

family. With new sequence data and new technologies becoming available, some parts of the presented phylogenies will certainly change. Some of the open questions will hopefully be solved soon, but I strongly believe that it will take a long time before this book is outdated.

The book can be ordered for 110 US\$ from <http://www.compositae.org/>, and by e-mail to compositaebook@gmail.com. All profits go to the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) (<http://www.botanik.univie.ac.at/iapt/>).

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book review

The Making of a Biogeographer: the life of Jack Briggs

A Professorial Life. An Autobiographical Account, by John C. Briggs
Xlibris Corporation, 2009, 272 pp. ISBN 13 (TP): 978-1-4415-8881-4
<http://academicautobiography.com/>

With “A Professorial Life” John (Jack) Briggs, an icon in the field of Biogeography, follows the advice of Renaissance sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, who suggested that every person should write their autobiography. At the outset Briggs defines his autobiography as an interlace between professional and personal life that feed on each other and can’t be separated. Since he is turning 90 this year, Briggs has experienced enough changes both in the discipline and in society to have material for an insightful book. His book broadly covers three main areas: his personal life, a career in academia, and his main scientific contributions. His personal life is entertaining. I found his accounts of early fishing and hunting in wild California to be full of nostalgic charm. His short foray in the Air Force during WWII, followed by some hairy flights and landings in people’s fields in his personal airplane soon after the war, brought back a long lost sense of adventure. Jack Briggs married four times (his first wife married fifteen times!) and has nine children and many grandchildren. Thus his diatribes denouncing the poor state of education in the US, and his writing of a scientific children’s book (*A Mesozoic Adventure*, which incidentally my kids

thoroughly enjoyed) clearly come from personal experience and frustration. A recurrent theme in the book is his interest in real estate. I quickly lost count of the number of houses that the Briggs household moved in and out of, bought and sold, I am wondering if Jack Briggs knows this number himself.

The autobiography then moves into the scientific aspect of Briggs’ life. It is very interesting to try to figure out how Briggs’ career choices shaped his biogeographic thinking. As a child and young man, Briggs extensively camped and fished in Yosemite National Park, California, and later worked as a ranger at Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. His personal love of the wild streams of the Western US translated in graduate work on the ecology of trout and salmon rivers. As a graduate student at Stanford, which was then still in the intellectual footsteps of David Starr Jordan, he learned to know fishes in the best possible place to do so. As was common then, while being a broad systematist, he also specialized in a particular group of fishes. He focused his attention on gobiesocids, or clingfishes, a group of unique fishes with a sucking disk on their underside that,

for a budding biogeographer, are conveniently found worldwide.

The book then takes a turn and focuses on Briggs' academic career. This portion of the book mostly deals with the political aspects of the job, where one goes from one position to another, has to deal with innumerable committees, works very hard and, when lucky, achieves something. And Jack Briggs did get a chance to experience several institutions in the US and Canada: Oregon State, Stanford, Florida, British Columbia, Texas, South Florida and Georgia. Among the academic positions he held, I learned that he spent some time teaching and was hired as faculty in Human Anatomy. We get a chance to witness Briggs dissecting his first human body, a far cry from minute cling-fishes. Most of Briggs' career was spent at South Florida University, where he developed a strong program at the Department of Marine Science (now College of Marine Science). After retiring, he donated to its library a collection gathered over the years of valuable ichthyology books, such as Bleeker's Atlas, and a treatise by Belon published in 1553. Over his long career, Briggs got a chance to meet great people and to be in contact with students that would later become famous on their own, such as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Evolutionary Biologist Peter Grant, and Ichthyologist Joseph Nelson.

Briggs autobiography then moves into the retirement portion of his life and describes his scientific achievements. It is interesting to note this coincidence and it is not easy to determine if the message is that scientists only become productive after retirement, when all the bureaucracy of academia is over, or if the book is arranged in such a way just for ease of writing. I want to believe it is the former.

During his career, Briggs championed several important causes. In one case, he was a very vocal opponent of the proposed creation of a sea-level Panama Canal, and provided cogent testimonies that may have resulted in the project being dropped altogether. In the last part of his book, Briggs gets back to this issue. In a nutshell, Jack Briggs is convinced that biological invasions have no major ill effects on local ecologies; rather, they

enhance invaded ecosystems. As such, biological invasions should be promoted where deteriorated ecosystems need to be enhanced. Point in case is the northern Atlantic fisheries and the Caribbean ecosystem. Both places are in terrible shape. His solution is simple enough, let's start again from scratch with introduced organisms from the diverse Pacific. Fisheries will be enhanced and resilience will be promoted. A tangible argument is put forth with the situation in the eastern Mediterranean, where Lessepsian migrants, which invaded from the Red Sea via the Suez Canal, have enhanced the depleted local ecosystem. With his new personal stance on this issue, he reneges his past position about the sea level Panama Canal, as he would now precisely promote the opposite view. While I completely disagree with his new position, it is difficult to be upset because of Briggs' complete faith in the scientific process. Rather than being dogmatic about it, he genuinely states that if he's right, time will tell, and if he's wrong, science will move on.

More germane to our field, Briggs gets a chance to get even with "vicarianists" and "panbiogeographers". Oh it must be so nice to have so much room to vent in an autobiographic book! Again, while his attacks are targeted, I commend his clarity of style and thinking. Briggs never wavers and provides some precise arguments that can easily be tested and discussed, a hallmark of a thoughtful and confident scientist.

In many places, particularly when times were harsh, Briggs chose to forge ahead, look forward and not dwell in the past. Luckily for us, he decided to make an exception by writing this book.

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