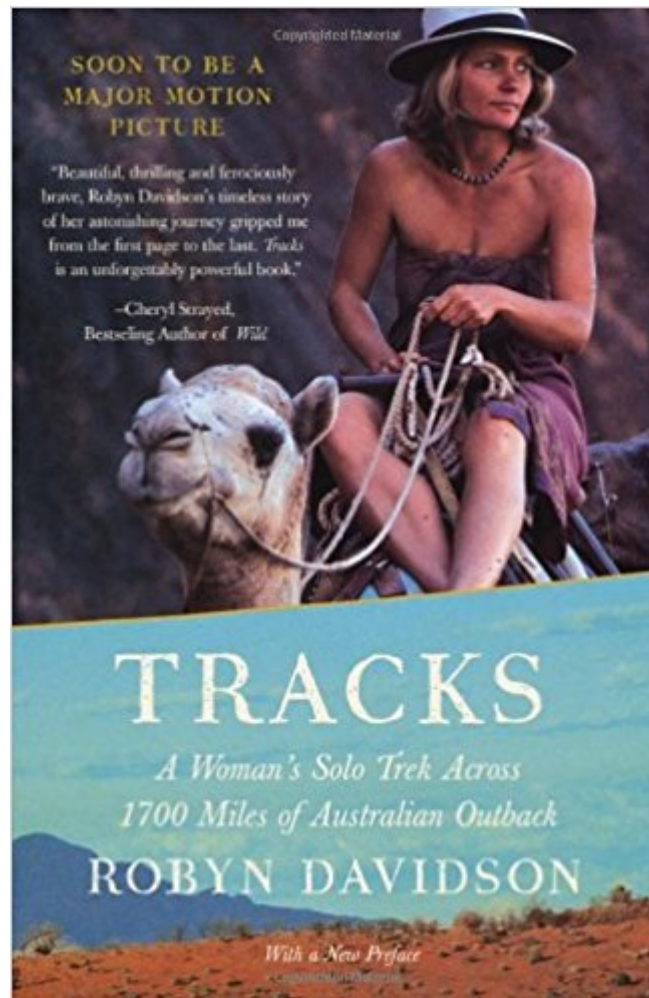




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Tracks: A Woman's Solo Trek Across 1700 Miles Of Australian Outback



Synopsis

NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE Robyn Davidson's opens the memoir of her perilous journey across 1,700 miles of hostile Australian desert to the sea with only four camels and a dog for company with the following words: "I experienced that sinking feeling you get when you know you have conned yourself into doing something difficult and there's no going back." Enduring sweltering heat, fending off poisonous snakes and lecherous men, chasing her camels when they get skittish and nursing them when they are injured, Davidson emerges as an extraordinarily courageous heroine driven by a love of Australia's landscape, an empathy for its indigenous people, and a willingness to cast away the trappings of her former identity. *Tracks* is the compelling, candid story of her odyssey of discovery and transformation. An unforgettably powerful book. —Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild* Now with a new postscript by Robyn Davidson.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Subtitled, "A Woman's Solo Trek Across 1,700 Miles of Australian Outback," this 1980 book by Robyn Davidson, then 30 years old, is now considered a classic. She did it alone, with four camels, a loyal dog, and all the self-doubt and introspection that make her very human. Ms. Davidson grew up in Adelaide, a city in Southern Australia, but she traveled to the Central Australian town of Alice Springs, arriving with just \$6 in her pocket and a desire to learn about camels. She worked in a bar and apprenticed herself to a camel owner, performing menial jobs and learning all she could. It took two years and half the book, but finally she was ready to pursue her dream. She never was able to accumulate the funds needed to outfit her camels and so she applied for and received a grant from

