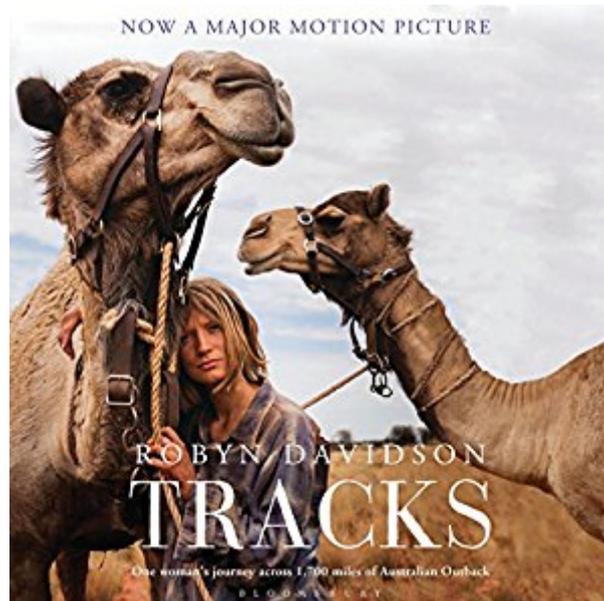


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# Tracks: One Woman's Journey Across 1,700 Miles Of Australian Outback



## Synopsis

"I experienced that sinking feeling you get when you know you have conned yourself into doing something difficult and there's no going back." So begins Robyn Davidson's perilous journey across 1,700 miles of hostile Australian desert to the sea, with only four camels and a dog for company. 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.

## 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.

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.

Who really knows why Robyn Davidson--a woman who describes herself in "Tracks" as a disaffected refugee of the superficiality of Sydney's and Melbourne's urban culture of the late 1970s--sold her belongings and trekked to Alice Springs, a tiny town nearly in the center of the Australian continent? Sure, plenty of us have trekked to Nowheresville in our youths, but from the first page of "Tracks," readers will immediately recognize that Davidson is not only leaving

something, like Hemingway, she is searching for something as well. In light of a renewed interest in Aboriginal rights--and in the rights of Native Peoples everywhere on the planet--Davidson's seminal account of a grueling (and also rewarding) journey across one of the world's most forbidding wildernesses should prove to mainstream thinkers and commentators that Davidson had it right all along. Like Beryl Markham's "West With the Night," another account of a pioneering woman taking on what at the time was reserved for the so-called men of the world, Davidson's "Tracks" is not only filled with useful information (did you know "whoosh!", a word almost everyone in the English-speaking world, is actually an Afghani word that means "sit!"), it is also one of the most readable adventure and travel books written in many years.

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