



The Forest

Edward Rutherfurd

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“. . . A sprawling tome that combines fact with fiction and covers 900 years in the history of New Forest, a 100,000-acre woodland in southern England . . . Rutherfurd sketches the histories of six fictional families, ranging from aristocrats to peasants, who have lived in the forest for generations. . . . But the real success is in how Rutherfurd paints his picture of the wooded enclave with images of treachery and violence, as well as magic and beauty.”

–*The New York Post*

The Forest Details

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From Reader Review *The Forest* for online ebook

Belinda says

The format of this book is like all of Rutherford's others: historical fiction. This story takes place in a location that is very near Sarum (the subject of his int'l best selling breakout book), but its emphasis is much different: the focus is on how the forest in this area affects the people that live there and vice versa. You get wafts of the big events (e.g. Queen Elizabeth and her Golden Age, the Spanish inquisition) but everyday details concern how deers and oak trees mature. I love Rutherford's books---I always learn something and, although the characters change in each chapter, there's aspects of each one that I can connect with as a reader. I don't think this is Rutherford's best book (hence the 4 stars) but it was good enough to compel me to read London sometime soon.

Deborah Pickstone says

This is an exception to my usual reading but not in a good way. I have read a couple of his other books and swore to venture there no more. They should be just the sort of thing to appeal to me but they so very don't! As I came in to write this I noticed that he cites James A. Michener as an influence. Well. Says it all - he's one of the few others to reside on a mental list of 'never touch that author again.'

It had been a long time and there was the book so I thought I'd give him a second chance. Bad idea - the man can't write, characterisation, such as it is, is wooden and his historical howlers flew like goose feathers from a split duvet in the wind. The writing has improved marginally since *Sarum: The Novel of England* but not by much.

I renew my vow to avoid like the plague in future. How he is a best seller boggles my mind.

Elizabeth Reuter says

The Forest stars England's New Forest over a thousand years of development. I read it back in 2005, and still remember much of the plot today; in other words, it's a story that stays in a reader's mind. Through everyday conflicts in his characters lives--fighting over a lover, family disputes, making enough money to feed yourself, living under corrupt leaders--Rutherford wrote culture and history with a human element. It's fascinating to think of the sheer number of people who have lived and died before this generation, like us and yet not because of cultural and technological differences.

I loved how well he wrote these women; very few writers grasp the opposite gender. The women of *The Forest* believe they should be submissive and that men are superior as that's how they've been schooled...yet they are resourceful, brilliant, strong without turning into anachronisms.

This is not light reading. Though Rutherford gives many characters happy endings, they don't all get away unscathed. The characters are also historically accurate, which means uncomfortable prejudices and practices are considered normal and go unquestioned, even when you desperately want characters to ask some questions. Also, at nearly 800 pages, it takes time to get through *The Forest* even if you're a quick reader.

The Forest is a book to be savored and read more than once to pick up on the rich detail. It's dense in the best possible way.

-Elizabeth Reuter
Author, *Demon of Renaissance Drive*

Natalie says

This is my favorite of the ones about England. It spans a large area with a lot of folklore, witchcraft, and strong females.

Andrew says

I love this book.

It takes time. But it rewards. It helps if you know the area.

I live within a mile of Hale on the edge of the New Forest, and daily walk Charlie there. When we moved here 18 years ago, from London, it was like being born into a new world. What brought us here was, we used to borrow a little upside-down house in Hyde, just below Fordingbridge; the bedroom and bathroom were downstairs and the kitchen and lounge upstairs. The previous owners had a glass roof so they could gaze at the stars at night before dropping off. After 20 years in London, where you only ever saw the North Star and Venus and Mercury, on those visits to Mousehole, we'd stand on the wooden balcony at night and see the haze of the Milky Way reveal itself into a billion suns. The ponies and the donkeys used to visit the back fence because of the long lush grass in the garden. The boys were three and five when we started coming down. The donkeys would try to eat Josh's hair because it was blond. Jamie suddenly drew his first three-dimensional drawing — and hasn't stopped drawing since. We'd stroll down to the ford below and were surprised to find grass snakes both short and thick as your wrist in the bracken, and long and emerald sunning on the shingle paths deep in the untroubled forest. One day as I was drifting off, lying in the sun on a grass bank by the stream in Hale, Jamie ran to me, "Dad, Dad, look at this!" It was an adder, just a foot long, small and thin and jagged with black. I had never seen a snake reverse before, as it backed into the bracken.

