



Underground: A Human History of the Worlds Beneath Our Feet

Will Hunt

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A panoramic investigation of the subterranean landscape, from sacred caves and derelict subway stations to nuclear bunkers and ancient underground cities—an exploration of the history, science, architecture, and mythology of the worlds beneath our feet

When Will Hunt was sixteen years old, he discovered an abandoned tunnel that ran beneath his house in Providence, Rhode Island. His first tunnel trips inspired a lifelong fascination with exploring underground worlds, from the derelict subway stations and sewers of New York City to sacred caves, catacombs, tombs, bunkers, and ancient underground cities in more than twenty countries around the world. Underground is both a personal exploration of Hunt's obsession and a panoramic study of how we are all connected to the underground, how caves and other dark hollows have frightened and enchanted us through the ages.

In a narrative spanning continents and epochs, Hunt follows a cast of subterraneaphiles who have dedicated themselves to investigating underground worlds. He tracks the origins of life with a team of NASA microbiologists a mile beneath the Black Hills, camps out for three days with urban explorers in the catacombs and sewers of Paris, descends with an Aboriginal family into a 35,000-year-old mine in the Australian outback, and glimpses a sacred sculpture molded by Paleolithic artists in the depths of a cave in the Pyrenees.

Each adventure is woven with findings in mythology and anthropology, natural history and neuroscience, literature and philosophy. In elegant and graceful prose, Hunt cures us of our "surface chauvinism," opening our eyes to the planet's hidden dimension. He reveals how the subterranean landscape gave shape to our most basic beliefs and guided how we think about ourselves as humans. At bottom, Underground is a meditation on the allure of darkness, the power of mystery, and our eternal desire to connect with what we cannot see.

Underground: A Human History of the Worlds Beneath Our Feet Details

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Will Hunt**

From Reader Review *Underground: A Human History of the Worlds Beneath Our Feet* for online ebook

Out of the Bex says

A love letter to a lost world.

Will Hunt chronicles his search for meaning in the oft undiscovered world beneath our feet with a work that is part travel journal, part anthropological study. Hunt writes of his numerous explorations underground from the catacombs of Paris and the vast tunnels of NYC, to untouched caves in South America and Australia—and everything in between. His thoughtful commentary remarks on the discoveries of some of history's greatest minds juxtaposed with that of the common traveler turned dirt evangelist, a commentary proving that an enduring and utterly human fascination with the underground world has always existed and will exist inevitably into the future.

Perhaps enhanced by the otherworldly circumstances in which these events took place, it's clear Hunt has a gift for understanding the importance of narrative even in nonfiction. He reports real happenings as if a story and does so in a voice that is at times conversational, at times introspective. A writing style that in itself requires digging into. Each chapter is a thoughtful thirty pages in which Hunt alternates his own stories of adventure and discovery with reverent tales of the explorers who came before him.

WHAT WOULD I CHANGE

UNDERGROUND is written with a mesmerizing prose designed to incite wonder, but descriptions seem always only half cast, as though the author is not fully willing to share every secret.

Perhaps we can't begrudge these withholdings. After all, adventure belongs solely to the adventurer himself. We, the reader and witness, are allowed only the glimpse we deserve from the safety of our armchairs, lit with reading lamps and a comfortable cup of tea at our side. Some things must be left undiscovered and undocumented, left for our own internal meanderings which I believe the author hopes to inspire by his documentation of a subsurface largely unknown.

Two notes on structure stand out as what I could see as potential improvements. Firstly, the sentence structure itself, which acts as a sort of start and stop hap-dash of commas and semicolons that far exceeds the average. This is due in part to the work's conversational style, but does require some acclimating. Secondly, the book is punctuated with numerous black and white photos that sometimes lack full description. I would have appreciated the occasional italicized caption with more detail.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This startling and thought-provoking work unearths a connection to the depths at once spiritual and biological, a revelation that astounds even the most casual of readers. A must-read for the spare traveller, the amateur archaeologist, the pioneer, the naturalist, the spiritualist, the dreaming anthropologist—but most importantly, the lingering explorer who lies buried in the hidden cavities of every human soul.

