



# Travels with My Sketchbook

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

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That Michael Foreman is an enormously well-travelled author and illustrator is evident from his many beautiful picture books wherein he draws upon his wealth of experiences. This however is something altogether different: herein the nearly octogenarian takes readers – not necessarily children – on an amazing journey both through his career and around the world. We start with the young boy at the end of WW2 in the village shop run by his mother, contemplating the wonders of places such as those where the palms grew that were shown on the date boxes sold. Unsurprisingly Foreman jumped at the chance of a travel scholarship to the USA on graduating from the RCA and after that seemingly, he's never stopped being a globe-trotter. His career has seen him visiting such far-flung destinations as Siberia, Japan, the Arctic Circle and the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim, China, India, Nigeria and Bali.

Essentially this is a memoir of some of his epic journeys that features sketches, drawings and anecdotal jottings from the sketchbooks that always accompanied the artist on his travels; and new writing done specially for this book which is presented in a different font from the original notes.

The author talks of his life-long passion for football, which he calls 'the most egalitarian of sports' and there are several scenes of the game being played in such unlikely places and settings as the Golan Heights and Sikkim. Seeing children enjoying the game inspired Foreman's book **Wonder Goal**, the endpapers of which include the sketchbook scenes from troubled regions as far afield as the Berlin Wall and the Golan Heights from 1970 to the foot of Mt. Fuji in 1997 and Marseille in 1999, as well as an amusing picture of a 1972 game in a school yard in Northern China where a dozen children are firing several balls at once at Foreman whom they've put in goal.

Every single gorgeous colour wash illustration though has a story to tell: take the various mountainous scenes: there's Sikkim: 'The mountains are like layer cakes of different climates' and Kashmir where 'Outside toilets were built facing the roads to encourage passerbys to contribute personal manure. I was happy to oblige – frequently'; juxtaposed with 'deep snowfields running upwards towards peaks plumed in cloud – Been where the Gods live.'

Foreman talks of his desire to walk a lot wherever he goes: 'You are open to the sounds and smells of the place, and you can leave the roads and follow tracks across country. I like experiencing these walks alone – days here and there. So it's just you and the place.'

However, it is, so he says, a case of east, west, home's best for he concludes 'Of all the journeys, the journey home is always the sweetest particularly when it ends in our home in Cornwall. '

One of the things this absorbing and powerfully evocative book did was to send me back with a more acute vision, to my much-loved collection of Foreman's picture books and other volumes he's illustrated. This is a book to lose yourself in, and to rediscover and more deeply appreciate, Foreman's life-time's work.

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