



The Lost Amazon: The Photographic Journey of Richard Evans Schultes

By Wade Davis

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Richard Evans Schultes (1915-2001) was probably the greatest explorer of the Amazon, and regarded among anthropologists and seekers alike as the "father of ethnobotany." Taking what was meant to be a short leave from Harvard in 1941, he surveyed the Amazon basin almost continuously for twelve years, during which time he lived among two dozen different Indian tribes, mapped rivers, secretly sought sources of rubber for the US government during WWII, and collected and classified 30,000 botanical specimens, including 2,000 new medicinal plants. Schultes chronicled his stay there in hundreds of remarkable photographs of the tribes and the land, evocative of the great documentary photographers such as Edward Sheriff Curtis. Published to coincide with a traveling exhibition to debut at the Govinda Gallery in Washington, D.C., *The Lost Amazon* is the first major publication to examine the work of Dr. Schultes, as seen through his photographs and field notes. With text by Schultes's protege and fellow explorer, Wade Davis, this impressive document takes armchair travelers where they've never gone before.

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The Lost Amazon: The Photographic Journey of Richard Evans Schultes By Wade Davis Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A cross between Indiana Jones and Timothy Leary, Harvard botanist Schultes explored the farthest reaches of Amazonia in the middle decades of the 20th century and discovered hundreds of new plant species, including a number of hallucinogenic plants that helped spark the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s. He took peyote with Kiowa medicine men for his undergrad thesis, and after that he was never too sick, crippled or pressed for time to detour miles through the rainforest to ingest an unfamiliar hallucinogen in a shamanic ritual. He even fixed up William Burroughs with some ayahuasca "vision vine," thanks to which the beat demigod "achieved pure bisexuality, becoming a man or a woman at will, awash with wild convulsions of lust." Schultes was also a talented amateur photographer, and this engaging biographical essay, adapted by ethnobotanist Davis (*The Serpent and the Rainbow*) from his full-length biography, is paired with gorgeous reproductions of Schultes's black-and-white photographs from his travels among the Amazonian Indians. The photos include well-observed anthropological documents of Indian rituals and crafts, candid shots of everyday life and romantic photos of towering mesas, thundering falls and mist-shrouded rivers. The result is an absorbing biographical and visual record of a quickly vanishing culture and landscape and a larger-than-life explorer of exterior and interior terrains.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Schultes (1915-2001), of Harvard University, was a plant explorer and expert in sacred hallucinogenic plants. He was also, according to one of his proteges, ethnobotanist Davis, "a lover of all things Indian and Amazonian." Davis presented an in-depth portrait of his mentor in *One River* (1996) and now reveals another facet of this remarkable pioneer, Schultes' gifts as a field photographer. Schultes took hundreds of photographs of the northwest Amazon between 1941 and 1953, using a Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex camera, which, as Davis so astutely observes, required the photographer to hold the camera at waist height and gaze down into it, thus bowing to one's subject. This posture of respect is in keeping with Schultes' sense of reverence and wonder, a quality palpable in his striking black-and-white photographs of Amazonians and their magnificent and mysterious world. An exhibition based on the book is touring the country, and with a foreword by another of Schultes' students, Andrew Weil, and Davis' illuminating commentary, *The Lost Amazon* stands as a keystone volume in the history of the Amazon. *Donna Seaman*
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From the Back Cover

An extraordinary document, as rich in rare, beautiful photographs as it is in the story of a true adventurer, *The Lost Amazon* chronicles the journeys of legendary explorer Richard Evans Schultes.

Regarded as the father of ethnobotany and described by his protégé Wade Davis as "the last of the great plant explorers in the Victorian tradition," Schultes revealed the botanical identity of *teonanacatl*, the sacred hallucinogenic mushroom known to the Aztecs as the "flesh of the gods," through his doctoral research. Soon after, in 1941, he left Harvard for the Amazon, intending to be gone for only a semester. Instead, he disappeared into the rainforest and spent the next twelve years in pursuit of its mysteries. He lived among dozens of local tribes, mapped unknown rivers, sought out sources of rubber for the U.S. government during World War II, collected over 30,000 botanical specimens, discovered over 300 species, and described for the first time the use of over 2,000 medicinal plants.

As gifted a photographer as he was a scientist, Schultes's exquisite images capture both the lush landscapes of his journey, as well as his deep empathy with the peoples who held him in high esteem; forging strong camaraderie with the local tribes, Schultes almost never carries a firearm, and said, "I do not believe in hostile Indians." The Lost Amazon is not only the story of one man's astonishing journey, but also an unrivaled anthropological record.

Schultes's field notes are accompanied by a biographical essay by Wade Davis that provides personal and historical reflection on his mentor in science and exploration, and a foreword by Andrew Weil, another of Schultes's students. Together with Schultes's own photographs, they provide, for the first time, a visual and written chronicle of astonishing discovery—and of a way of life that can never be recaptured.

Users Review

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