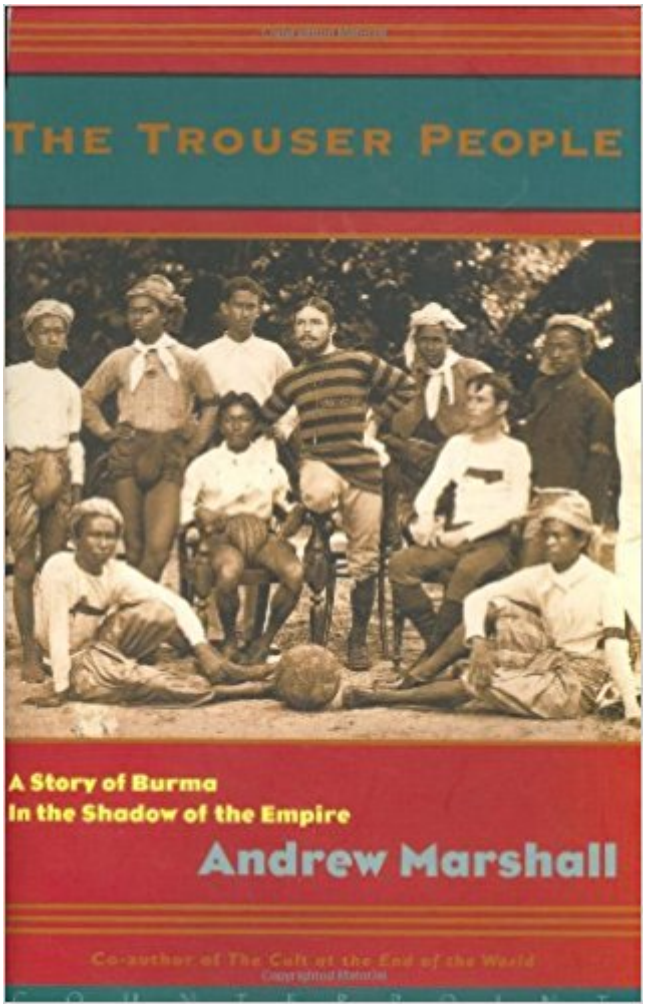
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The Trouser People: A Story Of Burma In The Shadow Of The Empire



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Synopsis

An unforgettable adventure story of two journeys, one hundred years apart, into the untraveled heart of Burma. Part travelogue, part history, part reportage, The Trouser People is an enormously appealing and vivid account of Sir George Scott, the unsung Victorian adventurer who hacked, bullied, and charmed his way through uncharted jungle to help establish British colonial rule in Burma. Born in Scotland in 1851, Scott was a die-hard imperialist with a fondness for gargantuan pith helmets and a bluffness of expression that bordered on the Pythonesque. But, as Andrew Marshall discovered, he was also a writer and photographer of rare sensibility. He spent a lifetime documenting the tribes who lived in Burma’s vast wilderness and is the author of The Burman, published in 1882 and still in print today. He also not only mapped the lawless frontiers of this "geographical nowhere"-the British Empire’s easternmost land border with China-but he widened the imperial goalposts in another way: he introduced soccer to Burma, where today it is a national obsession. Inspired by Scott’s unpublished diaries, Andrew Marshall retraces the explorer’s intrepid footsteps from the moldering colonial splendor of Rangoon to the fabled royal capital of Mandalay. In the process he discovers modern Burma, a hermit nation misruled by a brutal military dictatorship, its soldiers, like the British colonialists before them, nicknamed "the trouser people" by the country’s sarong-wearing civilians. Wonderfully observed, mordantly funny, and skillfully recounted, The Trouser People is an offbeat and thrilling journey through Britain’s lost heritage-and a powerful exposÃƒÂ© of Burma’s modern tragedy.

