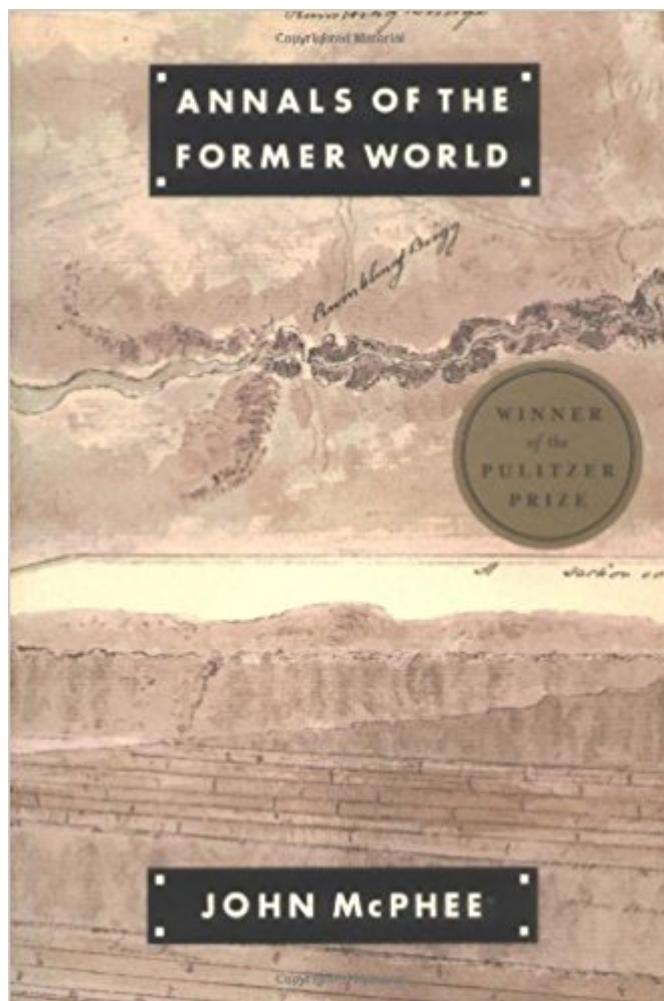


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# Annals Of The Former World



## **Synopsis**

The Pulitzer Prize-winning view of the continent, across the fortieth parallel and down through 4.6 billion years Twenty years ago, when John McPhee began his journeys back and forth across the United States, he planned to describe a cross section of North America at about the fortieth parallel and, in the process, come to an understanding not only of the science but of the style of the geologists he traveled with. The structure of the book never changed, but its breadth caused him to complete it in stages, under the overall title *Annals of the Former World*. Like the terrain it covers, *Annals of the Former World* tells a multilayered tale, and the reader may choose one of many paths through it. As clearly and succinctly written as it is profoundly informed, this is our finest popular survey of geology and a masterpiece of modern nonfiction. *Annals of the Former World* is the winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In 1978 New Yorker magazine staff writer John McPhee set out making notes for an ambitious project: a geological history of North America, centered, for the sake of convenience, on the 40th parallel, a history that encompasses billions of years. In 1981 he published the first of the four books that would come from his research: *Basin and Range*, a study of the mountainous lands between the Rockies and the Sierra Nevadas. Two years later came *In Suspect Terrain*, a grand overview of the Appalachian mountain system. In 1986 McPhee released *Rising from the Plains*, a history of the Rocky Mountains set largely in Wyoming. And in 1993 came *Assembling California*, a survey of the area geologists find to be a laboratory of volcanic and tectonic processes, a place where geology can be watched in the making. *Annals of the Former World* gathers these four volumes, which