VERDICT: Buy It

Karen says

<https://booksnooks.wordpress.com/2019...>

Beneath my feet lies a 300 million-year-old petrified rainforest– the second largest in the world. Pictures of it can be seen here. It's incredible to imagine that this snowy countryside was once a tropical rainforest and that its remains are now buried deep below where I stand today. Scientific proof of what once was. Do you ever wonder about what used to be? Do you wonder about what can't be seen.

Will Hunt's curiosity about the unknown began the summer he turned 16, when he discovered an abandoned train tunnel that ran under his neighborhood. It was this experience that eventually launched his passion for urban exploring- a hobby that allowed him to travel all over the world as he sought out abandoned subway platforms (ghost stations), dodged police officers in foreign countries, and encountered "Mole People". While in the Catacombs of Paris, he even came across an underground library, La Librairie, where urban explorers left books for others to borrow. Oh, my soul!

"I saw that we- all of us, the human species- have always felt a quiet pull from the underground, that we are connected to this realm as we are to our own shadow."

I must say my favorite bit may have been the story about the "Mole Man of Hackney" who decided to dig a wine cellar in his basement and never stopped. He kept burrowing until his home started to collapse. In his words, "I just have a big basement."

Underground by Will Hunt was fascinating and really well done! If you are a fan of traveling from your couch or, like me, are simply saving your cabbage and working all the side hustles so you can travel in real life, this is the book for you! Hearing about his expeditions energized my sense of adventure and learning the science of the "worlds beneath our feet" caused me to look at things from a whole new perspective. Microbiologists keep finding life deeper and deeper inside the earth and are even discovering pockets of water that are more than a billion years old. In addition, it's estimated that more than half of the world's caves are undiscovered! We explore outer space, but there is so much to find here- our oceans and underground landscapes are just as much a mystery.

Nick T. Borrelli says

Very cool book about the unique world of our subterranean landscape. Whether it be subway systems, mines, catacombs, underground tunnels, etc.... This is a fascinating world tour penned by an urban explorer who documents the amazing underground world that exists and that we rarely even notice or think about. A quick read but a very fun one that I found entertaining and enlightening. Definitely pick this one up when it comes out in January of 2019.

Flint Bill says

One of the best works of non-fiction I've read in a while. Elegantly written, meticulously researched. Hunt

went everywhere for this book! So many discoveries to be made about the world's caves, catacombs, mines, sewers and other holes in the ground. And it's beautifully illustrated. Recommend a hundred times over.

Joyce says

This is the kind of quirky book that I love--lots of history, geography, geology, literature, psychology, religion, all tied to a single idea: underground spaces, natural and man-made, and how they've been used over the millennia. I'd never consider going caving myself--I'm way too claustrophobic--but I enjoy reading about the pleasures and all that is to be found. Hunt recounts his research into these spaces from ancient caves to disused subway tunnels and offers an amazing array of facts (or perhaps trivia for fans of that) to be enjoyed. He writes about "pioneers" in the field and shares his encounters with modern underground explorers. The book is fairly brief and moves quite briskly from one adventure to the next, with bits of philosophizing slowing it slightly. Lots of literary references, as any number of books from classics to more recent titles have played with this idea, and he also brings in real people, like Picasso, who were strongly influenced by their own glimpses into these underground worlds. It's thought-provoking, informative, rich in mythology, religion, art, history. The writing is detailed and evocative, the setting often exotic. An earnest yet entertaining read. Hunt's personal journeys underline the universal nature of man's curiosity about hidden places.

Nicolaus Stengl says

“Underground: A Human History of the Worlds Beneath Our Feet” is an extraordinarily well-researched book about the cavernous realm just beneath us. Will Hunt is our Virgil, guiding us into and through the subterranean world, and enthusing this tour with erudition, vitality, and an explorer’s yearning to explore our world and our place in it.

