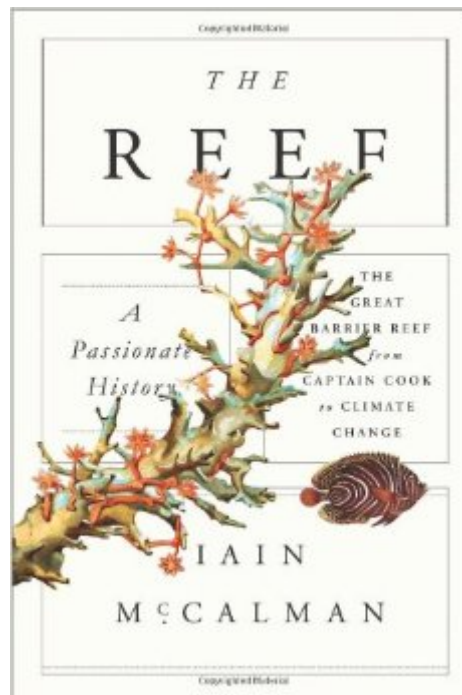


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# The Reef: A Passionate History: The Great Barrier Reef From Captain Cook To Climate Change



## Synopsis

Stretching 1,400 miles along the Australian coast and visible from space, the Great Barrier Reef is home to three thousand individual reefs, more than nine hundred islands, and thousands of marine species, and has alternately been viewed as a deadly maze, an economic bounty, a scientific frontier, and a precarious World Heritage site. Now the historian and explorer Iain McCalman takes us on a new adventure into the reef to reveal how our shifting perceptions of the natural world have shaped this extraordinary seascape. Showcasing the lives of twenty individuals spanning more than two centuries, *The Reef* highlights our profound desire to conquer, understand, embrace, and ultimately save the world's most complex ocean ecosystem. Opening with the story of Captain James Cook, who sailed unknowingly into the southwest entrance of this vast network of coral outcroppings, McCalman shows how Cook spent months navigating this treacherous underwater labyrinth, struggling to keep his crew alive and his ship afloat, sparring with deceptive shoals and wary native islanders. Through a series of dramatic tales from intrepid explorers, unwitting castaways, inquisitive naturalists, enchanted artists, and impassioned environmentalists who have collectively shaped our ideas about the Great Barrier Reef, McCalman demonstrates how this grand natural wonder of the world was built as much by human imagination as by the industrious, beautiful creatures of the sea. A romantic, historically significant book and a deeply personal journey into the heart of a marine environment in peril, *The Reef* powerfully captures the delicate relationship between humanity and the natural world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The story of the Great Barrier Reef presented as a series of biographies starting with Cook's 1770 initial encounter with the reef and Mathew Flinders' circumnavigation through the reef in 1802-3. Cites the 1724 speculation by Peyssonnel that the coral was actually an insect (an animal). After covering the benign interaction with aboriginals, we get the stories of several ship-wrecked Europeans adopted for various periods by natives. Either their positive experiences and strong bonds with adopted families are ignored (Morrill and Pelletier in the 1870s) or they get blown up into dreadful stories of abuse and cannibalism (Eliza Fraser, 1830s). Joseph Jukes serves as expedition artist when HMS Fly surveys the Torres Strait in 1842 and documents the gentility and amazing technology used by these mostly gentle people to subsist in a harsh environment. His Journal of the Surveying Voyage becomes the baseline document that Darwin references in his own reef studies. In 1849 the artist and linguist Brierly is there to rescue Barbara Thompson living with natives since a child, and patiently documents her life with the aborigines. William Kent in 1888 converts a one-time survey assignment into a 4-year job as a fisheries warden. These years result in detailed study of coral using advanced photography and eventually the celebrated Great Barrier Reef of Australia volume and then his Naturalist follow-up. After Darwin publishes his subsidence theory, Alex Agassiz (son of ardent anti-evolutionist Louis) becomes obsessed with disproving that theory and without the background of plate tectonics you can actually see that he has a point. While his student Alfred Mayor does some significant experiments on coral growth highlighting the importance of temperature.

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