

Magical mystical tour of the world's mysteries

**MAGICAL AND MYSTICAL
SITES: Europe and the British
Isles. By Elizabeth Pepper and
John Wilcock. Abacus. 416pp.
\$7.50.**

Reviewer:

RALPH ELLIOTT

FROM Ephesus to Delphi, with a stopover to look for lost Atlantis; from Malta to Pompeii; from Toledo to Brittany; from Cornwall to Ireland "where it all began", the two intrepid compilers of this substantial guide-book leave no meglith untoured in their search for magic.

Although described in its opening line as a "quest for magic", this book is as much a tourist guide for other, more secular seekers as a record of the authors' own extensive journeyings.

There are, for instance, maps showing the places mentioned; there is the number of the bus you take from Athens to Eleusis; there is the

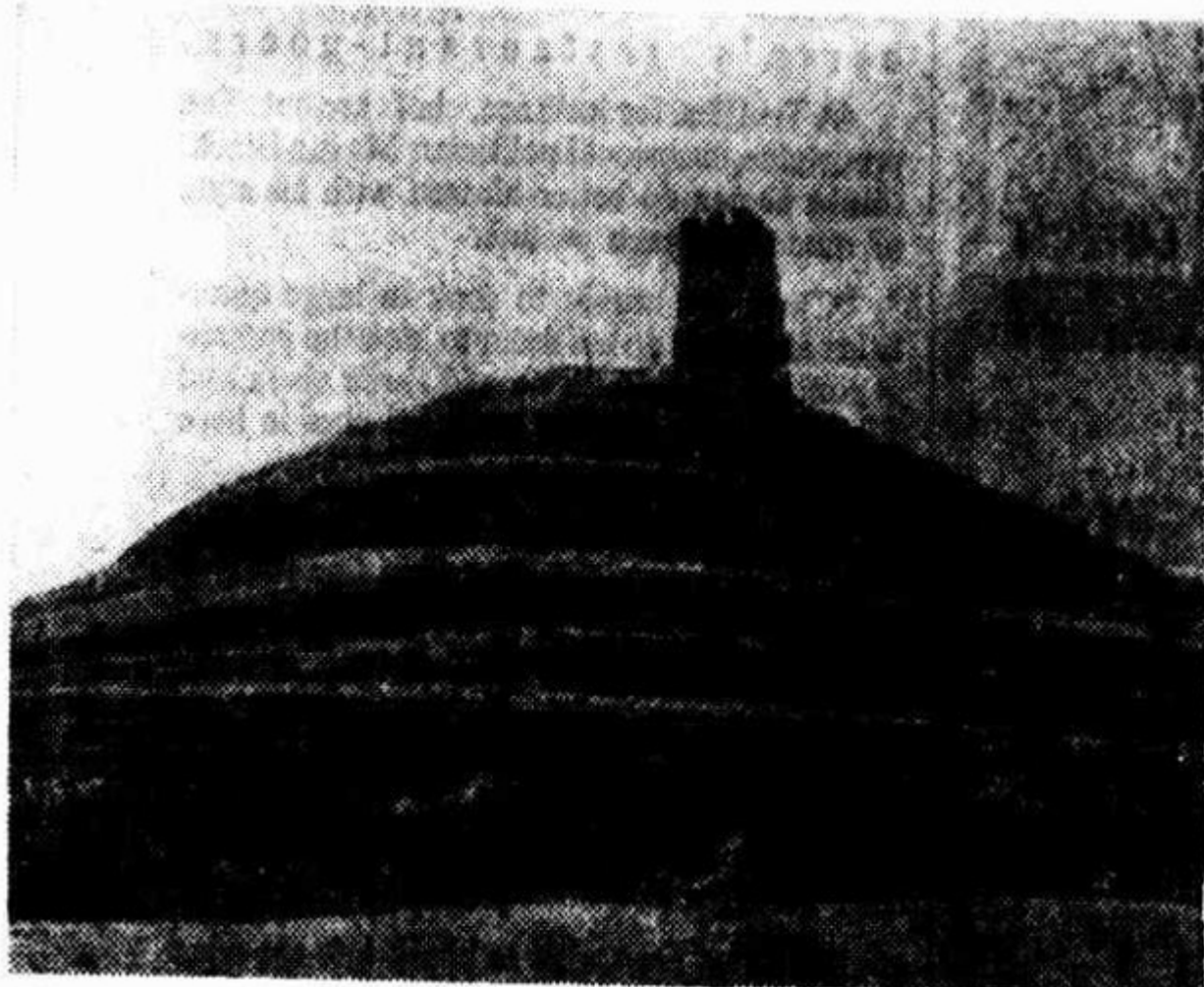
from Athens to Eleusis; there is the invitation to "try the friendly Grand Harbour Hotel" in Valletta; the direction to public toilets in Toledo; the recommendation "to have a sandwich at the Logan Rock Inn" at Treen in Cornwall; and the helpful warning "to take the path to the left" somewhere in southern Ireland, because the field to the right houses an angry bull.

