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TOM COX

21st-Century Yokel



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21st-Century Yokel explores the way we can be tied inescapably to landscape, whether we like it or not, often through our family and our past. It's not quite a nature book, not quite a humour book, not quite a family memoir, not quite folklore, not quite social history, not quite a collection of essays, but a bit of all six.

It contains owls, badgers, ponies, beavers, otters, bats, bees, scarecrows, dogs, ghosts, Tom's loud and excitable dad and, yes, even a few cats. It's full of Devon's local folklore – the ancient kind, and the everyday kind – and provincial places and small things. But what emerges from this focus on the small are themes that are broader and bigger and more definitive.

The book's language is colloquial and easy and its eleven chapters are discursive and wide-ranging, rambling even. The feel of the book has a lot in common with the country walks Tom Cox was on when he composed much of it: it's bewitched by fresh air, intrepid in minor ways, haunted by weather and old stories and the spooky edges of the outdoors, restless, sometimes foolish, and prone to a few detours... but it always reaches its intended destination.

The book is illustrated with Tom's own landscape photographs and linocuts by his mother.

21st-Century Yokel Details

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Author : Tom Cox

Format : Hardcover 416 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Environment, Nature, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography Memoir, Writing, Essays, Animals

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From Reader Review 21st-Century Yokel for online ebook

Colin says

21st-Century Yokel is hard to classify - part nature writing, part comic memoir, part travelogue - but is nevertheless completely entertaining. Tom Cox has an eye for the absurd as much as for the glories of the natural world and there are plenty of good jokes in this book. A great walker, Cox unfolds his narrative with the sort of rhythm a favourite hiking companion would use in sharing some favourite stories on a good long walk, and has a well-tuned sense of the innate eeriness of the English countryside up close and personal. The uncanny is all around us, along with the ridiculous and the beautiful.

Maj says

'Tis the first book I've read to which publication I've contributed via Unbound, even if in just a small way. I've listened to albums and viewed art I helped finance (again, usually in just a small way), but this is still a first. Gotta admit, it was a tiny bit heartwarming seeing one's name among the many many others at the end of the book.

Unlike Tom's cat books, 21st-Century Yokel is more thematically varied, basically a collection of essays. Some I found I pretty much hoovered up, some interested me less, but I happen to like Tom's style and quirks (sorry, can't think of a better word ATM), and so even those outside of my interests were a pleasure to read.

Just as with the preceding book, it was quite cool time travelling & re-living stuff I've read on Tom's blog & seen on his social media accounts, here in a slightly different form or contexts.

Well, that's it for now, I'm all caught up, but I'm looking forward to more from Tom!

Stephanie says

The first of Tom Cox's books to be published through the book crowdfunding publisher Unbound, '21st Century Yokel' is a collection of stories and anecdotes about Cox's love of the countryside. It's a merry jaunt through his family life, and appreciation of the simpler things about his homes in Norfolk and Devon.

I have the physical book, which I got as a perk through supporting its publication, though I listened to this as an audiobook, narrated by Cox himself. His reading is charming and whimsical and adds a character to the stories, particularly those about his family.

A nice rambley wander. Relaxing listen.

Karen Cleary says

A collection of long essays, that like Tom, ramble around before reaching a conclusion. I enjoyed it, but not quite as much as his cat books.

Emma Wood says

Listened to the audio book read by Tom Cox. I didn't love chapter one too wordy for me but after that it was great. I loved hearing all the family stories, stories about places, animal, insects and birds stories and general reminisce. Its like having a marvellous conversation with an old friend about everything and nothing where at the end you feel genuinely happy.

Kristy says

A thoroughly enjoyable memoir-ish collection of essays that exist at the intersection of the British countryside, cats, the author's endlessly amusing family (especially his dad), and lots and lots of walking. I got to know Cox's writing through his My Sad Cat Twitter feed and his social media presence (especially the instagram pictures he takes on his long walks) is all extremely enjoyable. This book proves that he is just as enjoyable in long form, even when he isn't writing more exclusively about his charming cats, who were the focus of his previous books. Not every essay held together for me, but the good ones were extremely good and, taken as a whole, the structure and imagery of the essays makes you feel like you are listening to the rambling and warm memories of a good friend. The book also features a beautiful design, including woodcuts by the author's mum that couldn't be more perfect for the text.

