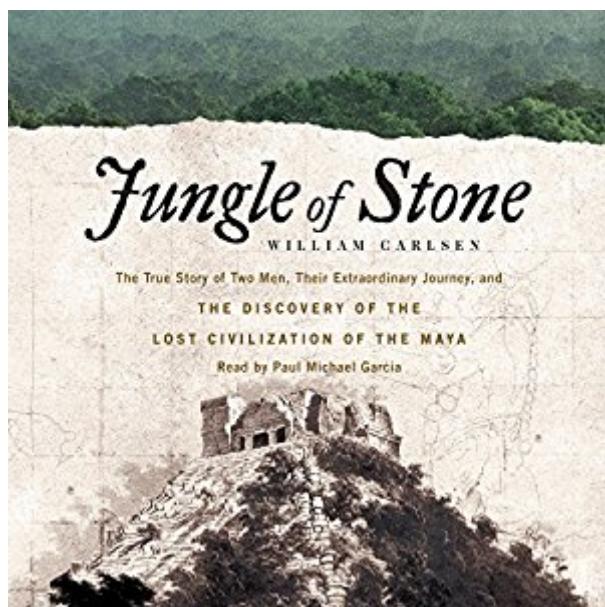


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# Jungle Of Stone: The True Story Of Two Men, Their Extraordinary Journey, And The Discovery Of The Lost Civilization Of The Maya



## Synopsis

"Thrilling.... A captivating history of two men who dramatically changed their contemporaries' view of the past." (Kirkus) In 1839 rumors of extraordinary yet baffling stone ruins buried within the unmapped jungles of Central America reached two of the world's most intrepid travelers. Seized by the reports, American diplomat John Lloyd Stephens and British artist Frederick Catherwood - each already celebrated for their adventures in Egypt, the Holy Land, Greece, and Rome - sailed together out of New York Harbor on an expedition into the forbidding rainforests of present-day Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. What they found would rewrite the West's understanding of human history. In the tradition of *The Lost City of Z* and *In the Kingdom of Ice*, former San Francisco Chronicle journalist and Pulitzer Prize finalist William Carlsen reveals the unforgettable true story of the discovery of the ancient Maya. Enduring disease, war, and the torments of nature and terrain, Stephens and Catherwood uncovered and documented the remains of an astonishing civilization that had flourished in the Americas at the same time as classic Greece and Rome. Their remarkable book about the experience became a sensation and is recognized today as the birth of American archeology. Most importantly, Stephens and Catherwood were the first to grasp the significance of the Maya remains, recognizing that their antiquity and sophistication overturned the West's assumptions about the development of civilization. By the time of the flowering of classical Greece (400 BC), the Maya were already constructing pyramids and temples around central plazas. Within a few hundred years, the structures took on a monumental scale. Over the next millennium dozens of city-states evolved, each governed by powerful lords, some with populations larger than any city in Europe at the time. The Maya developed a unified cosmology, an array of common gods, a creation story, and a shared artistic and architectural vision. They created dazzling stucco and stone monuments and bas reliefs, sculpting figures and hieroglyphs with refined artistic skill. At their peak an estimated 10 million people occupied the Maya's heartland on the Yucatan Peninsula. And yet, by the time the Spanish reached the "New World", the classic-era Maya had all but disappeared; they would remain a mystery for the next 300 years. Today the tables are turned: The Maya are justly famous, if sometimes misunderstood, while Stephens and Catherwood have been all but forgotten. Based on Carlsen's rigorous research and his own 2,500-mile journey throughout the Yucatan and Central America, *Jungle of Stone* is equally a thrilling adventure narrative and a revelatory work of history that corrects our understanding of the Maya and the two remarkable men who set out in 1839 to find them.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

A brilliantly written page turner about the discovery of the major Mayan ruins in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mr. Carlsen's writing gives the reader a real sense of the challenges faced by these adventurers, one of whom, John Stephens was a great travel writer and the other, Frederick Catherwood, was a brilliant artist. Mr. Carlsen includes many of Catherwood's drawings and offsets some of them with current photographs of the same sites so the reader gets a real sense of the detail that went into these drawings. Anyone with any interest in the history of early civilizations, particularly in the Western Hemisphere should read this book.

