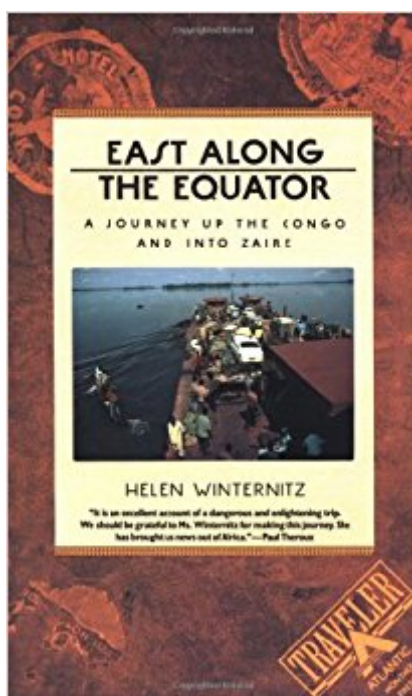


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# East Along The Equator: A Journey Up The Congo And Into Zaire (Traveler / Atlantic Monthly Press)



## Synopsis

In this brilliant mix of political journalism and travel writing, Helen Winternitz and fellow journalist Timothy Phelps witness what few Westerners have: life in the ecologically rich but financially impoverished American-backed dictatorship of Zaire, the former Belgian Congo.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the first of the publisher's travel series, this vivid account details a trip the author and her boyfriend both journalists took four years ago on the Congo (and eventually overland to the border of Uganda). Their route by river from the capital of Kinshasa to Kisangani followed the path of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and shows that, in a sense, little has changed—the earlier colonial brutality has been replaced by the corruption and exploitation of President Mobutu. Winternitz proved to be happily gregarious, mixing with Zaireans, learning the local language, passing on wonderful impressions and quotations to the reader as when she describes the universal excitement when a hippopotamus is caught and butchered. She also illustrates the shattered state of Zaire's economy (for example, the radio station in Kisangani, one of Zaire's largest cities, no longer broadcasts because scavengers kept stealing valuable wire and cables available only on the black market if at all until the transmitting tower collapsed). The journey ends on an appropriately bitter note: Winternitz and her boyfriend are arrested by Zairean secret police and grilled on and off for more than a week thus experiencing firsthand Mobutu's machinery of repression. Despite a tendency to overstate an already convincing case and sometimes sloppy language, Winternitz

offers an eye-opening tour of Zaire. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

After a 15-year absence from Africa, the author and her companion gamely embark upon a 2000 mile, two-month trek by boat, bus, and truck into the heart of Zaire, the former Belgian Congo. The result is this appealing, wide-ranging blend of travel writing and political journalism. Everyday adventures and life are described and used as springboards to a broader exposition on the colonial past and desperate present of Zaire. In the background always is the corrupt and corrupting President Mobutu, whose security police finally expel Winternitz. Entertaining and informative for both the adult reader and student of Africa. Jerry Maioli, Western Lib. Network, Olympia, Wash. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book is a rarity. I have read histories of Africa and I've read travelogues set in Africa and on other continents. But never have I read such a readable and illuminating mix of the two. If you're interested in Africa, read this book. If you like fine writing, get this book.

"East Along the Equator: A Journey Up the Congo and into Zaire" is an excellent account of a journey across Central Africa (in what was then Zaire) in the early 1980s. Winternitz and her companion traveled by river barge along the entire navigable portion of the Congo river, from Kinshasa to Kisangani. The Congo river barges are legendary among 'extreme' travelers. The end of Belgian colonization of the Congo meant the end of roads, making the river the only practical way to travel between Kinshasa and Kisangani. These river barges are (were?) floating villages, complete with markets and nightclubs populated by traders who make their livelihood onboard, as well as travelers going from place to place. From Kisangani the journey continues overland, to an eventual return to Kinshasa by air. In Kinshasa the pair are arrested and interrogated by the secret police after interviewing a politician opposed to president Moubutu. Winternitz gives an even-handed and interesting account of the journey, along with relevant history and background information. The book contains a good bibliography. This book was journalism when it was first published, and it is still worth reading today, as a document of the Congo under Moubutu.

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The author's America-hating politics grate on the reader throughout and make her stories unbelievable. She does everything in her power to blame the United States for Africa's woes. Guess what, sweetie: Africa has been corrupt for a few years now and will continue to be so. Stop blaming America.

This book was truly fascinating. I read it shortly after reading *The Poisonwood Bible*, which had sparked my curiosity about central Africa. The author and her boyfriend set out on a trip across Zaire with no real idea of how they would get to their destination, and ended up dealing with situations that were so far beyond my frame of reference that I could scarcely imagine them. The author generally writes well and conveys a good sense of the tribulations and frustrations - as well as some moments of optimism - they encountered along the way as they got an unusually close-up view of the people and culture of the country. My only quibble with the book has to do with the inordinate number of typos.

Zaire isn't easy to get through, but the author certainly gave it her all making the trek. As a travel piece, I'd give it five stars. However, I'm deducting a couple of points for the politics. I disagree strongly with the author's conclusions/assessments. She and her partner shouldn't have been so surprised by their "arrest" just before leaving; while others were left to rot in jail, tortured, etc. they were able to feast at the ambassador's residence under a sort of "house arrest" until Mobutu finally got sick of toying with them and gave their passports back.

I'm delighted to see this book available as I thought it was long out of print. This is among the most astounding adventure travels that I have ever read. Although it's been years since I read it, many of

her experiences remain vivid in my memory.

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