



Amazon Expeditions: My Quest for the Ice-Age Equator

Paul Colinvaux

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In this vivid memoir of a life in science, ecologist Paul Colinvaux takes his readers from the Alaskan tundra to steamy Amazon jungles, from the Galapagos Islands (before tourists had arrived) to the high Andes and the Darien Gap in Panama. He recounts an adventurous tale of exploration in the days before GPS and satellite mapping, and a tale no less exhilarating of his battle to disprove a hypothesis endorsed by most of the scientific community.

Colinvaux's grand endeavor, begun in the 1960s, was to find fossil evidence of the ice-age climate and vegetation of the entire American equator, from Pacific to Atlantic. The accomplishment of the task by the author and his colleagues involved finding unknown ancient lakes, lugging drilling equipment through uncharted Amazon jungle, operating hand drills from rubber boats in water 40 meters deep, and inventing a pollen analysis for a land with 80,000 species of plants. Colinvaux's years of arduous travel and research ultimately disproved a hotly defended hypothesis explaining bird distribution peculiarities in the Amazon forest. The story of how he arrived at a new understanding of the Amazon is at once an adventurous saga, an account of science as it is conducted in the field, and a cautionary tale about the temptation to treat a favored hypothesis with a reverence that subverts unbiased research.

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