



Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future

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Like many of us, Mark Hertsgaard has long worried about the declining health of our environment. But in 1991, he decided to act on his own concern and investigate the escalating crisis for himself. Traveling on his own dime, he embarked on an odyssey lasting most of the decade and spanning nineteen countries. Now, in **Earth Odyssey** he reports on our environmental predicament through the eyes of the people who live it.

Earth Odyssey is a vivid, passionate narrative about one man's journey around the world in search of the answer to the essential question of our time: Is the future of the human species at risk? Combining first-rate reportage with irresistible storytelling, Mark Hertsgaard has written an essential--and ultimately hopeful--book about the uncertain fate of humankind.

Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future Details

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From Reader Review Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future for online ebook

Steven Peberday says

Read this book about 2000 i think. There's some very thought provoking areas on industrial pollution. One i'd like to read again to see if it's stood the test of time. At the time an excellent read.

Sarah Sammis says

We are going through a drought here in Northern California. Since this summer we've been asked to use no more than 100 gallons of water per day. We took the request seriously and let the summer heat kill our patio garden. One hundred gallons still seems like an extravagant amount of water but according Mark Hertsgaard in Earth Odyssey, the typical American household uses 186 gallons a day, nearly twice what we've been asked to cut back to!

In 1991 Mark Hertsgaard traveled around the world to see what people thought of environmental problems. What he found out is people universally find it hard to see beyond their own immediate needs. It doesn't seem to matter if it's a family in a war ravaged Sudan, a Thai family in traffic clogged Bangkok or a family living in the toxic clouds of Beijing, the response was the same: "we're used to it." That didn't mean they were happy, just able to cope. The bigger environmental picture never seemed to play a part in the responses Hertsgaard received.

Hertsgaard sets the stage by describing the environmental crisis each place is facing: famine, heavy metals in the air and water, nuclear waste freely dumped in the rivers and so forth. Then he introduces the people he interviewed and worked with. Earth Odyssey is a surprisingly fast read for all the depressing facts. The book doesn't offer much in the way of solutions for the problems faced by the environment and the specific places Hertsgaard visited.

Brian says

I read this book when i was pretty young, right when it came out, and i think it is what sparked my activism, just the stories of his travels and the hardships and realities of the rest of the world compared to white north americans.

i recently re-got this book and debate about reading it again because i probably wont like it as much. I think this came out in 1996 or something and he said then that the world was already ten years late on turning back the clock on global warming and if we stopped all of the discharge of harmful emissions in the next five years, we **might** have a shot at survival. C'est la vie.

Suz says

Skipped ahead to the Russia chapter -it's very interesting to me -esp. since Dr. Natalia Mironova and some other Russians are mentioned in this chapter and we just had an international nuclear accountability workshop with Natalia and others in April 2007.

Worse than Chernobyl is Mayak, another little known nuclear facility in the Urals in Russia. Before glasnost (and "open" sharing of information) there were 4 accidents at Mayak -accidents that were WORSE than Chernobyl but aren't known because of the closed system at the time.

(not even the Russians were told)

So many people have suffered -and still are -because of these accidents.

I'm completely digressing and this isn't so much a review as a "what I find interesting right now as I read". :)

Karmen says

I read this book a few years ago but, with the recent discussion on global warming and especially George Bush's recent (April '08) global warming goal nonstatement, I have been thinking about issues raised in this book. This is a great introduction to the global environment and issues facing the global community. I want to reread the book and then write a real review. Right now I want to recommend the book to anyone who cares about people, the Earth or both! We should ALL be environmentalists. What we do (or do not do) **does** have an impact on the quality of life for human beings -- that's US, folks; we need to care! The author adeptly invites all to participate at whatever level is comfortable. Too many times I hear "Oh, I can't, as one person, make a difference." Wrong! Without the "One" there can never be the "Many!" Come on, people, let's get going!

Ushan says

In the 1990s, an American journalist visited many environmentally blighted places: a refugee camp in South Sudan, Russian villages downstream of Kombinat Mayak, Bangkok, Chinese and Brazilian countryside, and many more. The air and water are terribly polluted, and people are sick. For several years, not a single boy from several villages around a heavily polluted river in North China has been able to pass the army physical examination; in a village in Amazonia, children routinely die of dehydration and dysentery, especially children from very large families and children of unwed mothers; Soviet doctors routinely lied to the residents of villages around Kombinat Mayak about the cause of their various radiation-related illnesses. Hertsgaard implies that if radical measures are not taken, the entire world will live like this. Among environment-disrupting technologies, he is particularly fond of automobiles and nuclear energy. Hertsgaard calls for a "Global Green Deal" that would "renovate human civilization from top to bottom in environmentally sustainable ways".

The narrative is interesting, and it is good for one's mental health to be occasionally reminded, how the less fortunate live. Yet while reading this book (and Laurie Garrett's *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health*, which is also a slumming book, and quite a few more), I kept getting the feeling that there is more to the story than we are being told. There has been a war between Sudan's Arab North and black African South for most of Sudan's independence, causing enormous suffering - who made these two areas one country, and why? If many environmental problems of the Third World have political causes, then how can we blame the UN and rich countries for not doing enough to address them? Imagine Martian peacekeepers and aid workers descending on Europe in 1943.

