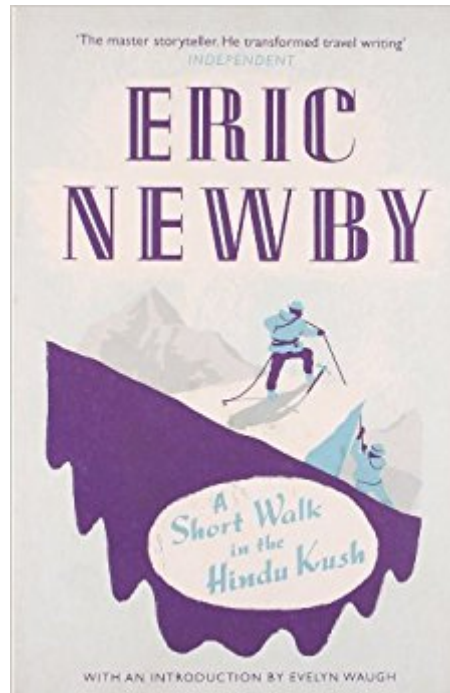




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A Short Walk In The Hindu Kush



Synopsis

When Eric Newby, fashion industry worker and inexperienced hill walker, decided after 10 years in haute couture he needed a change he took 4 days training in Wales then walked the Hindu Kush. This is his account of an entertaining time in the hills!

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For more than a decade following the end of World War II, Eric Newby toiled away in the British fashion industry, peddling some of the ugliest clothes on the planet. (Regarding one wafer-thin model in her runway best, he was reminded of "those flagpoles they put up in the Mall when the Queen comes home.") Fortunately, Newby reached the end his haute-couture tether in 1956. At that point, with the sort of sublime impulsiveness that's forbidden to fictional characters but endemic to real ones, he decided to visit a remote corner of Afghanistan, where no Englishman had planted his brogans for at least 50 years. What's more, he recorded his adventure in a classic narrative, *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*. The title, of course, is a fine example of Newby's habitual self-effacement, since his journey--which included a near-ascent of the 19,800-foot Mir Samir--was anything but short. And his book seems to furnish a missing link between the great Britannic wanderers of the Victorian era and such contemporary jungle nuts as Redmond O'Hanlon. At times it also brings to mind Evelyn Waugh, who contributed the preface. Newby is a less acidulous writer, to be sure, and he has little interest in launching the sort of heat-seeking satiric missiles that were Waugh's specialty. Still, *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* is a hilarious read. The author excels at the dispiriting snapshot, capturing, say, the Afghan backwater of Fariman in two crisp sentences: "A

whole gale of wind was blowing, tearing up the surface of the main street. Except for two policemen holding hands and a dog whose hind legs were paralysed it was deserted." His capsule history of Nuristan also gets in some sly digs at Britain's special relationship with the violence-prone Abdur Rahman: Officially his subsidy had just been increased from 12,000 to 16,000 lakhs of rupees. To the British he had fully justified their selection of him as Amir of Afghanistan and, apart from the few foibles remarked by Lord Curzon, like flaying people alive who displeased him, blowing them from the mouths of cannon, or standing them up to the neck in pools of water on the summits of high mountains and letting them freeze solid, he had done nothing to which exception could be taken. Newby also surpasses Waugh--and indeed, most other travel writers--in another important respect: he's miraculously free of solipsism. Even the keenest literary voyagers tend to be, in the purest sense of the term, self-centered. But *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* includes wonderfully oblique portraits of the author's travel companion, Hugh Carless, and his wife, Wanda (who plays a starring role in such subsequent chronicles as *Slowly down the Ganges*). There are also dozens of brilliant cameo parts, and an indelible record of a stunning landscape. The roof of the world is, in Newby's rendering, both an absolute heaven and a low-oxygen hell. Yet the author never pretends to pit himself against a malicious Nature--his mountains are, in Frost's memorable phrase, too lofty and original to rage. Which is yet another reason to call this little masterpiece a peak performance.

