Opening extract from

Barefoot Books World Atlas

Written by

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This atlas is dedicated to Earth's children – N. C.
For Mum & Dad – D. D.

Nick Crane is a writer and well-loved television presenter. In 1992-3, he walked 10,000 kilometres across Europe, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea, an experience which he describes in his book *Clear Waters Rising*. Among his many other projects is *Mercator: the Man Who Mapped the Planet*, the definitive biography of Gerard Mercator, the 16th-century map maker who invented the atlas. As a child, Nick spent many hours exploring the Norfolk countryside with a bicycle and a map; he has been travelling the world ever since. He lives with his family in London.

David Dean is a full-time illustrator who is enjoying his mission of travelling the world from the comfort of his own studio. Known for his exotic and colourful work, David works in a room surrounded by books from many different cultures, from which he finds inspiration.In his spare time, David enjoys walking the countryside near his house in Cheshire, taking photographs of the things he sees.

Barefoot Books

WORLD ATLAS

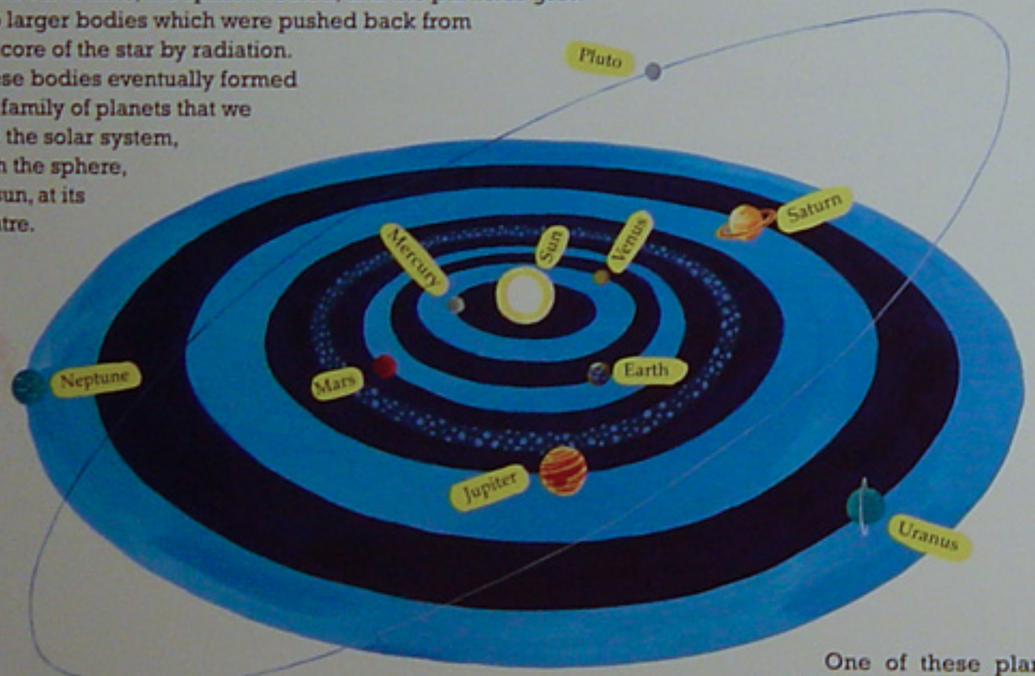
Written by NICK CRANE
Illustrated by DAVID DEAN

Barefoot Books
Step inside a story

The Story of our Planet

The Solar System

An atlas is the most recent chapter of a miracle story. It is a story that began when a small part of the universe collapsed to form a star, a rotating sphere of gas and dust particles. As this sphere continued to collapse, pressure on the core increased, creating hydrogen. At the same time, the sphere cooled, and the particles grew into larger bodies which were pushed back from the core of the star by radiation. These bodies eventually formed the family of planets that we call the solar system, with the sphere, or sun, at its centre.



One of these planets, the one third-closest to the sun, was destined to be different. It was so hot that it was molten. When it started to cool, a crust formed on its outside, rather like a cracked shell. Very, very slowly, parts of the crust slid across the surface of the planet. When they collided, their edges sometimes bent and folded into ranges of mountains. Cracks opened up, allowing molten rock to burst upwards as volcanoes of heat and gas, creating new landscapes.

The First Signs of Life

All the while, this ball of spinning rock was being bombarded by meteorites and comets – some of which carried water or ice. Eventually, warm, soupy oceans covered most of the planet's surface, which became wrapped in a thin film of gases – the beginnings of an atmosphere. Nobody knows for sure, but it is likely that the first forms of life, bacteria, developed deep in the planet's scalding interior through a series of chemical reactions. It took ages for the earliest, simplest life forms to migrate from the depths to the bright sunlight of the surface. Bacteria evolved into multicellular organisms, which evolved into plants and worms, fish, amphibians, reptiles, insects, birds and mammals.

The Human Species

Through the millennia, the planet was pulverised by meteorites, covered by ice or clouded by gigantic volcanic eruptions. Whole species were wiped out, never to reappear; others adapted to their changing conditions. One of these species eventually learnt to run, climb and swim. It also developed a complex mind which was curious about technology, art and music. This species had a sense of what was 'right' and what was 'wrong', spending a lot of time just thinking about things. *Homo sapiens* (a Latin name meaning 'wise human') was surrounded by a planet of incredible diversity. The oceans teemed with fish. The great mountain ranges poured with rivers of crystal water, fed by snowfields and glaciers. Forests reached across entire land masses. When humans learnt to measure time, they discovered that 4,700 million years had passed since their home first started to take shape. We now estimate that our species has been around for only 140,000 years. If you think of the life of the planet as a week, we have been here for less than one minute!

The Oceans and Continents of the World