

## BOOKS

'Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day.' —A.A. Milne



## Sweet as Hunny

## The Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh

By Kathryn Aalto  
Timber Press, 307 pages, \$24.95

BY DAVID BENEDICTUS

ASHDOWN FOREST, where the Winnie-the-Pooh stories are set, is a 90-minute drive from London if traffic is flowing freely, which it probably isn't. If you visit you can still observe Eeyore's Gloomy Place ("rather boggy and sad"); climb to Gills Lap (Galleon's Lap in the stories), empurpled with heather; discover a front door in a tree or a stone plaque in memory of A.A. Milne and illustrator Ernest Shepard; play Poohsticks at Poohsticks Bridge, or stop to listen for Heffalumps—though you are unlikely to hear any.

But despite the title of Kathryn Aalto's book, it would be hard to find another 100 square miles in the United Kingdom that is quite so devoid of natural history. There are clumps of Scotch pine trees, and there is a carpeting of bracken and heather and gorse, but Ms. Aalto must have felt daunted at having to fill 300 pages with the area's flora and fauna (even before a fair chunk was destroyed in a recent forest fire). Milne lived in a charming farmhouse in Hartfield, yet a casual reading of his oeuvre produces more about cricket and croquet than nature. If natural history is what you're after, you'll find richer pickings in Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows," Arthur Ransome's "Swallows and Amazons" or Rudyard Kipling's superb "Just So Stories."

"The Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh" is lavishly illustrated with superb photographs as well as reproductions of the delightfully familiar Shepard illustrations, which render the landscapes so accurately that it is hardly necessary to visit the forest. The actual structure of the book is tripartite, with sections dedicated to "The Creation of a Classic: The Collaboration of A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard"; "Exploring the Hundred Acre Wood: Origins of the Stories"; and "A Visitor's Guide: The Flora and Fauna of Ashdown Forest." This is an affectionate book, written with an innocent enthusiasm not often found among masters or mistresses of garden history.

The style is quite chatty, with a few friendly clichés along the way.

Books about Pooh have always sold; my own attempt is apparently a best seller in Latvia. There has been "The Tao of Pooh" and "Winnie the Pooh" in Latin. All you really need to become an expert on Milne is Ann Thwaite's biography, "A.A. Milne: His Life" (1990), Christopher Robin Milne's "The Enchanted Places" (1974) and Milne's premature autobiography, "It's Too Late Now" (1939). None of the above will tell you much about the flora of the forest, that's true, but the splendid Friends of Ashdown Forest have produced several pamphlets, including "Wild Flowers and Trees on Ashdown Forest," that will.

E.H. Shepard sketched Pooh and Piglet's habitat so well that visiting the actual place is superfluous.

There is, I believe, a useful, indeed a necessary, subtext to Ms. Aalto's book. The British are really bad at protecting and promoting their enchanted places. Stonehenge is as mysterious as it is imposing, but it has been wrecked not by Vandals but by the ironically named organization English Heritage. It used to be possible to stroll across meadows until the henge was suddenly there in front of you. But now it has been turned into an adjunct to a massive visitors center, where pointless souvenirs are sold to tourists with more money than taste.

Ashdown Forest, by contrast, has been lovingly looked after—by which I mean scarcely looked after at all. You may stroll wherever you wish to and pass the afternoon pleasantly until you feel that a smackerel of something might be welcome. There is a shop, a tiny one called Pooh Corner, just along the road from Cotchford Farm, where the Milnes lived, but it's an extremely discreet one, if a touch cute. I take this as the moral of Ms. Aalto's unfocused book: Do as little as possible and the magic will survive. English Heritage take note!

Mr. Benedictus is the author of "Return to the Hundred Acre Wood."

## FIVE BEST: A PERSONAL CHOICE

Douglas Waller  
on American espionage in World War II

## From Hitler's Doorstep

Edited by Neal H. Petersen (1996)

**1** 'FROM HITLER'S DOORSTEP' traces the results of one agent's work—in this case, the wartime intelligence reports that Allen Dulles, a star operative for the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, filed from Bern, Switzerland. The reports—featuring cover names like "Burns" for Dulles and "Nabors" for the Germans—can be addictive. For an agent crossing the border into Lugano, Switzerland, Dulles instructs that "he should call our 809 [the city's OSS representative] . . . at the Hotel Splendide. This call should be made from a public telephone booth and he should employ the password 'Pocatte.'" Dulles's telegrams ranged from the politically momentous—among them, alerts on plans for the July 20, 1944, plot to assassinate Hitler ("a dramatic event may take place up north" in Germany, he cabled on July 12)—to minutiae that the military appreciated. These included a 1944 report on the Nazis' development of a machine that could pump artificial fog into the air to conceal targets from bombers.