--James Marcus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

'The master storyteller. He transformed travel writing' Independent
 'One of the most enjoyable reads of the last century' Herald Tribune
 'The most successful travel writer of his generation. It's impossible to read this book without laughing aloud' Observer
 'Endlessly entertaining and self-deprecating' Daily Mail
 'Full of serendipity and surprise' The Economist
 'A total success' New Yorker
 'Notable addition to the literature of unorthodox travel ... tough, extrovert, humorous and immensely literate' Times Literary Supplement

"A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush" established him as a traveler who not only journeyed fruitfully but had the ability to bring his readers with him' William Trevor, Guardian
 'I still think the last few sentences of "A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush" the funniest ending to any book I have read' Geoffrey Moorhouse, The Times
 'The book that made [Newby's] reputation ... typically ironic in its understatement' Observer
 'Newby is easily the best of the bunch' Sunday Times
 'All the lyricism, and spirit of adventure and discovery [in] Newby's work' The Times
 'As good as its hype' Wanderlust

This book is heralded as one of the greats of the "Travel Adventure" narratives but I found that it

was overly long and drags on a bit for my taste. It does have some colorful characters and is loaded with dry English humor, but it could have had the same punch without slogging through the chapters where very little happens. The ending is quite abrupt, which I understand it is a trademark of the author's other works.

I buy this book as a gift for all my friends eager to learn about Afghanistan. A comical yet serious journey by two British wanderers that constantly find themselves in unbelievable situations that tax them mentally and physically. Or "just another day" as most Afghans would recognize it. Truly well written and look for the appearance of a special guest explorer near the end of the story.

A shocking book! Two Englishmen who've never climbed before set off to visit the mountains in Afghanistan. They drive across Europe (a challenge itself) and then arrive to face tribes who've never seen westerners, not to mention the unknown mountains. Evelyn Waugh wrote the preface, so that gives you an idea about this book, whose title is itself an understatement. Serious and funny!

A very funny and self-deprecating adventure classic about getting to and exploring a remote part of Afghanistan, and a failed attempt to climb Mt Samir. Before there was Bill Bryson, there was Eric Newby. Another excellent reason to recommend the book is its portrait of an Afghanistan that existed before so much international meddling (Soviet, Pakistani, Iranian, American) doomed Afghans to the current dismal state of affairs. You can read about that woeful place in Christina Lamb's excellent Farewell Kabul.

Absolutely wonderful travel book. If you know Afghanistan before the wars (pre 1978) there are some very funny parts. I loved his description of the glass display counter in the government hotel lobby in Herat. "Two rusty cans of Russian peas, a packet of dusty Pakistani biscuits (cookies), a sticky spot which might once have been sweets, a bent clothes hanger, and a number of dead flies." These items were still standard in government hotel display cases in the 1970s. In any case, it is a wonderful depiction of pre-war Afghanistan, which in those days was a beautiful, friendly, and hospitable country ... Mostly. Note that the quote above is from memory... I think I mentioned all the items but they may be out of order.

Of all the dozens of mountain ranges that converge in North Asia, perhaps the most daunting is the

Hindu Kush, "the Hindu Killer", yet an adventurous businessman in the London fashion world, with a checkered history that spans both boat racing and a stint as a prisoner of war (1942-45), yet completely untrained at mountain climbing, decides to take a jaunt with a friend, with no more preparation than a hike on a hill in Wales. Their encounters and experiences are many, the descriptions dazzling, their confrontations with the world of the tribes and villagers utterly beguiling yet not always to their advantage. The book is outrageously funny, remarkably enterprising and absolutely irresistible. I have probably read it half a dozen times over the years and still laugh, to such an extent that I have searched out his other books as well, including his boat ride down the Ganges, which is hysterical.

I love British travel writing. This book is a prime example. Intelligent, witty, informative, unpretentious and low-tech.

This book could have been used as a primer for the entire "Eccentric Englishman goes abroad" genre. The nonathletic Newby and his semi-athletic friend decide to climb a mountain in the Hindu Kush. They take a long weekend climbing course and set off for Afghanistan to begin their trip. Nothing stops them including unfriendly natives, poor planning, bad shoes, lack of food. They actually come up short of reaching their climbing goal but do manage to explore all the places they set out to see. Maybe I'm not too old after all!

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