



## **Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas**

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**Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas** Sy Montgomery  
Studies the work and unique methods of three women scientists who contributed to understanding chimpanzees, mountain gorillas, and orangutans.

## Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas Details

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## **From Reader Review Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas for online ebook**

### **Mary says**

Excellent on-site studies of the three prominent primate specialists who have spent their lives with orangutans, chimpanzees, and gorillas. The women's lives are very different, and their approach to the study also different, but all were dedicated. The author presents sympathetic but realistic pictures of the three women, their personalities, and their failures and successes--and also presents hte personalities of the apes.

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### **Joan says**

This is an old book. Since it was published in 1991, Sy Montgomery has changed her audience to youth and learnt the fine art of reducing books' length to emphasize the important messages she wants to convey. This is a book published not long after Dian Fossey had been murdered and perhaps was too focused on what really amounted to gossip about her. Montgomery tried to be fair by reporting both good and bad but you can also sense that she felt that Dian had erred on the side of fanaticism and cruelty in how she reacted to people hurting her mountain gorillas, who were as close as family to her. Even allies sometimes questioned Fossey's tactics. The book shows it's age: she spent a lot of time showing Goodall as being unwilling to help chimps in general which was changing by the time the book was published. She did note the change but obviously this part is very out of date. I picked this up mostly because I was curious about both these three remarkable women and to see how Sy Montgomery used to write. I succeeded in both goals. I learnt a lot about these three women, especially Galdikas, who clearly Montgomery admired the most of the three, and I learnt a lot about Montgomery's old writing style. She has changed her style a great deal, but not her message that animals need our understanding and help. However, I won't go back and read any more of Montgomery's older books but enjoy her more recent titles. Speaking of which, I'm disappointed Tapir Scientist didn't win an honorable mention at least in the 2014 ALA Awards just handed out this week. Oh well, let's see what next year brings!

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### **Debra Cook says**

This a book about the research and ways of consevation of Dian Fossey, Jane Goodall, and Birute Galdikas.

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### **Kelly says**

I loved that the book addresses the emotional and spiritual side of science, very interesting. Montgomery was the perfect person to write the book: open minded, calm, and thoughtful.

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### **Elaine Burnes says**

An early book, if not Montgomery's first. She profiles Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute Galdikas together in sections by theme. Just really well done, especially the juxtaposition of them and the insight Montgomery brings. Jane was the first, the golden (literally) girl, Dian was the difficult middle child. I knew of Galdikas from her Earthwatch days and this explored her myths and gave critical insight into how and why she works the way she does. Seeing her framed by the others is interesting.

Jane, in particular, changed the way we see animals, and study them. That's pretty significant. Dian's life was just tragic all around. Sure, she went off about protecting the gorillas, but it seemed pretty necessary and no one else was going to do it. And Louis Leakey was fascinating. The way he chose the women, that he preferred women around him.

Montgomery's epilogue got a bit woo woo. She delves into African-ness in trying to explain Dian Fossey. I'm not sure I buy it. All her anecdotes might have come from white people. Is this what Africans told her? It raised my racism hackles, but not sure what to make of it. Essentially, she's saying Africans don't care about life—human or animal. Seems like a pretty broad statement to levy on an entire continent. Is Trump a stand-in for all North Americans? Just sayin'.

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### **Margo Tanenbaum says**

This is a terrific introduction to the work of these three women by one of the best writers about animals around. Highly recommended.

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### **Jim says**

I found this book in a book sale, and I thought I'd like to read about the three "ape ladies" all in one book. The three are Jane Goodall, who studied chimps, Dian Fossey, gorillas, and Birute Galdikas, orangutans. Reading the book, I realized I knew a lot about Jane Goodall and her work. I have seen her speak twice. As this book was published in 1991, the book ends as Jane is just beginning her work to save the wild chimps and help all those held captive in labs, etc. I also knew a lot about Fossey, but it was mainly from the film starring Sigourney Weaver. As everyone knows, she was killed while defending the gorillas. Sy Montgomery points out that a sort of madness overcame the woman. The whole situation was going to end badly. Today, the best hope for the remaining gorillas is that the local people see value in the gorillas for attracting tourism. It looks like this is happening...The person I knew almost nothing about was Birute Galdikas, a Canadian descended from Lithuanians. Interestingly, she was able to assimilate herself into Indonesian society, especially through her marriage to a local Indonesian man. The book is useful as it summarizes the women's lives at least up to 1990, for Jane and Birute. All three have been magnificent members of the human species who have expanded our understanding of our closest relatives in the animal world--the great apes.

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### **Kathryn says**

I loved this book.

