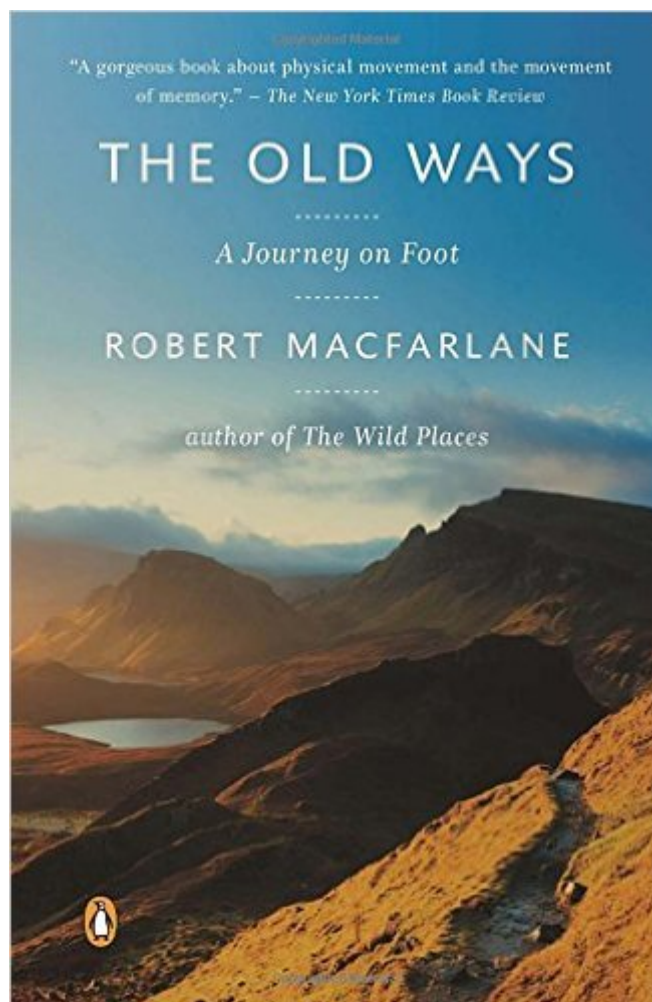


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The Old Ways: A Journey On Foot



Synopsis

The acclaimed author of *The Wild Places* examines the subtle ways we are shaped by the landscapes through which we move. In this exquisitely written book, which folds together natural history, cartography, geology, and literature, Robert Macfarlane sets off to follow the ancient routes that crisscross both the landscape of the British Isles and its waters and territories beyond. The result is an immersive, enthralling exploration of the voices that haunt old paths and the stories our tracks tell. Macfarlane's journeys take him from the chalk downs of England to the bird islands of the Scottish northwest, from Palestine to the sacred landscapes of Spain and the Himalayas. He matches strides with the footprints made by a man five thousand years ago near Liverpool, sails an open boat far out into the Atlantic at night, and commingles with walkers of many kinds, discovering that paths offer a means not just of traversing space but also of feeling, knowing, and thinking.

Book Information

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (September 24, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0147509793

ISBN-13: 978-0147509796

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (97 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #42,911 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in [Books > History > Europe > Great Britain > Scotland](#) #37 in [Books > Travel > Europe > Great Britain > General](#) #42 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural History](#)

Customer Reviews

This is a stunning book. The author walks, talks to people, but most of all sees deeply the natural history and human history of the places he walks. I was captivated by the intensity of his observations, the beauty of his writing, and the astonishing range of his knowledge (and vocabulary!). He sees and writes like a poet and a naturalist. He also makes friends with people who know the terrain and the history; people he meets along the way, but even more, people of knowledge and creativity themselves who are deeply tied to the landscapes he walks. Another reviewer asked for maps. I read this book, in retrospect, in the best way possible. Reading it in the Kindle app on my iPad, I could easily look up the flowers and birds he sees, and the geological and

