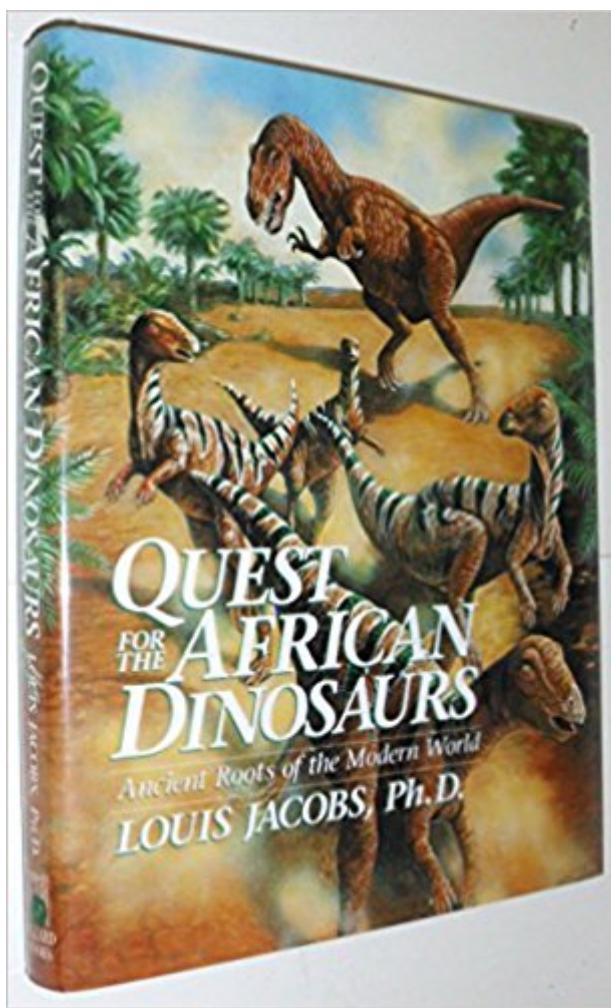


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# Quest For The African Dinosaurs: Ancient Roots Of The Modern World



## Synopsis

A leading American paleontologist records the landmark discoveries he has made on the continent of Africa, addressing, at the same time, many provocative questions about the world of paleontology in general. 25,000 first printing. \$25,000 ad/promo.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Excavating in the highlands above Africa's Lake Malawi, paleontologist Jacobs unearthed the remains of a strange crocodile and three dinosaurs, one of which provided a missing link in the fossil record. He uses the story of his discoveries to depict Africa as it was 100 million years ago, when the continent was breaking away from the rest of the world land mass. Taking readers on-site to observe excavation and field work, he elucidates the process of dinosaur identification and the intricacies of their anatomies. Later, visiting a fossil bed in Cameroon's Koum Basin, he notes that the African fossil record covers a great deal of dinosaur history but is frustratingly spotty and incomplete. His own research with the titanosaurid sauropod Malawi-saurus, which chronicles an unbroken 79-million-year history, fills in some of the blanks. This fine book is an important volume for dinosaur fans. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Some important side effects of the popularity of dinosaurs have been to teach many nonscientists about science and to attract students to scientific fields. Paleontologist Jacobs (an expert on the tiny mammals that coexisted with the dinosaurs) packs a huge amount of interesting scientific information into this book and supplements it with entertaining travel stories from Malawi and

Cameroon, a dose of African history, informative illustrations, and a bit of scientific skepticism. Lest we think dinosaurs are just a fad in the United States, an interesting subtext tells how Jacobs's paleontological expeditions captured the imagination of local people and led a few African students to study paleontology. Jacobs recounts his adventures with exemplary clarity and a quirky sense of humor and, in the end, produces a good dinosaur book for popular collections.- Amy Brunvand, Fort Lewis Coll. Lib., Durango, Col.Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Great!

