



Off the Beaten Track

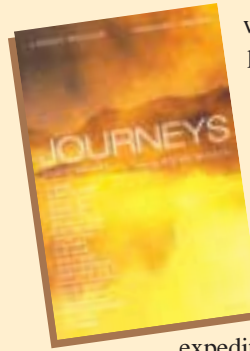
Journeys - An Anthology

I would hesitate to recommend *Journeys*, an anthology of travel writing, to anyone who is used to flipping through *Lonely Planet* or *Let's Go Europe* for tourist routes and attractions.

In the Introduction, Robyn Davidson questions right away the idea of travel writing. She argues that travel writing can span many styles and experiences. It goes beyond the work of professionals commissioned to report in the field on the landscape, local cuisines and how to get around. Davidson, who once trekked across Australia with only camels for companions, redefines travel writing as a non-fiction work in which the author goes from point A to point B and tells us something about it. Instead of journeys for holidaying, this anthology covers all sorts of people in varied situations and emotional states. Hence the "capricious" list of contributors, ranging from known to unknown, expected to unexpected: Chatwin to Battuta; Hemingway to Matsuo Basho; Flaubert to Nungarrayi.

The book is organised by countries and every continent is included. There are journeys of pleasure, adventure, displacement and horror. Mary Kingsley travels through Africa in a good thick skirt; Simone de Beauvoir ventures into 1940s Harlem, a black district made notorious by unreasonable fear; Ernest Giles survives a 9-day journey in Australia's desert, trudging alone and suffering from starvation and burning thirst. This book also includes revealing insights into Nature. For example, the silence of the once populated bush in Zimbabwe, as Doris Lessing observes, tells so much about the plight of animals in the wild.

Of all the entries I found the extract from *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz* the most dramatic. In this short piece, the great composer takes a coach trip from Florence to Paris, tortured by jealousy and rage at his betrayal by a lover,



with two loaded pistols on his lap. The piece that impressed me most, however, was Aspley Cherry-Garrard's chronicle of how Robert Scott survived "the worst journey in the world". The horror of his 19-day winter trip in Antarctica still lingers in my mind: three frozen men struggling along, in darkness, on the vast icy plain, with temperatures dropping to as low as -75° . The motive behind their expedition: "to achieve the impossible".

While travelling imaginatively across continents and timelines with the authors, you can also enjoy the beautiful language of their writings. See how Walter Benjamin describes the noises he heard when strolling along the empty streets in Marseilles: "Every step stirs a song, a quarrel, a flapping of wet linen, a rattling of boards, a baby's bawling, a clatter of buckets". We have V. S. Pritchett depicting Castile, an area of hidden villages in Spain, as "a place of sunsets in the haze of dust and of short twilights when the sky at the last moment goes green over the sharp violet mountains, which seem to have been cut out by a knife". And Werner Herzog recalls walking through the forest steeped in snow: "burning snow blows biting" into his face and his legs are so "brittle and stiff that they'll crumble like chalk" once he halts.

Journeys is not a book for light reading. Few readers will respond with equal enthusiasm to every entry either. Yet it is an enjoyable read. An armchair traveller will find his longing for the exotic satisfied. And there is always something to inform, amuse, stimulate or shock. Probably you will read all of the travel writings in the end.

A traveller without knowledge is a bird without wings.

Sa'di

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'Not-a-Mindboggler' Answers



- What is a "gangmaster"?
B: A person who organises and oversees the work of casual manual labourers
- What does a "wordrobe" mean?
A: A person's vocabulary
- What is a "blue on blue" incident?
C: An attack made by one's own side that accidentally harms one's own forces
- What does "latte factor" mean?
A: Unconscious day-to-day frivolous spending
- What do you eat when you have a "potsticker"?
A: A Chinese wonton dumpling
- What is a "larp"?
A: A form of role-playing game
- What is a "crittercam"?
C: A camera attached to a wild animal
- What does a "furkid" mean?
B: A pet treated as though it were one's child
- What is a "spork"?
C: A utensil with both bowl and tines
- What is the meaning of "handbags"?
B: A confrontation that does not lead to serious fighting, especially among soccer players
- What does "marketspace" mean?
A: Commerce carried out by electronic means, especially via the Internet
- What does "m-commerce" mean?
B: Commercial transactions conducted electronically by mobile phone
- What is "retail therapy"?
B: Going shopping to make one happy
- What are "batchmates"?
B: Classmates
- What is a "mystery shopper"?
A: A person employed to visit a shop incognito in order to assess the quality of the services

The winners are:

Name	Department
Lam Mei-fan	Civil Service Bureau
Au Wai-ping	Hongkong Post
Or Doi-kuen	Leisure and Cultural Services Department
Marianne Chan	Official Receiver's Office
Yu Chiu-lai	Social Welfare Department

They will be notified individually by post.