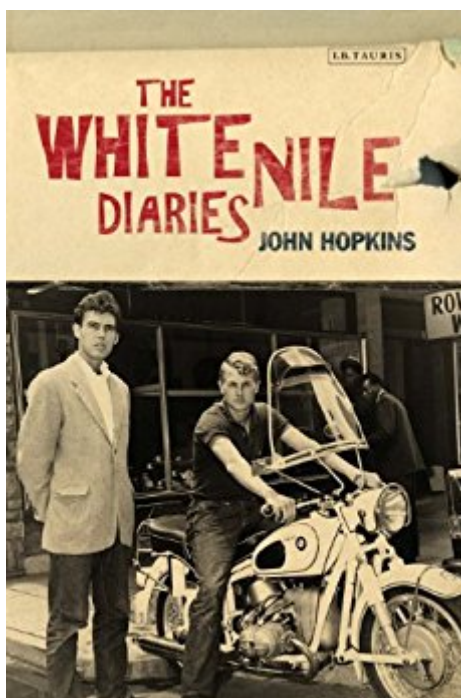


The book was found

White Nile Diaries, The



Synopsis

It all began at the Oyster Bar in Grand Central Station, in 1961: Two young Princetonians have returned to New York from South America. With the fire for adventure still burning in their veins, they are tempted by a mysterious letter from Kenya and plan a trip across Africa. They buy a white BMW motorcycle and paint the words "The White Nile" on the tank, to honor the route they will follow. In limpid, elegant prose John Hopkins describes deadly salt flats where tourists vanish without a trace, mysterious Saharan oases, and the funerals of young Tunisians killed by the French Foreign Legion. In Leptus Magna he conjures visions of ancient Rome and visits Homer's fabled island of the Lotus Eaters. They escape armed vigilantes in the Tunisian desert, and are chased by the border patrol across Libyan sands. They climb the Great Pyramid at Giza at dawn, endure "The Desert Express" across the Nubian desert, and travel by paddlewheel steamer through the Sudd, a swamp bigger than Britain. But the final adventure, at the idyllic Impala Farm at the foot of Mount Kenya, turns out to be a poisoned paradise.

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Customer Reviews

The author is an old prep school and college roommate pal, so anything he writes is jake by me. Only one thing missing: I had to contact him in Jolly Ol' to ask whatever happened to the white BMW bike. I wish it had been added to his journal. A fine tale, well told which brought back myriad memories of many gold old times.

A great adventure in a time and place now gone. Also, it brought back my own travels on my BMW R-69 back in the 1960s. A really good read!

This is an intimate and personal book that, I imagine, will affect each reader differently depending on who that reader is and where he is in his life experience. I was immediately taken by the author and his tale, but I actually remember Princeton in the 60's, and Ivy Club, and all of the circumstances and events that open this story. As a consequence I responded to the author's story almost as though the book were just a long letter addressed to me by a classmate and contemporary. It is a sobering thought that just as I was captivated by the "Great Gatsby", despite the fact that I had not lived in its times, there are many, most, people now for whom pre-1970's Ivy League life is just as distant and unexperienced an historical period. For such readers, curious about what people and life were like before the great cultural shifts of the 70's, this is a wonderful book. How interesting to experience, even vicariously, the casual entitlements and freedom of wealth and privilege. The assumption that one might do as one wished without constraint. The indulgent support of doting parents. All of this is treated as a matter of normal course. It gives the book a fantastical and almost fairy tale sort of introduction. And that's fine, because everything about this adventure, even the periods of hardship and privation, is fantastical and out of the ordinary. It's glamorous and almost mythic. It was only the 60's, and yet so long ago we might as well be with Teddy Roosevelt on the . I read something once to the effect that modern travel consists of going to places and confirming that they look more or less just like you thought they would. I recently called up a Google map of Timbuktu and put the little street level man in it and walked around the city. This book is the antidote to that type of exploration. It is idiosyncratic; it is elegant; it is meant to be matter-of-fact but it is really almost impossibly elegant. This book is not only a travel book, it is a time travel book, and sometimes feels like an alternate world fiction. Like some of the best works by authors like Eric Newby and young Paul Theroux, like the fantastic descriptive work of authors like Jan Morris, this will take you somewhere that once was but is no more, (and, it is to be hoped, without the dysentery). Just a marvelous book and a brilliant decision to bring it into print. So, take

the time to visit the Tunisian desert, Leptis Magna, and the Nubian desert. Travel to other worlds with this engaging and clear-eyed companion. Please note that I received a free advance copy of this book in exchange for a candid review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.

This is a travelogue by John Hopkins, who in the early 60s, after spending time in Peru, looks for a new adventure instead of going home to a typical East Coast preppy lifestyle, as his parents want. The wanderlust is so huge in him he goes despite the love of what seems to be his dream woman. Given an opportunity, or at least encouragement, to visit Kenya, he and his buddy buy a motorcycle in Germany and cross the Sahara before making a right turn at the Nile. At first I was a bit disappointed that they weren't actually following the Nile to its origin, as the title might imply; instead it's the name they give their motorcycle. But like with Robert Heinlein's Tramp Royale and the recently read and reviewed Harry Harrison autobiography, I'm fascinated by descriptions of places I've traveled to, reveling in the differences 50 years have made. Of course this also made for some obnoxious moments when I suddenly yelled "Been there!" like with Djerba and Leptis Magna, but that's neither here nor there. My favorite part of his writing is description, from the mournful call to Islamic prayer to the blonde blue-eyed denizens of the Sahara. He and his buddy also seem to have a lot more fun at border crossings than is really recommended. More importantly, he doesn't give short shift to the bad moments, especially the boredom. My favorite line: "My only revenge is this diary, where I record how awful it all is." On the other hand, if there's one thing to love about this author/adventurer, it's his optimism: "Whatever I leave on a page, unless a mystery breeze whisks my notebook overboard, a snack for the crocs, these words will be with me forever. That was what the Pharaohs aimed at. Forever. That was what they got, but it took a pyramid to do it. I can achieve it on a single page. Forever." One more quote, which reminds me of why I only travel to places I like now: "We showered and washed our clothes by treading on them in the shower." So, in sum, a pleasant enough yarn with plenty of funny moments among the introspection.

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