A few years after we moved down Coco joined us, a chocolate Lab, and the next year, Jessie, a colly?lab cross (supposedly). We loved them for fifteen years. Coco rampaged through the high bracken and woods, Jessie bolted through the streams. We went everywhere in the Forest with them, Bolderwood, Brockenhurst, all about the north, Woodgreen, Nomansland, Fritham, Frogham, Gorley, over the years. We went everywhere. It was a magical picturesque world, pigs in the woods, ponies and foals, great secret dells and purple heaths, the most beautiful thrilling woodland walks. But what I love most about the Forest is the shingle streams: shingle from cream to ochre, little ochre depths, salmon mud banks with seams of blue?grey silt and sand, like the most gorgeous marble imaginable. We've just played in one of them down in Hale Purlieu. Charlie, our new collie puppy, is getting brave with the water, and he runs flat?out, ears flat and a wide delicious grin, through the bracken and heather. (Coco went a couple of years ago now, Jessie last October; it didn't feel right not having a doggie about our lives. Then Josh found Charlie. What a beauty!)

So knowing these places quite intimately, and many of the others brought alive in the book, it was a delight

to read how Rutherford wove his historic tales of family feuds and romances through the Forest and all these places. He did it so superbly in Sarum, that was an outstanding experience. I read it soon after we started coming down, finished it just before we moved here. It brought the whole area alive. Rutherford is excellent at his family lines set against huge historic events.

Although in *The Forest* the beginnings are of the distant past, the book took off with *Beaulieu*, and even though I was not especially enamoured by the coastal tale of *Lymington*, which was, even so, still of interest, I was enthralled by the *Armada* piece, and fascinated all the way through by the historical setting and explanations, which encouraged me to look up the kings and queens and learn more about those events. I have never been particularly interested in history prior to the twentieth century; now, though, Rutherford so brought all these episodes to life, I have an awakened interest: Rufus the Red, Edward Longshanks, John the Bad, the merry monarch Charles I (a little Dickensian satire splashed these pages), the awful James II, and so on. What criminals they all were! I loved the story of *Alice Lisle*, which inn we used to frequent down by Moyles Court as visitors to the Forest. I enjoyed the Austen-like *Albion* story, almost a book in itself; his characterisation was excellent, although the trial based in Bath distracted, I felt, and did not satisfy. But because Rutherford wove such strong and varying characters throughout each historic episode — some real, others invented — it brought every section alive, entertained throughout, and taught me a great deal about Forest ways and terms and practices, about nature's way, and about how all this interacted with the historical setting and how those historic episodes involved and changed the Forest.

The Forest is best read if you have two or three weeks to come down and explore the place. It is my home, this part of the world, I felt so strongly from the beginning that I belonged here. *The Forest* sat on my shelf for thirteen years waiting to be read while I was distracted elsewhere in the world because of my work. How facile that working life compared to the rich depth of spiritual, soulful belonging which living in and around the New Forest has been, and still is. It was high time I came back home and got back into the Forest. Rutherford has brought it alive for me again — although I do not think I can ever regain that sense of love and wonder and belonging, that exhilaration I felt during the first few years visiting and living here. Sheer wonder, it was.

Geographically less explorative and less grand than Sarum, *The Forest* is nonetheless a wholesome and reviving experience, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I must read Sarum again, now.

Vít says

Historie m?sta nebo státu ve form? románu, to je vlastn? Ruthefurdovo poznávací znamení, ale historie lesa? Na to jsem byl docela zvdavý.

Vyšlo z toho velmi p?íjemné ?tení, které si nezadá t?eba se Sarumem. Jak jsme zvyklí, sledujeme proplétající se osudy n?kolika rodin p?es mnoho staletí. Tentokrát se ale pohybujeme v uzav?en?jším prostoru obrovského jihoanglického lesa a jeho nejbližšího okolí. ?ili sv?t se m?ní, lidé vál?í, rodí se a umírají, ale Hvozd je tu po?ád a pozoruje je.

Flapper72 says

I love Edward Rutherford books, he uses the same system for all books. They are about a specific geographical area (country or area - on this occasion the New Forest on the South Coast of England) and we

are lead through the development of that area - from its inception through until modern day. We learn about the history, the way people lived and are guided through time using a few families and their relationships in different generations. I'm never very good explaining why I like books but this was fantastic. The novel and relationships between people would stand alone but the fact that you learn about how people were living in the New Forest through its history makes it even better. The books are always long but well worth reading.

