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On the Trail of the Maya Explorer: Tracing the Epic Journey
of John Lloyd Stephens (review)

Louis R. Sadler

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Rivero's model of industrial development within the contemporary restraints of Mexico's pre-1940 economy.

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On the Trail of the Maya Explorer: Tracing the Epic Journey of John Lloyd Stephens. By Steve Glassman. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 283. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95 cloth.

Most Latin American historians know the incredible story of American diplomat John Lloyd Stephens and artist Frederick Catherwood slogging through the jungles of Central America from 1839 to 1841 in pursuit of the wandering capital of the United Provinces of Central America. The principal spin-off from this quest was Stephens and Catherwood discovering and exploring the hitherto unknown Mayan temples in the jungle. When they returned to New York, Stephens wrote and Catherwood illustrated the most famous travel book of that era, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*. Published in 1841, the book sold more than 20,000 copies in twelve weeks, an extraordinary best seller for that era, and it is still in print.

Steve Glassman, Professor of English at Emory-Riddle Aeronautical University, says he became obsessed with Stephens and decided to replicate his journey through the swamps of Central America with one major difference—he traveled via truck while Stephens traveled on a mule. Glassman's journey took place in the early 1990's, and it was still dangerous to travel in certain parts of the region. His account of his trip integrates Stephens's text with a contemporary description of each locale and, upon occasion, juxtaposes contemporary photographs with Catherwood's original drawings.

The result is a tour de force. Glassman writes with verve, his descriptions are judicious, and his conclusions on current conditions in the region are balanced. He does indulge in a bit of presentism in his dismissal of the great Mayan archaeologist, Sylvanus Morley. Glassman observes that Morley was wrong about the interpretation of Maya glyphs, which he certainly was, but Michael Coe, the present day synthesizer of Mayan scholarship, has recently noted, "Morley may have been more right than wrong" on a number of important points. That said, Glassman's well-written monograph will certainly revive interest in Stephens and should be required reading in a host of Latin American history courses.

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Che's Chevrolet, Fidel's Oldsmobile: On the Road in Cuba. By Richard Schweid. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Pp. 239. Map. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$27.50 cloth.

Despite the odd title, this travelogue is an informative, extremely readable, and consistently thought-provoking contribution to the study of contemporary Cuba. It