



Unsuitable for Ladies: An Anthology of Women Travellers

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Diving to the bed of the Timor sea, reaching the summit of Annapurna, encountering a madman in the Amazon jungle, suffering shipwreck and kidnap on the Barbary Coast, hiking the Alps with an infant in a backpack--these are just a few of the adventures readers will explore in *Unsuitable for Ladies*, a wide ranging collection of travel pieces written by intrepid women globe-trotters. These writings reveal that there are few corners of the world that have not been visited by English women, and that there are few difficulties, physical or emotional, real or imagined, that have not been overcome by these same dauntless explorers. Here readers will find such well known authors and figures as Florence Nightingale, Mary Shelley, Frances Trollope, Gertrude Bell, Karen Blixen, Mary Kingsley, Jan Morris, Freya Stark, Rosie Swayle, and Rebecca West. These writers take us to virtually every area of the globe in every era, from Alp-climbing with Freya Stark in 1950 ("The first time in my life I climbed with a rope.... The happiness was almost frightening") to exploring Waterloo with Charlotte Eaton in 1817, just after the battle ("The ground was ploughed up...with the charge of the cavalry, and the whole field...covered with soldiers' caps, shoes...belts, and scabbards") to a trek through China in 1885 with Emily Innes ("I was suddenly awakened by a great shouting and a great light overhead. 'A Chinese festival, no doubt,' thought I; and I felt no alarm.... I was far from guessing what was the fact, namely, that my host had been murdered a few minutes before") to Mary Kingsley's description of shooting leopards in Africa ("Do not mistake this for a sporting adventure"). Riveting, often disturbing accounts of historical events appear, ranging from Florence Nightingale's thoughts on the bloody Crimean war, to eye-witness accounts of recent uprisings in Soviet Georgia and in Romania, where Dervia Murphy witnessed the execution of dictator Ceausescu, an event that left her uneasily satisfied and "shocked badly to be taken over, for the first time...by pure hatred of fellow beings." And throughout the volume are brilliant descriptions of exotic foreign landscapes, such as Karen Blixen's writings on her home in the African hill country ("Africa distilled up through six thousand feet, like the strong and refined essence of a continent"). Editor Jane Robinson skillfully weaves the excerpts together with short introductions that keep each entry distinct while connecting them by theme, time, or place, and she includes a detailed map section, providing geographic orientation for the reader.

An exhilarating journey through sixteen centuries of travel writing, aboard almost anything from a Bugatti to a Bath chair, *Unsuitable for Ladies* is a fascinating read, suitable for anyone who loves exploring new cultures and landscapes, whether first-hand or from an armchair.

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