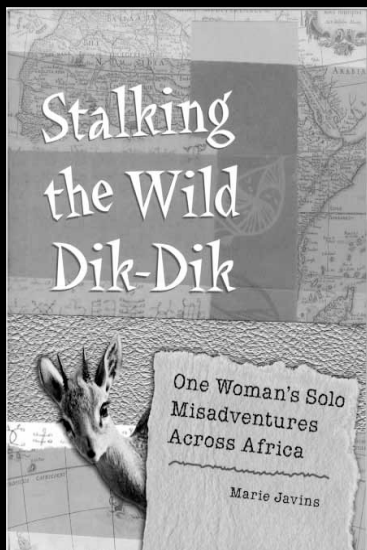


Book Review

Stalking the Wild Dik-Dik:

One Woman's Solo Misadventures Across Africa

by Marie Javins



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Reviewed by
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From Cape Town to Cairo, *Stalking the Wild Dik-Dik: One Woman's Solo Misadventures Across Africa* is a light-hearted account of this continental portion of Marie Javins' overland trek around the world. In 2001 Javins left her job as a cartoon illustrator and editor at Marvel Comics far behind to follow her true passion – adventure travel. She sets out to circumnavigate the world using her past travel experiences, her wit, and a strict, “almost-no-frills” budget. Couple this with the fact that Javins imposes a moratorium on air travel for the journey and it makes for quite a unique, and at times nerve-wracking, trek. Ultimately two flights are necessary to complete the trip across Africa, but only as the result of unforeseen and virtually unavoidable circumstances.

Arriving in Cape Town via container ship, Javins' introduction to Africa was less than exciting: “It felt more as if I were entering a pawn shop at home in New York than as if I were crossing the threshold of a new, exciting continent.” But not to worry, the dynamic personality of Africa would soon be revealed to her as she makes her way through the bustling city of Cape Town to Table Mountain. After three days in the port city, the trek north begins with the neighboring country of Namibia as the first checkpoint. Along with the hope of seeing elephants, rhinos, zebras, giraffes, lions, gorillas, and meeting the locals along the way, Javins boards the first of many buses (not to mention cars, trucks, and trains) for the long journey to her final African destination – Cairo.

Along the way not only does Javins see an abundance of wildlife, she has several “up close and personal” encounters. There is the time that she is accosted by an angry elephant while horseback riding in Zambezi National Park. It seems she ventured a bit too close for comfort to the pachyderm and a spirited chase quickly ensued. Or the time Javins was awakened by the sound just outside her tent of what she was certain must be the largest and most ferocious lion in all of Nyahururu: “The lion will smell me, a Marie-sized snack waiting to be eaten, like a dog wrapped in a tent instead of a bun!” Upon inspecting the tracks left by the visitor, she quickly realizes she was terrorized not by a lion but by a dik-dik – a tiny African antelope. And then there were the mountain gorillas in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, who – seemingly unaware of the humans below – performed a flatulent cantata before descending, one by one, into the undergrowth and slowly disappearing into the dense rainforest.

As the journey continues, Javins' experience with local culture continues to reveal the many dynamic and fascinating layers of personality that are the true heart of Africa. From the Maasai in Tanzania to the poverty-stricken beggars in Ethiopia, she realizes that Africa has become more than just a place on her “to do” list: “I hadn't expected to love Africa, and it caught me by surprise.”

I suspect that I may have come to much the same conclusion had I actually been there. However, as I read her account it felt as though I was somehow right alongside Javins as she witnessed a spectacular sunset along the shore in Namibia, struggled to make nearly impossible bus connections, endured a 53-hour/1,150 mile train ride on the TAZARA train to Dar Es Salaam, trekked through the dense jungles of Uganda, canoed nervously past hippos in Zimbabwe, crossed the Kenyan desert at a snail's pace, frantically hitched a ride in an overloaded cargo truck from Woldia to Lalibela, walked the streets of post-September 11 Sudan with a smile instead of paranoia, and took a 20-hour ferry ride and slept under the stars on the Nile for the final leg of her African adventure.

For those wanting to experience Africa but unable to make the actual journey, I would recommend an afternoon of reading Javins' account – it's the next best thing to being there. 🌐

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