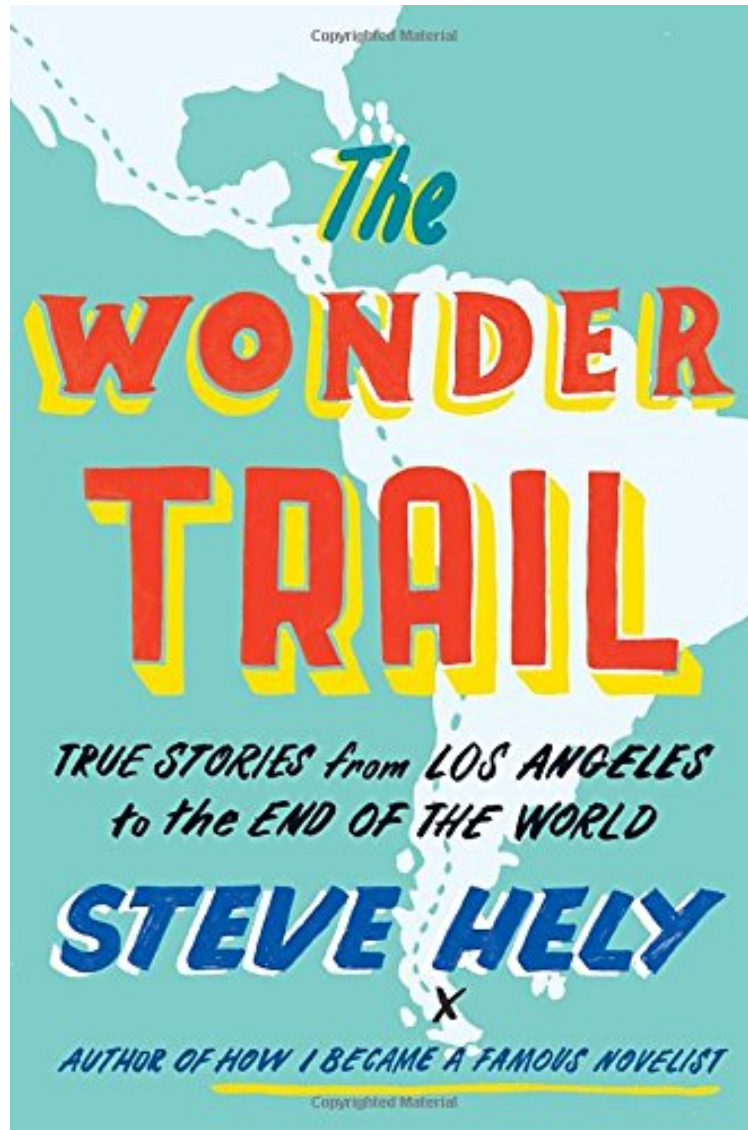


# The Wonder Trail: True Stories from Los Angeles to the End of the World

Steve Hely

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**Steve Hely : The Wonder Trail: True Stories from Los Angeles to the End of the World** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Wonder Trail: True Stories from Los Angeles to the End of the World:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I want to have a beer with the A Team (and Steve Hely if he's not too busy) and you will want to also ...By CMcGSteve Hely hides wry social insight in his humorous prose, much as he

hides moderately-badass adventurer in his skinny geek persona. Like his other works, this is a legitimately great and fun read. Like the Ridiculous Race it inspires wanderlust, envy and amusement. And his quick and engaging interaction with readers is surprising, engaging and disarming. And now I'm running out of adjectives, so I'll say this: I bought two copies -- the least you could do is buy one. I bet you'll be as hopeful as I am of future adventures with the A Team, or with Steve if the A Team isn't available. It's past time for Steve Hely to be recognized as the Famous Novelist he Became, and I hope the next book comes quicker! (And the Canada sequel doesn't count.)PS: Hey Steve, why doesn't this book show up on your author page? C'mon![http://smile.com/Steve-Hely/e/B001JRWHOK/ref=dp\\_byline\\_cont\\_book\\_10](http://smile.com/Steve-Hely/e/B001JRWHOK/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_10) of 0 people found the following review helpful. Hilarious, Fun, and CleverBy SPThere is a Venn diagram somewhere of three spheres of writing: travel, humor, and memoir, and this book lands firmly in the center. You know, in the spot in the middle that when you draw it yourself, you concentrate on to make sure it looks right, but then you look at the wedge where only two circles overlap and you're like "damn, I kinda screwed that one up" but you move on with your life because honestly, if you're gonna get on yourself about how you draw venn diagrams, you're not going to be able to get through the day.At its core, this book is funny. It's a travel book, and it will lead you to daydream about traveling the world. But it definitely spends more time discussing the people you meet while traveling the world, rather than, you know, the actual world. The world seems secondary when you're on a boat full of Australian partiers who realize, with a bit of horror, that there are a few more days left on their boat ride, and the entire boat is out of drugs.I enjoyed this book quite a bit and wish for more books in this genre.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The tip of the iceberg!By JDThis book is a very entertaining tale of the author's trip through Mexico, Central and South America, but beyond that, is just a delicious taste of the rich history of Latin America with a huge list of references to follow up with. For better or worse Steve just dictated my reading list for the next year. Thanks? I am not sure, either way, it is a very compelling read, with a lot to follow up on.Jeremy DeConcini, author of Camino del Diablo and Alpine Slide

