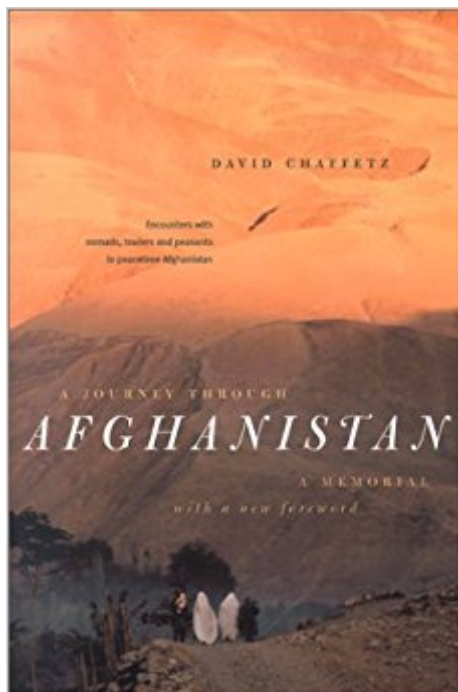


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A Journey Through Afghanistan



Synopsis

Shortly before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, David Chaffetz slipped from the protection of Western culture and immersed himself in the customs, fears, and hopes of the Afghan people, setting out by car and on horseback for a long journey through the northwestern quarter of the country. *A Journey through Afghanistan* is the story, told in vivid, descriptive prose, of his experienceâan account that reveals more about the Afghan people themselves than most books written either before or since.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Shortly before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, David Chaffetz and a fellow American student slipped from the protection of Western culture and immersed themselves in the customs, fears, and hopes of the Afghan people, setting out on horseback through the mountains and into a lonely, hermetic world of nomads and isolated villages. Chaffetz's vivid, honest, and often poignant account of their experience reveals a great deal about the people of Afghanistan-and Willard Wood, his traveling companion, contributes a foreword considering the experience of the Afghan people in the new light of autumn, 2001.

David Chaffetz, educated at Harvard University, has written for scholarly journals and lectured extensively on the Middle East. Willard Wood is the English translator of several French texts, including Andre Raymond's *Cairo* and Jean-Christophe Ruffin's *The Abyssinian*.

Chaffetz does an admirable job of describing northwest Afghanistan as it was circa 1975 and the effect that the country and its people had upon him. As one who had passed through the country in the late sixties, there was much I could recognize in both the stimulus and the author's response. Particularly gratifying to me was the "update" aspect - the provision of information from that particular time period, of which I had previously read and heard only the barest political and economic facts. Chaffetz ably uses history to inform and frame the life and times he experienced. A further enhancement is the author's knowledge of Farsi and the inclusion of translations into English of words, old inscriptions, and occasional couplets of Persian poetry. The title of this review is taken from one of those couplets. The book is evocative and commendable.

Chaffetz book "A memorial" is the last in my trilogy of readings on Afghanistan for this year. First, I read about Nic Danzinger's travels through the area in recent years. Next, I jumped back to the 1950's and '60s with Sir Wilfred Thesiger's--"Among the Mountains". I finished with Chaffetz's "A Journey Through Afghanistan". They are all brilliant but Chaffetz's book stands out as a scholarly piece and could well be used in anthropological circles for it's in depth study of the urban and nomadic Afghanis prior and during the Russian invasion. The recent drought that has affected the Hazarajat and Kuchi nomads of Afghanistan was brought that much closer with this book. I had bought this book in the late 1980's but between different trips to the Near East--I had forgotten where I left it. As a result, it took me 10 years to actually get around to reading it and after finishing it, I wondered why I hadn't cracked the spine earlier. Chaffetz' style can be a bit off-putting but his travelling companion is a perfect foil to David's abrasive personality. I would really like to know why Chaffetz was studying Parsi in pre-revolutionary Iran or was that just a cover?

A very humane and sensitive account that explores the world view of people far from the beaten track. Despite the differences we are led to understand their concerns which turn out to be far less foreign than the material setting would suggest.

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