Hertsgaard writes, "The claim that high-efficiency cars are impractical was publicly mocked when Greenpeace activists "kidnapped" a Renault Vesta-2 prototype in 1993 and brought it to the International Car Show for spectators to test drive. The Vesta-2 had a maximum speed of 140 miles an hour but got 107 miles per gallon in highway driving. Toyota, GM, Ford and Volkswagen had produced similar prototypes but, like Renault, had not put them on the market, claiming they were uneconomical". A Google search shows that the Renault Vesta-2 weighed 475kg. A Honda Insight with a 5-speed manual transmission and air conditioning weighs 848kg. Will anyone venture to guess, why Vesta-2 was not put into production? He also repeats the GM-destroyed-public-transportation-in-Los-Angeles canard that has been refuted so many times (when will it ever die? Probably the day the story about Prince Grigory Potemkin constructing fake villages and the story about Polish cavalry attacking German tanks kick the bucket). When I read things like this in a book, I ask myself the question: in what other areas, which I do not know as well, is this book as true to the facts as here?

Theresa says

This is an important book. I gave it 4 out 5 star for primarily two reasons: 1) Some chapters, like the ones about China, are at times repetitive and meandering. 2) SOME of Hertsgaard's claims do not stand up to the test of time and now seem so exaggerated, they cause the reader to question the truth in what Hertsgaard writes. This shadow cast over his writing is unfortunate, since there is so much important information in this book.

David Kroodsma says

I read this book because it is by a guy who spent seven years traveling the world to write a book about the environment.

Mark is a good writer, and I admire many passages in this book. Likewise, he has fantastic passages about some of the people he meets. I also really like the section where he takes the long-run perspective, talking about the history of the earth and how we find ourselves at this point in civilization. In general, when he talks about history, I like it.

His organizing question, though, "Will humans survive our environmental destruction," is not a very good one. The question is about the quality of life.

The book is organized thematically, not chronologically or by country. In the end, I almost feel that it has too much analysis and not enough travel. Sometimes I get a sense of the places he is, but then he launches into pages of researched statistics, and, while all is interesting, gets away from the place he is visiting.

The book is dated, now ten years old, so many of the facts he presents are old news to me, so maybe that is part of my displeasure with the book.

The book simultaneously has too much of the author and not enough. I don't learn about what his travel experiences were like, and I don't have any idea of his personality, other than I have an impression that he's kind of a boring person to hang out with. But it is hard to say -- there is very little full travel narrative here. But on the other hand, he expounds for a long time in each chapter. Most of this is substantive research on

the topics at hand--but I feel like it is too much. There are other books for that.

Of course, Time said it was "one of the best environmental books in recent years."

Lisa says

They need a category for tried to read and failed. What is it about this book? Highly recommended by Sievert Rohwer, who I respect enormously and who actually went so far as to provide a free copy to all attendants of the 2001 AOU meeting. I admit to having found myself self-righteously espousing ideas from the first chapter (and only chapter I read). Just couldn't get any further. Suspect it might have to do with the inexcusably hideous cover.

Jason Carr says

Great book, but outdated.

amber says

Employing a refreshingly anthropological approach in which just a few statistical crumbs are couched in the cracks, Herstgaard explores international environmental concerns in context of socioeconomic and political cultures throughout the world. He introduces us to many colorful faces and places whose contributions to environmental degradation are all too human, while casting dark shadows on the few institutions which have the means, but fail to lead the way out. Sometimes heart-wrenching, frequently paranoia-inspiring, and only sporadically mundane, Earth Odyssey speaks for humanity as much as it does for the planet, and makes clear just how fragile the relationship is between the two.

Victoria says

A very blunt report of the environmental outlook of humanity and commentary on our global gamble with long-term planetary health. I think it was overall optimistic - we as a species have all the right tools to establish a health progress to fixing our environmental footprint, but thus far markets remained skewed, and we lack the political will to put these tools into action. This book was written in 1999 and still remains relevant today. I believe anyone interested in environmental issues should read this book. It did, and still can, teach much.

Ryan says

This book is an older book, published in the late 90s, about global environmental problems as told through the author's travels around the world. What I found most interesting about it were the various governmental / corporate promises made and estimates about how the environmental trends would pan out by or around

2010. Some have turned out better than expected, but most promises have been broken and most trends have turned out to be worse than expected.

Steve says

Interesting read. Though now dated, much of the information and forecasting has come to pass.

Sarah says

Somewhat dated by the time I got around to reading it but his insights about political inaction in the face of any crisis that appears to threaten the status quo and economic bottom line seems apropos off into infinity as far as I can puzzle out. His hands on research was very interesting, his skewering of Gregg Easterbrook made me wince and laugh simultaneously kind of like Matt Taibbi does all of the time. While I think his suggestions for solutions in his conclusion build up quite a head of steam and seem grandiose I do take his point about "doing nothing is well...going to get you nowhere so at least make the effort and adjust when necessary". And he does offer suggestions and ideas for solutions - most people don't- they just endlessly define the problem. And the reading caused me to look up Armory Lovins (again) in Wikipedia just to see what he is up to now which pointed me to the BMW3i which further pointed me to the just released Super Bowl commercial with Katie Couric and Bryant Gumbel discussing the Internet/and the new Beemer. I laughed... My son said it was humor for the easily amused...I prefer to believe that I appreciate people that can laugh at themselves and not take themselves too seriously. Mr. Hertsgaard has written a serious book though and I appreciate that too. Give it a look ...just for the places you go in your own head.

Favorite quotes: "you can stand on a mountaintop with your mouth open for a long time before a roast duck flies into it"

"Try again. Fail again. Fail better". Samuel Beckett in Worstwood Ho
