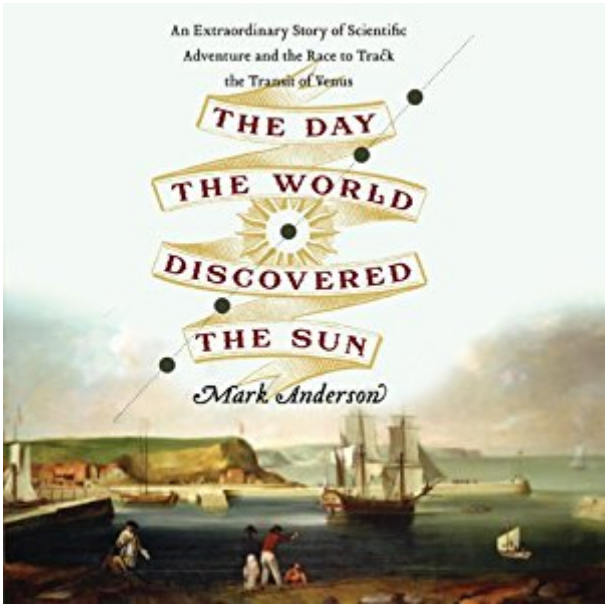
The Day The World Discovered The Sun: An Extraordinary Story Of Scientific Adventure And The Race To Track The Transit Of Venus



Synopsis

On June 3, 1769, the planet Venus briefly passed across the face of the sun in a cosmic alignment that occurs twice per century. Anticipation of the rare celestial event sparked a worldwide competition among aspiring global superpowers, each sending their own scientific expeditions to far-flung destinations to time the planet’s trek. These pioneers used the Venus Transit" to discover the physical dimensions of the solar system and refine the methods of discovering longitude at sea. In this fast-paced narrative, Mark Anderson reveals the stories of three Venus Transit voyages--to the heart of the Arctic, the New World, and the Pacific - that risked every mortal peril of a candlelit age. With time running out, each expedition struggles to reach its destination a quest that races to an unforgettable climax on a momentous summer day when the universe suddenly became much larger than anyone had dared to imagine.The Day the World Discovered the Sun tells an epic story of the enduring human desire to understand our place in the universe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book on the hair-raising scientific expeditions of the 1760s is a rich and rewarding adventure from start to finish. It’s exciting history that was galvanized by some of the most important scientific and political imperatives of the 18th and early 19th centuries: finding life-savingly accurate means of longitudinal maritime navigation; exploring the mysterious South Pacific and beyond; and determining the precise distance from the earth to the Sun, the most critical and fundamental astronomical unit of measure. All of these and more prompted the cause cÃ©lÃ¨bre of the age: far-flung measurements of the extremely rare transit of Venus, which occurred in 1769.This book

doesn’t feel like "science" though, although those factors are well explained. On the contrary, we have mad kings, exotic natives, scary epidemics, erudite Jesuits, stubborn viceroys, squabbling astronomers, wide-eyed naturalists, leonine monarchs, curious common-folk, dedicated scientists, international political intrigue, wild overland journeys, and the gamut of seagoing excitement, for starters.The various locales journeyed to give us a breathtaking "you are there" window into 18th-century Vienna, St. Petersburg, Mexico, Baja California, Siberia, Paris, arctic-circle Norway, South Pacific islands, London, Barbados, Cape Town, Tierra del Fuego, Copenhagen, Jakarta, Cadiz, Rio de Janeiro, and places in between. The point of the Venus transit was to get readings from many locations, as mutually distant as possible, in order to triangulate a reliable distance to the Sun. And getting to these locations is half the adventure, but certainly not all of it. Greater challenges meet each adventurer upon arrival at their destination.The intriguing characters we follow include, among others: the renowned Captain Cook; the "French Benjamin Franklin"; two latterly famous fellows named Mason and Dixon; the aforementioned diligent erudite Hungarian Jesuit; and all of their partners, assistants, and travelling companions.In the cleverly organized narrative that weaves several strands together at once, there are moments of cliff-hanging suspense in each of these journeys halfway across the world. And there are also many aha! moments for the reader: remarkable historical revelations, recognition of familiar historical names, and moments where something clicks -- either historical, or technical, or even a distant fact learned decades ago -- and makes brilliant sense. It’s this living quality to the narrative that makes it memorable and inviting.The book is a rich, full, thick tapestry of colorful and very real and tangible true-life adventure. I thought it was only going to be about adventurous discovery, but it’s so much more -- it’s the very human story of characters you immediately care about, come to know deeply, and think about long afterwards.

I have read hundreds of popular science books, but few are as vivid and well told as this one. The author has a flair for dramatic exposure without resorting to cheap effects. The histories told in this book reveal how different science was 250 years ago, and to what lengths people would go for scientific insight. People literally traveled to the ends of the world to observe the sun - often for months and years - to see Venus pass in front of the Sun during a few hours. If it was cloudy that day - bad luck. Anderson also weaves in the political conflicts which raged Europe, like the war between France and England in the years leading up to the Venus passage, and also the extreme hardship Spanish rule inflicted on the people of "New Spain" (Mexico).As a Norwegian, I particularly loved the story of the Hungarian priests and astronomers going to VardÃƒÂ¸. Their trip was

extremely rough and long. Today it would have taken two days, tops. How the world has changed. Not only was the journey hard, but they had to bring everything they needed, and build the infrastructure they depended on.Kudos to Mark Anderson for a great accomplishment.My only gripe with this book is that Anderson erroneously gives NASA credit for the Venus Express mission (which reached Venus orbit in 2006). Seriously, it is one of the flagship missions of European Space Agency, ESA.But really, it’s a wonderful book. If you’re interested in science history, astronomy or space science, it is probably for you.

I am trying to read every book, article and journal paper on the observation of transits of Venus. This book is a very positive addition to the corpus of transit history. It is obviously well researched and the writing is outstanding in general. I do have a meaningful beef about it, however. Anderson covers three 1769 transit expeditions that are all remarkable for the incredible trials endured in the name of science. The three observations were a contribution to the calculation of the astronomical unit, but not the only ones. What irks me is that the preparation for and execution of other observations are not even mentioned, even though they had just as much impact on the results as the three described. In particular, the observations by William Wales and James Dymont at Hudson Bay were made under severe conditions and are worth at least a page. It is beyond my comprehension that an American writer would not include the three observatories established by the American Philosophical Society which received a total of one word (Philadelphia) in the text. In my opinion, this book should be second one you read about transits with Sheehan and Westfall being the first.

Not only was the subject matter interesting and adventurous, but Anderson’s writing is appropriately humerous making the experience a lot of fun. My only complaint is that I would have preferred each expedtion’s story to be told in full then the next story etc., rather than jumping from story to story to keep the stories in synch in terms of the time sequence. Maybe it wouldn’t matter in the printed book b/c you can easily jump back to remind yourself of who was who, but in the kindle I found it hard to jump back and forth as needed to remember the details of that particular expedition. All in all I loved it though, and the epiloge is great too.

I absolutely loved this book! It’s well written and a pleasurable read. What would seemingly be a dry topic is presented in such a way as to make it exciting! I’m on a bit of a history binge right now so I am particulary enamoured by these kinds of books. I learned alot as well - I never really thought

about or understood the significance of solar or lunar events and now realize their immense value to early astronomers in understanding our place in the solar system. I only wish I had read it before the recent transit of Venue this spring so I would have been more in awe. Great book.

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