Will Hunt’s writing masterfully evokes W.G. Sebald; he mixes travelogue, biography, autobiography, history, science, documentary, and literary criticism. And in *Underground* Hunt’s writing evinces an encyclopedic knowledge and excitement of all things subterranean. *Underground* succeeds in giving us a panorama of the places below us and these spaces relate to humans throughout history.

Anaxagoras said, “The descent to hell is the same from every place.” *Underground* shows us that all descents into the spaces beneath us, also are descents and explorations into what it means to be human.

Ariel says

This book was absolutely fantastic. Hunt is a fantastic writer, who manages to make his trips to these various places both scary and charming, and does an excellent job of conveying the importance and fascination of the history surrounding it all. I learned so many things I didn't know before, and want to spew these facts at everyone I know, which I consider a mark of greatness in nonfiction. Definitely read.

Thanks Edelweiss for an e-arc! It gets 5 glowing stars.

Jessaka says

Will Hunt spent time in the N.Y. underground, the subway tunnels. Revs did as well. Revs was a graffiti artist who spent many years using N.Y. City as a canvas. He became famous, but not in a way that made him money. Then Revs took a ladder, paints, and other tools of his trade into the subway tunnels at night when no one was watching. He picked out the most obscure sections, those filled with darkness, to begin writing his book. With a paint roller and yellow or white paint, he made large book pages; his ladder came in handy. Then he took a spray can of black paint and began writing his life down. Will Hunt copied down his writings, but he found it dangerous to dodge the trains. He met Revs once, and he tried to ask him questions about his art in those tunnels, but Revs wasn't interested in talking. You can find some of those pages online by typing Revs, N.Y. City, Subway, and Diary.

Will Hunt had spent years checking out underground cities and caves. It was quite a journey. In Paris he found the underground city and ventured below. It was what people called the catacombs, only it really wasn't a burial place, not the kind we think of. He walked for miles and miles, and found rooms upon rooms. He learned that some of the people of Paris go into these catacombs to have parties, to even watch movies. Then there was a room where he found human remains, bones. Long ago there had been a plague. There were so many deaths that they could not bury all the bodies, so they threw the bodies down a hole above ground that landed the bodies in a room below, down in the catacombs. Life had lost its sacredness.

Then Will went to Australia to see a cave there, one that the Aboriginal people were still able to protect. It was an ochre mine. The Aboriginals believe that they came up from these caves in the beginning of time. Even some of the Native Americans have this belief. There are actually creatures living in that darkness, creatures with no eyes. I ask, "How can a human, who had evolved in the caves, more than likely with no eyes, come out into the light and survive?" I have this vision of their sitting at the mouth of the cave in the sunlight feeling its warmth and the fresh air, fearing to venture no further, but after thousands upon thousands of years, developing eye sight. I especially like their belief that they went upon the earth along songlines (paths) singing songs, bringing the nature into existence. I think of the Creator as singing songs that brought the universe into existence.

My favorite chapters were those on the caves, a topic that did not draw me to this book; it was the underground cities that had caught my interest. When Will writes, you see it all, you feel it all. First there were the cave paintings, which I had always found to be beautiful when seeing them in books or on the walls of a class room at college. Then there were the two bison sculptures made of clay from the cave. Whenever people came into the cave, Tuc d'Audoubert, they felt a sense of worship. A sacredness. It was in these caves that the cave dwellers had their religious ceremonies. They danced themselves into trances, seen by the footprints that had remained in the cave all these years. But what is more, being in a dark cave, in total darkness can cause the mind to expand. You get visions.

And so I end this review with a couple of my own stories:

When I was growing up in Paso Robles, CA there was the Cumming's Mansion. Kids had stories about it. It was now abandoned, the man had, and his wife was in a rest home. Teenagers used to break into the house, so Mary and I thought, "Let's try it." We went to the back of the house during the day and began tearing boards off one of its windows. We climbed in and looked around. People had thrown things around. It was a mess. We went into the kitchen, and I saw a door, opened it, and found it led down to the cellar. I could see

wine kegs, but that was all. We had not brought a flashlight, so we didn't venture down the dark stairs. If we had, perhaps we would have found the tunnel, but we had not heard of it or perhaps we would have both brought flashlights.

