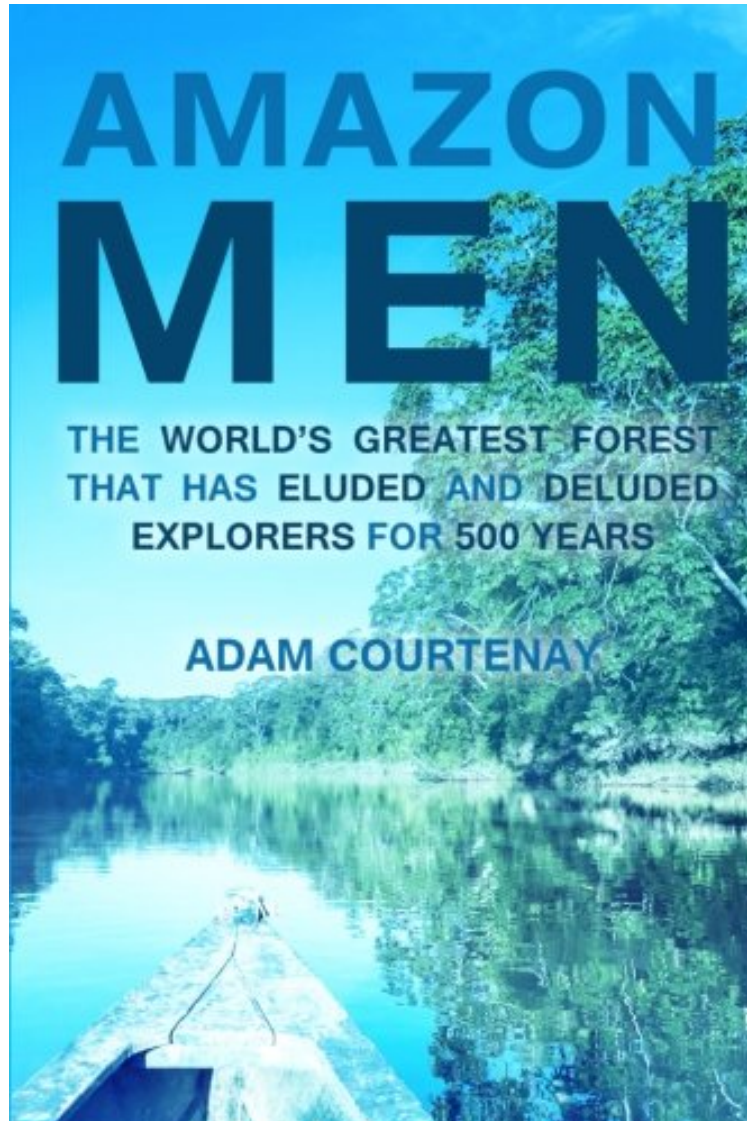


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Environmentalists will tell us the depredations visited by man on the Amazon are recent this is erroneous. They also believe they are the first to respect and save it this is also untrue. Killing and caressing the Amazon has been a pastime for nearly 500 years, ever since European man first set eyes on this impenetrable ocean of green. Sometimes he has laid siege to it. At other times he has tried to understand, harness and culture it. At just about all times there has been an ongoing war of attrition between the greatest eco-system and the greatest predator. Up to now, the predator has failed. Amazon Men is about these two types of men those who have tried to conquer and exploit the Amazon and those who have tried to understand it and savour it. In both cases it is has remained beyond their grasp. It is about conquistadors and botanists, colonisers and human rights activists, slave traders and philanthropists - that is, men who have variously tried to conquer, rework, map, enslave and save the region and its river system, each according to the needs and zeitgeist of their time in history. Amazon Men is a region's history revealed through the motivations of men. Conquistadors Francisco de Orellana and Lope de Aguirre play their parts as representatives of the Age of Discovery. Charles Marie de la Condamine is a perfect foil for the Age of Enlightenment. Alexander von Humboldt appears as a scientist of the Romantic age, seeking unity in the midst of chaos. Walter Hardenburg represents the machine age, defying the industrial imperatives of his time to oppose unfettered colonial capitalism. Sydney Possuelo, the greatest living Amazonian explorer, represents the ongoing conflict between modern expansion and environmental causes. This book asks questions that most history texts avoid. Over 500 years, did men confront the forest based on the prejudices and attitudes of their time? Or were they free to think, to discern the forest for what it truly was? What do their respective experiences tell us about our attitude to the unexplored and unknown recesses of the planet? This is not the story of a forest, but rather man's contradictory and complex responses to phenomena beyond his scope and ken. The stories of Amazon Men are punctuated by deeds of bravery and acts of brilliance, but also by forgotten holocausts where guns, germs and steel have all played their roles.

About the AuthorAdam Courtenay lives and works as a financial journalist in Sydney, Australia. Men is his fourth book.