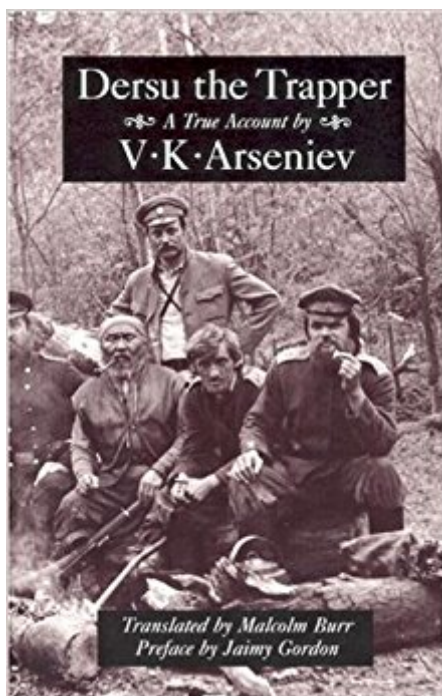


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# Dersu The Trapper (Recovered Classics)



## Synopsis

Vladimir Klavdievich Arseniev (1872-1930) undertook twelve major scientific expeditions between 1902 and 1930 in the Siberian Far East, and authored some sixty works from the geographical, geological, botanical, and ethnographic data he amassed. Among these, *Dersu the Trapper* has earned a privileged place in Russian literature. In this Russian counterpart to *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* and the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Arseniev combines the precise observations of a naturalist with an exciting narrative of real-life adventure. Arseniev describes three explorations in the Ussurian taiga along the Sea of Japan above Vladivostok, beginning with his first encounter of the solitary aboriginal hunter named Dersu, a member of the Gold tribe, who thereafter becomes his guide. Each expedition is beset with hardship and danger: through blizzard and flood and assorted deprivations, these two men forge an exceptional friendship in their mutual respect for the immense grandeur of the wilderness. But the bridges across language, race and culture also have limitations, and the incursion of civilization exacts its toll. *Dersu the Trapper* is at once a witnessing of Russia's last frontier and a poignant memoir of rare cross-cultural understanding. Originally published in 1941, this English translation is reprinted in its entirety now for the first time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Russian explorer V. K. Arseniev received a hero's welcome when he returned to Moscow from the Far East in 1906, having mapped the unknown corner of Siberia just above what is now North Korea and just east of Manchuria. He could not have done this work alone, Arseniev protested, and

the real hero was an indigene who befriended his party. Arseniev then wrote a remarkable memoir devoted to the Goldi trapper, Dersu, who saved his and his men's lives on more than one occasion while showing them the ways of the deep forest. An action-filled memoir of exploration and natural history, Arseniev's record of friendship with Dersu is one of the finest works of amateur ethnography. It is also the basis for Akira Kurosawa's prize-winning 1976 film *Dersu Uzala*.

Arseniev, a Russian geographer, ethnographer and geologist who surveyed the Taiga, the vast forest region of eastern Siberia, on three separate occasions between 1902 and 1907, knew the real Dersu Azala for some 19 months. The Dersu that appears here, is actually a composite character, combining the real Dersu with myths about the primitive lifestyle and heroic deeds of "noble savages" in the manner of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. All three expeditions described in this memoir entailed life-threatening danger from blizzards, rainstorms, lack of food, wild animals or hostile natives?and all ended with Dersu's instinctive knowledge saving the day. In a stock ending to the meeting of civilized and savage, Arseniev persuaded Dersu to come with him, but his friend could not adapt to restrictions of life indoors, preferring the rigors of his old nomadic existence to the spurious comforts of city life. Burdened by an awkward, outdated translation, this somewhat repetitive memoir still sustains interest as it recounts the adventures of two exceptional friends. Film buffs will also recognize it as the basis for Kurosawa's 1975 Oscar-winning movie, *Dersu Azala*. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

An authentic and very enjoyable account of the adventure of two friends, in a beautifully and unexplored wild region. Arseniev is a government geographer, the leader of a survey expedition, who takes time to detail his observations of the landscapes, animals and birds of the Taiga. Dersu is a man from the past, one of the dwindling native Nanai people, with a unique perception of life. He has the ability and preference to live in the wilds, without any modern convenience. He represents lost knowledge and a gentler way of living. He exists in harmony with the natural world, with a dignity and respect for all living things - something often lacking in modern people.

