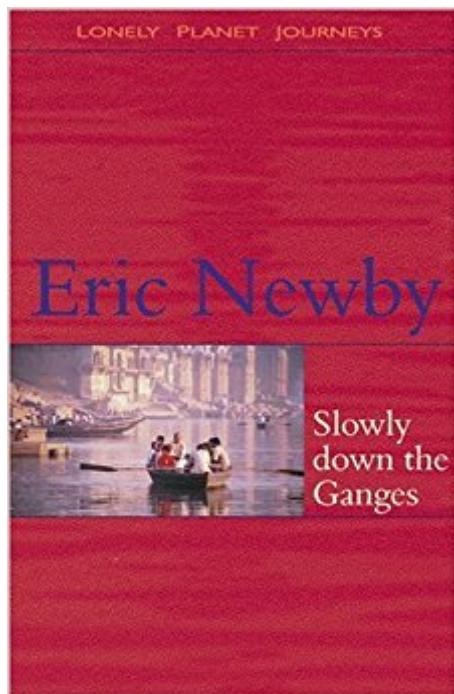


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Slowly Down The Ganges



Synopsis

On his forty-fourth birthday Eric Newby, a self-confessed river lover, sets out on a 1200-mile journey down the Ganges River from Hardwar to the Bay of Bengal, accompanied by his wife Wanda. Things do not start smoothly as they run aground 63 times in the first six days, but gradually India's holiest river, The Pure, The Eternal, The Creator of Happiness, lives up to its many names and captures them in its spell. Traveling in a variety of boats, most of them unsuitable, as well as by bus and bullock cart, the Newbys become intimately acquainted with the river's shifting moods and colorful history. Slowly Down the Ganges brims over with engaging characters and entertaining anecdotes, recounted in Newby's inimitable style. Best of all, he brilliantly captures the sights and sounds, the frustrations and rewards, the sheer enchantment of travel in India.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Eric Newby has never been bedeviled by practicality. Hence this 1,200-mile journey down the Ganges River, which the author undertook in 1963 in the company of his wife and an ever-changing crew of Indian retainers. What moved him to take the trip? Partly it was the memory of his military service in India more than two decades before. And as he confesses, Newby has a lifelong and perhaps congenital love of rivers: "I like exploring them. I like the way in which they grow deeper and wider and dirtier but always, however dirty they become, managing to retain some of the beauty with which they were born." Few rivers grow quite as dirty as the Ganges, which also goes by such nicknames as Atula ("Peerless"), Savitri ("Stimulator"), and Bhinna-brahmanda-darpini ("Taking

pride in the broken egg of Brahma"). And few accounts of this mighty waterway could possibly be as acute and hilarious as Slowly down the Ganges, which Newby first published in 1966. As always, the author finds human comedy everywhere he looks. Take his initial departure from beneath the Balawali Bridge, where a highly emotional crowd has gathered to see him off: Two hundred yards below the bridge and some twelve hundred miles from the Bay of Bengal the boat grounded in sixteen inches of water.... I looked upstream to the bridge but all those who had been waving and weeping had studiously turned their backs. The boatmen uttered despairing cries for assistance but the men at the bridge bent to their tasks with unwonted diligence. As far as they were concerned we had passed out of their lives. We might never have existed. And so it goes, even as Newby and his crew run aground 63 times in the first six days, or switch doggedly from boat to train to bullock cart and back to boat again. His patience in the face of continuous disaster is superbly entertaining, as are his attempts to mollify his increasingly impatient wife, Wanda. Still, his gift for the farcical slow burn never keeps him from relishing the terrain, or from recording it in lyrical yet laconic prose: "At about six the sky to the east became faintly red; then it began to flame and the moon was extinguished; clouds of unidentifiable birds flew high overhead; a jackal skulked along the far shore and, knowing itself watched, went up the bank and into the trees; mist rose from the wet grass on the islands on which the shisham trees stood, wrapped like precious objects in their bandages of dead grass." Slowly down the Ganges is packed with such time-lapse portraiture, along with plenty of casual wisdom about history, humanity, and (last but not least) conjugal life. It's one of those rare voyages we only wish were much, much slower. --James Marcus

...for the adventurous traveler who wants to live like a native.' --Real Simple Magazine, June 2005

