

## = A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush =

A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush is a 1958 book by the English travel writer Eric Newby . It is an autobiographical account of his adventures in the Hindu Kush , around the Nuristan mountains of Afghanistan , ostensibly to make the first mountaineering ascent of Mir Samir . It has been described as a comic masterpiece , intensely English , and understated . Publications including The Guardian and The Telegraph list it among the greatest travel books of all time . It has sold over 500 @, @ 000 copies in paperback .

The book has 14 monochrome photographs taken mainly by Newby , and two hand @-@ drawn maps . The novelist Evelyn Waugh wrote a preface that mentions the book 's whimsy and its Englishness .

The action in the book moves from Newby 's life in the fashion business in London to Afghanistan . On the way Newby describes his very brief training in mountaineering in North Wales , a stop in Istanbul , and a nearly @-@ disastrous drive across Turkey and Persia . They are driven out to the Panjshir Valley , where they begin their walk , with many small hardships described in a humorous narrative , supported by genuine history of Nuristan and brief descriptions of the rare moments of beauty along the way . Disagreements with Newby 's Persian @-@ speaking companion Hugh Carless , and odd phrases in an antique grammar book , are exploited to comic effect .

The book has been reprinted many times , in at least 16 English versions and in Spanish , Chinese and German editions . While some critics consider Newby 's Love and War in the Apennines a better book , A Short Walk was the book that made him well @-@ known , and critics agree that it is both understated and very funny in an old @-@ school British way .

## = = Background = =

In 1956 at the age of 36 , Newby ended his London career in fashion and decided impulsively to travel to a remote corner of Afghanistan where no Englishman had ventured for 60 years .

He sent a telegraph to his friend the diplomat Hugh Carless , then due to take up his position as First Secretary in Tehran later that year , requesting he accompany him on an expedition to Northern Afghanistan . They were poorly prepared and inexperienced , but Newby and Carless vowed to attempt Mir Samir , a glacial and then unclimbed 20 @, @ 000 foot peak in the Hindu Kush .

## = = The book = =

### = = = Publication = = =

A Short Walk was first published in 1958 by Secker and Warburg . It has been reprinted many times since .

Translations include :

1997 : Laertes , Barcelona ( Spanish )

1998 : ???????????????? . Marco Polo , Taipei ( Chinese )

2002 : Eichborn , Frankfurt am Main ( German )

2005 : Goldmann , München ( German )

### = = = Illustrations = = =

The book was illustrated with 14 monochrome photographs taken by Newby or Carless ; one depicts the explorer Wilfred Thesiger in his sleeping @-@ bag .

There are two hand @-@ drawn maps . The " Map to illustrate a journey in Nuristan by Eric Newby and Hugh Carless in 1956 " , shows an area of 75 x 55 miles covering the Panjshir valley to the Northwest , and Nuristan and the Pushal valley to the Southeast ; it has a small inset of Central Asia

showing the area 's location to the Northeast of Kabul . The other map , " Nuristan " , covers a larger area of about 185 x 140 miles , showing Kabul and Jalalabad to the South , and Chitral and the Pakistan region of Kohistan to the East .

= = = Preface by Evelyn Waugh = = =

A two @-@ page preface by novelist Evelyn Waugh recommends the book , remarking on its " idiomatic , uncalculated manner " , and that the " beguiling narrative " is " intensely English " . He hopes that Newby is not the last of a " whimsical tradition " . He explains that Newby is not the other English writer of the same name and confesses ( or pretends ) that he began to read it thinking that it was the other man 's work . He sketches out the " deliciously funny " account of Newby selling women 's clothes , and the " call of the wild " ( he admits it is an absurdly trite phrase ) that led him to the Hindu Kush . Waugh ends by advising the " dear reader " to " fall to and enjoy this characteristic artifact . "

= = = Structure = = =

The book contains 20 chapters , all narrated in the first person by Newby .

= = = = The rag trade = = = =

Chapter 1 Life of a Salesman

Newby describes his frustration with life in the fashion business or " rag trade " in London .

Chapter 2 Death of a Salesman

Newby leaves the rag trade .

