

---

### WALLACE IN AMERICA

**Alfred Russel Wallace's 1886–1887 Travel Diary: The North American Lecture Tour.** Charles H. Smith and Megan Derr, eds. Siri Scientific Press, 2013. 258 pp., illus. \$45.00 (ISBN 9780956779588 paper).

**T**he purpose of *Alfred Russel Wallace's 1886–1887 Travel Diary: The North American Lecture Tour* is to document a little-known chapter in the life of this British naturalist and codiscoverer (with Charles Darwin) of evolution by means of natural selection. This publication also marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Wallace (he lived from 8 January 1823 to 7 November 1913), who recorded many of his remarkable experiences in

a two-volume autobiography (Wallace 1905). In the first decade of this century alone, four biographers have explored his life (Raby 2001, Shermer 2002, Fichman 2004, Sloten 2004), and the author of one of those (Michael Shermer) also wrote the preface to this volume. The first editor, Charles H. Smith, is a science librarian who runs the Web site *The Alfred Russel Wallace Page* at Western Kentucky University (<http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/index1.htm>) and is the editor of both an anthology (Smith 1991) and an intellectual history (Smith and Becaloni 2010) of Wallace.

History has provided Darwin with the lion's share of the credit for the theory of natural selection because of the 20 years of data he presented in *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin 1859). Wallace was fully supportive of Darwin's priority, pleased to be Darwin's colleague in raising the subject, and delighted that it was not his fate to explain evolution to the world. Darwin even wrote to Henry Bates, Wallace's good friend and traveling companion in the Amazon: "What strikes me most about Mr. Wallace is the absence of jealousy towards me: He must have a really good honest and noble disposition, a far higher merit than mere intellect" (Berra 2013). This nonproprietary attitude allowed Wallace to concentrate on biogeography (Wallace 1869, 1876) and eventually on spiritualism—in the form of a bizarre fixation with mediums and séances that began in 1866 and that adversely affected his scientific standing.

Wallace was a pallbearer at Darwin's funeral in 1882, along with James Russell Lowell, an eminent literary figure and the American minister to Britain at that time. The latter invited Wallace, then the world's most famous living naturalist, to lecture at the Lowell Institute, in Boston. Wallace accepted the offer in 1885 and began planning what was to become his North American lecture tour, his lectures eventually forming a substantial part of his major work, entitled *Darwinism* (Wallace 1889). Wallace arrived in

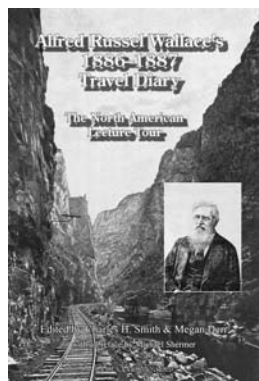
New York on 23 October 1886, traveled to Boston 5 days later, then proceeded to Baltimore; Washington, DC; Toronto; Cincinnati; Bloomington; St. Louis; Kansas City; Salina, Kansas; Denver; and, eventually, San Francisco. The return trip included Salt Lake City, Colorado Springs, Sioux City, Chicago, and East Lansing, to name some of the 41 lecture stops. Like most ventures Wallace attempted, the lecture tour was not especially profitable. After expenses, the tour earned Wallace only £350.

The bulk of this travel diary contains the daily transcriptions of Wallace's journal, the original of which is owned by The Linnean Society of London. He gave his first lecture in Boston on 1 November 1886 to a full and appreciative audience; the topic was "The Darwinian theory." Other topics in his repertoire were "The origin and uses of the colours of animals"; "Mimicry, and other exceptional modes of animal colouration"; "The origin and uses of the colours of plants"; "The permanence of oceans, and the relations of islands and continents"; "Oceanic islands and their biological history"; "Continental islands: Their past history and biological relations"; and "The physical and biological relations of New Zealand and Australia." He illustrated his lectures with colored lantern slides. A newspaper account from the *Boston Evening Transcript* of his Darwin theory lecture stated, "The first Darwinian, Wallace, did not leave a leg for anti-Darwinism to stand on when he had got through his first Lowell lecture last evening. It was a masterpiece of condensed statement—as clear and simple as compact—a most beautiful specimen of scientific work. Mr. Wallace, though not an orator, is likely to become a favourite as a lecturer, his manner is so genuinely modest and straightforward" (Wallace 1905, p. 110).