Steve Hely, writer for The Office and American Dad!, and recipient of the Thurber Prize for American Humor, presents a travel book about his journey through Central and South America. Part travel book, part pop history, part comic memoir, Hely's writing will make readers want to reach for their backpack and hiking boots. The Wonder Trail is the story of a trip from Los Angeles to the bottom of South America, presented in 102 short chapters. From Mexico City to Oaxaca; into ancient Mayan ruins; the jungles, coffee plantations, and remote beaches of Central America; across the Panama Canal; by sea to Colombia; to the wild Easter celebration of Popayn; to the Amazon rainforest; the Inca sites of Cuzco and Machu Picchu; to the Galpagos Islands; the Atacama Desert of Chile; and down to wind-worn Patagonia at the bottom of the Western Hemisphere; Steve traveled collecting stories, adventures, oddities, marvels, bits of history and biography, tales of weirdos, fun facts, and anything else interesting or illuminating. Steve's plan was to discover the unusual, wonderful, and absurd in Central and South America, to seek and find the incredible, delightful people and experiences that came his way. And the book that resulted is just as fun. A blend of travel writing, history, and comic memoir, The Wonder Trail will inspire, inform, and delight.

Full of anecdotes, local color and touches of the cheerfully bizarremaking [it] indispensable.--New York TimesThe Wonder Trail may be my favorite travel book of all time. Steve Helys voice is casually insightful, refreshingly honest, and, most of all, amazingly funny. --B.J. Novak, author of One More ThingFast-paced, informative, and funnyHelys hilarious descriptions of the stunning sights and quirky people he encounters along the way will delight experienced globetrotters and armchair travelers alikeHighly recommended.--Library Journal (starred review)"A very funny book."--Outside MagazineAs informative as it is funny.--Chicago TribuneWryly observed essays[find] insight and humor in unexpected encounters on the road." --The Citizen-TimesAbout the AuthorSteve Hely was a writer for 30 Rock, Late Show with David Letterman and the acclaimed animated comedy American Dad! He also wrote the Thurber-winning novel How I Became a Famous Novelist, and coauthored the comic travelogue The Ridiculous Race. He's cohost of The Great Debates podcast.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.\*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof\*\*\*The Beginning / Los AngelesA Travel BookThere were stories like this way before there were books.Ill bet you the cave paintings they find in France, all those bison and horses running around, those were illustrations for tales of trips. Maybe they also served as base camp for kinds of mental or spiritual trips, shamanic trips, practice trips.What we call humans climbed out of the trees, two million years ago lets say, in eastern Africa. We started walking and we havent stopped. We filled up the Earth, every crevice and corner. Now were poking about looking for new Earths.Campfire stories arent always about trips, its truesometimes theyre about Hook-Hand Man, for instancebut then again youre already camping. Youre reenacting the major activity of human history: walking the Earth.For as long as there have been books, there have been books about trips. In the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, King Gilgamesh and his grass-eating, wild-haired buddy Enkidu are off to the Cedar Forest by tablet 4.In fairness, Gilgamesh and Enkidu arent just going on vacation theyre going to kill the monstrous giant Humbaba because it will make them even more famous. Gilgamesh is already famousback in tablet 1, its established that hes had sex with every single hot woman in Uruk, to the point that its a problem. But he feels called to go on an adventure.Maybe the first

