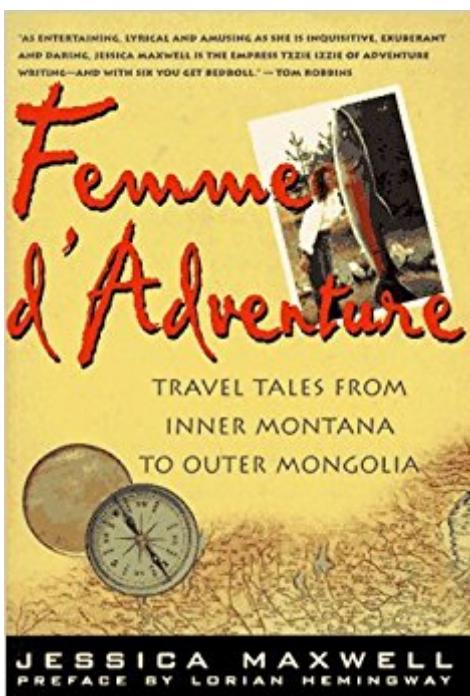


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Femme D'Adventure: Tales From A Wild Life (Adventura Books)



Synopsis

A wryly told, delightful melange of footloose chronicles by a sometimes anxious wanderer. Maxwell (*I Don't Know Why I Swallowed the Fly*, 1997) is rather like the rest of us: wary of small planes and rushing rivers, yet also fond of wildlife. Unlike some of us, however, she gamely runs Idaho's Salmon River, takes a 37-hour train ride across the Gobi Desert (insidious grit stormed the failing shell of that old railroad mollusk'), and snorkels among whales. Fly-fishing is Maxwell's *raison d'Être*, and readers will happily follow her as she searches for steelhead trout on a wild and secret Washington river and fishes a Mongolian waterway reputedly containing the heftiest salmon on earth (up to 200 pounds apiece). One need not be a fellow traveler to appreciate her jaunts; Maxwell's prose is wittily light-hearted. Repulsed by said Mongolian salmon, she declares, I'd be damned if I was going to set a world record with a fish that looked so much like Quasimodo in a mermaid suit.' During an uncharacteristically urban trip to Italy, she comments, If the Italian Renaissance painters had been dentists, their dentures would have looked like Venice. Arcaded and cupolaed, welded together with fancy bridgework, riddled with elegant root canals, its yellowed buildings rising straight out of the sea, it looks, for all the world, like a floating grin.' On her stubbornly eclectic route, Maxwell also journeys to Alaska with sled-dog champion Susan Butcher and her Alaskan huskies. She visits a huge colony of monarch butterflies; she encounters a giant toxic toad. And amid all the double entendres and sardonic asides, this outdoorswoman remains an informative naturalist.

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Customer Reviews

In the first chapter, Maxwell (*I Don't Know Why I Swallowed the Fly: My Fly Fishing Rookie Season*, LJ 4/15/97) states, "There are few accomplishments more gratifying in a woman's life than building her very own relationship with the whole wide world." Written for those who have ventured a bit themselves, this book supports her statement. In each chapter, Maxwell travels to a different place, like "mystical" Ireland, Alaska (to interview a dog "musher" and Iditarod racer), Oregon for steelhead fishing, and Mongolia for salmon fishing. The subject matter is interesting, but Maxwell writes in cliches, and her loose use of grammar detracts. She tends not to delve as deeply as she could into the purpose of her travels and the people and animals she encounters. Yet even with these flaws, Maxwell's world travels will be of interest to many public library patrons. ?Melisa Fiumara, North Tonawanda P.L., N.Y. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A wryly told, delightful melange of footloose chronicles by a sometimes anxious wanderer. Maxwell (*I Don't Know Why I Swallowed the Fly*, 1997) is rather like the rest of us: wary of small planes and rushing rivers, yet also fond of wildlife. Unlike some of us, however, she gamely runs Idaho's Salmon River, takes a 37-hour train ride across the Gobi Desert ("insidious grit stormed the failing shell of that old railroad mollusk"), and snorkels among whales. Fly-fishing is Maxwell's raison d'être, and readers will happily follow her as she searches for steelhead trout on a wild and secret Washington river and fishes a Mongolian waterway reputedly containing the heftiest salmon on earth (up to 200 pounds apiece). One need not be a fellow traveler to appreciate her jaunts; Maxwell's prose is wittily light-hearted. Repulsed by said Mongolian salmon, she declares, "I'd be damned if I was going to set a world record with a fish that looked so much like Quasimodo in a mermaid suit." During an uncharacteristically urban trip to Italy, she comments, "If the Italian Renaissance painters had been dentists, their dentures would have looked like Venice. Arcaded and cupolaed, welded together with fancy bridgework, riddled with elegant root canals, its yellowed buildings rising straight out of the sea, it looks, for all the world, like a floating grin." On her stubbornly eclectic route, Maxwell also journeys to Alaska with sled-dog champion Susan Butcher and her Alaskan huskies. She visits a huge colony of monarch butterflies; she encounters a giant toxic toad. And amid all the double entendres and sardonic asides, this outdoorswoman remains an informative naturalist. Though she'll go to almost any length to muscle out a story, Maxwell writes with refreshingly little machismo. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