This is really a fun book to read. It is written more like an adventure story or a 19th century travelog. As the title suggests it is about the quest for African dinosaurs (more broadly fossils of Africa). It is not a condensation of the latest research in the field, but a personal account. There are just enough illustrations to visually elucidate what the author is writing about, and enough about a field season to feel like you are there. I think that anyone who is interested in dinosaurs will find that it is a great book.

A enterprising editor might have boosted sales of this fine book using a different title. Steve Gould's *Panda's Thumbs and Flamingo's Smiles* do well. Jacobs' depiction of his search for African dinosaur fossils deserves no less. Along with a fine account of his field work in Malawi and Cameroon, Jacobs' assessment of fossil composition and what it tells us about past life is illuminating. As it happens, the structure of a crocodile's nose tells us whether it lived on land or water. This seemingly dry fact relates to how our own skulls are organized, and why. Deftly woven into his story of seeking dinosaur fossils, tracing the movement of continents over the face of the globe and the status of Malawi's culture in today's world, are the threads of his research. Evolution's had a busy time of it, and Jacobs explains how to read the record of its workings. Jacobs' travels and observations demolish the image of the austere scientist who cares only for his research and status within his guild. The title isn't "The Dinosaurs of Africa" - he's done that before. Here, he's relating his journey to make those finds, updating information on what he's found. The broader approach means learning of the travails experienced in locating the fossils, what it's like to work a dig, and how he and his team dealt with their host countries. He leaves a valid image of a broadly caring person, untrammelled by his own cultural heritage. Jacobs is adept at bringing the reader into his world. That world has a long time span, with unceasing change the only constant. He traverses millennia more easily than countries. Justly so - there're no border guards at century

boundaries. African dinosaur fossils are elusive in popular science writing. The notoriety given "the Bone Wars" in 19th Century North America have kept interest and funding largely curtailed to that region until recently. Jacobs was among the first to bring the African fossil picture into view. Although finds are being announced from that continent with increasing frequency, few of the scientists have produced a record as readable as *Quest for the African Dinosaurs*. Nor has there come to light other examples of the follow-up in developing local expertise Jacobs has undertaken in Malawi. It's an inspiring story and one of interest far beyond fossil analysis. The final chapter, "The Good of Dinosaurs" demonstrates how a serious scientist can express awareness of his host country and act to improve desperate conditions, even if only marginally. "One small step . . . "As a reissue, this book requires an editor for more than just a title. Jacobs has a propensity for short, choppy sentences, or else some editor has betrayed him. As it stands, many of these random statements break up the idea he's conveying. Perhaps it's a trick to get the reader to review the prior material. Sometimes it works. Fortunately, it doesn't detract from Jacobs efforts to convey a picture of a shifting, changing Mesozoic world and its inhabitants. He covers ground [more than geographical] rarely addressed by others. He's a good read and a valuable human being. More of you should learn about him from this book. [stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

I was really excited to find this book had been rereleased, and grabbed it the minute I saw it. It has a good reputation, and I had liked Jacob's "Lone Star Dinosaurs". Unfortunately, only about half the book is actually about dinosaurs. A person writing about dinosaurs may have a scientific duty to make the point that dinosaurs were not alone in their world and a moral obligation to discuss the indigenous population if they're describing a dig in a third world country. I can even sympathise with the fact that Jacobs found the giant crocodile and early mammals his expeditions found as fascinating as the dinosaurs but knew that he'd have less of an audience if he didn't push the dinosaurs. But he (or his publishers) should have bitten the bullet and been more honest with the book's title once these other considerations were given as much paper as they were. That being said, a chapter about *Malawisaurus* is currently the best source for the general public about Titanosaurid sauropods. As for African dinosaurs in general, this and Phillippe Taquet's interesting "Dinosaur Impressions" are our choices at the moment unless and until we get a book about the turn-of-the-century German expeditions or - more likely - Paul Sereno's recent work. A good, up-to-date work on the dinosaurs of Africa has yet to be written.

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