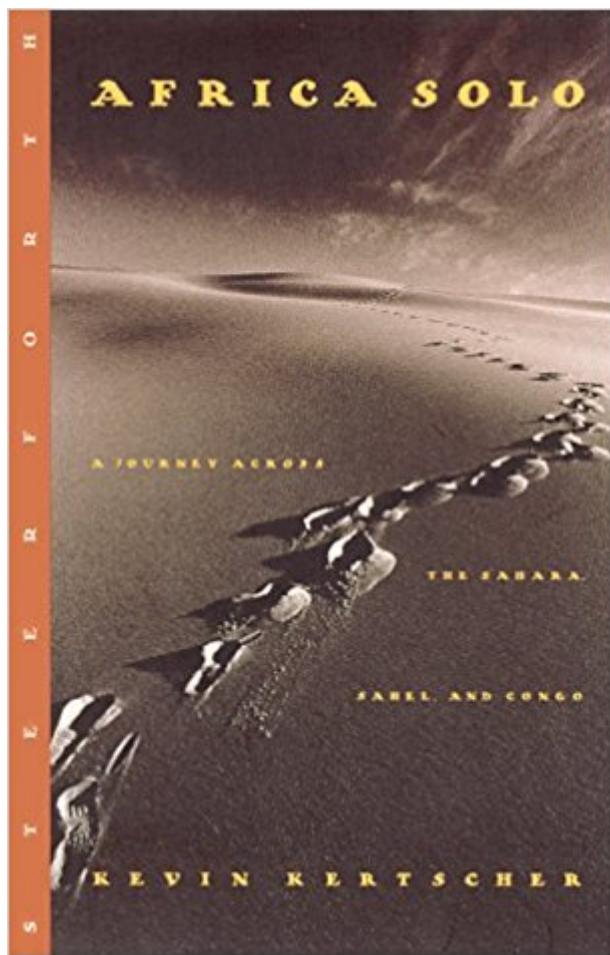


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Africa Solo: A Journey Across The Sahara, Sahel And Congo



Synopsis

Feeling the need to reorient his inner compass, filmmaker Kevin Kertscher set out on a personal journey across large expanses of the African continent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kertscher, a film editor who worked on Ken Burns's Baseball and Thomas Jefferson documentaries, needs "to be alone to orient my inner compass." In fall 1988, he decided to fulfill a fantasy?to traverse the Sahara and journey across Africa. With little historical preparation, he traveled from Algeria through West Africa to Ghana, Zaire, the Congo, Rwanda, and Kenya. His recurrent fear of unfamiliar surroundings and his anxiety about being robbed, raped, conned, hounded by beggars, or afflicted with disease inhibited adventurous curiosity and prompted him to keep company with fellow Westerners. As a result, his observations and encounters are understandably of marginal interest, lacking cultural, historical, or political engagement. Not recommended; instead read Michael Asher's *Impossible Journey: Two Against the Sahara* (Morrow, 1988).?Lonnie Weatherby, McGill Univ. Lib., MontrealCopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Kertscher, an independent filmmaker whose grandfather was a white hunter in Africa, uses his background to render a fascinating account of his travels across the breadth of Africa. Kertscher crosses the Sahara desert and the Sahel region, moving on to Timbuktu and southward to the Ivory Coast and the jungles of equatorial Africa. He battles malaria and loneliness, sees the silverback gorillas of East Africa, and floats on the Congo River in a rigging of six barges alive with people,

animals, and cargo. At differing times and durations, his traveling companions include peace corps volunteers, conventional tourists, and a band of adventurers trying to sell progressively deteriorating cars. Kertscher has an eye for detail and an appreciation of different peoples and cultures, finding beauty and dignity in the music or religious worship of the people he sees. He appreciates the experience of being a foreigner, wondering at the rootlessness of long-term travelers unable to fit in anywhere. And he clearly understands the privileges that continue to be extended to a white person in Africa. Vanessa Bush

This is the perfect Adventure book, I enjoyed every page and admired the authors guts in many situations.

I would recommend this book. For someone who didn't really know what he was getting into, you can see he matured during his trip. Good job. He became a citizen of the world.

