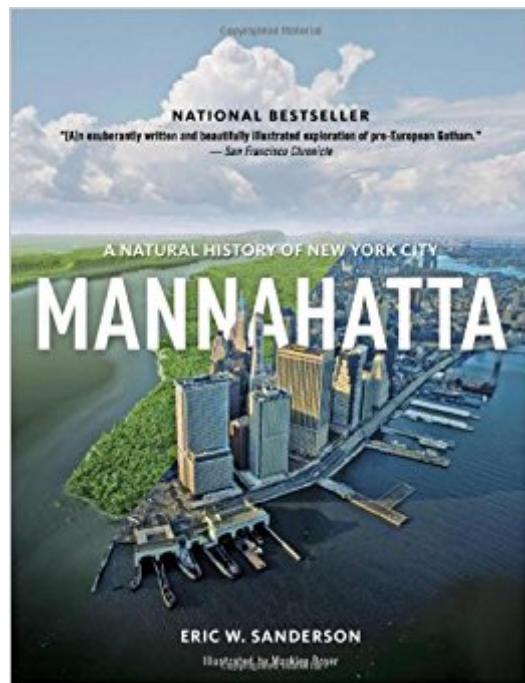


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Mannahatta: A Natural History Of New York City



Synopsis

On September 12, 1609, Henry Hudson first set foot on the land that would become Manhattan. Today, it's difficult to imagine what he saw, but for more than a decade, landscape ecologist Eric Sanderson has been working to do just that. *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City* is the astounding result of those efforts, reconstructing in words and images the wild island that millions now call home. By geographically matching an 18th-century map with one of the modern city, examining volumes of historic documents, and collecting and analyzing scientific data, Sanderson re-creates the forests of Times Square, the meadows of Harlem, and the wetlands of downtown. His lively text guides readers through this abundant landscape, while breathtaking illustrations transport them back in time. *Mannahatta* is a groundbreaking work that provides not only a window into the past, but also inspiration for the future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a heavy and substantial tome (inevitably printed in China - where else?) which details the author's amazing work in reconstructing the stunningly-beautiful natural environment of Manhattan Island in 1609, when the Dutch explorer Henry Hudson and his crew first laid eyes on it. This much I already knew before purchasing the book, but frankly, I was disappointed when I actually got it. In part this is because the book seems to struggle to decide what it wants to be. A major portion does indeed deal with Manhattan Island in 1609. There are a number of amazing images put together with the latest computer-generated image technology after painstaking field research and with the

18th century British headquarters map. They depict a Manhattan so beautiful it brings tears to the eyes, particularly when you consider how totally the natural environment of the island has been destroyed. Still, I was left only half-satisfied, and would love to have seen something other than simulated aerial views, i.e. some neighborhood by neighborhood ground-level close-ups with descriptions (maybe they exist somewhere, but the link to the [...] website printed on the book's jacket didn't work; perhaps it's not up yet). But apart from reprints of historical paintings and drawings, there is less detail than I would have expected. Nor is there much discussion (apart from references to the laying-out of the grid street-plan and the grading involved) of the Manhattan archeological record, or of the massive and traumatic process of changing the primitive woodland paradise of 1609 into an unrecognizable agricultural and then urban environment.

Eric Sanderson is a landscape ecologist who after moving to New York City a decade ago became obsessed with the question of what NYC looked like on the eve of the arrival of European explorers (1609). Sanderson eventually saw a 1782/83 British military map that laid out the topography of the entirety of Manhattan in great detail at a time when the city was still confined to the southern tip of the island -- great detail, that is, except for the actual height of the many hills depicted (in the language of the Lenape Indians, the name was originally "Island of Many Hills"). Eventually, Sanderson was able to establish the original heights of the hills from a variety of sources, including early 19th century surveying records and modern investigation of surviving bedrock outcroppings. (Over the course of many decades, most of the hills of Manhattan had been lowered or completely leveled and low land filled in.) Using this data and the British military map and other maps and drawings, Sanderson constructed an intricate computer model of the island's 1609 topography, and mated this model with a wealth of information about ecosystems of coastal regions of the northeast US, yielding quite literally a detailed picture of 1609 Manhattan, a picture unveiled in numerous computer-generated images and maps reproduced in Sanderson's new book "Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City". It is almost as if we were looking at aerial photographs taken on the day that Henry Hudson first sailed up the river that later bore his name.

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