

Books

THE DARWIN EXPERIENCE: THE STORY OF THE MAN AND HIS THEORY OF EVOLUTION

By John Van Wyhe
(National Geographic, \$50)

EVOLUTION REVOLUTION

Book explores Darwin's life, theories, impact

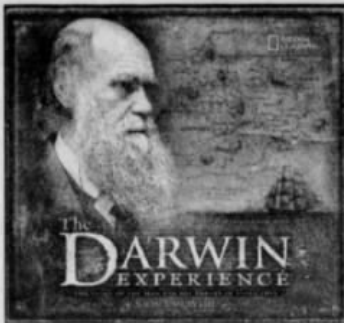
By CHARLES WEBSTER
STAFF WRITER

This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Charles Darwin and the 150th anniversary of his landmark evolutionary theory advanced in his manuscript "The Origin of Species."

To celebrate those important milestones, "The Darwin Experience: The Story of the Man and His Theory of Evolution" by John Van Wyhe offers the casual reader and history enthusiast a unique look at the man and his theory with a fun and educational eye to the man's life and life's work.

The book is presented in two-page chapters, presenting 30 facsimile documents that give us a chance to see Darwin up close and personal. These reproductions of actual historical documents may not have that old musty smell from the archives nor the texture of holding the real thing, but looking at them, you can see what Darwin's handwriting looked like, as well as important pieces from his life. And they give the reader a real sense of Darwin's place in history.

Some of the most exciting pieces in the book are excerpts from Darwin's diary — not transcripts, but reproductions of pages



straight out of his diaries. Maintaining a diary is an activity lost in the age of computers, the Internet, blogging, texting, MySpace and Facebook.

The reproductions are interesting and fun, but they could have been of more impact if the attention to detail in folding these items along the same lines as the originals could have been achieved to complete the journey back in time — or to the Darwin archives.

Other interesting reproductions are the pages from Darwin's field notebooks, maps, sketches and more than 200 beautiful illus-

trations and photographs that provide a fascinating glimpse into the life and times of one of the world's greatest thinkers.

In the end, the reader gets a copy of one of the prized tickets to attend Charles Darwin's funeral (Yes, in 1882, tickets were distributed for attendance at the funerals of prominent figures) and a reproduction of the funeral's order of procession.

Casual readers or serious students of Darwin will be fascinated by the inclusion of an itemized list written in 1837 laying out his thoughts to "Marry" and "Not Marry."

Van Wyhe is superbly qualified to lay out the lessons of Darwin's work. A science historian at the University of Cambridge and the author of numerous books and articles about Darwin, Van Wyhe is the editor and director of "The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online" found at darwin-online.org.uk.

"The Darwin Experience" is the perfect gift for anyone with a passing fancy for Darwin or a passion for his evolutionary theory.

Van Wyhe accomplishes the task he set out to accomplish: to provide readers of "The Darwin Experience" with enough to whet the appetite to discover Darwin for the first time or simply to learn more about the man's ideas.