= = = = Training = = = =

Chapter 3 Birth of a Mountain Climber

Newby and Carless receive very brief training in mountaineering technique , on boulders and small cliffs in North Wales . The inn has " splendid " waitresses who seem to be expert climbers and who take them up the Ivy Sepulchre on Dinas Cromlech , as the easier Spiral Stairs route is busy .

= = = = Driving out = = = =

Chapter 4 Pera Palace

Newby arrives in Istanbul with his wife , Wanda , having driven across Europe .

Chapter 5 The Dying Nomad

With Carless , they drive across Turkey to Persia ( present day Iran ) . They make an emergency stop on the road , just short of a dying nomad , and with difficulty convince the police they did not cause the death .

Chapter 6 Airing in a Closed Carriage

Wanda returns home and the men cross Persia and Afghanistan , driving through Herat to Kandahar and Kabul . They had driven 5 @,@ 000 miles ( 8 @,@ 000 km ) in a month . There are comic touches , as when " The proprietor Abdul , a broken @-@ toothed demon of a man , conceived a violent passion for Hugh . We sat with him drinking coffee ... ' Arrrh , CAHARLESS , soul of your father . You have ill @-@ used your motor @-@ car . ' He hit Hugh a violent blow of affection in the small of his back , just as he was drinking his coffee . ' Urggh ! ' "

= = = = Journey = = = =

Chapter 7 A Little Bit of Protocol

Newby and Carless try to acclimatise to the altitude with a practice walk . They visit the Foreign

Ministry , hire an Afghan cook , and buy a " very short " list of supplies . Newby describes the geography of Nuristan " walled in on every side by the most formidable mountains " and a little history , with the legend of descent from Alexander the Great , the British imperial adventures , and pre @-@ war German expeditions .

#### Chapter 8 Panjshir Valley

They are driven out from Kabul by a servant from the Embassy . They stay in a tall mud house in a place with mulberry trees , vines and willows by a river . Hugh puts the dinner guests to sleep with a complicated story " about an anaconda killing a horse " .

#### Chapter 9 A Walk in the Sun

They meet their three " very small " horses and their horse @-@ drivers . The cook has to return to Kabul . Despite having horses , they decide to carry 40 pound ( 20 kg ) packs " to toughen ourselves up " . The local people insult them for carrying loads in the heat . The drivers are angry at having to walk in the heat . They agree the drivers ' pay .

#### Chapter 10 Finding our Feet

They walk . They get upset stomachs and blisters . They find a man " with his skull smashed to pulp " ; the head driver suggests they should leave the place immediately . Two lammergeiers circle overhead .

#### Chapter 11 Western Approaches

They become tired of each other 's company , and of the food they have brought . They come to a ruinous summer pasture village , and eat local food : boiled milk , the yellow crust that forms on cream , and fresh bread . They catch sight of their goal , Mir Samir . They find tracks of ibex and wolf . One of their drivers catches a snowcock by running after it .

#### Chapter 12 Round 1

They look up at the awesome West wall of the mountain above them . They walk up the glacier wearing new crampons , probing for crevasses with their ice @-@ axes . They cross the bergschrund and climb " a few feet of easy rock " . Carless suggests rappelling 200 feet ( 60 m ) to the next glacier . They agree " it would be difficult " to get back if they did that . They return to their base camp and try again the next morning , again finding their way blocked . They wish the climbing waitresses from Wales were with them .

#### Chapter 13 Coming Round the Mountain

An injured boy is dressed in a " devilish " goatskin to draw the poison from his wounds . Newby has to eat the tail of a fat @-@ tailed sheep . They are escorted up the Chamar valley by a greedy farting albino . Newby tries to learn some phrases in the Bashguli or Kafir language from a 1901 Indian Staff Corps grammar , which contains sentences such as " A lammergeier came down from the sky and took off my cock " .

#### Chapter 14 Round 2

Setting out at 5 a.m. , they attempt to climb the East ridge . It becomes very hot . The rock is gritty with sharp flakes of mica . They pretend to be " Damon Runyon characters trying to climb a mountain " to cheer themselves up . They get better at roped climbing . After six and a half hours the altimeter shows 18 @,@ 000 feet . They reckon they could reach the top if they tried a different gully and started at 4 a.m. They go down . Carless 's hands are red and bleeding .

