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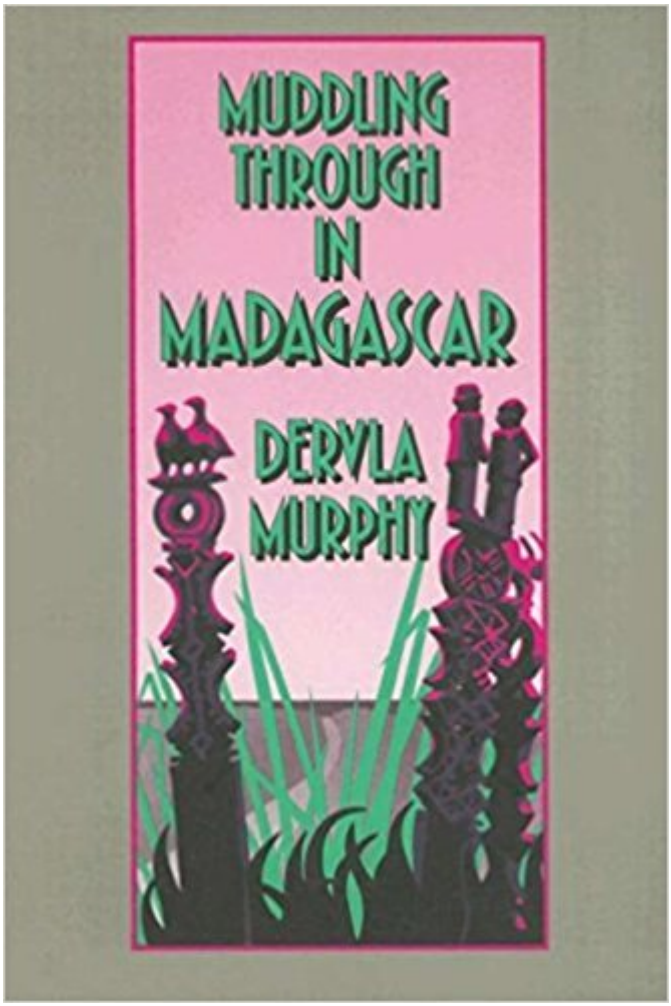

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Synopsis

A hilarious and perceptive travel journal. â œEverything about Madagascar is surprising,â • as Dervla Murphy and her 14-year-old daughter, Rachel, found to their delight. Despite accidents, misadventures, contrasts and the political instability of the Great Red Island, they returned with a lasting respect for the kindness of its proud people.

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Customer Reviews

Readers who have followed Murphy’s adventures (Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle ; In Ethiopia with a Mule) know she is a dauntless traveler, unfazed by the unexpected and physically able to face rigorous conditions. But the Republic of Malagasy (Madagascar) was a challenge. Murphy and her 14-year-old daughter Rachel made their way across and around the southern two-thirds of this fabled island, finding spectacular scenery and severe erosion; there was no reliable modern communication system or transport network, and sanitary conditions were best left unmentioned. Murphy interweaves the story of their adventures with an account of the island’s history and its peoples. Nominally Christian, they retain an unusual form of ancestor worship and some animalism with complex taboos (fady). The author found them gentle and courteous, untouched by tourism and without a work ethicnearly everything on the island appeared to be crumbling, from infrastructure to education, under Malagasy management. This is a lively tale of adventure in an exotic environment. Photos. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

’A travel writer of rare heart and freshness’ Observer ’Dervla Murphy belongs firmly to that fine

tradition of eccentric women travellers ... endearingly self-deprecating' Spectator --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The first book that I read by the very peripatetic Dervla Murphy wasÂ In Ethiopia with a Mule. It is an account of her 1000-mile trip across the highlands of Ethiopia, in 1967, solo, save for the mule which carried her belonging. For many of us, that would have been THE impressive idiosyncratic achievement of a lifetime. Not so for Ms. Murphy, who sees an obscure place on the globe, and has to go there, and savor it, usually via unconventional means. I gave the Ethiopia book only a 4-star review, since I was annoyed that throughout the long journey she was incapable of loading her own mule, and always had to rely on the "kindness of strangers." That flaw in her travel mode was not present in this book... in fact, she seemed to "double down" in terms of challenges... at the age of 51, in 1983, instead of being accompanied by a mule, it was her (beloved) 14 year old daughter! Ah, that all teenagers might have such an experience.Just the first chapter, an excellent history of the island, is worth the purchase price. It was the largest fertile area of the world that was uninhabited until the arrival of Malayo-Polynesian groups around 900 AD. Various African groups came thereafter. Then the Portuguese showed up in 1500, and then the English and the French showed tepid interest for a few centuries. Only well into the 19th century did the London Missionary Society get serious in sending missionaries, who are often the advance wave of colonists, as all too many colonized have learned. In 1896 Madagascar officially became a French colony, which was its status until independence in 1960. The human settlement and interactions there have been historically unique, but what truly sets the island off, in terms of uniqueness, is its flora and fauna, with numerous species found only there, and nowhere else in the world.Murphy wrangled a visa, and an all-important "permission letter" of the "to whom it may concern" variety from the embassy in Paris. She and her daughter flew there the cheap way - via Aeroflot and Moscow, arriving in the capital, Antananarivo, mercifully called "Tana." The newly independent government's push for autarky means that few things work well; and many things don't work at all. Imports are virtually non-existent. And in particular, for a traveler, the roads are abysmal; in some cases they are passable only on foot. And for sure, the buses don't run on that very alien concept: "time." Rather, they run when they are full... and don't break down.In what seemed to be a couple of months, they covered a large part of the southern two-thirds of the island. The central highlands are the most populous, and the town of Antsirabe (the "Vichy," that is, the spas and mineral springs, of Madagascar) seems to be the most viable and enjoyable. They went to the western coastal town of Tulear, but stopped to see the lemurs on the way, in the Parc National d'Isalo. Due to the lack of