I was familiar with Dian Fossey mainly from the film *Gorillas in the Mist* and had heard of Jane Goodall but mainly for her more recent environmental campaigning, but had never heard of Birute Galdikas who works with the Orangutans of Borneo before reading this book. All three women are truly inspirational, their

dedication to the primates they studied and to the preservation of the species was and still is amazing. This book is beautifully written and the stories conveyed so well that it brought me to tears on several occasions and that is a truly special book that is able to do that to me. I will definitely be reading more by Sy Montgomery and now also want to read the original works by the three scientists.

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### **Andrea says**

OK, what is it about these women and apes? Why would they be intent on devoting decades of their lives in the field, under the most improbable circumstances (Leakey's choice!) and the roughest, most uncomfortable conditions?

The premise of this book is to give an overview of the careers of the three leading women primatologists, but it is mostly an attempt to interpret and understand the way these women approach their work (mission would not be an exaggeration) and the motivation that fuels it. Not exactly a triple bio, but more of a synthetic assessment of their similarities and differences, coupled with insights and observations from the author, no stranger to the field herself.

I enjoyed this on several levels. First of all, it satisfied some of my curiosity. Like the rest of the population on the planet, I remember some incredible National Geographic shots of Goodall and Fossey in action (and interaction) with their respective primates, although I had not heard of Galdikas before seeing a documentary on her work recently. So, my initial question (why women and apes?) was answered: Dr. Leakey was at the origin of their assignments. The fact that he purposely chose women, especially women not necessarily trained in accepted field methods (at least at the beginning of their posts) is further examined and developed by the author in terms of what their unique and unconventional perspective brought to their research.

Sy Montgomery writes well and the book offers plenty of alert and insightful moments. It would be denying reality to pretend that such intense dedication to field study precludes less scientific and more personal motivations. With this in mind, she delves into our collective fascination with the animal world and our link with it, including examples from world mythologies of shape-shifting and totems, animal spirits and shamanism. Why not, it's universal, valid and interesting. But she goes too far when she writes of a séance conducted by a friend of hers who is a *medium- a sort of modern-day shamanto* try and contact the spirit of the dead Dian Fossey. Fortunately, this bit was in the epilogue or I probably would have stopped reading the book, but it does tarnish the whole and discredits the author to a degree, at least to my eyes.

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### **Kelly says**

Famous archeologist Louis Leakey did something unheard of at the time: he sent an untrained young woman into the wilds of Africa to study an ape thought to be a savage beast. To the surprise of the science community, Jane Goodall not only changed the way we see chimpanzees, but she also gave a voice to animals in a way no one else ever has and, to this day, has changed the way scientists study animals. And in case people didn't think Leakey was crazy enough before, he then sent Dian Fossey, also untrained, into the forests to study mountain gorillas and then later on Birute Galdikas to study orangutans. Though all three women are different in many ways, their unprecedented ways of studying animals have torn apart the scientific community.

I don't think there could have been a better author to write their story. Sy Montgomery understands these three women and their love for the animals and places they've studied. She understands their passion, every tear they've shed, every peaceful moment they've spent among the animals. And more than anything, she understands the battles they've fought as women in science, and the way they have ultimately conquered the male-dominated Science with a capital S.

I have read a lot about Jane Goodall, but I knew little about Dian Fossey when starting this book, and even less about Birute Galdikas. Though Jane Goodall is still my favorite of the three, I respect Dian and Birute for everything they have done for the mountain gorillas and orangutans. Anyone at all interested in any of these three women needs to read this book.

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### **Guillaume Belanger says**

I enjoyed this book. It is a brief, triple-biography of Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute Galdikas, Louis Leakey's three protegees, his three "Primates", as he called them, in reference to the ecclesiastical title. The portrait that is painted of these amazing women is wonderful. They were all three truly unique in character, in resolve, in depth of determination, and in their qualities as the primatologists---the first women primatologists. They redefined the field entirely. They redefined our understanding of apes, our understanding of animals, and, consequently, of what it is to be human. The writing is nice, even if a little immature. The descriptions are fresh, and the language that is used avoids cliches, which I appreciate very much, because I cannot stand any of the traditional cliches that are so commonly used by non-fiction writers.

There is a great deal of emphasis throughout the book on the major difference between a man and a woman, between men and women, at a fundamental level. I don't remember seeing this in the books I have read. Maybe this is because the book was written long enough ago that political correctness in making references to the differences between the characters and tendencies, the inclinations and sensitivities, of men and women had not yet done its work in expunging them from most people's writings. But maybe it is because the author, a woman herself, wanted to emphasize how those essential differences were at the heart of these three women's successes, and that therefore none of what they had achieved could have been by a man. I was delighted by this, because such differences must be appreciated and their value underlined, instead of being ignored or dismissed as is often the case today. Louis Leakey, a very intuitive man, knew this, or maybe he just felt it. This is why he wanted women for this work. And, as is clear today, he was proven right in this intuition about the importance of choosing women.

