



DRAGON HUNTER ROY CHAPMAN ANDREWS AND THE CENTRAL ASIATIC EXPEDITIONS

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Charles Gallenkamp
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This book deserves two thumbs up. Although primarily a bibliography of Roy Chapman Andrews, *Dragon Hunter* gives a remarkable account of the geography, history and social changes in the US and other countries where Andrews traveled. There is not a dull moment – whether the reader is transported to the New York jet society of the 1920's for fundraising to finance the Central Asiatic Expeditions or to the social revolutions in the Far East. The title, *Dragon Hunter*, by its simple but well-chosen words accurately conveys the theme of this book: the quest and discovery of dinosaur and mammal fossils, regarded as dragon remains by the Chinese and Mongolian country men.

The author, Charles Gallenkamp, leads us step by step through the amazing life of Roy Chapman Andrews, perhaps the last great American explorer. Andrews' early determination to enter the scene of the American Natural History Museum (AMNH) in New York proved to be a cornerstone in his life. We soon understand how Andrews' keen persuasive talents will become instrumental to promote himself among the rich and influential society to

fulfill his life goal of being a first class explorer for AMNH. Under his own admittance, Andrews was not a great scientist. Nevertheless, he obtained a Masters Degree from Columbia University but he lacked patience and

abhorred the tedious laboratory work that a true scientist must do. He, however, excelled in organizing expeditions – from the fund raising stage to the field work. He felt most at ease in the deserts or jungles during his journeys, but equally thrived in the fame of his exploits back in American cities. Charles Gallenkamp gives not only an untarnished portrait of a man with his talents and qualities, but also eloquently relates his vices and shortcomings.

Through Andrews' eyes the reader witnesses the sometimes daily decapitation of Chinese in Beijing, and gains understanding of the rivalries among diverse political and army factions always



ready to butcher each other to overcome the ruling institution. None of these atrocities, however, affected his lavish daily life in the Beijing polo club or private parties while waiting for permits to launch the central Asiatic expeditions. In 1922, Andrews and his team were the first one to challenge the Gobi Desert, at that time a vast blank spot on the Asiatic map, by combining several automobiles for the scientists, and a caravan of over a hundred camels to support his team. This innovative combination proved so successful that it was repeated for the following four expeditions up to 1930.

Whether Roy Chapman Andrews is the true inspiration for Indiana Jones as mentioned by Michael Novacek in his foreword remains speculative. Nevertheless, both heroes shared the same aversion for snakes as we can read when poisonous snakes once invaded Andrews' camp at sundown and crawled into tents, beds, and shoes. Andrews suffered partial loss of eyesight under the inexorable desert sun, shot himself in the leg, and amputated gangrene-infected limbs of Chinese country men. He and his team confronted physical hardship and dangers while enduring blistering heat, blinding sandstorms, freezing blizzards, marauding bandits, bribes, and exasperating policy changes by governments in Asiatic countries. However, the results of these expeditions were priceless. Previously unknown zoological specimens shot or gathered became the pride of the AMNH collections. The fossils ranging in age through the Phanerozoic are still studied

today by paleontologists. Among those, although not the most important discovery, dinosaur eggs from the Flaming Cliffs became sensation among various editorials at that time but by some strange unexpected circumstances they also became a key element for the demise of the relationship between the AMNH and the Chinese government. Strangely enough the controversy of these dinosaur eggs persisted even in their taxonomic assignment. Because of the abundance of protoceratops dinosaur skeletal remains it was assumed these eggs had to be protoceratops eggs and the theropod dinosaur found laying on the top of those was regarded as an egg thief, hence its name: Oviraptor. New discoveries by the American Museum of Natural History team in 1993 produced another nest with similar eggs also covered by an oviraptor dinosaur. That same year, the team found a single egg containing a well preserved oviraptor embryo, therefore demystifying the feeding hypothesis in favor of the brooding behavior of this theropod dinosaur.

In conclusion, whether simply interested by the extraordinary life of Andrews and his unforgettable adventures, or because of vested interests in paleontology, I would highly recommend this well-written and colorful book to a vast audience. The historical accounts of the social changes in the Orient combined with a detailed biography of Roy Chapman Andrews will fascinate the readers and entice them to perhaps visit the countries where these exploits took place.