National Geographic. Throughout the book she questions that decision because this meant she had to meet with a photographer on several parts of her journey as well as an onslaught of unwanted publicity. In her mind, the trip became less the pure expedition she had envisioned and there is much soul searching about this. This is not the only thing she constantly reflects about though. Throughout her 7-month trip, she questions everything, even at times, her own sanity. I learned not only about the harsh Australian Outback, the pleasures and problems of living with camels, and the plight of the Aboriginal people she met along the way. I also shared every nuance of her fears and inner journey, which was as complex and richly landscaped as the harsh and beautiful land around her and found myself laughing out loud at times at her offbeat sense of humor. And I watched her change from self-conscious timidity to a woman who gives up so many trappings of civilization that towards the end of the book she walks naked next to her camels, her skin browned and thickened to a leather-like consistency, heavy calluses on sandaled feet from walking 20 or 30 miles a day, and so far from the former civilized accouterments, that she doesn't care that menstrual blood is dripping down her legs. There's little background information that explains why Ms. Davison undertook her journey and I never really understood her reasons for doing it. That didn't matter though. What did matter, however, is that she is a living example of someone who made choices to follow her own personal dream. And for that, she is an inspiration. Upon finishing the book I was left with the thought that if she could do this, anything is possible and I applaud this her for reminding me of this. Recommended.

It's a cliché to call books "inspiring," but this one really is -- not because Robyn Davidson is heroic, but because (as she points out repeatedly) she's an ordinary woman from a rather sheltered background, but with extraordinary determination, persistence, and resourcefulness. To her, the meaning of her journey is that anyone can achieve whatever they want to. But, she tellingly points out, many of the reporters who dogged her steps portrayed her as crazy because that blunted her message -- which, if women took it seriously, would rock the foundations of society. She's completely frank about her feelings, her doubts about her journey, and the excuses she makes to herself when she's tempted to quit; but, to me, this made her accomplishment even greater because she was fighting herself as well as external obstacles. The internal journey she underwent was as important as the external one, and those readers who complain that there's too much of the former and not enough of the latter are, I think, completely missing the point of the book.

This book is a true story by a determined Australian woman who crossed one of the most

inhospitable stretches of land in the world - a wide swathe of treeless dry scrubland which is most of Australia's center and its northern half. I especially enjoyed this Australian classic, having just visited the remarkable and idiosyncratic town of Alice Springs where the early part of the book is set. This is where the author learns how to tame, care for, live with, and depend on camels for survival, as she prepares for the dramatic trek which lies ahead. The rage against the male photographer who keeps showing up - the compromising aspect of her compact with her sponsors at National Geographic - is at times shocking, leaving one to wonder whether the author has more sympathy for her camels than fellow human beings. But this impression is deceptive. The mostly male characters who populate her book hardly seem caricatured, while the camels do emerge as a woman's best friend in the outback. "One does not have to delve too deeply to discover why some of the world's angriest feminists breathed crisp blue Australian air during their formative years, before packing their kangaroo-skin bags and scurrying to London or New York or any place where the antipodean machismo would fade gently from their battle-scarred consciousness like some grisly nightmare at dawn. Anyone who has worked in a men-only bar in Alice Springs will know what I mean." The rage, courage, vulnerability, determination, and other emotions and qualities which this trek depicts, almost seem like a metaphor for the complex place of the outback in the Australian experience. "It was delicious new country but it was tiring. The sand dragged at my feet and the repetition of the dunes lulled me into drowsiness when the first excitement wore off. The stillness of the waves of sand seemed to stifle and suffocate me." Even without seeing the photos from National Geographic, the reader is left with graphic images of a remarkable landscape and the unusual qualities it takes for a transplanted urbanite to survive it. Beyond character and landscape descriptions, the book offers some inspirational passages. Consider this extract from the final paragraph: "As I look back on the trip now, try to remember how I felt at that particular time, or during that particular incident, try to relive those memories that have been buried so deep, and distorted so ruthlessly, there is one clear fact that emerges from the quagmire. The trip was easy. It was no more dangerous than crossing the street, or driving to the beach, or eating peanuts. The two important things that I did learn were that you are as powerful and strong as you allow yourself to be, and that the most difficult part of any endeavor is taking the first step, making the first decision...." Another bookshelf recommendation for those who are serious about Australian or about unusual human endeavors.

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