These and similar practical hints prove that the authors' feet were firmly on the ground, however much of their heads and hearts were responding to strange vibrations and other weird manifestations of ancient mysteries.

It is easy to be critical of a book like this, to marshal its inaccuracies, to cavil at odd inclusions in the bibliography or, worse still, at omissions from it, like John Read's scholarly book on alchemy, or to be irritated by inane remarks like the reference to Goethe's masterpiece as showing that he was "impressed enough to comment" on the Faust legend. Some comment!

To anyone interested in the

... anyone interested in the



Glastonbury Tor, an enigmatic sacred landmark associated with countless myths and legends, rises above serpentine, man-made paths, illustrated in 'The World Atlas of Mysteries'.

mythology of the European North, the total omission of Scandinavia is inexplicable, as is that of Eastern Europe. Even if some East European countries might have looked askance at prospective visits from the editors of **Witches Almanac**, they should certainly have visited the sacred groves and inspected the runic stones of Scandinavia. Nor do British runic inscriptions, including the 20 in the

inscriptions, including the 29 in the prehistoric grave-mound at Maeshowe, Orkney, receive a single mention. Yet runes were powerful magic to the ancient Germanic peoples.

The book contains many fine and sensitive descriptions of the numerous sites visited as well as 43 photographs, and there is an entertaining

graphs, and there is an entertaining medley of history and legend, of fact, fiction, and pure romanticising in the discussions of these places and their mythological and legendary associations.

For all its shortcomings, this is an enjoyable, because unusual, tourist guide. You do not need to believe in magic to appreciate the historic importance of Kos, the uniqueness of Pompeii, or the romantic grandeur of Stonehenge with its more recent tragic association with Thomas Hardy's *Tess*. The authors' enthusiasm,

conveyed by an easy narrative style, will carry most readers with it.

Whether or not you intend to travel to these magical and mystical sites, there is something to be learnt from reading about them, even if it is only where to obtain the current ferry schedules to the Outer Hebrides, or that the folklore museum at Riom is closed on Mondays.

WORLD ATLAS OF MYSTERIES. By *Francis Hitching*. Collins. 256 pp. Illustrated. \$12.95.

Reviewer:

MICHAEL APPS

WHEN I first picked up this book and looked at the back jacket cover asking such questions as, "Is the Great Pyramid the centre of the World?", "What is a dragon?", and "Why is our brain so large?", I was tempted to put it back and select a more "readable" book.

How wrong can you be? After flipping through the first few chapters, I found myself totally absorbed

in an unbiased and analytical survey of some of the world's most puzzling unsolved mysteries. We all suffer from preconceived notions and most of us blindly follow accepted, 20th century scientific facts, but in his cleverly written book, the author expresses the profound hope that we stand back and take another look, so that perhaps 21st century science can embrace the process of re-discovery as much as discovery.

In 10 sections illustrated with more than 350 photographs, maps and diagrams and covering everything from the "Death of the Dinosaurs", "The Migrating Instinct" and "Atlantis solved?", through to the "Bermuda Triangle" and "UFOs", Francis Hitching attempts to describe the many doubts

attempts to describe the many doubts and debates that have influenced man's thinking over the centuries and have prompted tentative and frequently vague explanations. He seeks to redress the bias of accepted scientific dogma and as a balance, provides examples to demonstrate the impermanence of scientific theory.

There are many fascinating stories, but to take one extract from the myriad of facts, I have selected a topic much debated in recent years and highlighted in the media within the last few months. As the subject of speculation, controversy and much emotive argument, I refer of course to Unidentified Flying Objects or UFOs.

I didn't know for example that only about 13 per cent of all people who notice mysterious flying objects in our skies actually take the trouble to report them. Mostly it is because they are naturally reticent or they fear ridicule and embarrassment.

Furthermore, from all the reports, as many as 3 million landings *may* have taken place in the last 25 years and for those seeking a physical and reasonable explanation for the presence of UFOs, clearly this figure is absurd.

I liked this book and coffee-table or not, my friends and I can learn a lot from the author's well-pres-

a lot from the author's well-presented, well-argued discussion of still unsolved mysteries that defy 20th century scientific explanation.