

Tourist attraction

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The Scientific Traveler: A Guide to the People, Places and Institutions of Europe. By Charles Tanford and Jacqueline Reynolds. Wiley: 1992. Pp. 335. £10.95, \$17.95 (pbk).

ALAN Bennett recently remarked that he would rather look at a good quality postcard than trudge around museums, scrutinizing the paintings themselves. Some travel books are written for people like him: volumes that can be enjoyed thousands of miles away from the scenes they describe and that are unlikely ever to be packed in the suitcase. Another class of travel guide demands to be taken along; indeed, is rarely valued seriously except *in situ*.

Charles Tanford and Jacqueline Reynolds clearly intend *The Scientific Traveler* to be packed, and no one would get much satisfaction in staying at home and looking at its poor-quality illustrations. The volume is no substitute for the real thing. At the same time, I doubt if it will inspire many to take up the art of scientific travel. Instead, it succeeds on two fronts, providing historical background to the scientific traditions of Europe, and useful information about some of the things of scientific interest to be seen if one finds oneself in Germany, France, Ireland or some other European country.

About two-thirds of the volume is concerned with European science and scientists. Like any guide book, geography determines its structure. Seventeen chapters describe the scientific traditions of as many countries, the combination of Poland and Russia into a single chapter being offset by an introductory chapter on "Our European Heritage". England, Scotland and Ireland merit separate consideration; Wales, Portugal, Norway, Finland and Belgium are omitted. Italy, France, Germany and England rate the longest chapters, with their scientific histories recounted largely through the biographies of some of their principal scientists and, less conspicuously, their main scientific institutions. Although the authors discount their book's pretensions as a history of science, the life stories of some 300 scientists are told in such a way that the various national traditions in science can be appreciated. *The Dictionary of Scientific Biography* seems to be the authors' chief source, but they maintain a reasonable level of accuracy and possess a good eye for anecdote.

After the heritage comes the travel. For each country, a second section on



The Eocene oil shales of Messel, near Frankfurt, Germany, are remarkable for the unusually complete and detailed picture they give of life some 50 million years ago. Shown here are a fossilized jewel beetle (Buprestidae; left, $\times 4.2$) and a winged 'queen' of a small ant species (Formicidae; $\times 2.2$), both common at the site. The pictures are taken from *Messel* edited by S. Schaal and W. Ziegler, which contains hundreds of colour illustrations of the fossils and descriptions of their ecology, biogeography and evolutionary significance. Oxford University Press, £50.

"Principal Places to Visit" details the tangible legacies of European science and scientists. These range from surviving birthplaces to graves, and include museums, laboratories, statues, plaques and, in several cases, geologically important scenery. Thus we are directed to Neuchâtel in Switzerland to admire the glacial deposits first elucidated by Louis Agassiz, and to Kirbymoorside in Yorkshire, to visit Kirkdale cave, where William Buckland identified the fossilized bones of hyenas and other species extinct in Britain. The museum and cliffs at Lyme Regis recall the fossil-hunting of Mary Anning and the Victorian discovery of *Ichthyosaurus* and other giant vertebrates. Archaeological and prehistoric sites also get good coverage, with descriptions of stone circles in England and Scotland, cave paintings in Lascaux, Tarascon-sur-Ariège and Altamira, and the museum at Abbéville, where Jacques Boucher de Perthes uncovered so many worked flints.

For the most part, however, Tanford and Reynolds guide us to the urban legacies of science. London tops the list with 11 separate listings, such as the Royal Observatory, the Natural History Museum and the Royal Institution. Paris has eight, including La Villette, the Institut Curie and the Pasteur Museum. In Paris, the Jardin des Plantes has a full entry, whereas Kew Gardens in London gets none. Westminster Abbey rates a section, whereas Père Lachaise gets only a passing mention. Most other major

European cities — Rome, Berlin, Edinburgh, Stockholm, Geneva — get reasonable coverage, as quite naturally do Padua, Leiden and Edward Jenner's Berkeley. Out-of-the-way places include the Mendelianum in the monastery in Brno; the island of Ven, where Tycho Brahe's observatory stood; and the Temple of Serapis, near Naples, made famous by the frontispiece of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*.

As the authors make clear, this book represents the personal selection of two indefatigable travellers, who have retired to England after distinguished scientific careers at Duke University. They have seen the places they describe and include brief instructions on how to get there, opening hours and contact telephone numbers. It is as up to date as the political turmoil in Eastern Europe permits and includes, for instance, a description of the newly opened Boerhaave Museum in the old St Caecilia Hospital in Leiden.

Most good general guide books contain some information on places of scientific interest, but I know of no volume in print that focuses on science and which has such broad geographical coverage. I read it from cover to cover without getting itchy feet, but I shall certainly take it along the next time I travel in Europe. □

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