I helped support the publication of this book on Unbound, which is a pretty cool crowdfunding model for authors, and I hope to check back in and support some more independent writers this way.

M. Langlinais says

Mr. Cox is a modern-day bard with a unique voice. It may not be for everyone, but I sure enjoy it.

Isla Scott says

I found this a humorous and amusing read. Its insightful and a good sort of escapist, holiday read. His family, particularly his father, seem quite quirky and I enjoyed getting to know them via his writing. His father is particularly entertaining with the various, often curse filled outbursts noted IN CAPITAL LETTERS. He certainly seems both amusingly delightful and eccentric. I enjoyed reading the various anecdotes, getting to know various landscapes the author has enjoyed exploring, as well as learning about the nature within.

It was perhaps a bit longwinded, at over 380 pages long. I did feel a bit impatient to finish the book after a certain point but for the most part I quite enjoyed reading it, finding it both an insightful and entertaining read. I also liked the various (black and white) photos included. Not a bad read, one I'm happy to recommend to nature lovers.

Helen says

Very enjoyable, quirky collection of well-written essays - Tom's life, family, nature, landscape, part memoir. It is not a conventional book, which is why, probably, it is published by "Unbound", which has a subscription-based model (think 18th and 19th century publishing: people chip in, get their names in the back, and the author gets a better % of the profit if there is one). I was reading the physical hardback version which is very professionally produced, looks good in every way and not at all "home-made" (i.e. this is not at all like the products of some self-publishing printing ventures).

Favourite sentence is the one in which he explains why he only got half-way through D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers"!

Ade says

Rather directionless - discursive if you want to be kind, or rambling if less so, which I realise was the point of the book but it didn't work for me, as I frequently found I'd lost the thread of the narrative. The chapter about Mr Cox Senior was wicked funny though.

Paul says

The facets that make up our character are drawn from many sources; our DNA, our family, our culture, our history and as Tom Cox argues in this book, the places where you grow up that can define you as much as these other things. The way that Cox recommends that immerse yourself in the local landscape is to walk through the lanes and paths, climb the hills and the stiles, take in the views and soak up the natural world at walking pace.

The blurb on the cover says: It's not quite a nature book, not quite a humour book, not quite a family memoir, not quite folklore, not quite social history, not quite a collection of essays, but a bit of all six. But there is a lot more in this book than that; crammed into the covers of the book. He is captivated by all sorts of things that he encounters on his strolls, from bees to beavers, scarecrows to owls and even his cats make an appearance a few times. Keeping his sanity by taking longs walks in the country around his Devon home gives him plenty of time to consider the world. All of the subjects he tackles begin with a narrow focus, before becoming wider ranging and for me, much more interesting.

He is fascinated equally by the ghosts of the past as he concerned by the future of the countryside, but what makes 21st Century such a really good book is that it defies categorisation. Part of this reason behind this is because Cox writes about what he wants to without following any set agenda, and partly this is because this reflects modern life and all its distractions where you start on one project, get distracted by something else, wander off to get an item and arrive back four hours later wondering why you were starting that in the first place. Because of this, the book feels fresh and interesting, it has its poignant moments, the chapter on scarecrows is really quite creepy and is a great example of modern folklore, His VERY LOUD DAD makes me laugh every time he appears in the narrative too. This rich and varied book is not quite many things, but one thing it is, is fantastic.

Breakaway Reviewers says

21st Century Yokel - Lovely Man

I first came across Tom Cox when a friend alerted me to one of his Twitter feeds - My Sad Cat. I had a black cat at the time called Puzzle and my friend saw some kind of similarity between them, although now I would say that Puzzle was a composite of both The Bear and Shipley, another black cat that Tom had at the time. The puzzle was an existentialist potty mouth and could silence anyone with a look! But I followed the feed and immensely enjoyed the photos and captions. I remember showing my sister the feed whereupon she promptly found the My Sweary Cat and the My Smug Cat feeds too. Eventually, I explored the whole Tom Cox internet concept more and more and found that I liked it! A lot.

