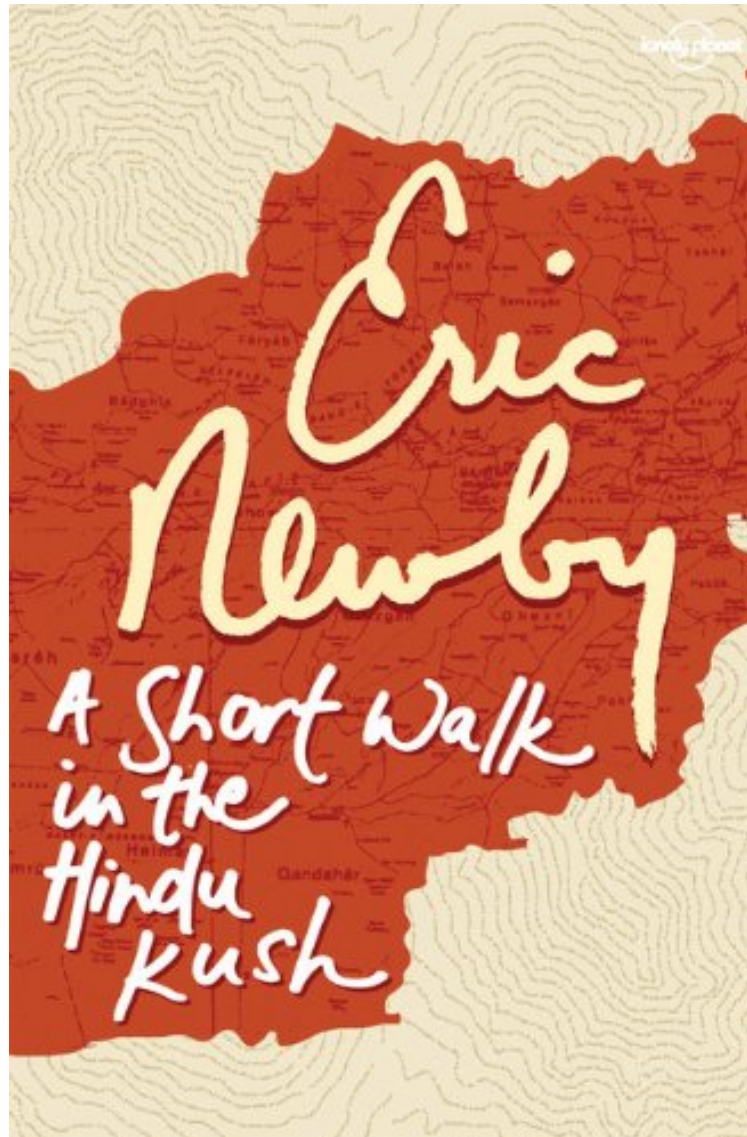


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## A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush

*Eric Newby*

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**Eric Newby : A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Dry English humor By Grumble 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. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Classic of Travel Writing, Inexplicably Out of Print By VeryBadChessPlayer This is one of the classic travel books, written with classic British understatement and wit. (The "short walk" of the title is very long indeed.) Anyone who likes to read about other people's travels, and especially anyone who prefers to enjoy reading about exotic, risky (and in this case of this book, now mostly unreachable) places is certain to love this book. All of which makes it simply astonishing that it's apparently out of print, and has been for many years. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A very funny and self-deprecating adventure classic about getting to and exploring ... By James O'Reilly 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.

The view was colossal. Below us on every side mountain surged away it seemed forever; we looked down on glaciers and snow-covered peaks that perhaps no one has ever seen before, except from the air. Feeling restless in the world of London's high-fashion industry, Eric Newby asked a friend to accompany him on a mountain-climbing expedition in the wild and remote Hindu Kush, in north-eastern Afghanistan. And so they went - although they did stop first for four days of climbing lessons in Wales - becoming the first Englishmen to visit this spectacular region for more than half a century. Newby's frank and funny account of their expedition to what is still amongst the world's most isolated areas is one of the classics of travel writing.

.com 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 Readers will admire his (Newby) perseverance, intriguing personality, and outstanding descriptions.' --Library Journal, March 2002 From the Publisher 6 1.5-hour cassettes