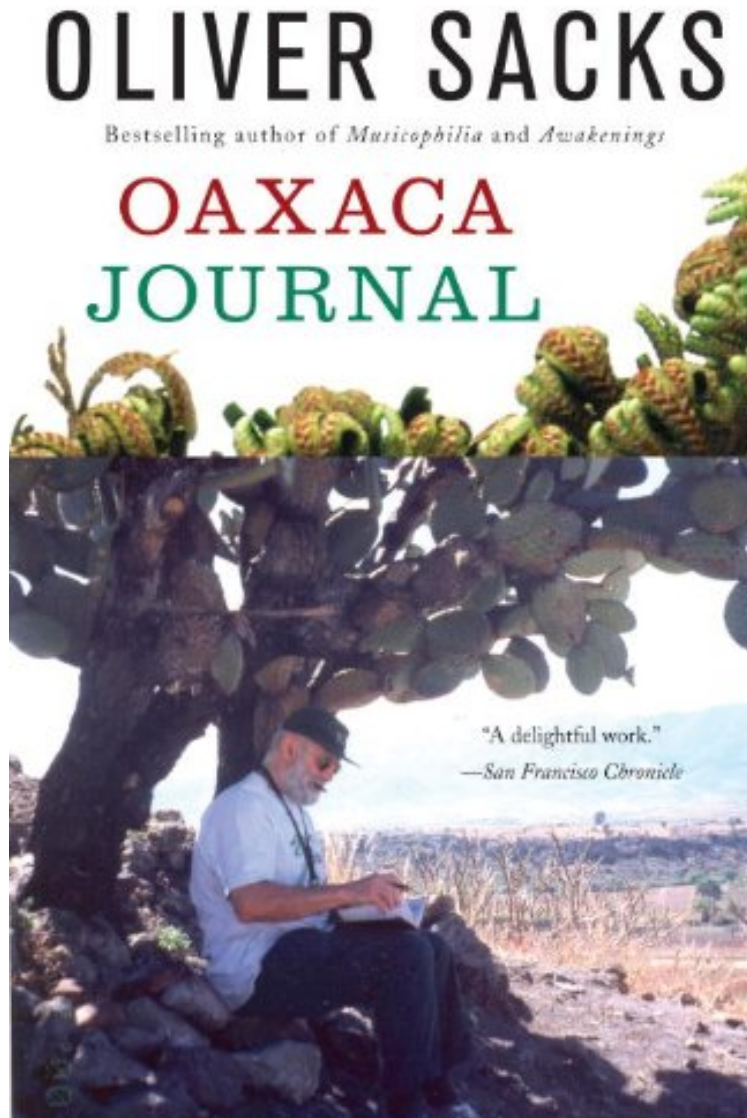


Oaxaca Journal

Oliver Sacks

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Oliver Sacks : Oaxaca Journal before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Oaxaca Journal:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. interesting and eclecticBy Rebecca SalzbergOliver Sacks has a huge amount of curiosity and insight. The book is not over-written, he shares his experiences about traveling with the fern society to Oaxaca very directly and although this might not sound promising, it really is.4 of 4 people found the

following review helpful. Very enjoyable, as if the reader was there in the field too. By Dr. John D. Ferguson This book was really a gift for my wife, who is a biologist and really enjoyed reading about this field trip experience. It was a perfect book to read together. The excitement of finding plant species was familiar to her, the descriptions of local foods, customs, and cottage industries was fascinating, and the discussions of subjects of interest to the author added a special touch. Why four stars instead of five? We found the book to be very good, but we like to save five stars for the truly outstanding. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Marvelous Narrative By A. F. Adamson This another of Dr. Sacks contributions to good reading along with contributing to the world's store of how the mind works. Since it is a journal we get a glimpse also of how his mind works, and a delightful narrative of a trip into Oaxaca. For botanists it is also informative about ferns as a result of the companions who are also interested in what that part of the world has to offer.

Since childhood, Oliver Sacks has been fascinated by ferns: an ancient class of plants able to survive and adapt in many climates. Along with a delightful group of fellow fern aficionados—mathematicians, poets, artists, and assorted botanists and birders—he embarks on an exploration of Southern Mexico, a region that is also rich in human history and culture. He muses on the origins of chocolate and mescal, pre-Columbian culture and hallucinogens, the vibrant sights and sounds of the marketplace, and the peculiar passions of botanists. What other species would comb ancient Zapotec ruins on their hands and knees, searching for a new type of fern? Combining Sacks's enthusiasm for natural history and the richness of humanity with his sharp and observant eye for detail, *Oaxaca Journal* is a rare treat.