## A Spy at the Heart of the Third Reich

By Lucas Delattre (2003)

**2** FRITZ KOLBE, who detested Nazism, carefully cultivated his image as an obtuse but efficient minor official and by 1941 had worked his way into the political-military affairs department of Berlin's Foreign Office. In 1943, he arrived in Bern as a courier with a sealed diplomatic pouch for the German Embassy. Wrapped around his thighs "with sturdy string" were two envelopes full of secret diplomatic cables that he presented to Allen Dulles. "A Spy at the Heart of the Third Reich" is a

detailed record of his two years of espionage for the OSS. Kolbe delivered to Dulles some 1,600 secret cables and memos on German foreign and military policy. Deliveries were always tense. "Fritz watched in terror," Mr. Delattre writes, as a Foreign Office mailroom employee opened a package to inspect the clothes that Kolbe said he was returning to a colleague in Bern. The inside pockets of the coat in fact held rolls of film for the Americans. "Fritz had his hand on the little revolver that he always carried with him," Mr. Delattre notes. He would get safely past that danger only by the sheerest accident.

## Operatives, Spies and Saboteurs

By Patrick K. O'Donnell (2004)

**3** PATRICK O'DONNELL interviewed scores of OSS veterans and collected hundreds of their oral histories and after-action reports buried in government archives. The result is this brisk, vivid and realistic picture of life as a spy in World War II. The experience of terror was central. Leon Adrian, caught by the Gestapo, chewed up and swallowed an incriminating piece of paper. "First, they gave me a shot to make me throw up . . . but that did not work. Then they gave me a solution to drink which I refused and immediately I was hit with the butt of a rifle in the teeth and I spit out three teeth. Then they forced the solution into my mouth and I still did not vomit. Next they used two cylindrical rubber rollers, which were pressed against my body and rolled from my knees to my ribs. I vomited." Adrian, who eventually escaped, later found two of his Gestapo torturers in an Allied prison. He "coolly removed a pistol" from a nearby guard's holster, Mr. O'Donnell writes, "and fired two shots into each man, killing them instantly."

## Piercing the Reich

By Joseph E. Persico (1979)

**4** IN THE LAST six months of the war in Europe, a band of intrepid OSS officers in London, led by William Casey (later Ronald Reagan's CIA director), scrambled to parachute spies into Germany ahead of advancing Allied forces. These were high-risk infiltrations. Unlike in occupied France, where OSS agents could count on friendly locals to hide and feed them, operatives dropped into Germany faced hostile citizens. "Piercing the Reich" brings to life the many ways in which Casey's London team and his agents in Ger-



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many improvised on the fly. A section codenamed "Bach" rushed to fabricate identity documents for spies—no small feat. "An ordinary civilian in the Reich," Persico writes, "would be expected to carry, besides his ID card, a police registration, food and clothing rations stamps, travel permits, housing registration, and perhaps a driver's license, draft exemptions, and other specialized papers." On one mission, an enterprising agent who had been dropped into Bavaria talked two French women who had been forced to work in a brothel into letting him hide in their closet. There, with a flashlight and notepad, he jotted down military secrets that their Wehrmacht customers blurted out.

## The Overseas Targets

By Strategic Services Unit (1976)

**5** GEN. WILLIAM "Wild Bill" Donovan, the director of the Office of Strategic Services, paid close attention to the drafting of the official multi-part history of its wartime activities. Even so, the second volume, "The Overseas Targets," which was declassified and then published in book form in 1976, is a remarkably candid account of Donovan's global operation. It describes missions that the OSS considered successful, such as a project code-named "Sussex," in which 26 spy teams dropped into German-occupied France and "sent in a total of 1,164 intelligence items." But the misfires are also reported. Project "Banana" infiltrated agents into neutral Spain to collect intelligence on its military aid to Germany. The friendly relations that Washington wanted to maintain with Spain were disrupted by this strangely planned operation. The agents, whom Spanish authorities soon arrested, had been carrying weapons "all with U.S. markings." Banana was, the book reports, "the largest OSS blunder of the war."



ACES The OSS patch was designed by Wild Bill Donovan.