#### Chapter 15 Knock @-@ out

They camp below a cliff . Rocks continually fall , bouncing over their heads . It is bitterly cold . There is a thunderstorm . They eat pea soup , tinned apple pudding , and jam straight from the tin . They try to sleep . They try to ascend a 70 degree ice slope . They reach the ridge , after five hours , not the estimated two . At 19 @,@ 100 feet they have a tremendous view of the Hindu Kush , the Anjuman Pass , Tirich Mir , and the mountains that border Pakistan . Choughs croak above them . They are only 700 feet below the summit , but four hours away . They turn back . " The descent was terrible . " They return to camp at 9 p.m. after climbing for 17 hours .

#### Chapter 16 Over the Top

Carless makes an impressive speech in Persian to convince the drivers to continue into Nuristan . They climb an extremely indistinct track to the pass . They descend into Nuristan : it grows hot . Men run to meet them : they are told they are the first Europeans ever to cross the pass ( Newby doesn 't

believe this ) . They are given ice @-@ cold milk to drink .

#### Chapter 17 Going Down !

They make camp in a loop of the river to reduce the risk of being murdered in the night . They are visited by two evil @-@ looking men with an ancient Martini @-@ Henry rifle , riding a horse . In the morning they try out the Bashguli grammar on a man ; he understands , but speaks a variant dialect or language . Newby tells the history of the Kafirs and the Russians . Their guide does not let them camp in a grove of mulberry trees full of " extremely handsome " girls and young women ; instead , he makes them camp under some cliffs in a place full of flies and excrement . They undress to wash in the river , discovering how thin they have become .

#### Chapter 18 A Room with a View

A large audience gathers to watch them get up and cook . There is a violent storm . They reach Pushal , " the capital of the Ramgul Kafirs " . The headman gives them delicious apricots and tells tales of the old days . They admire the antique rifles of many kinds that the men have , all " in a disgraceful condition " . A mullah forbids them to go to a funeral where a bullock is to be slaughtered , in a holiday atmosphere . Instead , they sit under a walnut tree beside a river , with kingfishers , butterflies , hummingbird hawkmoths , a woodpecker drilling , and have " a rare moment of peace " . Newby shakes hands with two lepers . They all have dysentery . Newby spends hours negotiating the price of a complete male Nuristanis costume .

#### Chapter 19 Disaster at Lake Mundul

Walking down from Lustagam they pass hand @-@ made irrigation canals of hollowed @-@ out halved tree trunks on stone pillars . They are shown a large rock , the Sang Neveshteh , with an inscription said to be in Kufic script , supposedly recording the Emperor Timur Leng 's visit in 1398 A.D. Newby gives some pages of history " lifted almost in their entirety ... from Elliott [ sic ] and Dawson 's History of India , Vol . III , London , 1871 . " The emperor forcibly converted the Nuristanis to Islam , which Newby implies they still regret . The country becomes lusher , with both ordinary mulberries and the king mulberry , plums , sloes and soft apples . Then they cross a wooded country with watermills , wild raspberries and buttercups " like a summer morning in England , but a long time ago " . They climb back into the " wilderness " to Gadval , a village on a cliff , with picturesque privies over the streams . At Lake Mundul a mullah swims the horse with Newby 's camera and all their film and other possessions across the river . The headman shows a scar inflicted on him in deep snow by a black bear .

#### Chapter 20 Beyond the Arayu

They climb 2 @, @ 000 feet out of the valley to reach the Arayu . At Warna they rest by a waterfall with mulberry trees . They walk on . Newby dreams of cool drinks and hot baths . They struggle on over a high cold pass . The last village of Nuristan , Achagaur , is peopled by Rajputs who claim to come from Arabia . They reach the top of the Arayu pass , " one of the lonely places of the earth with all the winds of Asia droning over it " . Newby feels the place will continue " whatever disasters overtook the rest of mankind " . They feel very happy going down from the pass . They meet the explorer and author of Arabian Sands , Wilfred Thesiger . He is disgusted by their air @-@ beds .

