there is another portfolio out there somewhere containing 134 more that was recorded as sold by Henri's daughter's in the 1920's. Hopefully he'll be able to locate it and insert it into a future edition of this book as Henri was truly a talented artist. After only a short time in the United States, Henri had already formed a strong opinion of Americans and he recorded the many things he saw good in America and the many things that were sorry. He particularly did not like "Yankees" (and can't resist making mention of it even when he is far away from them in South America). His thoughts on the pitfalls facing the young nation give one pause and I think retain their accuracy more than 160 years later: "To sum it up, with Americans, the head leads and trumps the heart... reducing all relationships between men to usefulness. There are noble passions that enrich the soul; money spoils and withers it. It seems that greed is blowing a harmful wind upon America, which, when it latches onto what is moral within man, destroys genius and smothers enthusiasm perhaps down to the bottom of the heart, in order to drain the source of noble inspiration and generous impulses." Henri was so relieved when he finally departed the United States and arrived in Cuba, he recorded in a letter: "At last, here I am in a country that through its nature, its poetry, its originality, its sky and land, its cities and its people, its morals and its physics, is willing to reward my journey." However, traveling is always difficult, and Henri never quite found satisfaction in any of the places that he traveled. One almost feels sorry for Henri as his impatience with unfamiliar ways of doing things continually grinds away at him. It is the heat and the cold and the bull-fighting (and the bear-fighting!) and the mosquitoes and the ticks, but it is also the lying scoundrels, the cheating rascals, the lazy locals, the Catholic clergy, and in general the great unwashed residents of the new world that try his patience. It gets to be almost comical sometimes, as his frustration with whatever nationality or race he is dealing with at the moment spurs him to typically describe them thus: "...their faults are so numerous and so disagreeable to list and describe that I give up doing it." He constantly sought out the company of fellow-Europeans when he could find them but he even grew weary of the Germans who traveled along with him on part of his journey as their behavior devolved into drunkenness and gunplay. However, his insular loneliness which stemmed from missing life and family in Switzerland also produced some of the more sublime writing in his journal. Typically, he writes as if he were writing for an audience but a year into his travels he seemingly wrote more to himself: "How deeply I miss a friend; a comrade, a companion who shares some of the same tastes and ideas as me, and with whom I could converse - a bond, one that enlivens both the heart and the mind. This someone, this friend with whom I could forget the weariness and hardships of the trip, while sharing our time and our thoughts, this someone I have yet to find and will not find. Here I sit, with self-reflection as my only recourse, which is neither good nor agreeable, nor instructive." By the time that Henri's journal abruptly ends at the mouth of the and he finally finds a ship for home, you feel as if you've made the exhausting and uniquely wonderful voyage with him. Thanks to Henri's great-great-grandson, we have this valuable diary of a unique time in the history of our world that is gone and never to return, even if the ever-present complaints of the very human traveler will always remain.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. If you travel, you'll need to take this book along!

By James S. Scherrer The Journey of Henri de Buren (1852-1854) is a marvelous accounting by this Swiss naturalist of his travels through North and South America in a time that has been long forgotten. Not only is Henri a great naturalist, but also a crisp and entertaining travel writer. His descriptions, color and energy drip from every page. His ride down into a volcano is most exciting and his observation of a bull fight, is very thrilling yet simultaneously depressing. His writing and illustrations combine the best of Edward Lear (of Owl and Pussycat), John J. Audubon (Elephant Folio) and Rachel Carson (of Silent Spring) into one travelogue, far before the invention of Frodor's or Trip Advisor. Later, Ernest Shackleton, British explorer who led three expeditions to the Antarctic, would chronicle his polar travels, but this is an accounting of no-less-harrowing travels on land. Not only does he provide accurate botanical, geomorphological and fluvial assessments but fills the pages with anecdotes which give the reader grist for later research. Who else would provide such comment about the native Indians as "their songs and melancholic cries which, I think, are in perfect harmony with the solitude of this great river and the thousands of noises you can hear at night in the forest." If you enjoy travel, and appreciate what its like to have fine accommodations, then this story of ticks, mosquitos, and otherworldly critters is sure to keep you entertained. Hopefully his "long lost" Album and nature illustrations will turn up in some "yard sale" or "e-bay listing" and bring us the entire story of this magical adventure in a time when discovery was still beginning.

Blending adventure and social commentary, the journals and letters of Henri de Bren, a young Swiss nobleman, detail his grand tour from his family castle overlooking Lake Neuchtel, Switzerland, to the still youthful Americas of the 1850s. His voyage-on foot, horseback, and by boat-would take him through the Eastern United States, the waters of the Caribbean, the vast expanses of Mexico and the stunning lakes and mountain ranges of South America. Henri would not return home for two years. Henri's first-hand accounts of his travels in the New World reflect his observations on a variety of subjects: the grandeur of nature (made both from the vantage point of an artist and avid botanist); racial injustice and social inequality; his meetings with noted Swiss scientists such as Louis Agassiz; and his colorful encounters with European emigrants and wily government officials. Henri's journals and letters to his family, seeing the light of day for the first time in over 150 years, will fascinate readers who value wit, history, and the broadening qualities of travel. His thoughts and observations on the 19th century open a larger window into the past, one that shows at times how far we have come and at others how far we still have to go.