Barbra says

This is the second Rutherford book I have read and it was just wonderful. I learnt so much about the New Forest and its ways and the lives of the people who lived there. I love his books but because they are so huge they take me such a long time to read.

Back Cover Blurb:

Few places lie closer to the heart of the nation's heritage than the New Forest. The author weaves its history and legends into compelling fiction.

From the mysterious killing of King William Rufus, treachery and witchcraft, smuggling and poaching run through this epic tale of well-born ladies, lowly woodsmen, sailors, merchants and Cistercian monks. The feuds, wars, loyalties and passions of generations reach their climax in a crime that shatters the decorous society of Jane Austen's Bath. From the cruel forest laws of the Normans to the danger of the Spanish Armada, from the free-roaming herds of ponies and wild deer to the mighty oaks which gave Nelson his navy, Rutherford has captured the essence of this ancient place. Forest and sea: there is no more perfect English heartland.

Bettie? says

The Forest - Rutherford

hist fic

br eng> new forest

mad,evil (mediaeval)> Rufus, son of William the Conqueror, to the present day

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epic

3* The Forest

4* The Princes of Ireland

4* The Rebels of Ireland

Ann says

Whereas *London: The Novel* focuses on, obviously, the city of London, *The Forest* focuses on the development of England as a whole over the centuries. Much of English history concerned the independent hamlets and regions that felt very little connection to the King and to London until the past few hundred years. It was fun to read about the small agrarian communities with their nearby abbeys and giant expanses of forest land. Many things influenced these small communities as England became a more sophisticated country, like the shipbuilding yards (situated close to those plentiful forests for the wood) and the introduction of the steam engine train.

Amalia Gavea says

"Even the forest grows new oaks."

When I see a book by Edward Rutherfurd, the effects are the same as when I see a creation by Ken Follett. I believe that most die-hard lovers of Historical Fiction have placed these two writers on a high pedestal. Rutherfurd's books aren't heavy on the romance element like Follett's and this is a significant plus for me. So, it was with great enthusiasm that I started reading *The Forest* and I was not disappointed.

But why did Rutherfurd choose to write about the Forest? Well, The New Forest in the county of Hampshire is a place steeped in history and folklore. It is the largest ancient forest in England and therefore, it stands as an everlasting witness to many crucial moments in British History. Prince Richard and William II, the sons of William the Conqueror, died in the Forest and the legend goes that they died as a punishment for their father's faults. A mix of folktales and apocryphas covers the area making it one of the most fascinating and mystical places to visit in England. A version of King Arthur's legend claims that there is a hidden lake said to have been the birthplace of Excalibur and the domain of the Lady of the Lake. On July 31 in 1940, the English witches gathered in the New Forest and raised a powerful cone to stop the advances of Hitler's forces. Many stories of ghosts and weird, unexplained sightings grace the place and the village of Beaulieu is particularly high in the list of strange activity.

It goes without saying that all these elements are present in Rutherfurd's book and dealt with in a unique, beautiful way. The history of the forest is told in nine stories, through the eyes of two opposing families (Rutherfurd's favourite technique) and their course over the ages and the generations. Each story centers around two powerful themes, the struggle for power and the worries over the preservation of the forest. We see that the machinations people use to climb up the ladder of society and the effects of greed over the natural environment are similar through time in an eerie, discomfoting way.

For me, the stories that really stand out in *The Forest* are "The Hunt", "Beaulieu", "Alice" and "The Albion Park", although each story is a necessary piece of the beautiful puzzle the writer has created. In "The Hunt", set in the era of William the Conqueror, we meet a wonderful allusion of Man Vs Nature in the form of the agony of a young doe to protect her newly-born fawn during the continuous huntings of the nobles in the sacred forest. Like the beautiful doe, Adela -the heroine of the story- is trying to break free from the patriarchal society, being in the unfortunate position of having a noble name but no dowry.

"Beaulieu" is set in the era of Edward I, the well-known Longshanks. Here, we see the games the Church uses to gain control of the Forest over the noblemen. At the heart of the story is a beautiful relationship between two people who are separated by the Law of God and the laws of men alike. Brother Adam is an

extremely well-written character and I would surely read a novel with him as the central hero.

