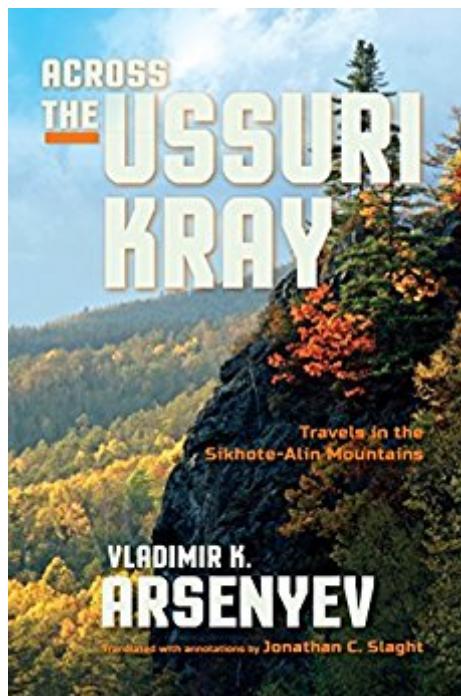


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Across The Ussuri Kray: Travels In The Sikhote-Alin Mountains



Synopsis

In Russia's Far East sits the wild Ussuri Kray, a region known for its remote highlands and rugged mountain passes where tigers and bears roam the cliffs, and salmon and lenok navigate the rivers. In this collection of travel writing by famed Russian explorer and naturalist Vladimir K. Arsenyev (1872-1930), readers are shuttled back to the turn of the 20th century when the Russian Empire was reeling from its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and vulnerable to its Far Eastern neighbors. What began as an expedition to survey the region's infrastructure for the Russian military turned into an adventure through a territory rich in ethnic and ecological diversity. Encountering the disappearing indigenous cultures of the Nanai and Udege, engaging the help of Korean farmers and Chinese hunters, and witnessing the beginning of indomitable Russian settlement, Arsenyev documents the lives and customs of the region's inhabitants and their surroundings. Originally written as "a popular scientific description of the Kray," this unabridged edition includes photographs largely unseen for nearly a century and is annotated by Jonathan C. Slaght, a biologist working in the same forests Arsenyev explored. Across the Ussuri Kray is a classic of northeast Asian cultural and natural history.

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Customer Reviews

About two years ago, as I finished reading Dersu the Trapper by V.K. Arseniev (Malcolm Burr trans.) I said to myself, now this is a book that I need to read again someday...and hopefully not in the too distant future. I was drawn to the character Dersu, his animism, the way he could read tracks in the forest and foretell the weather by the behavior of birds; I was also shocked by the exploitation of wildlife carried out mainly by the Chinese. This part of the world -the taiga and the Russian Far East- had always intrigued me but I never knew that there was a Russian naturalist who explored the region at the turn of the century and wrote about it both passionately and elegantly and who had the incredible fortune to meet Dersu and have him as his guide. That's the kind of book I could read again. When I heard about Slaght's new translation that contained chapters and sections missing the version that I had read, I just had to have this book! I had also been following Slaght's excellent blog posts on Scientific American, so I knew I was in for a treat with this new version/translation of the book, and I was not disappointed. One of the great triumphs of this new book is the extensive and, in my opinion, absolutely essential footnoting that Slaght has done for us. He tracks down a plethora of new details, information, and updates concerning wildlife and follow-ups that Arsenyev (the two translations spell the author's name differently) carried out. The effort that he put into this shows me just how much a labor of love this project was to Slaght. For instance, when I read the previous English-language version of this book, I was outraged when I read how the Chinese exploited a sea lion rookery on the coast (Slaght also taught me the word 'haulout' that can be used for rookery) and I finished that chapter wishing that something could've been done. I was delighted, in this new version, to learn that Arsenyev did in fact do something about it later. A footnote here tells us that he returned on a secret expedition, arresting and deporting the Chinese poachers (I think that's the word for them, as they always seemed scared and nervous when they encountered the Russians, signs, I believe, that they knew they were committing some kind of crime, exploiting, raping (and they also did rape the native women) and pillaging the land and its wildlife. I was thrilled to learn that Arsenyev, with a mind to protect the natural world, set off on this expedition and evicted and arrested many Chinese. To go on about the footnotes, I learned a lot about Russian history thanks to these notes, specifically about Russia's disastrous sea war with Japan and naval chases with the British. And going back to the Chinese, it was with great satisfaction to read that the Chinese despot Li Tan Kuy was brought to justice by the Russians and arrested -this information does not appear in the Burr translation. Reading this book brought back great recollections from the older book about

tiger encounters and a bear hunt, both told with great zest and intensity in Slaght's book here. There are differences in content between two books. Slaght offers us amazing photographs while the older book contains very nice sketches of important scenes like a sable attempting to take down a red deer. One of the biggest differences between the two books I read is the ending. Slaght's book ends with the "captain" Arsenyev watching Dersu walk away, calling out to him, and waving goodbye, whereas the older version details several other things, namely Arsenyev's attempt to get Dersu to live in town (it doesn't last long) and Dersu being murdered somewhere on the roadside when he was en route back to the mountains. Both endings are fitting and satisfying. Overall, I recommend Slaght's *Across the Ussuri Kray* very highly. His book ends with Arsenyev's promise to publish another book soon. I can only hope that Slaght translates Arsenyev's 1937 book *In the Sikhote-Alin Mountains*.

I thought I knew Arsenyev and the Russian Far East through Akira Kurosawa's film, "Dersu Uzala" (streamable on), but I was wrong. Jonathan Slaght's translation of "Across the Ussuri Kray" brings to life - in greater detail than the movie - all the complex majesty of that wild land and the people who shared it. Arsenyev, a pre-revolution military surveyor and a competent naturalist, uses his superb powers of observation to beautifully describe what he encounters. It helps that the translator is also a conservation biologist who has worked extensively in the area. Slaght is able to channel Arsenyev making his work lyrical yet accessible to the reader. The book makes you want to go back in time to join the expeditions Arsenyev describes.

Excellent natural history, cultural, and geographic tour of the Russian Far East in the early 20th century. Mr Slaght captures the Arsenyev's narrative with an excellent translation. By living and working in Primorye for many years, he has an excellent perspective from which to tell this very interesting and informative story. I give it 5 stars and would increase it if I could. Buy and read this book!

an amazing translation of a lost classic!

I enjoyed this book immensely, with the detailed descriptions of the areas culture, trees, topography and bird life. A Lewis & Clark type of journey in the early 1900's

Not only is this a complicated translation of the ENTIRE work originally written by Vladimir

Arseneyev, the translator has taken the time to fill the pages with footnotes that give full explanations of everything from locations to current/common bird names!

Great book

It is a fun book !

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