

**BOOK REVIEW**

Donald MacIntosh, *Gone Native*, 2010, £14.99  
Merlin Unwin Books, Palmers House,  
7 Corve Street, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY8 1DB.

Donald MacIntosh is a talented wordsmith, and his reminiscences are obtained from a working life spent mainly as a forest surveyor in West Africa. He appears widely read and adept at constructing short stories, which he recounts with panache and humour.

Somewhat unusually for him, the first half dozen tales in this book vividly describe his boyhood in Galloway (SW Scotland) during the Second World War, where we meet his Gaelic-speaking grandfather, his younger brother, a tinker girl and a local tramp. We are told how he was taught to fish and shoot, and on the way learn about the animals and plants that populated this landscape. Dick was powerfully reminded of his own rural childhood – although in less wild country than the author’s.

However after a magical description of his young days in Scotland (in more senses than one) he devotes two-thirds of the book to colourful anecdotes of West Africa (Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Nigeria). We meet the Professor who helped him escape from a honey badger, a small but bad-tempered creature; “Dr Death” whose signboard proffered treatment for both First Class and Working Class Gonorrhoea; the pygmy girl who so charmed MacIntosh’s Fulani assistant that he stayed with her; a Russian who had once caught a 5-foot wahoo (like a barracuda); and an American hunter who insisted on shooting animals in an ancestral grove within Tiv country – guess what happened to him. Two Intervening chapters draw on time spent in Canada.

We have read two of his earlier books on West Africa – *Travels in the White Man’s Grave* (1998) reviewed in the *Nigerian Field* 63: 161, and *Forest of Memories* (2001) which we discovered in Barter Books, during a NFS UK Branch weekend at Alnwick. Although these stories are written to amuse, he displays profound and sympathetic understanding of Africa and Africans. The African stories in the earlier books may be better than in the present one, and we would like to read more of his Scottish and other reminiscences. He has led an extraordinary life (although interesting lives are not usually comfortable) – and the book might have been better to continue in a more autobiographical vein -- to expand on his earlier years in Scotland, to explain the education and training that prepared him for forestry work, to tell us what led him to travel to Africa and to Canada, the conditions of life which he enjoyed (or endured), how he related to his various employers, and lastly what drew him back to the United Kingdom in his declining years – if indeed they are declining!.

— Richard and Joyce Lowe