From *The New Yorker* The eminent neurologist is also a fern lover, and this book is his record of a ten-day "fern foray" in southern Mexico. It is light and fast-moving, unburdened by library research but filled with erudition. Some of his fellow-foragers are professional pteridologists; others are amateurs, and there is a certain romance in the sight of smitten fern hunters crawling through the Mexican dust exclaiming in Latin. Among the botanical and anthropological observations, one catches glimpses of Sacks's inner life: his preoccupation with dualities, his nearly Victorian sense of modesty, his fascination with the world around him. He could be speaking of himself when he comments on a colleague peering through a hand lens at a small mountain flower: "Is it the artist or the scientist in him which is aroused by the *Lobelia*? Both, clearly, and they are utterly fused." Copyright 2005 *The New Yorker*

From *Booklist* Sacks is—besides a neurologist and a splendid stylist with a shelf of marvelous books to his credit, most recently *Uncle Tungsten* [BKL S 1 01]—a fern lover. That is to say, not that he is an Englishman living in New York, but that he is an amateur pteridologist, one whose hobby is appreciating the ancient class of plants called ferns (and "the so-called fern allies"—clubmosses, horsetails, spike mosses, and whisk ferns—"my own preference," he says). In 1999, that avocation led him to spend 10 days in Oaxaca, Mexico, with other members of the American Fern Society, to whose greater pteridological erudition he modestly defers. He kept a diary, the basis for this book. Fortunately for most readers, he doesn't just describe the rare fern species he gets to see. He notes the exotic birds that two of his companions find as thrilling as the ferns; he admits, however, that he never saw any avians smaller than hawks and vultures, for he hasn't developed a birder's eyes. He lovingly relays what the group's excellent guide imparted of Oaxaca's history, its indigenous, the Zapotecs, and their ancient culture; he rhapsodizes over ruins and the technological and intellectual powers they bespeak; and he admires the people, the many exotic foods, the vistas, and the age-old industries of the towns he visits—all of this while his fellow travelers mostly keep on ferning. He says he wants to go back. Take us along, Dr. Sacks—please! Ray Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved

A delightful work. *San Francisco Chronicle* Sacks's boundless curiosity is always a reward. *The New York Times Book Review* Sacks doesn't waste a word. . . . He deftly characterizes people he meets along the way, smoothly slips facts from his wide-ranging reading into his narrative, expertly describes landscapes and raises up a hero: Boone Hallberg, a U.S.-born scientist who has lived in Oaxaca since the 1940s, working to conserve the priceless diversity of the natural world. *San Francisco Chronicle* "Light and fast-moving. . . . Among the botanical and anthropological observations, one catches glimpses of Sacks's inner life: his preoccupation with dualities, his nearly Victorian sense of modesty, his fascination with the world around him." *The New Yorker* "Like all the best journals, it has a rich immediacy, a sense that we share the moment of the author's perceptions. Since Sacks is such a lovely writer, and he and his fellow travelers such fonts of knowledge about everything from Mexican history to Mayan culture to chocolate making to the workings of fern evolution, the book is a rare treat. . . . It makes you want to strap on your field glasses and catch the first flight south." *The Globe and Mail* Relaxed yet observant. . . . [Sacks] thoughtful, sometimes wistful ruminations, no matter how expansive they may grow, are always rooted in the concrete details he has observed. . . . Those who read *Oaxaca Journal* will appreciate Sacks' own diligence as an observer and his skill in translating the wonders of the material world into words. *Los Angeles Times* "Oaxaca Journal whipped up my appetite for a visit to Mexico, as the best travel writing does." *The Providence Journal* The combination of his insatiable curiosity and rigorous scientific observation makes him an excellent travelling companion. . . . Mexico past and present emerges from these bursts of association and digression. . . . With so much of the world made superficially familiar by tourism, Oliver Sacks's dogged pursuit of the exotic is especially welcome. He has, moreover, succeeded in striking that elusive balance of

input between traveler and culture that makes for good travel writing. Times Literary Supplement (London) Bittersweet and profound. . . . Truly a lovely book. The Chicago Tribune