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Turkestan Solo: One Woman's Expedition from the Tien Shan to the Kizil Kum (Century Travel Classic)

Ella Maillart

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Ella Maillart : Turkestan Solo: One Woman's Expedition from the Tien Shan to the Kizil Kum (Century Travel Classic) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Turkestan Solo: One Woman's Expedition from the Tien Shan to the Kizil Kum (Century Travel Classic):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. tales of a travel junkieBy Bob NewmanMost people travel to get somewhere in order to do something----pilgrims, businessmen, vacationers, academics, photographers. But there are a few who travel for the pure pleasure of travelling. Eva Maillart seems to have been one of these. She travelled through Central Asia in the early 1930s, coping with Soviet bureaucracy, no transportation except horses, camels or donkeys, no hotels, freezing temperatures, scarce supplies, and rampant insect life. She loved it. Though she may have had the lame excuse that she was a reporter and wished to learn of local conditions as a traditional society was transformed under Russian pressure, basically she just wanted to "go". Being There was the name of her game. Though some may say she was an "explorer", in TURKESTAN SOLO, she did not really cover unknown ground. Few Westerners and even fewer Western women had gone where she went, but that does not equal "discovery" on her part. She teamed up with four Russian mountain climbers to travel through the mountain wilds of Kyrgyzstan and climbed or skied some snowy peaks. Then, on her own, she travelled to Tashkent and the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.

Afterwards she made her way down the Amu Darya towards the Aral Sea, and then with a camel caravan across the desert to the railway line. It was hazardous and daring for a single woman in those days. The last, hardest part of the trip, across the desert, occurred in mid-winter. Maillart is at her best describing the colorful bazaars, the desert, mountain or river landscapes, and talking about the people she meets on the trains or the trails. Though she does try to introduce a bit of information on history or culture, it is often sketchy or even garbled. Similarly, it seems that either she or the translator did not give accurately the distances between certain places. The border between diary and book is blurred occasionally, when the writing is abrupt and unclear, but most of the time, I enjoyed the narrative, the scenes from a part of the world that has changed greatly since the early '30s. Like inveterate traveller Dervla Murphy, Maillart seems to revel in hardships, delight in telling us how tough it was. Two years later, she travelled through Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) with a British adventurer. These travels inspired an American, Stuart Stevens, to attempt a repeat voyage in the 1980s,--he even visited the aging lady traveller in Switzerland---but neither the trip or the book came up to Maillart's. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. An undiscovered classic! By M. H. Bayliss I was turned on to Ella Maillart after stumbling accidentally onto her obituary in the New York Times. Her life was so interesting that I went to the library and read all of her books -- she is now one of my heroes. This was a woman who was years ahead of her time. She makes the North Pole explorers look like cream puffs. Hers are some of the most incredible travelogues you will ever come across, and are all the more amazing considering that she was the first true female explorer. Some kind publisher should reissue a collection of her best work. A winner and worth seeking out.