



Benedict Allen

Benedict Allen was born in Macclesfield, Cheshire, the son of a test pilot & read Environmental Science at the University of East Anglia – where he crammed three expeditions (to a volcano in Costa Rica, a remote forest in Brunei & a glacier in Iceland) into his final year. There then followed a stint at the University of Aberdeen, where he tried to work out how to cross perhaps the remotest forest on earth, which lay between the mouth of the Orinoco to the mouth of the Amazon.

The idea he developed became the cornerstone for all his future ventures; instead of raising money through sponsorship back home, he would immerse himself among indigenous people & hope for their assistance – after all, they saw many apparently hostile environments, such as the Amazon & Borneo, as a home rather than threat. The philosophy offered another bonus: by travelling *'light'* he could be quick to take advantage of any opportunities & progress with speed (like the Alpine approach of mountaineers) & the crossing of so much formidably remote forest might actually become possible.

Having worked in a warehouse for sufficient basic funds, he arrived in South America & that same year, 1983, he & a string of locals pulled off that objective, notably a precarious 600 mile dash through the forest by foot & canoe. It was a remarkable feat & it almost cost him his life. He walked out of the forest alone & with two sorts of malaria – having been attacked by gold miners, fled & eventually eaten his dog to survive.

Benedict's first book, **Mad White Giant** (part of a planned quartet) followed from that experience – as did his decision now to submerge himself among some of the remotest people on earth to help understand the forest that had so nearly killed him.

In Irian Jaya, he led a band of remote people (Allen pointedly avoids the heavily-loaded word *'tribe'*) called the Momwina through dense forest to make first contact with their neighbours the Obini. He was forced to beat a hasty retreat when the Obini seemed intent on doing battle with his Momwina band but months later, in Papua New Guinea, settled in the Middle Sepik with the Niowra & in time underwent their harsh male initiation ceremony, designed to make their boys into men "*as strong as a crocodile*". This resulted in the second book, **Into the Crocodile Nest**.

A string of expeditions followed; the Iban of Borneo, Mentawai of Sumatra (where Allen memorably had to stitch up his chest with his boot-mending kit - **Hunting the Gugu**) & various peoples in New Guinea & the Gibson Desert. Allen also arrived in Australia on one occasion by seafaring canoe, having become marooned while crossing the treacherous Torres Strait (**The Proving Grounds**).

With training from the Matsigenka "Indians" he went on to cross the whole of the Amazon Basin, a 3500 mile journey of almost eight months; during this he broke three ribs falling off a horse & on Columbia's Putumayo River was shot at by assassins belonging to the drug baron Pablo Escobar (**Through Jaguar Eyes**).

It was now that the BBC asked Allen to take a video camera on his adventures. His first programme, **Raiders of the Lost Lake**, gained the highest viewing figures in the history of the Video Diary strand. There followed **The Skeleton Coast** series, the story of his arduous three & a half month walk with reluctant camels through the Namib Desert & **Edge of Blue Heaven**, about his five month trek through Mongolia, culminating in a six week lone walk across the entire Gobi Desert with a string of baggage camels.

Benedict Allen also presented **Mombasa to the Mountains of the Moon**, for the prestigious Great Railway Journeys BBC/PBS TV series. Also for the BBC he filmed (with the help of producer Ruhi Hamid) **The Bones of Colonel Fawcett**, about his search for the missing 1920s explorer in the Mato Grosso. Next came, with film crew assistance at times, **Last of the Medicine Men**, in which he investigated healers, shamans & so-called 'witch doctors' around the world.

In 2001, Benedict completed a 1000km trek through the Russian Arctic with a dog team in the "worst winter in living memory" – the subject of **Icedogs**, his 5th series for the BBC & later adapted by National Geographic TV. He has since published his highly praised anthology of adventures, **The Faber Book of Exploration**, with excerpts from heroic pioneers ranging from Burton to James Cook, Shackleton & Mallory (as well as many unsung explorers, past & present). It is, according to the Literary Review, a "monumental feat of compilation & editing".

His most recent book (**Into the Abyss: Explorers on the Edge of Survival**) tells the full story of the Icedogs expedition & Benedict's quest to understand what it is that enables any of us to survive hardship.

More recently, Allen has presented **Adventure for Boys**, a documentary on Rider Haggard for BBC 4 & **Travellers Century**, a series on the great tradition of British travel writing, featuring the three writers Eric Newby, Laurie Lee & Patrick Leigh Fermor.

Benedict is a much sought after motivational & after dinner speaker in Britain & around the world.

**For more information on Benedict Allen,
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