I love Tom Cox and his books. I love the conversational style that can belie the truths contained within the words. I love his sincere realism and the sense of humour that runs through all his work. I love his honesty. Perhaps best known for his 'cat' books this latest offering is a genre-defiant piece of writing that is joyous to read. To laugh, to think, to experience, to learn are not often found in one book.

What I am puzzled about is why Tom had to turn to crowdfunding to finance this work given the success of his other books? But he did and so Unbound (crowdfunding publisher) was brought into my consciousness and, I am sure, the consciousness of many others. All to the good. I felt proud and, given the hours of enjoyment Mr Cox's online presence has given me, obliged almost to support this project.

It would possibly be required to have a love of the countryside to truly appreciate this book but maybe it could foster such a love in those without. Certainly, the easy style of writing makes it very readable and accessible. Existing lovers of Tom Cox's work will be familiar with all of the cats and be happy to read about them. Full details of poor, sweet Roscoe cat's dreadful encounter with a dog and subsequent recovery are well documented here as well.

The world needs people like Tom Cox. If there were more Tom Coxes I doubt the world would be in such a mess. Maybe by reading this book, we can all get a little closer.

Whizz (who pledged financially to the publishing of this book}

Bethnoir says

Finishing this books feels like saying farewell to a friend. I've really enjoyed Tom sharing his world with me, he's made me think differently as well as recognsing similar views to my own on nature, the sea, folk horror and the love of grandmothers. An upliftng and delightful book.

Susan says

As a huge fan of Tom Cox's writing I helped fund this book to be published. However, he had said that this was going to be different from what had gone before because it was the book he had always wanted to write, free from the restrictions put on him by publishers. So I was curious to see whether I would love it as much as the others I'd read. The answer is yes, and even more so. There's a real mix of subject matter and the style is rambling, like listening to an old friend tell you their fascinating stories. Tom's passion for the countryside around where he has lived is clear, and he combines beautiful descriptions of his walks there with folklore and humour. Interwoven with the places are tales of family past and present, his cats, his borrowed dog, and other wildlife he encounters. All accompanied by his mum's gorgeous drawings and a few of his own photos. Some books you rush through, and I could have done that with this, but I loved savouring the writing and tried to put off the inevitable end. It's a precious treasure trove, one I shall enjoy revisiting again and again.

Penny says

3.5

I enjoyed spending time with Tom and his family. I'm using his first name already! And that's what this book felt like - a series of conversations about Tom's World. And I have to say his world can sometimes be a little strange (scarecrow obsession?) but always very entertaining. In lesser hands a book such as this could become mere ramblings, but with Tom we usually see where he is going - even though his thoughts twist and turn.

I loved the mixture of personal memoir, local history, nature and walking. His tribute to his much loved Liverpool born Nan was very touching.

Tom has a huge sense of place. His surroundings and where he defines 'home' are hugely important to him. He doesn't have a 9 to 5 job taking him away from a house or village each day. So his home, also his workplace, becomes all encompassing, maybe to an excessive extent.

When I started reading I did assume Tom was a young man, possibly in his late 20s or early 30s. There was a naivety about him - and I was very surprised later on to work out he was actually in his 40s. I also realised that his Leftie, Green, Hippy tousled haired persona was carefully cultivated. I often felt we weren't really getting the real Tom although there were hints - maybe he is nowhere near as 'interesting'?

What stops me giving the book a higher marking is the constant repetition - he must tell us a dozen times that he moved from East Anglia to Devon.

I also found his VERY LOUD DAD an irritant especially the constant TALKING IN CAPITALS. Quite amusing at first but it soon wore very thin.

Many thanks to Netgalley for an ARC of this work.