accommodation, they camped there. They checked the guest book, and there was only one page of names spanning a decade. (I checked on the internet, and there is now a very nice looking lodge there.) One of the "gutsy" (or crazy?) things they did was camp in the wild on several occasions. From Tulear they had another epic journey by vehicle, spanning days, across the southern part of the island, to Fort Dauphin. And then it was back to Tana, and beyond to the coast, with broken vehicles along the way, and a fairly vigorous hike at the end.Murphy is a keen observer of all, and has strong descriptive powers. She also carries a fair load of erudition, and weaves it into her account. The people, though poor, and in a daily struggle for so much that the "civilized" west takes for granted, seem to be happier, and certainly kinder to the stranger that she and her daughter are. Yet, and Murphy specifically makes this point, the island is no Rousseau fantasy. There is evil and unhappiness there also.She has been criticized for being too "new age." I didn't see that in particular, but I did feel she was a bit reckless in the treatment of her own health, particularly after being cut with a knife. In terms of her observations, I've marked many a passage, one of the best being: "The distortion of human relationships, rather than the building of Holiday Inns or the sprouting of souvenir stalls, is the single most damaging consequence of Third World tourism." Murphy also quoted extensively from Dr. Alison Jolly's naturalist workÂ A World Like Our Own: Man and Nature in Madagascar, which is a book I've owned for 30 years, and have yet to read. Murphy's push will finally remedy that deficiency. Overall, 5-stars.

Having traveled through Madagascar recently, I found Murphy's book spot-on. Her own journey, undertaken some thirty years ago, still accurately captures the spirit of the Big Red Island. Yes -- much has changed, yet in many respects, the country away from its few paved roads remains unchangeable. The south retains its spirit of timeless isolation. Rice cultivation dominates the central highlands. The west and east contrast with each other in every conceivable respect. Those acute shortages described by Murphy in such detail seem to be a matter of the past; a traveler in today's Madagascar is not at risk of starving, and hunger like that in neighboring Africa hasn't afflicted the country to a similar extent, but for ordinary Malagasy, life continues to be a struggle. Education, medical care, security -- none of these have changed so markedly over the last three decades as to make Murphy's novel a tale of the bygone past.Few travel writers have such an innate ability to go beyond the obvious -- after all, there are many books on Madagascar, and even more in French, but I found few (if any) that capture the essence of the country as well as Murphy. Madagascar is sometimes baffling and often inexplicable. Much of its richness lies underneath its surface: tradition remains a powerful force not just in far-flung villages. The Malagasy temperament,

the joye de vivre of its people, the good natured rambunctiousness of their children even after being stuffed into a bursting taxi brousse for 24-hours, the graciousness of strangers -- none of it is easy to describe, yet Murphy does so unerringly."Muddling Through Madagascar" isn't just a story of a long-ago trip through an exotic country; the human element that Murphy evokes, puts the books in the same league as the writings of Paul Theroux or Bruce Chatwin or Peter Matthiessen. It's an inspired, timeless piece of travel non-fiction. As interesting as it is for anybody lucky-enough to have spent time in Madagascar, it is also a remarkable book for the armchair traveler, vividly bringing the world that's Out There into the living room. The experience of traveling, going "there" from "here," all its trials and tribulations, as well as the more obvious rewards, makes for genuinely inspired reading. Today's trend calls for travel writing that's virtually indistinguishable from travel-brochure copy: fluff having replaced substance. Murphy's book takes us back to a time when this wasn't at all the case: her experience is genuine, as is her book, which is precisely what makes it so enjoyable to read.

Excellent book, and this month's choice for our book club. We meet in the local library one day a week, and over half of the group is composed of retired teachers so we are all very well read, but the Malagasy language does give us some problems. We have found it almost impossible to even begin to pronounce most of the native words which Ms. Murphy has to use to describe her experiences. Nevertheless, other than creating breaks and causing a lot of laughter, that doesn't detract from the excellence of her (and her daughter's) adventure. On a more personal note, when I first read the book several years ago it pushed me toward reading the adventures of Sir Richard Burton, and then I spent over a year reading everything I could find related to the search for the source of the Nile. I love it when reading a single great book becomes the start of an extended adventure.

Book is a little dated, but overall very interesting in telling about Madagascar.

This book was recommended by a world travelers book. Because it was available on kindle, I purchased it. So glad I did! While I expect Madagascar to have changed a bit since the writing, I'm familiar enough with African culture to know it won't have changed too much. I am prepared and looking forward to my own Madagascar exploration!

I enjoyed this book because after visiting Madagascar and returning 5 times it is the most accurate

book about what it is really like to be a guest in this beautiful country. I appreaciated the authors respect for the Malagasy people that I have come to love and admire. This is a great treatise in cross-cultural adaptation, wandering through a culture in which you have no clue what the rules and values are about.

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