

# In Suspect Terrain (Annals of the Former World, 2)

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From the outwash plains of Brooklyn to Indiana's drifted diamonds and gold In Suspect Terrain is a narrative of the earth, told in four sections of equal length, each in a different way reflecting the three others—a biography; a set piece about a fragment of Appalachian landscape in illuminating counterpoint to the human history there; a modern collision of ideas about the origins of the mountain range; and, in contrast, a century-old collision of ideas about the existence of the Ice Age. The central figure is Anita Harris, an internationally celebrated geologist who went into her profession to get out of a Brooklyn ghetto. The unifying theme is plate tectonics—here concentrating on the acceptance that all aspects of the theory do not universally enjoy. As such, In Suspect Terrain is a report from the rough spots at the front edge of a science.

The Delaware Water Gap, where the Delaware River cuts through the Appalachian Mountains, is a bucolic and peaceful landscape perhaps best known as the setting of Edward Hicks's famous painting, *The Peaceable Kingdom*. However, the calm landscape conceals the tortuous geological history of this region and the equally complex debates concerning the geological past of the eastern United States.

In *Basin and Range*, McPhee traveled across the United States with a strong proponent of plate tectonics. In this volume, he travels over some of the same terrain with Anita G. Harris, a geologist who questions the ability of plate tectonics to completely explain the geology of this part of the world. As always, McPhee conveys the brilliant enthusiasms of those he profiles and the engaging complexity of the disciplines within which they work.

This is the second of four books on North American geology by McPhee, collectively entitled *Annals of the Former World*. The other volumes are *Basin and Range*, *Rising from the Plains*, and *Assembling California*.

John McPhee was born in Princeton, New Jersey, and was educated at Princeton University and Cambridge University. His writing career began at *Time* magazine and led to his long association with *The New Yorker*, where he has been a staff writer since 1965. Also in 1965, he published his first book, *A Sense of Where You Are*, with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and in the years since, he has written nearly 30 books, including *Oranges* (1967), *Coming into the Country* (1977), *The Control of Nature* (1989), *The Founding Fish* (2002), *Uncommon Carriers* (2007), and *Silk Parachute* (2011). *Encounters with the Archdruid* (1972) and *The Curve of Binding Energy* (1974) were nominated for National Book Awards in the category of science. McPhee received the Award in Literature from the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1977. In 1999, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Annals of the Former World*. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

Other Books

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