Jungle of Stone is both enthralling and enlightening. I was captivated from beginning to end by Carlsen's masterful storytelling, which whisked me away on a breathtaking adventure while filling my mind with fascinating facts. Fans of the Peabody and Emerson Egyptology mysteries by Elizabeth Peters may find themselves as captivated as I was by the real-life extraordinary adventures of Stephens and Catherwood in Central America. They began their explorations together in 1839, discovering for themselves mysteries of the Maya civilization. The book is rich with Catherwood's drawings and Carlsen's photographs, enhancing the perfectly paced text. I read past my bedtime!

This is a well-written story of pioneering exploration back in the 1840s--the travels of Stephens and Catherwood that rediscovered many important Maya cities, long abandoned to the jungle. What

these men had to endure (heat and humidity chiefly, but the heavy rains, bugs of all types, and a lack of good maps, let alone decent trails, and sputtering civil wars and revolutions) to accomplish what they did is a classic and still amazing story of archeology. On their return to New York, author Stephens and illustrator Catherwood produced two best selling books about their adventures and discoveries. They've rarely been out of print since. Carlsen thus has good material on which to base this readable tale of what Stephens and Catherwood accomplished despite the conditions under which they had to work. He provides useful background on both men (chiefly travels in the Middle East which also led to best-selling books by Stephens), but focuses on the two trips the explorers made together and what they found. Even if you know the original books and the stories of both men, Carlsen's telling of their tale is well worth reading. If on the other hand this story is new to you, Carlsen's book is even better

A friend loaned me this one at the same time he loaned me *Path Between the Seas*. They were both great reads but this one was truly excellent. The level of adventure the two main characters engaged in to reach the ancient sites makes modern living seem tame beyond belief -- it makes things like adventure sports seem like silly wastes of time really. The only disappointment I found with this book was a part of the story itself -- not a problem with the book. It seems that Catherwood did not fashion his deal very well, as he did not seem to get nearly the financial or publicity credit from their partnership that Stephens did, even though the illustrations are incredible and undoubtedly were an equal contributor to their mutual success. I know Catherwood opted for a fixed payment but it still seems that he came up a bit short. His drawings live on though and they are amazing to this day.

I absolutely Loved this tale! I've read biographies of many explorers, including Hiram Bingham, Thor Heyerdahl, Herman Melville's time living among Pacific Islanders, Alexander von Humboldt's exploration of South America, Richard Evans Schultes exploring as for rubber, Teddy Roosevelt's trip down the River of Doubt, ... even the diaries of Marco Polo... This story is right up there with the best of them. Catherwood and Stephens explored the jungles of Central America when doing so literally meant risking life and limb to do so. it's truly amazing they survived. (Remember, anti-biotics did not exist during the years they spent hacking through these tropical forests. Nor did all the high-Tech gear we take for granted these days: no rip-stop nylon, no Vibram soles, no water purification tablets, no flashlights, not even a Bic lighter to start your fire...) These two were the real deal. Indiana Jones would be jealous.

I picked this book up at the library, and after reading a few pages, I knew I needed my own copy. The book is a must-read for anyone interested in the Mayan civilization and its amazing architecture. The entire story of discovery of the ruins by William Carlsen is fascinating. Edgar Allan Poe called the original book by John Lloyd Stephens, "perhaps the most interesting book of travel ever published". (Yes, I said "Edgar Allan Poe")!

Reads like an adventure novel, except it's all true. A tale of two men who are opposites personally but together they changed the world of archaeology that grabs your attention and doesn't let go. Plan on reading this way past your bed time. A worthy companion to this book is The Lost Cities of the Maya: The Life, Art, and Discoveries of Frederick Catherwood. This large format collection of Catherwood's illustrations is not to be missed, it is the closest to visiting these sites you'll get without a passport and vaccinations.

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