An enthralling tale! It is really close to a page-turner, which I didn't expect with a chronicle of an early Russian explorer/naturalist/surveyor. Dersu himself is a charming fellow and wiser than anyone around him, made even more interesting by the respect and affection shown by the Russians he is guiding. Arseniev's descriptions of the flora and fauna he encounters are delightful and he tells of the hardships of his journeys in a sometimes matter-of-fact way, even when they are

life-threatening. He loses his composure rarely, as is proper for a good expedition leader. There are also some sad passages about the terribly abused native peoples that Arseniev passes in his wilderness treks, shocking until you remember that all native peoples around the world have had the same cruel existence at the hands of invading "civilized" groups. In this particular region, they are usually Chinese trappers and merchants, as the border is very close, rather than Russians. I started to watch the film based on this book (the full 1961 movie, "Dersu Uzala", is on Youtube), but the English captions are difficult to follow while still watching the film. I'll get back to it, though, as it's highly recommended. The Kurosawa version of 1975 can be seen here:

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xzmn4n\\_dersu-uzala-1975-pt-1\\_creation](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xzmn4n_dersu-uzala-1975-pt-1_creation) . The photo on the cover was taken on location during the filming of the Kurosawa version. I don't think I would get nearly as much out of the film if I hadn't read the book, first, because this is a time and place that's very obscure to Westerners - and even some Russians.

This a beautifully story about the never ending battle between good and evil. The age-old contest between the sophisticated man, the city dweller and the free and unspoiled man of the wilds. It has been told many times. Unfortunately, since this is a Russian Novel evil wins and the good man, Dersu, dies. Arseniev obviously recognized Dersu as the noblest of all men and desired to protect him from the dangers of a modern society in vain. One often hears about an attempt "to find just one good man". Arseniev did find that man but civilization destroyed him as it seems to have done since the beginning of time. This tale is truly a masterpiece. This reader was enthralled by the seemingly effortless but beautifully descriptive imagery of Arseniev's accounts of his, and Dersu's, journeys through the wilderness. It broke my heart to learn of Dersu's death. however, Dersu was spared the cruelty of living through old age infirmities in the same manner as do the wild animals in the taiga. Life must move on. No wonder Kurosawa chose to make a movie about this absolutely beautiful story. Now I know that I must see the Kurosawa movie. The photograph on the front cover is perfect for this story. I recommend this book for all readers. It is priceless!

The adaptation by Kurosawa is my very favorite movie of all time. Arseniev's book is just wonderful in its own right. I wish there were more information out there about Arseniev; it is a relief to find he died before Stalin's terror overtook him. I would like to know what became of his daughter, whom Stalin did imprison. Arseniev was a great soul" in the way Tolstoy was, reverent to the humanity he found in others much different from he, and able to express it.... with flashes of wonderful humor along the way. Do not miss the droll pencil sketch he made of the bear who broke into a bee hive!

this is a book I will always keep, and reread simply to spend time among its wonderful characters.

This is such a vivid account of the far eastern part of Russia, its people and landscape. Arsenyev was quite a man. I was so fascinated by the story that I went on to read John Vaillant's book *The Tiger* (2010) and am now deep in George Kennan's *Tent Life in Siberia*, written around the time of our Civil War in the USA. So little is known about the vast area of Russia and these books brought it to life. Where there were maps, it made it even more interesting. My atlas came out but the scale of this place is too small. I'm now itching to go there but it can be fatal, so I'll keep reading on.

I borrowed a copy of this book and read it many years ago and while I don't remember it in detail at this moment (and I have just started to read it again) I remembered enjoying it so much that I wanted a copy of my own. I have great admiration for those who master one, or a group of skills, to such a degree that they seem magical to the rest of us. This is the story of such a person. I have been a tracker for many years and was lucky enough to have been a man-tracker student of the Texas Ranger, Ab Taylor, so my admiration for the story of someone who has taken that to a level that is simply elegant, may be hard for some to relate to. Even so, it is a good read about the "Wild, Wild East" that you never realized existed. I am a fairly successful big game hunter and can relate to what it takes to develop the many outdoor skills that Dersu, or anyone that lives closer to the earth than we do, had to hone to survive. Yesterday, it was very good for me to be able to tell that a mountain lion was ahead of me and tracking the same bull elk that I was. It completely changed the game (pun intended). If this type of material is of interest to you, please don't forget to read "Ishi, in two worlds" also.

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