

**UCLA**  
**Electronic Green Journal**

**Title**

Review: Javatrekker: Dispatches from the World of Fair Trade Coffee

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7wg6k354>

**Journal**

Electronic Green Journal, 1(29)

**Author**

Anderson, Byron P.

**Publication Date**

2010-01-20

Peer reviewed

**Review: Javatrekker: Dispatches from the World of Fair Trade Coffee**

By Dean Cycon

Reviewed by Byron Anderson  
Northern Illinois University, USA

Cycon, Dean. *Javatrekker: Dispatches from the World of Fair Trade Coffee*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007. xvi, 239 pp. ISBN 9781933392707. US\$19.95, paper. Printed on 50% postconsumer recycled paper, processed chlorine-free.

This around-the-world venture is told by an explorer of coffee communities. The book is composed of the author's personalized "travel yarns" in countries of Africa, South America, Central America, and Asia. Cycon professes, "The truth is, 99 percent of the people involved in coffee commerce, from roasters to baristas, have never been to a coffee village" (p. xiii). Trekking since 1987, Cycon became immersed in the customs, culture, struggles and hopes of indigenous coffee growers, finding coffee commonly intertwined with the culture, expressed in the rituals and customs of daily life. He encountered not only indigenous rights issues, but also environmental issues, including pesticide use, clear-cutting old-growth trees, and disrupting complex habitats when making room for coffee farms.

The vast majority of coffee is grown on farms of a few acres, and farmers make rock-bottom wages and profits from their crops, generally earning pennies per pound of beans. The price paid to coffee farmers has little to do with the cost of growing and processing the crop. Coffee prices are dictated by profit seekers—financial institutions, the processing plants, and layers of middlemen. Business takes place in a hostile environment of corruption, bureaucracy, and self-interest.

Awareness of social justice issues turned Cycon to activism. He helped found Coffee Kids, the first development organization dedicated to coffee communities. In 1993, he founded Deans Beans, a company that bought coffee directly from the farmers under Fair Trade terms. Fair Trade is defined as "a leveling of unfair trade terms...simply a different form of payment for the coffee" (p. 10). Rather than a formula, Fair Trade is a process that becomes involved with each country's culture and the realities of doing business. There are numerous examples of these realities. Cycon tells of coffee farms planted in areas with land mines left from previous wars leading him to help set up the Coffeelands Landmine Victims Trust. Also, of workers who risked life and limb in trying to ride moving trains while making their way to the US. This led to his helping establish a new facility to help feed and care for the maimed clients and their families.

*Javatrekker* combines business with social justice, taking responsibility wherever possible to bring about needed changes. With help from other organizations, Cycon established microloans and set up a radio station. He helped farmers organize and increase their harvesting and processing. He helped found Cooperative Coffees, the world's first roasters' cooperative. He taught farmers how to get their coffee certified organic in order to bring a higher price.

Cycon's real-life experiences are a rare insight into coffee cultures. The book is complemented with pictures, both black-and-white and color. An engaging read, recommended for public library and personal collections. School librarians will find this a great way to introduce students to the idea of Fair Trade and the complexities of doing good.

Byron Anderson <banderson@niu.edu>, Associate Dean/Public Services, Northern Illinois University Libraries, DeKalb IL 60115, USA. TEL: 1-815-753-9804, FAX: 1-815-753-9803.

**Electronic Green Journal, Issue 29, Winter 2009, ISSN:1076-7975**