

# A World Inside: 150-year History of the Canadian Museum of Civilization

Randall F. Miller

Volume 33, Number 4, December 2006

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan33\\_4rv01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan33_4rv01)

[See table of contents](#)

---

## Publisher(s)

The Geological Association of Canada

## ISSN

0315-0941 (print)

1911-4850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

## Cite this review

Miller, R. F. (2006). Review of [A World Inside:: 150-year History of the Canadian Museum of Civilization]. *Geoscience Canada*, 33(4), 190–191.

# REVIEWS

## **A World Inside: 150-year History of the Canadian Museum of Civilization**

**By C. Vodden and I. Dyck**

*Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2006*

ISBN 0-660-19558-5.

\$29.95, Paperback, 104 pages

**Reviewed by Randall F. Miller**

*Geology and Palaeontology Section*

*Natural Science Department*

*New Brunswick Museum*

277 Douglas Avenue, Saint John, NB,  
E2K 1E5

If you are a geologist in Canada and you do not know where our national museum system originated, here is your chance for enlightenment. I suspect it is one of those unknown stories of our profession. By its title, this book might not find its way into the hands of a geologist, but it should. I have the opportunity to work in a museum founded by a geologist, not an uncommon beginning for institutions of this kind. Geologists, by their profession, and probably by nature, are collectors. It seems that building a collection to document and represent what we see around us often leads to a museum.

Vodden and Dyck have put together a great book celebrating the 150-year history of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Even though the focus of the book is about the Canadian Museum of Civilization, it touches on the other museums in our national

system, as they all have a common origin in the early work of the Geological Survey of Canada. I have picked up the book a number of times to write this review, but have found myself intrigued by the content and its connection to our museum, and off I go to explore some thread picked up in this book. I have already used it as a reference in a couple of manuscripts in progress and loaned the book out to a colleague in our Humanities department. My colleague is exploring 19<sup>th</sup> century collections in our museum and unexpectedly began reading about geologists and Sir William Logan. It was a treat for me to point out that geologists contributed in many ways to the development of museums and our knowledge of Canada. *A World Inside* turned out to be a valuable reference source for her work as well. Although the book includes suggested reading and illustration credits, there are unfortunately no references. While understandable for this kind of book, some might find this a little frustrating. I encountered a couple of stories while reading the book and I would love to know where the information came from.

*A World Inside* is an engaging story, easy to read, well illustrated with fabulous photographs from the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection. There are archival photographs including portraits, field work and museum exhibits. In twelve chapters, *A World Inside* follows the story of the birth of the National Museum of Canada, its progression through the early 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury and the two World Wars, Canada's centennial, and finally the opening of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, now Gatineau. It is a story of institutional and personal vision, accomplishment and disappointment, hard work and determination. The choice of illustrations nicely complements the story and includes images both familiar and new. One of the first images shows Sir William Logan in a pose familiar to most Canadian geologists, one of the last images is of Pierre Trudeau, dressed as a voyageur for the groundbreaking ceremony of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The story is laid out in chronological order starting with the Survey's beginnings in Montreal and Logan's desire to develop a museum. Survey staff documented more than geology, they described the flora and fauna as they went. They also had an interest in the people and cultures they encountered. Not surprising, because field work brought Survey staff into contact with people across the country. Field geologists often lived and worked with indigenous peoples and may have been the first contact some of the native people had with Europeans. Anthropology became a natural and logical part of the Survey's interests. Geologists will find familiar names among the founders of Canada's national museums. George Dawson is described here as the 'Father of Canadian Anthropology'. Survey Directors Robert Bell, Albert Low, and Reginald Brock all worked to develop anthropology as part of the Survey's mandate.

I have only one complaint to offer about the book and that is the landscape format (20.5 x 33 cm). I admit it works well for the presentation of illustrations, but the soft cover binding makes this a difficult book to hold. The first time I read the book I wanted to slouch in a chair, put my feet up and enjoy the story. No matter how I tried I just could not hold the book and turn pages without it falling out of my hands. It is a small matter, but then again for me it is the kind of book that deserves a relaxed read, with time to ponder the connections to my own experiences. Otherwise the book is nicely produced with quality illustrations and offered at a very good price.

For those with an interest in geoscience history in Canada this is a good introduction to a part of that history. If you have never seen the Canadian Museum of Civilization read this book and then go visit. A deeper understanding of the museum's origin gained from this book will make it all the more interesting.

## Beauty in the Rocks The Photography of David M. Baird

By David M. Baird

*TouchWood Editions*

ISBN 10: 1-894898-37-0 (Hardcover)

ISBN 13: 978-1-894898-37-9

144 pages \$44.95

Reviewed by E.R. Ward Neale

5108 Carney Rd. NW, Calgary AB T2L 1G2

David Baird is known to this reviewer and other geoscientists for his work as a geologist, historian, educator and photographer extraordinaire. But he is also known to a much wider segment of the public through his creativity as founding Director of the National Museum of Science and, later, as founding Director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum. In 2004, the latter mounted an exhibition of Baird's black-and-white photographs amassed over his years of world travel. Images from that exhibition along with others from his collection form the basis of this remarkable book.

The essence of "Beauty in the Rocks" is perhaps best captured by the first two lines of a lovely poem in the introductory section:

"Walk softly, lest in your haste  
You miss a thousand things of  
beauty"

The author explains what you can miss in a prose format: "...natural patterns and textures are all around us. Satisfaction may come from the grandeur of a mountain scene....Delight may come from the symmetry of microcrystals in a snowflake or in a tiny cavity in a rock. In some places, the elements are being formed as we watch. In others, what we see tell us of events and processes in times past..."

This is the ideal coffee table picture book. Pages are not numbered and the lucid explanations of the pictures are not marred by technical jar-

gon. The photographs are grouped in "chapters" with catchy, self-explanatory titles. Thus, "Fashioned by Time" includes photos of glacial erratics in Norway, weathered granite in South Africa, chunks of basaltic lava in the Galapagos Islands rounded by Pacific surf, almost spherical boulders on a Cape Breton Island beach, and wind-blown sand grains in an ancient Newfoundland limestone. Other "chapters" are entitled: Field of View; Free-Flowing Forms; StillLife (fossils of course!); Cracks and Tracks; Geometry in Nature (e.g. columnar joints of Giant's Causeway); Beauty Revealed (roadcuts or erosion revealing ancient patterns); From Mountain Top to Sea; Waves and Ripples; Silent Sentinels (e.g. sea stacks and hoodoos).

The final "chapter", Off the Road, is probably my favourite because it includes several exquisite photos of back country Rocky Mountain scenes that I have come to know in my retirement years. As well, it includes Arctic mountains and a Chilean stratovolcano. Lone, distant figures in two of these scenes emphasize the insignificance of humans in the vast grandeur of nature.

The explanations of the pictures are frequently accompanied by interesting and/or amusing comments on circumstances at the time of photography. Thus, as he attempted to capture a diamond pattern made by waves on a Hawaiian beach "...the stream of passersby....seemed constantly intrigued by the crouching photographer with his nose and camera almost on the wet sand." A road cut in jointed slates at the intersection of the T.C.H. and the Banff-Jasper Highway caused "...tourists on the busy road to slow down to see what on Earth that man was fussing about on a mere rock outcrop. I was meanwhile thinking that beauty is where you find it." On another occasion, accompanying a warden on patrol in back country near Jasper, our hero was assigned a "gentle horse". Unfortunately, the animal was fright-