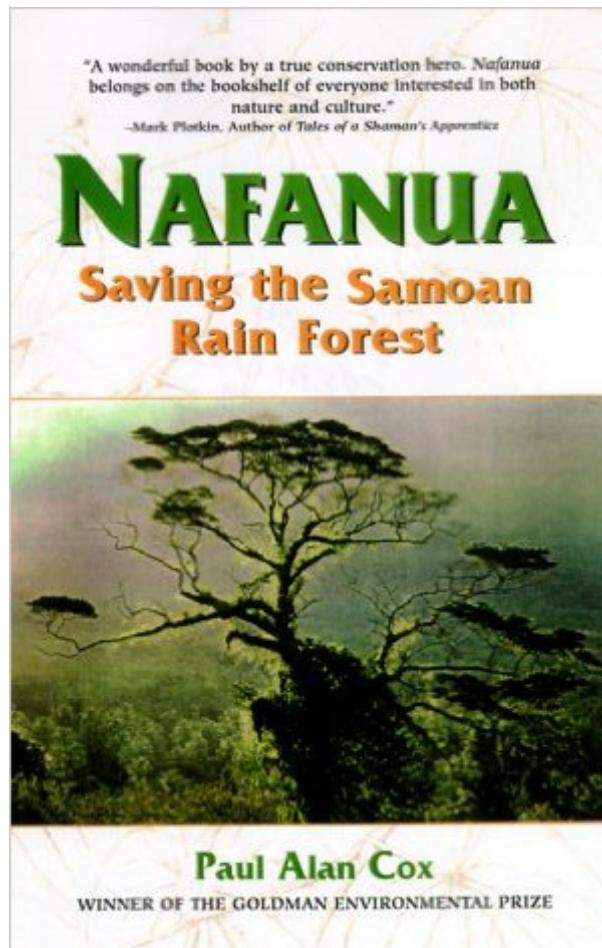


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Nafanua: Saving The Samoan Rain Forest



Synopsis

Paul Cox describes his research and adventures in Samoa, work that led to him being hailed by TIME magazine as a hero of medicine and awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize. Working closely with the native healers, Cox studied traditional rainforest remedies and is credited with finding natural drugs that can be used in treating AIDS, discovering a rare species of flying fox, launching an international campaign to save a 30,000-acre rainforest and helping to rebuild a village destroyed by a hurricane. Cox's respect for the traditional villagers and his excitement and perseverance make "Nafunua" a story of scientific and personal discovery.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a most interesting book, the story of how the author came to live in Samoa, and fell in love with the people and their tropical forest environment. When faced with a seemingly hopeless situation, namely the destruction of a huge area of tropical forest, the author recounts his experience in helping to save these sacred lands--through purchasing the logging rights from the outsiders who were beginning to bulldoze the forests, and turning the control of the forests over to the local community. The book is filled with fascinating stories, and the people and their forests come alive in its pages. I was particularly moved by Cox's account of living through a typhoon and barely managing to save his family and Samoan friends as the waves continued to pound apart each of the shelters that they took refuge in. A wonderful narrative of life on this remote Pacific Island, of botanical studies, conservation and commitment to a cause. Truly this book will be an

inspiration for people who are looking for real life heroes--in this case the lineage of elderly healers who have been the guardians of their sacred traditions for thousands of years, who worked with Paul Cox to ensure that their plants, many with profoundly important uses, would be preserved for future generations. I gave this book to several friends. It is, quite simply, a wonderful read.

This unique and fascinating book by Dr. Cox has important implications for development practitioners and academics interested in political ecology as well as ethnobotanists. The challenges faced by the people of Falealupo village in choosing between preserving their forest or building a school for their children are typical of the environmental trade-offs that many people in developing countries feel compelled to make simply to achieve, by our standards, a minimally acceptable standard of living. The solution presented by Dr. Cox, in which social networks are built such that people willing to invest in the preservation of ecosystems are put into direct contact with those people overseeing these ecosystems (without government or NGO intervention) has important lessons for people interested in promoting "Conservation-with-Development" approaches to economic development. This text also illustrates the complex ways that the human imprint on ecosystems is embedded in power-laden social networks and that change involves contestation and negotiation of power within these networks. This book thus holds important insights for those interested in political ecology. (For those interested in these topics, Dr. Cox's contribution to People, Plants and Justice - Charles Zerner, ed., Cambridge University Press, 2000 - makes an informative companion-piece to Nafanua.) Finally, as a person who has lived in Samoa for several years as a volunteer teacher and as someone who conducts ecological research there, I find Dr. Cox's presentation of the people of Samoa, shown from a more personalized perspective rather than an academic one, to be open, honest and fair. He avoids falling into the trap of romanticizing or essentializing the people as "ecologically noble savages" that live in perfect harmony with their environment that has become so common in depictions of indigenous peoples in the popular media. When I read the book, I often saw the Samoa that I knew from my own personal experience.

This was an outstanding work. I am a palagi who has been married to a Samoan woman for 9 years and have had extensive dealings with Samoans for 14 years. We visited Western Samoa in 1988, so I have seen the culture first-hand, as well as my state-side exposure with Samoan American organizations. I could almost see myself interacting with the people as he related his accounts... although my 50 or so word Samoan vocabulary can't be compared with the author. He truly captures the essence of Samoa and its people.

Professor Cox, winner of the Goldman Prize and other honors, writes a vivid and very personal first-hand account of life among real people of a remote and alien culture, written as much to remind those indigenous people who have migrated from the South Seas of their heritage, as for the rest of a world ignorant of the preciousness of a pristine rainforest. One must come to admire him for mortgaging his modest home in the U.S.A. to save a species and a treasure of the earth in the South Seas. His saga of fighting for survival in a week-long hurricane and flood is the stuff of an adventure movie, and yet he writes with a delicately descriptive brush, each chapter framed by beautiful drawings and poetry. His insights on Margaret Mead and anthropology offer an insightful and even humorous sidebar to an extraordinary window on living history. This true story of the Twentieth Century reminds us of the spirituality in isolation in such tales as "Dances with Wolves" and the horror of the hurricane in Neville Shute's "Trustee of the Toolroom." The book should inspire its readers to support the worthy causes of the Seacology Foundation in its efforts to preserve Nature's treasures in the South Seas.

I haven't quite finished the book yet, but I have enjoyed the style of writing and find it very engaging. My only criticism (if I can even call it that) is not knowing the Samoan names for the plants that precede each new chapter. Other than that, it has proven to be a good read.

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