"Femme d'Adventure" is a sublime collection of ecotourism and travel essays tied together by a few

simple themes -- that Nature is unbelievable but seeing is believing, that water is the stuff of Nature that bonds all species together, that a shared meal is the stuff of humanity that bonds people together, that humanity is just one species in the interrelated world of Nature, and that we may experience Nature in the American backyards that essayist Jessica Maxwell visits as well in the exotic locales -- Mongolia, Ireland, the Rockies, Alaska -- that she visits, too. Maxwell takes us climbing in the mountains and on the hillsides, diving in the oceans, rafting and fishing in the rivers. Frequently she grounds her observations in a shared meal among those sharing her travels. Her vivid metaphors from couture or cosmetics -- e.g., Compared to river dories, "Rafts are a lot like shampoo -- they give your ride more body and bounce, and make it more manageable" -- ring with the eureka! truth that comes of Maxwell's relating apparently unrelated concepts from Natural Science and the powder room. In the process, she reminds us that travel and adventure aren't matters of gender, even if the sexism of the traditional outdoorsman is: "The world in all its natural and cultured glory is out there waiting for each of us, if e're we dare to grab our fly rod, pack out waterproof mascara, and go." My favorite essay is "Day of the Stiff Dogs," in which we come to know California's monarch butterfly, Utah's brine shrimp, Alaska's ice worm, Texas's tadpole shrimp and leaf-cutter ant, Washington's gold beetle and giant Pacific octopus, and Florida's gentle, vanishing manatee and 5-pound Alpo-eating Bufo toad, whose venom temporarily paralyzes the pooches that bite this noxious amphibian to protect their dog food. Whether describing her own anxiety in a new and trying situation or else decrying our collective shame for the condition of the environment, this book is always buoyed with a dry, punning wit that engages our best selves. Between the covers of Jessica Maxwell's "Femme d'Adventure: Travel Tales from Inner Montana to Outer Mongolia," there are enough sunbeams and moonbeams to light our way to save Nature from humanity.

A wonderful series of essays reporting on a wide range of adventure travel undertaken by the author. From spending a few hours with Iditarod champion Susan Butcher, to wandering the streets of Venice, to seeking giant salmon in Outer Mongolia, Jessica Maxwell masterfully conveys the joy that exists in simply being somewhere, doing something. This book is a great counterbalance for all the people in our modern society that have succumbed to our innate fear of nature, of experiencing places and events that are completely out of our control, of simply being uncomfortable. The essence of Maxwell's writing is that she admits that doing new things and visiting new places can indeed be uncomfortable and scary. These are not tales of extreme travel there's nothing like "and then I looked the snarling grizzly in the eyes and stared him down" in this book. Rather Maxwell let's you know that the prospect of whitewater rafting on the Snake River terrified her; that

she didn't cast at a giant salmon in Mongolia because it was so big and ugly that it forced her to abandon the river. The key is to understand that despite discomfort and uncertainty she did it anyway, enjoyed it anyway. I highly recommend this book for anyone though particularly people who avoid camping because there might be a rock under the sleeping bag.

I resented the hell out of this book, and about midway through I realized why. It's not really adventure writing - it's adventure writing **for girls**. Most of these articles would only qualify as fluff or travel pieces, or maybe reflective essays, if they'd been written by men. Because the author is a woman - well, because she's a woman, a trip to Venice qualifies as adventure. A drive in Ireland qualifies as adventure. Fishing in Canada qualifies as adventure. In other words, this is an adventure travel book that only features travel - and fear. Fear is a necessary component of any adventure article or book, but fear shouldn't own the author and the story; in *Femme D'Adventure*, it does. Even the introduction, by Lorian Hemingway, talks about how much women have to fear these days, and surely we do, but I **live** the mundane terrors of a woman's daily life - I don't need to read about them in an adventure travel book. From adventure writing, I expect exceptional fear, life-affirming fear, thrilling fear, and this book is sorely lacking in that department. I mean, I was awfully glad to read that the author got over her fear of flying (and, in another article, her fear of rafting). But if I'd wanted to read that kind of story, I'd have bought a self-help book. In an adventure story, I want fear induced not by boarding an airplane but by jumping out of one. Another irritating aspect of this "adventure for girls" writing is the language. It's cute to the point of inducing nausea. "If the Italian Renaissance painters had been dentists, their dentures would have looked like Venice," the author informs us. Fine. What an adorable sentence that is. Of course, it's also meaningless. And I can't call to mind any other adventure writer OR travel writer who relies so heavily on alliteration. You can only read phrases like "the wicked Wicklow wind," something she repeats more than once in her article on Ireland, so many times before you start reaching for something a little less cute. Maybe I'd have liked this book a little more if it hadn't been so clearly marketed as adventure writing, right down to the word "adventure" in the title. And then again, considering the language, maybe not. Either way, though, this book mostly serves not to show us, as women, how far we've come, but rather how far we still have to go.

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