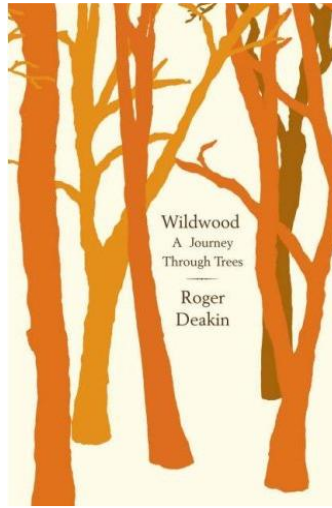


BOOK REVIEW

Deakin, Roger. *Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007.



"From the walnut tree at his Suffolk home, Roger Deakin embarks upon a quest that takes him through Britain, across Europe, to Central Asia and Australia, in search of what lies behind man's profound and enduring connection with wood and with trees. Meeting woodlanders of all kinds, he lives in shacks and cabins, travels in search of the wild apple groves of Kazakhstan, goes coppicing in Suffolk, swims beneath the walnut trees of the Haut-Languedoc, and hunts outback plums with Aboriginal women in the outback. At once autobiography, history, a traveller's tale and a work of natural history, *Wildwood* is a lyrical and fiercely intimate evocation of the spirit of trees."

Thus reads the publisher's description of this work by Roger Deakin, whose earlier book *Waterlog: A Swimmer's Journey through Britain*, left his readers clamouring for more. In *Wildwood* Deakin has answered this call.

This is a book that could take weeks to read, dipping into it at random, reading and re-reading favourite sections. The chapter on "The Bluebell Picnic", with its description of a picnic with friends "to raise teacups and glasses to spring, as announced by bluebells" of Tiger Wood in Suffolk is a delight, and invites the reader to affirm that it is always to groves that people "come both to their joys and their undoing. Come lightfoot and heart's-ease and school-free; walk on a leafy holiday with kindred and kind; come perplexedly with first loves".

In "Oak Apple Day" Deakin participates in the "annual reassertion of rights to collect wood in the Royal Forest of Grovely by the villagers", gathering oak boughs to hoist up to the top of the church tower, while inside the congregation sings and dances in a celebration unchanged for centuries.

In Australia, Deakin travels to Utopia where he joins the Aboriginal women as they set out to gather bush plums; to Leatherarse Gully outside Bendigo, to see and experience the work of artist and bushman John Wolseley; to the Pillaga Forest where generations of sleeper-cutters found work.

His travels also take him to Europe and Asia, but it is in Britain that Deakin's true love of trees is most evident. When writing about his homeland his prose soars, as he pursues his "quest for the residual magic of trees and wood that still touches most of us not far beneath the surface of our daily lives."