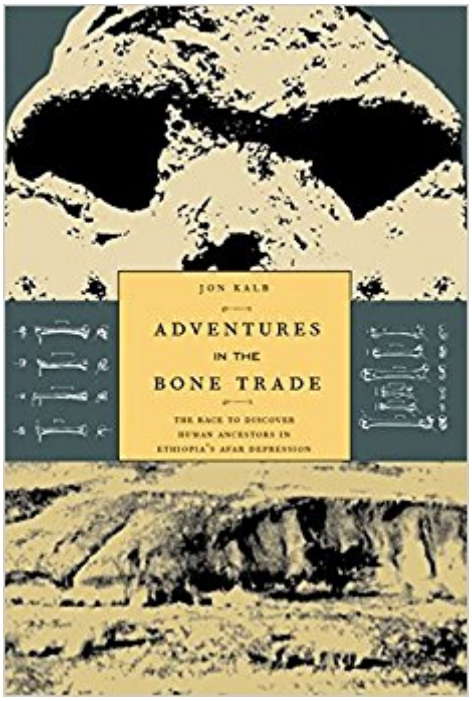
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Adventures In The Bone Trade: The Race To Discover Human Ancestors In EthiopiaÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Afar Depression



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Synopsis

As co-founder of the expedition that discovered Lucy, and leader of most of the first site-surveys in the Afar Depression in Ethiopia, Jon Kalb has years of experience with the region, its politics, and the scientists involved in the excavations. A participant himself in the "bone wars" that accompanied these discoveries, Kalb recounts the cutthroat competition and back stabbing that were often part of the media-highlighted race to find the oldest hominid fossil. He weaves this story in the rich fabric of Ethiopian society and politics, the plight of the regions peoples, and the international maneuverings for control of the fossil finds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kalb tells the story of his work, the scientific infighting, and the political turmoil in Ethiopia during his years there with verve and thoroughness.

"Like the fossil beds Kalb once explored, Adventures in the Bone Trade is crammed with valuable bits and pieces -- some on the surface, some buried deep below." -- Anne Dingus,texasmonthly.com)...a throwback to the style of the last century . . . informative, amusing, gripping, full of expectancy and denial, replete in political chicanery.... -- Richard H. Benson, Smithsonian Institution

I thought all this time that seeking old fossil material in some hot dry place would be boring but this

book took away that idea. Its really entertaining, besides being full of facts about the part of Africa where we might have started being human. I would recommend it to any one who wants to chuckle and learn at the same time...

Wow! If you like science, this book has it all. Kalb gives a serious accounting of plate tectonics, geology, anthropology, paleoanthropology and politics. Both the politics of Ethiopia and of hominid anthropology. This is the second book that I have read where Don Johanson, discoverer of the Lucy fossil, is lambasted. I am beginning to believe that Johanson left alot of people in his wake, including Kalb, on his way to fame and fortune. Kalb even gives details of Johanson's marijuana smoking exploits. Scandalous! It is Kalb who worked behind the scenes to elucidate the geology of the Afar region of Africa and set the stage for the advancement of many discoveries in the field of paleoanthropology. And he did it while dodging the bullets of a communist revolution! Kalb survives even though he is suspected of being a CIA operative planted in Ethiopia under the guise of his scientific mission. Kalb suspects that it was his falling out with Johanson that caused this little tidbit of doubt to be planted in the minds of the Ethiopian government. Kalb spends alot of effort over a few years fighting this charge, but he eventually loses and is expelled from Ethiopia. Kalb's story includes his sometimes angst ridden dealings with the Ethiopian government, who it seems are caught in the middle of a struggle of competing groups to exert dominance over the rich fossil beds of the Afar triangle. The struggle is not just between competing organizations of American science, but also between the Americans and a French team that comes close to stealing the show. The only flaw in the book is the way that Kalb weaves the recent history of Ethiopia into the book. That could have been a book in and of itself. Kalb is best when discussing geology and anthropology. The Ethiopian revolution and subsequent war with Somalia and Eritrea is distracting to the reader. Kalb's first hand journalist account of the struggles of the Ethiopian government is superb, but it would have stood on it's own. Kalb tried to write two books in one and almost pulled it off. One of the reasons why I read this genre of books is that it always offers surprises. One of Kalb's characters, Doug Cramer, assists in creating a couple of interesting fireside stories. Cramer taught Anatomy at NYU medical school. As an alumnus of NYU medical school, I remember Cramer well. We used to call him "The Viking" for his looks and demeanor. Cramer used to tell us that he was a "pastist", and now, twenty-five years later I understand what he meant. I am sure that Kalb could easily have written a book solely dealing with Cramer's antics. This is a must read for any armchair paleoanthropologists like myself. I am now inspired to read "Lucy" again given all the information I have about Johanson. The book was a page turner for me and I think that you will enjoy it. Thank

you, Jon Kalb, for your contribution to paleoanthropology. I hope that you can get back to Ethiopia to make some of the discoveries that you say will eventually be unearth there.

This is a book about exploring for humanoid fossils in the Afar Depression of Ethiopia from 1967 to 1976 during the overthrow of the Haile Selassie government and the beginning of the Derg--Mengistu Marxist regime. Rare indeed is the book that gives a good sense of the ambience along with immense readability. It is mostly about the geology and anthropology of the Ethiopian Rift Valley, but anyone interested in science will find this book fascinating because it is really a story about "doing" science: the fun, the people, the jealousies, ambitions, dirty pool, and and an exceedingly fine discussion of why the digging and excitement occurs in Ethiopia.This book must have caused its publishers agonies of indecision. It doesn't fit usual categories: It is a personal memoir; an account of Ethiopian history; an overview of the geology of the rift valleys and a thorough discussion of the activities of anthropologists searching for human ancestors along with explanations of how they know where to look for these goodies. the whole thing is interspersed with amusing and exciting anecdotes. The geology part of this book is as fascinating as anything you are likely to read. Partly this is because the Afar Triangle is such a formidable place, parts of which are among the lowest and hottest areas on earth. But don't think that this is a geology text book--far from it. I could say a whole lot more in favor of this book, but you get the idea that I think it is superior--well worth a good look.

Kalb takes a subject which could be as dry as old bones in a desert and makes it living and fresh. He combines real life drama with an informative tour of the competitive worlds of geology and anthropology. A fellow member of the Texas Coalition of Authors told me, "He is the personification of Indiana Jones."I have read many books and many soon become a weariness of the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:12) but not this one. It is fascinating reading; informative and entertaining.

The geology is a bit daunting, but the book is quite readable for anyone with a smattering of earth science background.The inside poop on competing researchers is funny as hell. Kalb shows SOME restraint in detailing Johanson's efforts to block his (Kalb's) access to the Afar, more restraint than was called for if Kalb's claims are true...Insights into the politics and history of Ethiopia abound.Great stuff overall. Well written.

Details of the digs are most engaging; sometimes the conflicts are upsetting. Always engaging.

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