Years later my mom sent me a newspaper article on the Cumming's Mansion because she had known of my interest in it. I wish that I still had that article. It said that Mr. Cummings had dug a tunnel from the basement to the lot across the street as an escape route. Who knows what he feared? Anyway, some high school kids had been in the tunnel and had started a fire by accident, so they closed up the opening to the tunnel. The house is no longer there, and it certainly would have made a wonderful museum.

Then my husband told me a story of going to Chinatown in S.F. right after he first t of Nam. He was with his high school friend Jesse. Jesse's older brother, Raymond, had asked them to come with him for protection. They packed guns. To Raymond led them into a Chinese restaurant, through the back room and then down stairs leading to an underground city. There was a very long hallway that had rooms on each side, and he could smell opium coming from the rooms. Raymond then went into a room by himself while they stayed out in the hall. Raymond later told him that there were prostitutes and opium dens down there and you could walk for a long time and come up in various parts of Chinatown. But it was a dangerous place, because you had to be either with a Chinese man or have some other business there. My husband felt it unwise to return.

So I had hoped that Will Hunt had also heard of the underground city in Chinatown and had ventured there, but he hadn't. What other cities do we have in America or around the world that people don't know about?

I have heard of underground cities in the past, so my interest in this book. What I didn't expect was that this book was also about caves that the author had visited, and this section of the book turned out to be much more fascinating than the underground cities, because early man not only painted the cave walls, he also made animal sculptures from its clay, and then held religious rituals in them. What is more interesting is that the author stated that when you are in total darkness your mind can expand and cause you to have visions. Listening to his and other people's experiences while visiting these caves, made them seem very sacred.

I also found it interesting that the Aborigines in Australia and some American Indianals believe that they originally came from the caves. I doubt this because if you have evolved in darkness, like the animals in the caves, you wouldn't develop eye sight, which I feel is needed in order to survive above ground, but then again, there could be an explanation that would prove me wrong.

The author first went to Paris' underground city, which I believe he said was 200 miles long. He first had to find a guide to help him find a way to get in, and when he did he walked much it. There were rooms and more rooms. One room was full of human remains, bones. There had been a plague centuries ago, so they

dropped the bodies down a hole into this room and then covered it up. Next, he mentioned how people sneak down to these catacombs and have parties in some of the rooms, even showing movies.

I was fascinated by the subway system in N.Y. City, and how a man named Revs went into the underground where the subway trains run and there he painted pages of a book on the walls, and wrote his autobiography on them. I would love if the author of this book would publish them. He could call it Revs' Life and other Graffiti. What Rev had done was paint the pages using white or yellow paint, and then with black spray paint he wrote about his life. (After I wrote this, I went online and found that someone had actually put his online. You can read it here: <https://publicdelivery.org/revs-autob...>)

Graffiti can be interesting. I had a boyfriend in Berkeley in the 70s who wrote for the Berkeley Barb, an underground newspaper. He asked me if I would go into the women's restrooms in town for him and write down the graffiti that I found interesting. He wanted to write an article on graffiti for the Barb. I remember one piece of graffiti in the Sproul Hall women's restroom on campus. It was something about Nixon, saying that he had a crooked dick. And then I recall one in the Renaissance Cafe where one woman had written, "My mother made me a lesbian," and another woman wrote under that, "If I give her a needle and thread will she make me one too?" Priceless. Revs' graffiti was also priceless.

And then there were what they called "The Mole People," people who can't stop digging. One man dug under his house for 40 years, just making tunnels. His back yard was piled high in soil from his diggings. His neighbors must have loved him.