#### Maps

= = Reception = =

Edward Mace George , writing in The Guardian , notes that the book " is the comic masterpiece Newby will be remembered by " , though his finest work was Love and War in the Apennines ( 1971 ) .

Kari Herbert notes in The Guardian 's list of travel writer 's favourite travel books that she inherited her father , English polar explorer Wally Herbert 's " well @-@ loved copy " of Newby 's book . " Like Newby , I was in a soulless job , desperate for change and adventure . Reading A Short Walk was a revelation . The superbly crafted , eccentric and evocative story of his Afghan travels was like a call to arms . " John Gimlette , in the same list , chooses Newby 's Love and War in the Apennines . The Telegraph includes it as one of its " 20 best travel books of all time " , describing Newby and Carless 's meeting with the explorer Wilfred Thesiger as a " hilarious segment " . It quotes " We started to

blow up our air @-@ beds . ' God , you must be a couple of pansies , ' said Thesiger . " Outside magazine includes A Short Walk among its " 25 essential books for the well @-@ read explorer " .

Margalit Fox , writing Newby 's obituary in the New York Times , notes that the trip was the one that made him famous , and states that " As in all his work , the narrative was marked by genial self @-@ effacement and overwhelming understatement . " She cites a 1959 review in the same publication by William O. Douglas , later a Supreme Court judge , who called the book " a chatty , humorous and perceptive account " , adding that " Even the unsanitary hotel accommodations , the infected drinking water , the unpalatable food , the inevitable dysentery are lively , amusing , laughable episodes . "

The Anmore Ladies Book Club ( Gentlemen welcomed ) called the book " an understated and very humorous travel story " , with " often ' laugh out loud ' funny " descriptions . While " the writing was a bit tedious at times , the general consensus was that [ the book ] was well worth the read " .

Travel writer John Pilkington includes the book in his " Top 10 writer 's reads " in Geographical magazine , observing that it is " still unmatched after nearly 50 years in print " , and describing it as a " hilarious and nicely understated description of an ill @-@ fated journey " .

American novelist Rick Skwiot enjoys the " blithely confident Brit 's " narrative style , finding echoes of its concept , structure and humour in Bill Bryson 's A Walk in the Woods . Skwiot notes the hazards of the journey as crevasses , precipices , thieves , bears , disease , thirst , hunger . " Somehow they blunder on toward their whimsical destination " , he remarks , the " seductive and tickling narrative " told with " understatement , self @-@ effacement , savage wit , honed irony , and unrelenting honesty . " The reader is drawn in " by his endearingly flawed humanity . "

Michael Shapiro , interviewing Newby for Travelers ' Tales , calls the book " a classic piece of old @-@ school British exploration , and established Newby ? s trademark self @-@ deprecating wry humor . "

In Varieties of Nostalgia in Contemporary Travel Writing , Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan observe that " travel writing , like travel itself , is generated by nostalgia " . But the " anachronistic gentleman " can only exist , they note , quoting Simon Raven , " in circumstances that are manifestly contrived or unreal " . The resulting " atmosphere of enhanced affectation is exploited to maximum comic effect " in books like A Short Walk , which they call " an acclaimed post @-@ Byronic escapade in which gentlemanly theatrics come to assume the proportions of full @-@ blown farce . "

= = Legacy = =

The Austrian alpinist Adolf Diemberger wrote in a 1966 report that in mountaineering terms Newby and Carless 's reconnaissance of the Central Hindu Kush was a " negligible effort " , admitting however that they " almost climbed it " . The climb was more warmly described in the same year as " The first serious attempt at mountaineering in that country [ the Afghan Hindu Kush ] " by the Polish mountaineer Boleslaw Chwascinski .

In January 2012 , an expedition under the auspices of the British Mountaineering Council , citing the " popular adventure book " , attempted the first winter ascent of Mir Samir , but it was cut short by an equipment theft and " very deep snow conditions and route finding difficulties " .

= = = Edition = = =

Newby , Eric ( 1974 ) . A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush . Pan . ISBN 0 @-@ 330 @-@ 24227 @-@ X.