This is yet another great travel narrative from an excellent writer, and, once again, Eric is accompanied by the indomitable (even by India and its casual and common berr-berri) Wanda, his wife and fellow adventurer. It turned out to be a very slow journey indeed, fraught with those difficulties that only India can create - but that just gives us, the readers, even more details, stories and evocative descriptions to enjoy - in fact you can find yourself wishing it slower. The idea was considered easy and enjoyable by the then Prime Minister, Gandhi - who armed Eric with a letter of commendation that did not much help - as it was the Ganges itself, that was the problem, a river without much water for the first 100 miles. They ran aground 63 times in the first six days and, frustrated, turned to train to bullock cart, bus, hiking, portage and back to boat again. Eric's 'motive' for returning yet again to India is his simple like for the country and its people from his time as a

"very junior" officer in the British Army - he never was an elite, plundering member of the Raj. One lyrical chapter covers their visit to Eric's old Army Post, now an Indian Army centre with the original mess hung with the records of two Sepoy who won the VC (Victoria Cross for Extreme Bravery) and a letter, rightly framed and accorded a honored placing, from another who, despite being a Prisoner of War in Germany writes back to his Battalion and requests that seven Rupees a month be stopped from his accumulating pay and donated to the International Red Cross. Far from reflecting condescending attitudes or trashing the endlessly varied and fantastic cults of Indian religions and their sometimes bizarre rituals, Eric finds time to see, hear, record, and appreciate it all, and finds everything fascinating. Thankfully, when he does start to get a little too detailed about these extraordinary Kings that are a mile high and fight battles lasting a thousand years, we can rely on Wanda to add some pithy comment. Rather than reflecting the perhaps expected 1980 Euro-Christian viewpoint, Eric contrasts one modern Indian mall, with its up-market restaurants, US Baptists Church and vendors of Christmas Cards and Scotch with the narrow lanes of the old 'native city' where "here the atmosphere was friendly and there was an air of excitement and animation lacking in the European part". How this talented pair of travelers manage to counter the frustrations and infuriations of India that I experienced I can only wonder at, admire and applaud and I look forward to reading more accounts of their ever-readable journeys together.

A journal, in often repetitive detail, of the difficulties of boating down the Ganges from its source to its mouth. Instructive about Indian character(s) in the 1960's, but not as funny as the cover blurb promises.

Bought it after I read Larry McMurtry reads it every few years. Slowly is in therefor a reason. But well written and an interesting author to say the least. Study up on the author before diving into the book. No hurry.

very funny

Seldom has a traveler kept a tighter, neater, closer log of every sight, scent and sound along a journey. He includes the rejoicing, the disgusting, the revealing; he is perceptive, descriptive and reiterative; he is fanciful and fondling and famished and fascinating. He is a detour, and perhaps a distant cousin, of the Slumdog. This text is a crash course in travel writing, covers a people and their landscape and even his personal dissents with his wife. He is funny, flamboyant, absolutely

obsessive and thoroughly enjoyable.

You feel this historic ride as if you were there via Mr. Newby by your side.

Newby at his best. Great stuff ! A man who loved adventure.

Slowly Down the Ganges details a trip that author Eric Newby and his wife Wanda took in India where they tried to traverse a large chunk of the Ganges. The writing style is very understated and of an older school of English gentleman explorer style of language. If you have read any of his other books you'll know exactly what I mean. That's not to say it is dreary, in fact it can be quite amusing, it's just that it is the sort of language where you have to be attuned to the nuances and the dry wit to enjoy it to the most. As time rolls by I can see the audience capable of doing this diminishing. As it stands this book - like so many of his others - is written in a concise yet descriptive manner as Newby has the ability to get across his meaning and his viewpoints in very much an evocative thumbnail style. Much of the books slow burn humour comes from this style of presenting things how they are with no real varnish on them, but with much of the meaning inferred as well. It definitely rewards the slower reader rather than the 'skimmer' of books. The Picador paperback copy I scored had a set of black and white photographs in the centre section which were a nice touch and brought home the period of this trip. This is not the emerging power of India, this is very much still a somewhat disorganised and hesitant India barely a generation into independence. Many of the foibles described in the book will be familiar to travel readers and it is somewhat interesting to read a book that talks about them in their time and place, rather than as a clichÃ©d crutch to simplify the job of the author. One thing I'd like to point out to anyone new to Eric Newby and that is much of his works can talk about the travel experience far more than the actual things seen on the trip. By that I mean he talks about the means of travel and the people met and the trials and tribulations of the travelling adventure rather than spend three pages describing every temple or mosque. If you have read A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush then this is written in a very similar vein. Though the fact that this was a trip done with his wife brings a new dimension to it. I'd recommend Eric Newby as an author to people interested in travel literature and this and in particular this book if India is of interest to you.

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