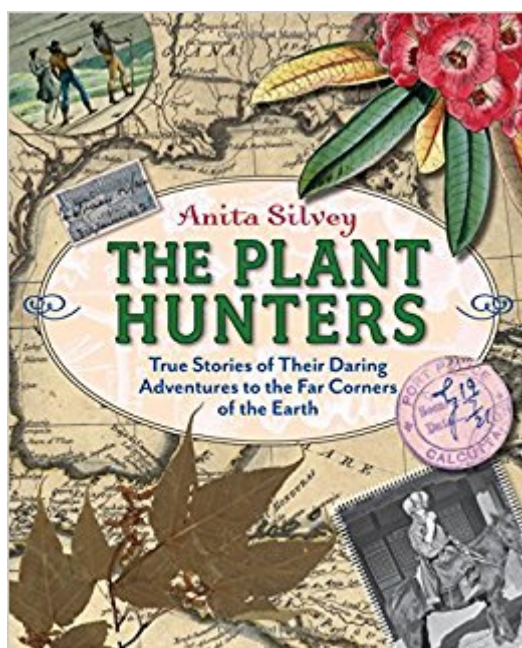


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# The Plant Hunters: True Stories Of Their Daring Adventures To The Far Corners Of The Earth



## Synopsis

Driven by an all-consuming passion, the plant hunters traveled around the world, facing challenges at every turn: tropical illnesses, extreme terrain, and dangerous animals. They battled piranhas, tigers, and vampire bats. Even the plants themselves could be lethal! But these intrepid eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explorers were determined to find and collect new and unusual specimens, no matter what the cost. Then they tried to transport the plants—and themselves—home alive. Creating an important legacy in science, medicine, and agriculture, the plant hunters still inspire the scientific and environmental work of contemporary plant enthusiasts. Working from primary sources—journals, letters, and notes from the field—Anita Silvey introduces us to these daring adventurers and scientists. She takes readers into the heart of their expeditions to then-uncharted places such as the Amazon basin, China, and India. As she brings a colorful cast of characters to life, she shows what motivated these Indiana Jones–type heroes. In *The Plant Hunters*, science, history, and adventure have been interwoven to tell a largely forgotten—yet fascinating—story.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

“A lovely presentation of amazing adventures.” —*School Library Journal* “successfully infuse[s] the image of plant collection with a measure of excitement many readers will not expect.”

•BCCB• Combining bits of botanical history and exploration with accounts of adventurers, this unusual book introduces European and North American plant hunters...• •Booklist• smoothly written, smartly paced and filled with exciting tales of risk taking and derring-do. •Kirkus Reviews

Anita Silvey is among today's foremost authorities on children's books. She is the creator of both the online and the print editions of the Children's Book-a-Day Almanac, and teaches courses in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science and the Children's Literature Program at Simmons College. A frequent contributor to NPR, Ms. Silvey lectures around the country on children's and young adult books. Her books include *Henry Knox: Bookseller, Soldier, Patriot, I'll Pass for Your Comrade: Women Soldiers in the Civil War*, and *Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children's Book*. She lives near Boston, Massachusetts.

Indiana Jones has nothing on these intrepid adventurers as they travel the world in search of the exotic - plant! Anita Silvey draws upon letters, diaries and journals to tell the story of these little known daring-do scientists. Passionate about their discoveries, plant hunters "...love being outdoors in the natural world. They enjoyed traveling to places often unseen by others, and they found alien landscapes mysterious and beautiful." While many went into plant hunting with the hope of becoming rich, most also wanted to make scientific discoveries, inspired by the life of Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778). Considered the father of modern botany, Linnaeus created the system to classify plants. "As he named everything from buffaloes to buttercups, he began to create order out of the natural world, or, as his motto has been translated, 'God created. Linnaeus organized.'" Anita opens with the amazing tale of Alexander von Humboldt. In his quest across South America, von Humboldt encountered a jaguar, is "...tormented by insects, threatened by crocodiles, and abandoned by his guides." At one point, he was poisoned by curare, a nerve poison used by the Tikuna tribe living on the Orinoco River. The adventure didn't end once the hunters found their specimens. Transporting the discoveries back to the museums, arboretums, and royal gardens sometimes proved more difficult. Sometimes it could take weeks or months before the plant was ready to harvest, then it had to be carried by mules then by boats, being carried across land and ocean, exposed to all kinds of weather and environmental changes. Because plant hunters wanted to make sure their specimens survived, they collected sometimes thousands of specimens, and in doing so, created an environmental disaster. Joseph Hooker's workers cut down ten thousand trees in order to gather four thousand orchids living at the top of them. The irony of destroying so much in

order to gain the prize could lend itself to a wonderful discussion about current environmental concerns. Anita includes an impressive collection of original drawings, paintings, photographs to illustrate the landscape and characters of her subject. This book is a remarkable blend of history, science and adventure.

I really, really enjoyed this book. It is for younger adult readers but that didn't make it any less intriguing or informative. I am an avid historian of the origin of plants and this was a fantastic overview. The copy was in great condition too.

While this book may be aimed at kids, it is really interesting and well written for adults, too. It gives you a deeper appreciation for all that went into discovering plants, cataloging, and naming them. Chapters are short so I read one a night or so just for a quick, fun read.

Perfect as introduction in the subject. Witty text and with illustrations both beautiful, rare and informative. Easy to digest makes it suitable for both the younger reader and for those that believes history must be boring.

Interesting book. I plan to donate it to a school library. I think the older boys and girls will enjoy knowing how the plant finds came into being.

Stalked by tigers, besieged by bandits, plant hunters endured massive privation, and masses of insects, to collect and send home specimens to advance science and make their countries wealthier and better. In an engaging and beautifully illustrated account, Silvey lures with tales of danger, opening reader's eyes to the history and value of plant exploration. Lots of archival photographs and prints compliment histories of individual explorers and 'super-star plants' that changed our economies, history and health. A final chapter touches on some contemporary explorers who seek alternative energy sources, beauty and bio-diversity. Suitable for reports, the book includes a selective timeline, footnotes and a bibliography. Mis-identification of a handful of images mars this excellent volume: a plant on the second page is egregiously misidentified as an orchid-orchids ONLY have parallel veination, aquatints are called watercolors and a smooth-faced Chinese man is identified as the bearded Frank Meyer.

What Silvey does here that's so terrific is that she doesn't just write bio per chapter after bio per

chapter. I thought that might be the case, after reading Chapter One, which is about Alexander von Humboldt. Instead, she organizes her chapters around topics. Say, Chapter 2 "Why Did They Do It?" While explaining why these people faced danger and made tremendous efforts to bring huge numbers of plants over long distances, she uses real people to illustrate her points. Every chapter is like that. They each are on a subject and the people involved get pulled in that way. And the nineteenth century illustrations and the black and white photographs are so perfect. The Author's Note has a great bit on how Silvey got the idea for this book while reading "The Orchard Thief" by Susan Orlean. This is a terrific book for older grade school students. It could even function as a quick introduction to this subject for much older readers. It might encourage a few plant hunters

My boys 11 and 13 LOVED this book! They were fascinated by the near death encounters that many of these explorers had and loved the pictures of plants and people and scenery. I really enjoyed this book too. It made me more curious about botany and eager to be more mindful of plants all around me.

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