person to take a trip just to write about it was Herodotus, who lived in Greece, or maybe western Turkey, in the fifth century bc. He went across the Mediterranean to have a look at Egypt. Herodotus showed the way to write this kind of book: Put in anything interesting you come across. He believed anything anybody told him, like for example that in Central Asia, there are enormous ants that dig up gold. This might sound ridiculous, but it may even be half-true. The pro-Herodotus historians will inform you that the Brogpa people of Ladakh, in far northern India, sometimes collected gold dust from burrows dug by Himalayan marmots. It doesn't matter. Herodotus's point was that the world was interesting, and if you had a look at it, and told people what you saw and heard, they'd be interested, too. He was right. The story goes that Herodotus got back to Greece with his pages and went immediately to the Olympic Games, where he read his work out loud in an arena and was celebrated by the crowd with thunderous applause. That's what later Greek writer Lucian claimed, anyway. Lucian might've been joking, come to think of it, or making fun of Herodotus in some weird, jealous way. You can feel the professional envy dripping off Lucian: There was no man who had not heard his name . . . he had only to appear, and fingers were pointing at him. Lucian was so pissed, in fact, that he wrote *True History*. As best as I can tell, *True History* was meant to be a wicked, brutal parody of Herodotus's travel stories. Lucian goes on and on about how when he was traveling, he saw a river of wine and a cheese island, and he visited the morning star where dog-faced men fight each other on flying acorns. I won't make anything up, though. Everything I put in this book is true. I saw it or heard it or experienced it myself, or else it's something I learned that I looked into and I believe to be true. There's no need to make up experiences. Why do that extra work of imagining? If you just go out into the world far enough, you'll find plenty that's crazy and worth putting down. Ancient China was full of travel tales. In the 1600s, Xu Xiake went all over China, along the way earning extra money from Buddhist abbots who would pay him to gather and write the history of local monasteries. There's enough odd and exaggerated stuff in Chinese travel literature to fuel a whole industry of people who believe ancient Chinese sailors were hanging out in San Francisco Bay by the 1400s. Then there was Rustichello da Pisa, who'd had some success writing a romance about King Arthur before he got thrown into a dungeon in Genoa around the year 1284. His cellmate was a guy named Marco Polo, who, it turned out, had traveled farther than anyone else alive, all the way to the court of Kublai Khan in what's now Beijing. Or had he? Some scholars suspect he made a lot of it up. But in any case, Rustichello saw a chance to make a quick buck ghostwriting, and the result is that Europe heard about China. Soon the great age of exploring began. In 1492, Columbus discovered something. It was unclear what, but the desperate and adventurous went to find out. Alcoholic bastard sons of minor nobles in Spain went to South America, lucked into lopsided victories over the locals, and made themselves lords of spectacularly wealthy kingdoms. Others got lost in the jungle and went insane. Magellan set off around the world on a leaky wooden boat that he had barely any idea how to navigate. He got himself speared to death in the Philippines by natives who guessed, correctly, that he was up to no good, but the survivors of his expedition became the first people to circumnavigate the Earth. From there traveling and travel writing were unstoppable. People couldn't get enough. The English went particularly nuts with exploring, maybe because they were from a cold, dreary island where nothing fun ever happened, and meanwhile the first English captains to reach Tahiti were writing stupefied entries in their logbooks about what Tahitian women had just taught them about blow jobs. The American scholar Paul Fussell wrote a whole book, *Abroad*, about this history of English travel writing, about sensitive aristocrats and shell-shocked survivors of World War I who set out for the tropics, for the desert, for the source of the river Oxus, and for the peaks of the Himalayas. There were so many English writers taking trips that they'd run into each other. Eric Newby was trekking around Afghanistan writing *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* when he ran into the legendary explorer Wilfred Thesiger, who was living with a local tribe and who told Newby the route he was taking was for pussies. Travel books were a massive form of entertainment in the nineteenth century. Robert Louis Stevenson commissioned one of the world's first sleeping bags so he could write his bestseller *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. Herman Melville got famous writing about his real-life adventures with cannibals in the Marquesas, and then went broke when he switched to fiction. The freelance reporter Henry Stanley went to Africa to find lost do-gooder doctor David Livingstone. All along the way back, he got chiefs to sign contracts they didn't understand, which he then sold to the king of Belgium, who used them to claim the entire Congo. For most of human history it was a lot easier for men to chuck whatever they were doing and wander off somewhere. But the stories of women who did it are incredible. There's an old theater near my house in Los Angeles where a packed audience heard a speech from Amelia Earhart, who soon thereafter took off on a flight around the world she never came back from. Lately, women have been dominating the field, perhaps because they've realized the emotional journey is more important than the physical one. Elizabeth Gilbert and Cheryl Strayed wrote massive bestsellers that are on the surface about geographical trips but are really about journeys of growth and restoration. (There's much more about female travel writers tucked in at the end of this book.) The world has changed so dramatically in the past ten to twenty years it's difficult to contemplate. One result has been that firsthand reports, dispatches, and images from anywhere in the world are about a thousand times easier to get than they were when I was a boy poring over the murals of Bonampak and the in *National Geographic*. But I think I still have something to offer. It seems like there might be some ground for me to stake out in the realm of travel reporting. Somewhere between a hard-nosed reporter who's camping out with the dwellers of the garbage dumps of Nicaragua, and Rick Steves, who tells PBS viewers where to find Stockholm's best

cinnamon buns. Leaving my house, heading south, and going all the way down the globe to the very bottom tip of the Western Hemisphere. That was an idea I had for a while. To be able to draw a line of travel down the side of Central and South America seemed like it would be satisfying. And then one day a sign appeared. A map on the wall of my local coffee shop. It was a big colored relief map like you'd hang on the wall of a sixth-grade classroom, showing Central and South America. Everywhere from Mexico down to the end, to Tierra del Fuego. Everything south of where I was. Just a bit of hipster style, really, nostalgic-retro interior decoration. The map was in bright 1970s colors, covering the concrete wall. But to me it was like a dare. Maybe I should go down there. First I said that to myself. Then I started saying it to other people: I'm gonna leave my home and go south. South where? I dunno, everywhere south, until I get to the bottom. Across Mexico, Central America, and South America down to the Straits of Magellan. If this was a bad idea, no one told me. I live in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, nobody ever tells you if your idea is bad.