McPhee always conceived of as a whole, to make that epic of the Earth's formation; to it he adds a fifth book, *Crossing the Craton*, which introduces the continent's ancient core, underlying what is now Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. McPhee's great virtue as a journalist covering the sciences--and any other of the countless subjects he has taken on, for that matter--is his ability to distill and explain complex matters: here, for example, the processes of mineral deposition or of plate tectonics. He does so by allowing geologists to speak for themselves and an entertaining lot they are, those sometimes odd men and women who puzzle out the landscape for clues to its most ancient past. *Annals of the Former World* is a magisterial work of popular science for which geologists--and devotees of good writing--will be grateful. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A feast for all John McPhee fans, this major book incorporates some of the author's best work on geology into a comprehensive tour de force. Those familiar with McPhee's writing on the subject of geology will know that his narrative includes not only scientific theory but also portraiture of his geologic guides. While the majority of this material has appeared in the *New Yorker* and in books such as *Basin and Range*, *In Suspect Terrain* and *Rising from the Plains*, the collection, which includes 20,000 new words, is much more than a recycling of past writing. As McPhee says, "The text has been meshed, melded, revised, in some places cut, and everywhere studied for repetition." McPhee's many fans won't be disappointed with the high-quality descriptive portraits of geologists, their work and theories. Since the writing follows McPhee's previous works and not any set geography or geologic logic, the author has provided what he calls a "Narrative Table of Contents," which not only describes each section in turn but the theories discussed in it. In this near flawless compilation of ambitious and expansive scope, McPhee's personalized style remains consistent and triumphant: "Ebbets Field, where they buried the old Brooklyn Dodgers, was also on the terminal moraine. When a long-ball hitter hit a long ball, it would land on Bedford Avenue and bounce down the morainal front to roll toward Coney Island on the outwash plain. No one in Los Angeles would ever hit a homer like that." 25 maps, not seen by PW. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I came back to this extraordinary work after a trip to California raised questions about geology. I remembered something about errant terranes from the first time I read "Assembling California," one of the parts of this work. It became compulsive reading while traveling and before bed, and it led me to Walter Alvarez's "The Mountains of Saint Francis" which complements McPhee's work nicely.

A much longer and technically challenging read from the master. You'll be reading along and, all of a sudden, realize that you've slipped into familiar territory because you're in a segment that you read years ago in *The New Yorker*.

Here is the story of the geology of the US, along with much history. The rocks are brought alive, not only in how they formed or moved, but in how they affected some of the history of people.

JOHN FOSTERED A LOVE OF GEOLOGY IN MY LIFE , I HAVE ENJOYED TRAVELLING AROUND THE COUNTRY AND VIEWING THE SIGHTS PRESENTED BY JOHN , I HAVE LIVED IN THE BASIN AND RANGE COUNTRY IN AND AROUND RENO ,NEV AND HAVE ENJOYED WYOMING IN JULY AND MONTANA ...HELENA MONT LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE ON TOP OF THE WORLD , EVEN THE CLOUDS SEEM TOUCHABLE , SO BEAUTIFUL. AND DON'T PASS UP CALIFORNIA AS A GEOLOGICAL WAREHOUSE ,IT IS BEAUTIFUL BEYOND BELIEF SO GET OUT THERE AND GOUGE AROUND...YOU WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED AND THAT'S A PROMISE. AMERICA IS BEAUTIFUL.

a collection of 5 books that should be required reading for anyone interested in geology. the best science writing i've ever experienced.worthy of several rereads

I first read John McPhee thirty years ago. I come back to him older and, I hope, wiser to find in his prose the finely crafted language of a humane and confidently authoritative voice. He is just simply amazing and magical. I am pleased to share the planet with him.

Best book (really, set of books) I've ever read. John McPhee is the best contemporary writer and this is his greatest work - pulled me straight through and after a very long read made me wish there was a lot more.

I'm enjoying Phee's travels through geology. *Annual of the Former World* was recommended by a friend who has also developed an interest in geology. I'm really enjoying it. I'm taking my time in Basin and Range. The book is a compilation of his writing for *The New Yorker*, and made up of several books: *Basin and Range*, *In Suspect Terrain*, *Rising of the Plains*, *Assembling California*, and *Crossing the Craton*. He's an amazing writer.

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