Reading this book, has made me want to read everything that these three woman---Goodall, Fossey, and Galdikas---have written about our closest cousins in the animal kingdom, the chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans. And has also made me want to do everything I can to help save them from extinction, which is inevitable if nothing notable and serious is done to prevent this from happening. This surely means that the author was successful.

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### **Brittany says**

This book covers the three women Louis Leakey sent out to live among the apes: Jane Goodall with the chimpanzees, Dian Fossey with the gorillas and Birute Galdikas with the orangutans. It is fascinating, in that it analyzes the relationship between and among these three women, their relationship with Louis Leakey

(favored daughter, crush, and which-one-were-you-again?) , and their relationships with their apes. Each woman brought her own personality and style to studying "her" animals and then dealing with the results of that study. Each woman has (or had) a different approach to the conservation of her species. And, in the end, each woman seems to be a reflection of the species she studied.

This book is well worth the read, though I think Montgomery's musings on Dian, and her eco-warrior attitude towards poachers are best read in conjunction with Tim Cahill's writings on the same topic. (These can be found in "Life and Love in Gorilla Country," from *Jaguars Ripped My Flesh* and "Love and Death in Gorilla Country," a from *A Wolverine is Eating My Leg*).

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### **Mariah says**

I had so much fun reading this book. It was honestly a joy to me, I learned so much from this. I will never forget when I read a book on Jane Goodall in elementary school and became infatuated with her. I thought she was so cool. I never forgot about her and so I got excited when I saw this book at the library on a stand and grabbed it so fast. This book is a good informative read if you want to learn the basics about these three women who Louis Leakey personally picked. They definitely had their flaws during their prime years..I was disheartened to learn of them. I am, however, glad that this book didn't sugarcoat them. Spoilers: The author acknowledged that for a time, Jane didn't care about the conservation of OTHER chimps. She only cared about the ones she was studying and that didn't sit well with me, as well as Dian being pretty much rude and Birute keeping people waiting for hours and then getting mad when they got tired of waiting and left. I didn't like reading any of that. But I am not letting that get in the way of what I think of their work. These women made a mark in history. They dedicated years and year to live in the wild to study these animals and loved them like they were their children. I can respect that.

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### **Terrance Zepke says**

This is a great book IF you're interested in Africa, Borneo, primates, anthropology, etc. The three women mentioned in the title were chosen to go to remote areas of the world to study primates. None of them had any formal training in this field, just a desire to make a difference. They have also been searching for a little adventure, which they certainly got given their circumstances! Goodall studied chimps in Africa while Fossey studied gorillas, also in Africa. Galdikas studied orangutans in Borneo. These women were basically the first to ever conduct any in-depth study of these animals, so they faced many challenges. Their contribution is invaluable. For one thing, they helped save these animals from extinction (most especially the mountain gorilla). And they brought us a greater understanding of these species. I enjoyed learning more about these fascinating women and their work.

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### **Riley says**

A really good biography of three of the world's best known primatologists, and how their approaches to their science allowed them to see things that their male counterparts did not.

I've always felt that the most inspiring people are those that succeed in what they love. In that sense, Jane Goodall and Birute Galdikas are uplifting individuals, though Dian Fossey, not so much.

Given descriptions like what follows, it is hard not to be interested in primates or impressed with Goodall, Galdikas and Fossey's commitment and sacrifice:

"Few wild orphans are as pathetically vulnerable as a baby orangutan. In the wild an infant clings constantly to its mother's coarse fur for most of its first two years. It nurses until the age eight. You cannot put an orangutan baby down as you would a human infant. A healthy infant orangutan hands on so tight with its four-fisted grip that it leaves bruises on your flesh; any attempt to dislodge the infant from your body, even for a moment, brings high-pitched, pathetic screams until it begins to choke on its own terror.

"Birute's first infant was not her own [son] Binti, it was Sugito. The year-old male orangutan arrived only days after she and Rod had set up camp. Sugito had been taken from his mother in the wild and had lived in a tiny wooden crate until he was found and confiscated by Indonesian government officials. Determined to mother him as a female orangutan would care for her baby, Birute slept, ate, and bathed with the wide-eyed infant clinging to her side, legs, arms, or head. Only three times in the first year did so force him off her body."

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