I have my own stories: There was the Cumming's Mansion in my home town of Paso Robles, CA. When I was a teenager, I had heard that it was empty and boarded up, so my friend Mary and I broke into the house by tearing boards off one of its windows. We had not heard about the underground tunnel, and since we had no flashlights, we were afraid to go down into the basement, but if we had, maybe we would have found it. Years later my mom sent me a newspaper article on the Cumming's Mansion because she had known of my interest in it. I wish that I still had that article. It said that Mr. Cummings had dug a tunnel from the basement to the lot across the street as an escape route. Who knows what he feared? Anyway, some high school kids had been in the tunnel and had started a fire by accident, so they closed up the opening to the tunnel. The house is no longer there, and it certainly would have made a wonderful museum.

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n in France they fell in awe.

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Isa says

Underground is one of the most poetic, breathtaking and ambitious books I have read in a long time. Hunt offers a delightful and unexpected journey, a fantastic expedition full of discoveries, surprising facts and wonderful anecdotes. He is a clever and tenacious explorer, who places himself as an illuminating guide through the most secretive and curious places in a world I never suspected could exist. It is a boundary-breaking tale set between past legends and rituals, secret tunnels alive right beneath our feet, sacred caves existing since eternity, and incredible scientific expeditions digging through the earth. I can't recommend enough this beautiful and surprising piece of work which I read from cover to cover in a thrill of excitement and curiosity. Fantastic!!

Mel says

Imagine yourself on an afternoon hike, stooping to push aside branches blocking a walk that meandered off the beaten path, and upon removing the pile of debris feeling the breath of a world beneath you coming from a small obscure opening in the ground. It takes a certain type of person to venture into this opening.

Interesting and well-researched; more philosophical than I expected. Author Will Hunt, I discovered, is equal parts thrill-seeker, philosopher, and academic. The mythology and other pieces of history the author connects to the world-wide sites he visits are worth thinking about. The author goes deep, both literally and figuratively and does a good job of accomplishing a well thought out and structured book about the subject of *worlds* (civilizations, creations, megacosms).

REVS' autobiography, in the farthest folds of NY's subway

Descending into underground of Paris

Where I expected more of a look into unknown subterranean discoveries through the eyes of a thrill-seeking explorer, I was educated rather than merely thrilled. True, it is thrilling to think of new discoveries beneath the feet we think are standing on terra firma. I was impressed by the information Hunt covers and the many diverse locations he shares. More importantly, I was humbled by the reminder of the stewardship we have over our earth, and that we seem to be drifting away from the sense of respect and appreciation for our planet that generations before us have had, especially indigenous peoples.

The Panel of the Great Black Cow, in the Cave at Lascaux

Unicorn, in the Hall of the Bulls

As we move more towards what we term scientific, we forget other possibilities. *"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."*

Aboriginal Rock Art

Citing some mind-bending theories, Hunt discusses scientists that have supported the possibility of life beginning actually beneath the surface of what was a violently evolving planet. The primordial incubation of life in the womb of Mother Earth aligns with the comparative mythology of several indigenous peoples. Whether you are Team Core Accretion or Team Disk Instability, the fact that these two theories of how our Earth formed are still "duking it out" adds to an interesting examination of how close what we think we know matches to how much we actually know, and how close mythology walks in the shadow of science.

Tyler Ruggles says

A remarkable book: beautifully written, deeply researched, full of fresh and bold ideas. Bought a copy for everyone in my family!

Sara says

This book combines basically all of my favorite things: travel, exploration, photography, graffiti, archaeology, anthropology....with a splash of philosophy. The author is present in the narrative but not irritatingly so. The book feels personal without feeling autobiographical. I want to read a full book on just about every chapter - the mythology and consistent fascination with the underground throughout human history is truly fascinating.

R Littlefield says

This non-fiction work starts off as a personal, memoir exploration of the author's preoccupation with subterranean worlds and expands into a much broader investigation, which ultimately explores the very roots of human spirituality. A unique and poetic and illuminating read.

Will Hunt says

To be fair, I wrote this book ;)

Jocelyn says

I requested this book thinking it would be about something entirely different and was pleasantly surprised by what I found. This book travels (literally) into many different types of underground and goes into the historical, religious, and artistic aspects of each. Very engaging writing style and well edited, I thought this book was wonderful.

I received a free review copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. All thoughts and opinions are my own.
