

AAG Newsletter
of the
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Time Out for Summer Reading

At some point each summer, I always draw a line in the sand—one that neatly separates my beach chair and book from the noisy ongoing bustle of the world. From such inviolable seats everywhere, geographers this summer will travel the world, from the coldest and nethermost poles to the warm currents of geographic imagination. As our tribe disbands for the summer to mountains, beaches, and basements, there hopefully will be a time, however brief, to leave behind the scholarly heavy lifting and explore more whimsical and perhaps even more expansive horizons.



Richardson

Those geographers just setting out on the annual diaspora via America's highways might start with AAG keynote-speaker Andrei Codrescu's *Road Scholar* or perhaps *Hail Babylon*, two irreverent tours of American cities and places. Or perhaps try Honorary Geographer John McPhee's most recent dalliance, *The Founding Fish*, which explores the territorial imperative of the American shad, to a wholly satisfying obsessive level.

For the hottest beach days of August, Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams*, irresistibly subtitled "Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape," will keep you cool. If that doesn't suffice, join Edward Shackleton for a long spell on an ice floe in the Antarctic. Carolyn Alexander's riveting and fast-paced account of Shackleton's legendary adventure, titled *The Endurance*, also contains the most extraordinary reproductions I have seen yet of expedition photographer Frank Hurley's otherworldly images.

To warm up again, dip into Tony Horwitz's witty and timely *Baghdad Without a Map: And Other Misadventures in Arabia* or his new *Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going where Captain Cook has Gone Before*. Nobel prizewinner V. S. Naipaul's just published *India: A Wounded Civilization*, while typically polemical is as always fascinating. In this same vein, *Emma's War* by Deborah Scroggins, an account of a British aid worker who marries a guerrilla leader in Sudan, is an unforgettable tale of life and strife in a much misunderstood region.

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Waldseemüller World Map, 1507, on display this summer at the Library of Congress as part of the "Rivers, Edens, Empires" exhibition. Courtesy of the Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

My beach reading last year was almost exclusively in the company of W. G. Sebald, a writer who will set you adrift on the dreamer's raft of history, geography, and memory. My personal favorite is *Rings of Saturn*, a brooding and engrossing meditation set in Suffolk County, England, with forays far and wide into the mysteries of existence.

For lighter fare check out the recent collections of short stories by T. C. Boyle (well-known to our geographer friends in his adopted Santa Barbara), or his short novels, including *A Friend of the Earth* or the just-released *Drop City*.

In preparation for the AAG's Centennial Meeting and celebration in Philadelphia, required summer reading should include at least one of a recent spate of new Ben Franklin biographies. I suggest Edmund Morgan's *Benjamin Franklin*, though Walter Isaacson's new biography, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, which I have not read, has been well reviewed. (By the way, our Centennial Meeting is shaping up to be one of the biggest events to hit Philly since the Continental Congress. Don't miss it.)

For those geographers who can't pull themselves away from NRC or NSF meetings this summer to get to the beach, there's always the Library of Congress while in DC as compensation. For these Type A geographers, or others who may be quarantined in Washington this summer, seek refuge at the Library's major new summer exhibition, "Rivers, Edens, Empires: Lewis and Clark and the Revealing of America." This extraordinary exhibit draws on the Library's collections of maps, letters, and archival documents and artifacts to describe the unfolding understandings resulting from multiple explorations and mappings of the North American continent. Specially featured in the exhibit is the 1507 world map by Martin Waldseemüller, recently purchased by the Library, which is the first map to use the name "America" for the newly explored lands.

Enjoy your well earned summer Rest and Reading!

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