Wallace met Asa Gray, the Harvard botanist and American Darwinian, on 5 November 1886. His other notable

Boston contacts included Oliver Wendell Holmes and Alexander Agassiz. In addition to visiting major museums, Wallace attended séances (in which he experienced "materializations") including those run by the well-known medium Hannah Ross, who was eventually charged with fraud. Wallace thought that she was legitimate, however. In Washington, DC, he met Spencer Fullerton Baird, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Wallace became friends with Major John Wesley Powell, head of the US Geological Survey, with whom he visited the White House and met President Grover Cleveland on 4 February 1887.

Wallace gave three lectures in Sioux City, Iowa (2–4 May 1887), and was described by Charles (1906) as "polite, genteel, neat in dress, he stood six feet high and was built in proportion. At the time of his visit here, he was wearing a closely cropped beard."



"Wallace was not an orator, not even a smooth speaker. He spoke carefully, without notes, and always kept within bounds. His lectures were strictly scientific. It was what he said, rather than how, that attracted. He was a pleasing conversationalist, one not given at all to small talk. [Although] it was hard for him to get away from the subject of evolution, I do not remember that he spoke a single time while here concerning his own great part in the working out of the evolutionary hypothesis" (pp. 56–57). This last point often frustrated Darwin, who wanted Wallace to accept his fair share of credit for the idea of natural

selection, but Wallace was content to be the person who stimulated Darwin to publish (Berra 2013).

While touring the American West, Wallace was greatly impressed with Yosemite Valley and its glacier-cut walls. The highlight of the western leg of his trip was a tour of the redwood and sequoia forests in the company of the budding conservationist John Muir. About the sequoias, Wallace wrote on 15 June 1877, "Of all the natural wonders I saw in America, nothing impressed me so much as these glorious trees....These grand pines are often from two hundred to two hundred and fifty feet high and seven or eight feet in diameter at five feet above the ground."

Following the journal entries are Wallace's notes on expenses. In addition, the editors have provided 97 pages of useful appendices such as lists of lectures given, places seen, and plants collected. *Alfred Russel Wallace's 1886–1887 Travel Diary* is well illustrated and well produced by a small publisher of short print runs of titles that might be overlooked by larger publishers. This explains the rather high price. For those who consider themselves Wallace aficionados, this book is essential; it is authoritative and trustworthy, and it describes a little known part of the Wallace story.

## References cited

- Berra TM. 2013. Wallace's acceptance of Darwin's priority in his own words. *The Linnean* 29. Forthcoming.
- Charles JH. 1906. Proceedings of the Academy of Science and Letters of Sioux City (1905–6), vol. 2. Academy of Science and Letters of Sioux City.
- Darwin C. 1859. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. Murray.
- Fichman M. 2004. *An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace*. University of Chicago Press.
- Raby P. 2001. *Alfred Russel Wallace: A Life*. Princeton University Press.
- Shermer M. 2002. In Darwin's Shadow: The Life and Science of Alfred Russel Wallace. Oxford University Press.
- Slotten RA. 2004. *The Heretic in Darwin's Court: The Life of Alfred Russel Wallace*. Columbia University Press.

- Smith CH, ed. 1991. Alfred Russel Wallace: An Anthology of His Shorter Writings. Oxford University Press.
- Smith CH, Beccaloni G. 2010. Natural Selection and Beyond: The Intellectual Legacy of Alfred Russel Wallace. Oxford University Press.
- Wallace AR. 1869. The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utan, and the Bird of Paradise: A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature. Macmillan.
- . 1876. The Geographical Distribution of Animals: With a Study of the Relations of Living and Extinct Faunas as Elucidating the Past Changes of the Earth's Surface. Macmillan.
- . 1889. Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection with Some of Its Applications. Macmillan.
- . 1905. My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions. Dodd, Mead, and Company.

## TIM M. BERRA

*Tim M. Berra (berra.1@osu.edu) is a university professorial fellow at Charles Darwin University, in Darwin, Australia, and professor emeritus in the Department of Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology at The Ohio State University, in Mansfield. Berra is the author of Charles Darwin: The Concise Story of an Extraordinary Man (2009) and the upcoming Darwin and His Children: His Other Legacy.*

