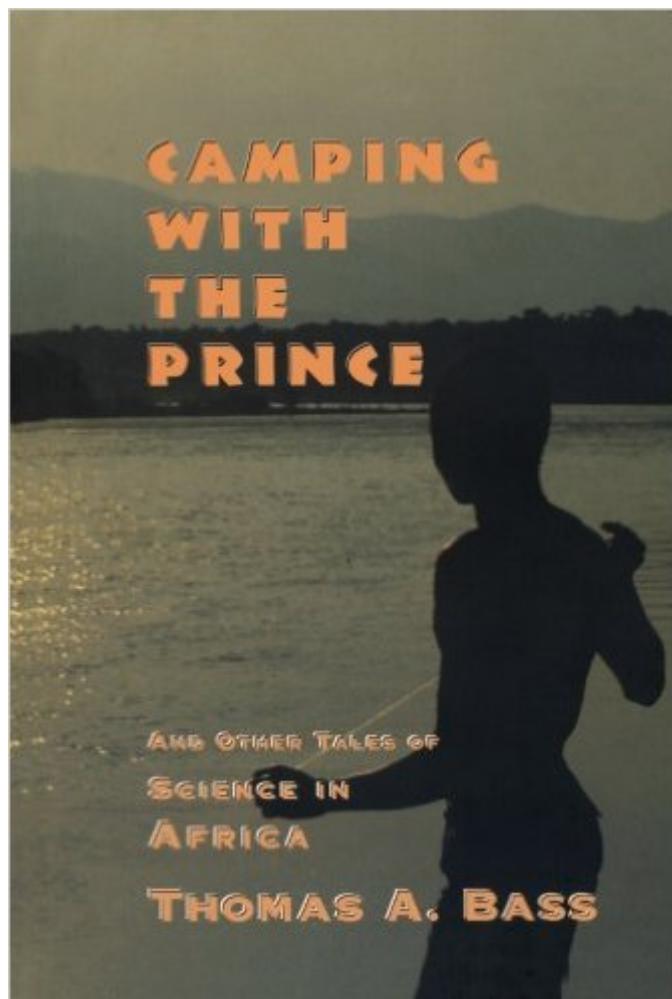


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# Camping With The Prince



## Synopsis

Originally published in 1990, this book tells of Thomas Bass's two-year journey across Africa, from Timbuktu to the Zambezi River, during which he spent most of his time in the company of scientists. In the course of his travels, he met a Cambridge-educated Kenyan-biologist trying to link the African spirit world with Western scientific methods, a Nigerian virologist fighting a losing battle to vaccinate the children of his country, and many others. In this book Bass' challenging tales dispel the many stereotypes about Africa.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Camping With the Prince, a 1990 book by the science journalist Thomas Bass, is a rare find and highly recommended. Most books on contemporary Africa are gloomy and angry. Some are hostile towards Africans, some towards Westerners, some towards both. Camping With the Prince is neither. Instead it is a fascinating look at things which are going right. Bass deserves praise for that alone. But his topics are fascinating in their own right. In seven chapters, Bass investigates seven areas of scientific research in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa. They range from sustainable forestry in Mali, to the response of nomad communities in Kenya to food shortages, Nigerian research on insect pests and virology, and on to paleoanthropology and the mating habits of the multicolored cichlid fish of Lake Malawi. To the extent there are villains in this book, they are international specialists in foreign aid, who have spent forty years delivering bad advice on agricultural policy and building dams that spread the guinea worm. But in fact the villains are very few. Much more common are people like Thomas Risley Odhiambo, a Kenyan entomologist who

founded the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology in Nairobi, which carries out world-class research on low-impact pest controls. Bass asks Dr. Odhiambo how Kenya -- and by extension Africa generally -- can afford such a program when many Kenyans have no potable drinking water. Odhiambo makes an equally obvious reply: "My own feeling is that we have to run on twin tracks," he says. "We have the longer-range problems that depend on science and technology. We must solve them. At the same time we must tackle these problems arising from urbanization and dislocation from the land. If we take only one track and not the other, we will be in worse trouble, because we will have no future in terms of strategies for the long run." Odhiambo's realistic but hopeful attitude -- a recognition of contemporary problems, coupled with the faith that Africa can overcome and transcend them -- is typical of the people Bass meets. They are Africans like Odhiambo and the Nigerian virologist Oyewale Tomori, Westerners like Jeremy Swift, an Englishman who has spent fifteen years living among nomads in the dry savannas, and even East Asians like Odhiambo's Chinese colleague Lu Qing Guang, who conducts research on insects like the trichogramma wasp which prey on common pests. The book has one minor flaw, in that it presents readers with seven more or less independent chapters rather than a coherent narrative. Bass also demands some effort from the reader, as his book addresses complex scientific issues without condescension. Those who will be put off by discussions of nematodes, Lorenzian biological aggression theory or the life cycle of the tsetse fly will find parts of the book pretty dense. But most readers who take up a book like this will view technical detail a strength rather than a weakness. And altogether, *Camping With the Prince* is a well-written, welcome respite from the bleak tone of most writing on modern Africa. Bass has done a fine job and deserves readers.

This is a book for people that think scientists walk around in white coats spouting equations at each other and relating dysfunctionaly to the rest of the world. Learn about science as a way of life, a way of seeing the world and accepting its challenges. Yes, Africa is somewhat of a mess, but as Africa goes, so may go the planet. Tom Bass brings you beautifully into this chaos and gives you the flavor of life with scientists who have let it all hang out, put it all on the line, in their fascination with and commitment to an important way of looking at the world. It's a new genre: Guerilla Science.

Review of *Camping with the Prince* and other tales of science in Africa by Thomas A. Bass.Citation: Bass, T. A. (1990). *Camping with the Prince and other tales of science in Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.Reviewer: Dr W P. PalmerIt is some years since I read this book, but I thought it worthwhile to look at it again to renew my interest in science in Africa. Since it was published more than twenty

years ago, much has changed in science in the African continent. The book does have the advantage of being wide-ranging, both scientifically and geographically. Scientifically Bass writes on areas as diverse as paleoanthropology, evolutionary biology, economics, ecology, medicine, insect physiology and tropical agriculture. Geographically his examples include East, West and Central Africa. There are seven instances of good science being carried out by African scientists which Bass describes. He notes that a number of large scale Western financed projects have failed "Africa littered with the bleached bones of white elephants". Instead he states "I offer test cases- ideas in action- that are meant to convey the incredible richness Africa offers the enquiring mind." Bass offers an optimistic picture of African science from his experiences in the 1980s. We now need other books offering a similar positive message. **BILL PALMER**

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This is a great book-exciting, exotic and fascinating as Bass profiles different scientific and social scientific researchers' projects in Africa. One gets a feel for the different cultures and ecosystems viewed through the lens of his portraits.

I was talking with a friend today who is bound for Uganda and as I rummaged around the attic of my mind, remembered what a pleasure this book was when I read it over ten years ago. I highly recommend it. Perhaps I shall read it again.

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