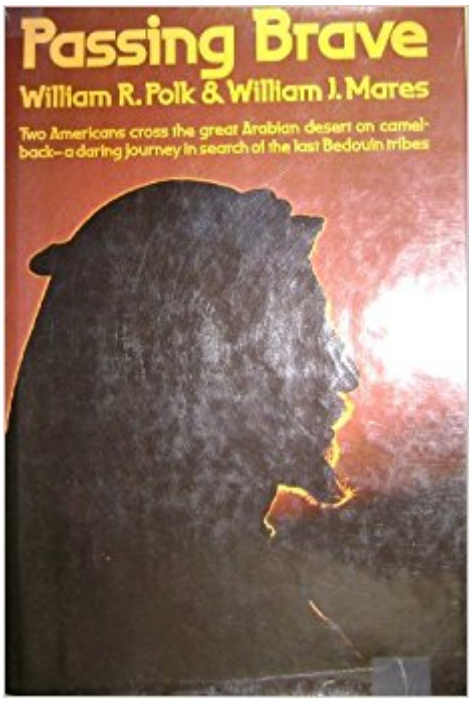
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Synopsis

Two Americans cross the great Arabian desert on camel backÃ¢â ¬â •a daring journey in search of the last Bedouin tribes. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

Hardcover: 206 pages

Publisher: Alfred a Knopf; 1st edition (June 1973)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0394478932

ISBN-13: 978-0394478937

Package Dimensions: 9.4 x 6.9 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #786,873 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 inÃ Â Books > Travel > Middle East > Saudi Arabia #69548 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs

Customer Reviews

The particular lyrics that William Polk and William Mares wanted to understand better were those of Labid, a pre-Islamic Arab poet who is attributed for developing a classic poem, the "Golden Ode." The authors received permission to experience the "anguish," from the Saudi Arabian government, in 1971, and traveled by camel from Riyadh to Amman in Jordan. Numerous Saudi government officials, with the hardships of the desert recently discarded, attempted to dissuade them in numerous ways. But as the author says in the first sentence, they persevered in their "quixotic journey."By persevering, they were one of the last people to truly experience a vanishing way of life, the life of the Bedouin; a life that has now almost completely vanished, like the Plains Indians, the Eskimos, and the Mongol horsemen. Their efforts at maintaining the authenticity of the trip were compromised on numerous occasions, as they had to accept the hospitality of the emirs of the various towns along the way. However, the baths, and the clean clothes were never eschewed.Roughly half the book is a description of the actual trip, the characters along the way, and the interactions with their four Saudi "guides." The other half is a wide-ranging rumination on the Arabic language, religion, the impact of change on all of us, and yes, the improved understanding of the words of Labid. The book ends far too early, essentially after the crossing of the Great Nafud, omitting the details of the last 400 miles to Amman.Since it was their first time to the Kingdom, despite their knowledge of classic Arabic, several subtle errors were made: they

placed Al Kharj in Wadi Dewasir (p 48), one would assume because their traveling companions, from Al Kharj, were from the Dewasir tribe; they seemed to accept the Saudi government's ploys about the limited number of camels available, as well as camel saddles; and they called the Arab headdress the kafiyah, the term used in Palestine, and not the gutra, the term used in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, parts of the crossing of the Great Nafud seemed to have been written during the exhaustion of that portion of the trip - there was no explanation as to why the camels did not drink from the puddles of recent rains, nor when they met a Bedouin group from the Ruwalla tribe, why they did not obtain some food, water, and directions to the wells at Ash Shaqiq.Overall though, the book deserves a full 5-star rating, for as they describe themselves, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza pulled off an incredible feat - long before the days that popularized "adventure travel." Today, now that oil and Islam dominate the international agenda, the book should definitely be re-issued.

Polk was a University of Chicago professor who went off across the desert on camels like days of yore. Really profound read...I read it 30+ years ago and still remember.In fact, I communicated with Polk and he sent back a long response. A really unique and idiosyncratic book. If you like reading the classical European explorers of the Middle East, then this book is right up your alley! Or even if this is your first foray into this genre, the book is observant, perceptive, honest, and sincere.

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