local terms he uses. When he writes a lengthy meditation on the art of a painter of the British Downs, I could Google the artist and see examples of his art. Best of all, by far, I used Google Earth to not only track his path but to see what he saw. When he describes a mountain in Tibet as having three intersecting ridges, I could move around a three dimensional image of the mountain, and also of the valley from which MacFarlane was looking. When he walked across a Scottish Isle, I could track his path around a lake, past a mountain, and across the heath. When he talked about the terraced hillsides outside Ramallah and the Israeli settlements, I could see those, too: the hills circled by ancient terracing, and the subdivision-like streets lined with identical houses and lots under construction. I'm now going to buy the hardcover version, because this is a book to keep and to re-read. But I highly recommend reading it with the Internet, especially Google Earth, at hand.

I just got back from walking the Camino de Santiago and found this book from a review in The New Yorker. I read the sample chapter and was hooked! I just wish that I'd read it before embarking on my 500 mile/35 day walk! It isn't even about the Camino - instead it is about every walk or trail... for anyone that enjoys walking... whether you are an armchair adventurer or a global wanderer, this is a magical book about the philosophy, magic, myths, geology, and history of walking your Way.

I came across a review of this book and thought it sounded interesting.. It turned out to be fascinating. The language is beautiful, and the author convincingly draws the reader into his premise that a landscape's (and seascape's) past and present can be felt by a thoughtful and aware traveler who takes the time beforehand to learn about the territory to be covered, and is physically in touch with the land paths and sea lanes being travelled. This book truly exemplifies Oliver Wendell Holmes' quote that one's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.

My criteria for giving a book five stars is that during the day I think on what I've read, and look forward to continuing my adventure with the author at the end of day; and the writing must be good. MacFarlane's writing is lyrical and masculine, too. Maps? You don't need maps; he's not writing a guide book for you, but inviting you to come along with him over old and ancient paths. Why would he recommend you walk the treacherous Broomway, where incoming tides over foggy quicksand have drowned hundreds? Simply walk beside him as he attempts it. My favorite treks with him were through England and Scotland, as he relates history, anecdotes and the natural beauty surrounding him. But Palestine and Tibet would have had me at the edge of my seat, if I hadn't been lying back in bed. Sail with him along the ancient water roads through the Hebrides. Meet his adventuresome

friends, including Isle of Harris sculptor, Steve Dilworth, whom I did look up on the Internet so I could admire his work. The best writing for me was MacFarlane's description of his ritual walk across the Cairngorm massif in Scotland, south to north, to attend the funeral of his grandfather, a mountaineer. I will be reading his earlier book, *Mountains of the Mind*, in which his grandfather is featured. He follows the Icknield Way and other paths of England in the footsteps of Edward Thomas, a writer and poet, who was killed during World War I in France. As an American, I was not familiar with Thomas' writings, but found MacFarlane's delving into his life and jaunts interesting, and that he was a friend of Robert Frost, who inspired him to become a poet. This book is full of little surprises. A joyful read. Author: The Wolf's Sun A Devil Sings Small

Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* is the third book in his trilogy about landscape; it also stands alone as an extended musing about walking old paths. The author recounts walks in England, Scotland, the Middle East, Spain, and Tibet - as well as two accounts of sailing in the Outer Hebrides, which seem a bit out of place in a book about journeying by foot. There are also two chapters devoted to Edward Thomas, an English walker, writer, and poet who died in WWI and who is clearly the author's muse. These chapters describe how walking is a way to explore both the walker's outer landscape and inner landscape. You can learn about yourself by walking the old paths and the old ways. The author, a fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, is obviously both an accomplished walker and a scholar. This academic background shows itself in the author's erudition. The book is full of interesting words, references to interesting books, and meetings with interesting people. It comes with the usual academic additions that I like in a book - glossary, bibliography, notes, and a really wonderful subject index organized by categories such as birds, maps and map-making, and weather. The only thing I didn't like about this hardcover book is its very odd dust jacket. It is attractive but manufactured in some material that feels very odd in the hands. I finally just took it off the book and then settled down to enjoy my reading.

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