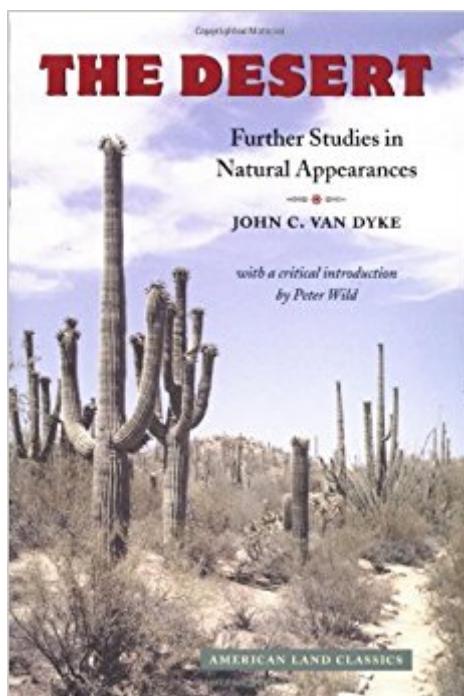


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The Desert: Further Studies In Natural Appearances (American Land Classics)



Synopsis

Since its first appearance in 1901, John C. Van Dyke's *The Desert* has been considered one of the classics of American nature writing. Before its publication, Americans thought of deserts as scorpion-infested wastelands—with names like Devil's Domain and the Lands That God Forgot. All this changed as *The Desert* drew attention to the extraordinary beauty that existed in the American West: rolling sand dunes, golden vistas, vibrant sunsets, and remarkable plant and animal life. Van Dyke's book captured the nation's imagination at a time when attitudes about the land were changing. It provided a vocabulary that continues to be used as appreciation of deserts increases and ever greater pressures lead to new calls to protect these fragile environments. With a critical introduction by Peter Wild, this edition offers new insights—and reveals some surprising truths—about this legendary author and his best known work. Van Dyke was not, it seems, the "plaster saint of the desert." He was not entirely honest with his readers about the journeys that inspired the book, and his natural history includes serious errors. But in this more informed reading, Wild notes, Van Dyke "emerges as all the more fascinating a writer and his famous book becomes far more intriguing than most readers have imagined through the decades." As the centennial of its publication approaches and the complex story behind its long success is finally told, this new edition of *The Desert* reveals an equally complex and dramatic narrative: our changing relationship with the American landscape. "Van Dyke came at just the right time... No sooner had Americans conquered the wilderness, cut down the forests, and slaughtered the buffalo than the romantic nation began sentimentalizing the past, longing for what it had just destroyed."—from the Introduction

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John C. Van Dyke was a professor of art history at Rutgers University and the author of many books, including *The Open Spaces*, *The Mountain*, and *Autobiography*. Peter Wild is a professor of English at the University of Arizona. His books include *The Secret Life of John C. Van Dyke* and *Daggett: Life in a Mojave Frontier Town*.

Astounding descriptions of the allure of the desert. Gary J. George author of "Mojave Desert Sanctuary".

This review is regarding the Kindle edition, not the book. I was excited to find one of my favorite books in Kindle form until I purchased it. The text is all justified, with no line breaks, making for a very frustrating and unpleasant reading experience. Until a better formatted version is out, I suggest sticking with the paper version.

Before Mary Austin and Edward Abbey came John Van Dyke, an art history professor who was the first to write about desert appreciatively from an aesthetic viewpoint. Some of the passages of desert description in this book have never been surpassed. Van Dyke also tackles the questions of desert ecology and evolution, although his expositions of those are less reliable than his aesthetic observations since he wasn't a scientist or a naturalist. With an introduction by Peter Wild, a leading scholar of desert writing, this is the edition of Van Dyke's classic to have. And nobody can begin to understand the North American southwest desert without reading Van Dyke, despite his sometimes outdated science.

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