"Alice" is derived from a well-documented trial case, during the Restoration era. Rutherford focuses on a woman's fight to protect herself and her children from the follies of her husband, in the midst of a mad civil war about Religion and Power. Yes, the story is obviously set in the terrifying years of Cromwell's revolution and its aftermath.

In "Albion Park", the longest story in the book set in 1794, he has created characters that are possible to anger you to the high heavens. Mrs Grockleton, a hybrid of Mrs Bennet and Catherine De Bourgh, Adelaide Albion, the unmarried aunt who has remained stuck in the feuds of the past and wants to control everything and everyone, Louise who strongly resembles the empty-headed, gold-digging girls in Jane Austen's books and Fanny, the main heroine, who is very intelligent but so docile and devoted to her family that she needs a rather big shock in order to face reality. I could notice some elements from Austen's Emma in Fanny's character, but without the sharpness of spirit and liveness of character that characterize our favourite matchmaker.

The last part of the book ties the past and the present in a brilliant way. I don't have much to say about Rutherford's writing, I am not able to. His descriptions take you right into the heart of the mystical forest, you can feel the wind, see the leaves change, the huts, the running deer, the chirping of the birds. He manages to use the right form of language for every era he depicts, and it is simply astonishing. You'd think that "Albion Park" has been written by Jane Austen, his interactions are so faithful, his research shows the traces of a great Historical Fiction writer, equal to Ken Follett and much better than Bernard Cornwell. His books are a source of knowledge and a jewel for every bookcase.

So, on to the next one. Will it be London or Russka: The Novel of Russia?
Decisions....

Melissa says

I discovered this gem at my local Half-Price Books. I had just finished *The Princes of Ireland*, one of his more recent books, and, even though I knew nothing about the area in which he was writing, it was hard not to fall in love with the characters. For once, Rutherford deviates from tales of the British upper crust to the forest folk: farmers, charcoal makers and even monks, and I found this to be far more interesting than the upper-government workings many of his books tend to take. If you're an Anglophile and a history buff, check this one out. You won't be disappointed.

Christina says

It is rare when I read a book, that I wish for it to end for other reasons that I want to find out what happens to the characters I have come to know and like. This book, however, I just wished to end so I could get it over with and move on to something better.

The book is composed of several short stories taking place in and around the New Forrest, telling stories about the people living there and following various families as they evolve through the span of the novel (some 900 years).

This idea is good and the amount of research gone into this book is staggering. But what is lacking is the

execution. The book doesn't read well. It is written well enough - but the characters are flat and one-dimensional and their actions and thoughts don't always make sense. They sometimes break character in a way that isn't plausible. Adding to that is the fact that the stories are for the most part not very interesting - they are supposed to be used to tell the story of the New Forest, I think, but Rutherford doesn't really succeed in creating great small stories about life in the various times or creating a grand story about the forest. It all just fall flat and becomes uninteresting - and for a novel of 800+ pages, you really expect more.

Individual review of each story below:

The Rufus Stone & The Forest

This is sort of a frame around the rest of the book and begins and ends it. We follow a young woman - a Pride - as she is investigating the forest and figuring out how to make a television program about it and discovers that she herself has roots in the forest.

The Hunt

The first part of this book takes place in 1099 and features two parallel stories. One about a young deer and her search for her first mate and the other, larger part, about a young Norman woman, Adela, and her search for a proper husband. The two stories intertwine when Adela saves the deer from being killed by a hunting party. Otherwise, it's a rather simple story about how Adela are pretty much on her own, except for a cousin, and how in her search for a husband, she falls in love with one man and hears rumours about an assassination attempt on the king William Rufus.

I didn't care much about this story - it was not very interesting, too simple and the plot was too straightforward without any twists.

Beaulieu

This second story begins in 1294. A young man, a lay brother in the monastery Beaulieu, accidentally hits another monk, and thinking he has killed him, flees and goes into hiding. The young man is Luke Pride and the entire Pride clan gets into a fight with the Furzey clan because John Pride has a pony that Tom Furzey claims belong to him. This put Mary, Luke and John's sister and Tom's wife, in an awkward position and causes a lot of trouble between Mary and Tom. One day, the monk brother Adam helps Mary after Tom hits her and the monk and Mary start an affair. But such things are hard to conceal in the forest...