Kevin Kertscher's Africa Solo is the account of the kind of trek that just cannot be undertaken right now, and so it's worth reading for both its historical and its sociological value. Although it is different from many travel books in that it focuses on individual experience rather than history or events, the book offers a different kind of education: a single person's insight and experience. In the late 1980s, Kertscher trekked - mostly by hitchhiking, with some walking and one plane trip - through West, Central, and East Africa, taking a winding path from Oran in Algeria to Nairobi in Kenya. He also traveled mostly alone, which gave him a lot more exposure to the continent, and put him in more danger as well. An average person like Kertscher probably could not duplicate this trip today; political instability and unrest have rendered many of the countries he visited more dangerous for foreigners, as well as altering the areas through which he traveled significantly since his journey. That change is one of the primary reasons why Kertscher's book is still worth reading - he provides an account of an older Africa the one that gave birth to the current one. His observations of Mobutu's Zaire, while not as detailed as Helen Winternitz's in *East Along the Equator*, explain a great deal about the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And his account of Rwanda during a break in its long history of conflict is surprising - he describes it as one of the most peaceful and progressive countries in Africa. The personal perspective of the book - the author's solo movement through the continent, relying mostly on others for transportation - is also valuable; I got a better sense of the regional differences in the people than I have from other Africa books. Kertscher also experienced much more than most travelers do of the kindness of strangers in Africa;

in his sort of travel, he was forced to rely on others, and it impressed me how often those others came through for him. I can't say I'd travel the way he did, but the results were apparently better than I would have expected. All in all, this is an engrossing read that provides a personal perspective on one portion of a very large place. Africa Solo should not be used as a guidebook, because of the many changes in the area, but cultures do change more slowly than governments, so perhaps a person planning a trip to the area would still benefit from this book. Certainly armchair travelers will enjoy it.

I was captured from the first page and found I couldn't put the book down. I have been reading as many books on Africa as I can in preparation for my own trip to the continent. Although lacking in the history and current issues facing the various countries the author visited (which have subsequently changed over the past decade) I found Africa Solo to be quite entertaining and educational from the perspective of traveling alone in a land that can still truly be called foreign. The author's trip through Africa was certainly more challenging and exciting than backpacking through Europe. The book lacks the wit of a Bryson, or the detail of Ridgeway, but it creates its own niche in the travel essay genre. Africa Solo is the author's diary cleaned up for readability and full of additional reflection during his post-Africa adventure. It is educational in providing anecdotes of situations future adventurers will likely encounter and the solutions that worked for the author. I enjoyed meeting the characters (most of whom would be called eccentric) who came across the author's path on his journey, and the social interaction that occurred. And I couldn't help but appreciate how lucky it is to be born and raised in a country as privileged as America. After finishing the book I was not disappointed, instead craving more, both about Africa and the author's further travels in Pakistan and India.

This is a travel book for those who have travelled. I really don't think, judging by some of the other reviews below, that one can judge this book if s/he has never thrown themselves headfirst into a travel adventure like this one. Having spent several months travelling in India, Nepal, and then the Middle East, I experienced every single emotion and, unfortunately, most of the gastro-intestinal disturbances that the author did. At times great, the trip was just as often miserable. Doing this kind of trip has nothing in common with Eurailing. The countries are very poor, the language and culture barrier is far greater, and the going can be very rough. First time travellers, me included, often delude ourselves about our adaptability. We eventually learn it, but it is an arduous process. I saw this book as a chronicle of a maturation process. Travel can often lay bare our best and worst

qualities and force us to come to terms with them. Kudos to the author for honestly and poignantly portraying that here. This is a refreshing travel book. No ego, just honesty. If you want more history and culture, read anthropology. That is not this book's purpose.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, an account of a trip through Africa the author took in the late '80's. The author doesn't have an agenda, though his concern with the poverty in Africa is evident throughout. If there is an underlying theme in the book it is how he learned to be a traveler, rather than a tourist. "Just close your eyes," he tells an elderly British couple who expressed concerns with their accommodations, "take a deep breath, and take everything unusual as part of the adventure."

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