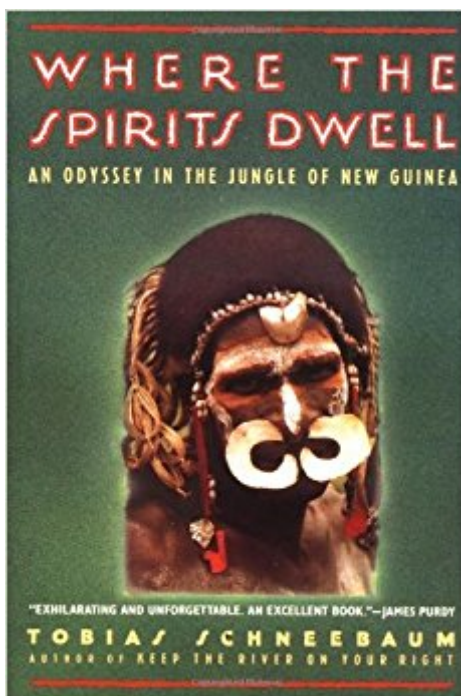


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# Where The Spirits Dwell: An Odyssey In The Jungle Of New Guinea



## Synopsis

Tobias Schneebaum here tells the remarkable story of his four years among the Asmat of New Guinea, a jungle-dwelling people rumored to have killed Michael Rockefeller. Instead of ferocious cannibals, Schneebaum found a regal, gentle people who freely accepted him and initiated him into a way of life no outsider had ever seen before.

## Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; Reprint edition (March 8, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802131662

ISBN-13: 978-0802131669

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.6 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

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## Customer Reviews

The author of the classic *Keep the River on Your Right* here tells the remarkable story of his four years among the Asmat of New Guinea, a jungle-dwelling people rumored to have killed Michael Rockefeller. Instead of ferocious cannibals, Schneebaum found a regal, loving, gentle people who freely accepted him and initiated him into a way of life no outsider had ever seen before. Adopted into an Asmat family in the village whose people were said to have killed Rockefeller, he crossed the boundaries into another culture and another age, learning secrets no other outsider had been allowed to see before. But it wasn't until Schneebaum met Akatpitsjin, a handsome married man with five children, that he entered the erotic world of the Asmat, when the two became "exchange friends" and lovers, a practice basic to the sexual life of the village. Schneebaum's encounter with the Asmat ultimately became something more intimate and liberating for him than the mere discovery of tribal secrets. He confronted himself. His odyssey is as much the record of a journey into himself as it is a unique and sensitively observed account of a vanishing society, written with a shimmering sensuality that has no equal in the literature of anthropology or self-confession.

"Exhilarating and unforgettable. An excellent book."--James Purdy "Tobias Schneebaum's frank and stunning memoir illuminates the mysteries of a distant culture while it reminds us of the universality of loneliness and desire."--Hilma Wolitzer "Humane, loving, precise in detail, and profound in understanding, *Where the Spirits Dwell* is a beautifully written account of personal engagement, during four years, with what must be the most remarkable environment in the world. Everyone should read it."--Hayden Carruth "A travelogue- exotic enough to captivate even reluctant armchair travelers."--Los Angeles Times "An unforgettable portrait of a vanishing world."--San Francisco Examiner-Chronicle "Once in a great while a truly original person like Tobias Schneebaum comes along. Everyone, including the primitive peoples he lives among, recognizes it instantly."--Edward Field, author of *A Frieze for a Temple of Love* Born in New York in 1922, Tobias Schneebaum graduated from the City College of New York and received a degree in cultural anthropology from Goddard College. He was the assistant curator of the Asmat Museum of Culture and Progress in Irian Jaya from 1973 to 1983. Since then he has served as the curator of a number of exhibitions of Asmat art, and lectured on Asmat culture at universities and museums around the world. *Where the Spirits Dwell* is the final volume of his autobiographical trilogy, which also includes *Keep the River on Your Right* and *Wild Man*. He was the subject of a documentary film, *Keep the River on Your Right: A Modern Cannibal Tale*, which premiered at the 2000 Los Angeles Independent Film Festival. His latest work, a memoir entitled *Secret Places: My Life in New York and New Guinea*, was published in October 2000.

I read the book after reading Carl Hoffman's book "Savage Harvest". It was a very good compliment to the Hoffman book.

Very interesting to read. Gives a look at a unique culture.

I read this book as a follow up to "Keep The River On Your Right". Again, Tobias takes us where few of us have ventured before. This exploration takes us to the primitive people of New Guinea. Tobias gives us an excellent narrative of encounters with the people. In addition, we have insight to the politics and policies of the 1970's, when these people are invaded by the outside world as the need for natural resources become greater. Those who are interested in primitive cultures, anthropology and third world experience will highly enjoy this book.

Very interesting and eye opening inside into native Papuans life.

Having visited the region where this book is set I found it mostly interesting for giving a picture of how things used to be there - they are much changed today! For those who haven't been to the Asmat region of New Guinea, this will be a fascinating read. Those inspired to go should be prepared to find it a lot more civilized these days.

A nice read but a bit too much about the author rather than about the people of New Guinea.

Variant, modifying New Guinea cultures - such is the conclusion that Tobias Schneebaum has accepted after compiling his social science field research at the end of an odyssey in the jungle on the second largest island on earth. Wild spirits, he infers in his book, *Where the Spirits Dwell*, could be mitigated by an unconventional search in the mysterious wilderness. Schneebaum's field research has taken the social scientist to a group's most sacred customs and practises, giving an intimate bird's-eye view on New Guinea. By participating in the daily spirit of the tribe he was able to collect data and now has shared his insightful findings. Most social scientists aim for the goal of presenting men in society as they naturally act. But to catch human nature surreptitiously requires the type of field research that is found in *Where the Spirits Dwell*. The secluded denizens were an attraction for the social scientist since he has investigated the hypothesis about the visual and thinking processes of the Asmat tribesmen by using the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test. But he also was drawn to the society by the tantalizing unknown. The author states, "perhaps it was nothing more than the thought that what lay on the other side of the mountain was more exciting than what was immediately around me." Some thoughtlessly have minimized the Asmat's thrill of discovering the first Caucasian. Years ago, social scientist and subject wanted to enjoy the intimacy of their encounter. The reader is attracted to the heart of the secret society which comprises some aspects of religious belief and many views of sexuality. Pursuing his field research the anthropologist's methods are justified by the freedom of inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge but perhaps he also may have achieved greater insight because the people sensed something in him that attracted them instantly. Tobias Schneebaum conveys the condition of a solitary social scientist's world. Besides the freedom of inquiry it is filled with the limitations of danger

I read this book and enjoyed it. Tobias is an off the books type of person, who is haphazardly entering upon territory in a way that is both remarkable but beyond the responsible range of any anthropologist. The other person reviewing this book says that the Asmat regions are now civilized,

so much the worse. there are traits common to the humanistic tradition which have thrived for millenia due to thier geografic remoteness, now the origins of our collective character is being usurped by values and judgements most purverse. Tobias was a man who belonged to a bygone era. one of color and mystisim. i rate this book highly for those who cant afford to bombard New guinea with thier tourism and want a look at what things were like in a diffrent time and scope.

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