This was a better story than the first one - I actually cared about what happened to the characters in this one.

Lymington

In 1480 we follow two young boys living in Lymington. The two boys are friends even though they come from different social classes. It must have been exciting to have been a boy back then - they go dragon hunting and are aboard a ship taking part in a race. But more than anything, this is a story of the relationship between fathers and sons, especially between Jonathan Totton and his father who are alone with each other after the mother died and are having problems with finding the right way to communicate with each other. Again, an okay story - but I don't know if it's just my not being fan of short stories that makes me feel that each of these stories are too simple and too short to really get you to care for the characters.

But I liked the little fact that if a ship was wrecked, more often than not nobody survived - because the cargo belonged to whoever found it, as long as there were no survivors...!

The Armada Tree

This fourth story takes place in 1587, a time of religious trouble in England. Because of Henry VIII, England is no longer a part of the Catholic church but some of the English people still want to be. One of these is Clement Albion's mother, a devout Catholic woman. Her daughter is married to a Spanish man and she works hard to make sure the Spanish will attack England and bring it back to the Catholic Church. One of her ways

of doing this is promising that when the Spanish attack, Clement will support them, along with the men he commands as being in charge of part of the English defense. Clement is having trouble deciding which cause to support so he strings both sides along. He seems rather weak-minded in some ways - but towards the end of the story he takes a rather drastic decision, a decision that seemed rather out of character. This ruined the story somewhat for me...

Alice

This story takes place from 1635 to 1685 - before, during and after the reign of Cromwell. It follows Alice Albion from a young age to her death. Because of her husband, she becomes a regicide (a person supporting the execution of King Charles I) and it follows her life as such, and what happens during Cromwell and after he dies (I didn't know they dug him up and hanged him posthumously!) and a new king takes the throne. Also, her life as a mother and a wife and as a part of the Forest with both supporters and adversaries surrounding her.

The most interesting part of this story was the portrayal of the English society at that time - I remember reading about Cromwell in *Children of the New Forest* when I was a child and I find this period very interesting and must admit that I know too little about it.

This is the second longest story in the book but because it covers fifty years, it still feels too short and I didn't really feel that I got under Alice's skin - I didn't really get to know her. This story could possibly have made into a novel and through one person's life have shown the transformation of the English society in these 50 years. As it stands here, it only touches the surface unfortunately.

Albion Park

This, the longest of the stories, takes place 1794-1804 and has two stories mainly. Firstly, we follow Fanny, Alice Albion's great grand daughter, and her life with her old father and aunt and her search for a suitable husband. We also follow the Grockletons. He is working as a Customs officer and trying to stop the vast smuggling going on at this period of English history and she's working on making it in society in Lymington. Again, the characters don't work. For instance, at one point Fanny, who is a well-behaved and decent young woman, promises that she will not speak with a certain gentleman and she keeps her word - but when the person she promised it to dies, she just breaks it without a second thought - and she just doesn't strike me as the type of person who would do that. It's not in character.

Another thing that doesn't work is, that when in the end we find out who's behind the smuggling, it's not really directly stated but more hinted at - but the author can't just let it be with the hinting. He sort of explicitly tells us that he is hinting at something... And to me, the revelation destroyed part of the earlier book. When an author tells us what people think, it seems strange that they don't even themselves seem to be aware of what they have done and are doing before the author sees it fit to tell the reader. To me, he sometimes becomes too clever for his own good - and thereby destroys the realism of his characters and the value of the story.

Pride of the Forest

This final story is about saving the forest and making sure it's kept for future generations as a place of beauty and historical importance.

It takes place from 1868 to 1925 and is also the story of a new era, an era of cars and trains and the like.

Marcos says

the amount of work and research to put together this history puzzle is impressive, like his previous books I've read... the subject didn't attract me as much as London or Ireland and is hard to keep track of who is who

down the years... still it is an enjoyable enough tapestry that seems to capture the spirit of a place and how it came to be...

Ayla says

History of the New Forest dating from 11th century to present day, told through the memorable people of the Forest: the Prides, Puckles, Cola the huntsman (Albion family), Furzeys, Tottons, the Seagulls. From medieval hunting forest and abbeys through time of the Armada and the civil war and Georgian and Victorian England up till present day. Lots of social, rural and some political history interwoven into the story of generations of these families.