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Customer Reviews

In The Trouser People, Andrew Marshall recounts his ambitious crisscrossing of contemporary

Burma, which emerges as isolated, heartbreaking, fitfully resilient, and, to Western eyes, certainly, often exotically unfathomable. Marshall's compass is the life of a now-obscure Victorian adventurer, Sir George Scott. He draws distinct parallels between British imperialism and Burma's crushing, present-day military dictatorship. But The Trouser People is less analysis than witty, candid travelogue, highlighted by excursions into the remote territory of some of the country's many ethnic minorities. Most fascinating among these are the Wa, former headhunters who now control much of Burma's drug trade. Through their territory Marshall tramps in search of a mysterious lake, whose waters, Wa myth has it, were their birthplace. This muscular, anecdotal narrative, by centering on individuals and the quotidian complexities of Burmese life, washes a country too often capsulized in black and white into bright color. --H. O'Billovitch

Beginning with an unusual Burmese monk who keeps a cell phone in his robes and negotiates with Thai border police regarding arms smuggled to the insurgent army fighting Burma's military regime, Marshall recounts his adventures in Burma over a five-year period, inspired by the diaries of late-19th-century Scottish adventurer Sir George Scott (The Burman). Scott furthered the interests of the British colonials (aka the trouser people) by mapping and photographing remote areas of Burma. As Marshall, chief Asian correspondent for British Esquire and coauthor of The Cult at the End of the World, follows in Scott's footsteps, he provides an informed history and his own observations of a country where most people "have never known true peace or true freedom." Burma is ruled by a brutal military dictatorship, and its democracy movement is symbolized by the house arrest in Rangoon of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi. Marshall retraces Scott's steps from Rangoon to Mandalay in 1880, when the despotic rule of King Thibaw, a reign that mirrors current political conditions, was coming to an end. All of the author's adventures will hold readers' interest, but his difficult journeys to tribal villages of the Shan Plateau, through drug-trafficking territory where head-hunting only ended in the 1970s, are particularly enthralling. Although Marshall's sardonic humor may not appeal to all, this is a valuable firsthand look at areas and living conditions in a country relatively unknown in the West. Avid readers of travel literature will love it. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

This is not an even-handed scholarly study of Burma -- thank goodness. It moves along just like a journey, in fits and starts, pausing here, rushing there.Focusing on Sir George Scott, British Empire-builder of a hundred years ago, Marshall paints a vivid picture of Burma today. His writing is extraordinarily full of life, leading the reader from sympathy to outrage, from suspense to laughter.

This is not a book you want to give to someone recuperating from surgery: Marshall is one of the funniest writers I have ever read, and would play havoc on surgical stitches.One point I would like to debate: his discussion of the Kayan/Padaung families working for the Hupin Hotel in Yawnghwe/Nyaungshwe. I know the family that runs the Hupin personally -- several branches of the clan, actually, and count several of the staff among my friends. Yes, they are not running the hotel for their health, and yes, they are making a profit, but in all sincerity, I do not think their dealings with the Kayan are as heartless as Marshall depicts.There are two families of Kayan by Inle Lake. Marshall met the ones hired by the Hupin, not those moved in by the government. The Hupin went into the mountains and made a deal with the family: they would build a house for them, give the men jobs in factories around Yawnghwe, the women would work for the hotel, and the kids would go to school at Hupin's expense. They are paid monthly salaries and medical expenses, and any weddings and what-not are paid for by the Hupin. Some of the children have reached high school, and are still going strong. Few children in the countryside get so much schooling. One little girl envied all the attention her big sister got from tourists because of the rings on her neck. The little girl raised such a fuss that her parents agreed to let her have rings on her neck, even though she had not reached the traditional age for that. BTW: she refuses to go to school.The price for a photo with the Padaung is US$3: this is split 3 ways, between the guide, the hotel, and the Padaung (US$1 is a good day's wage for someone working in Yangon, a week's salary for the countryside.) The Padaung are free to go back to Kayah state. When they go, they bring handicrafts back to the hotel, which they sell to tourists; this money goes into their own pockets. My friends from the Hupin asked the Kayan to lower the price of the bracelets I was buying, and let me tell you, it was a struggle! These are not listless zombies meekly obeying a master's wishes.Marshall describes a concrete compound. I am not sure what he is talking about, unless it is the area outside their compound, beyond the bamboo bridge. Their wooden house was built Kayan style, in accordance with their specific wishes. They are an extremely conservative tribe. Marshall makes much of the women not leaving their compound. The Padaung are shy people, and the women do not speak Burmese, so they are not willing to range far. Also, I have heard from separate, unrelated sources that there is a danger for Padaung women to roam, because there have been cases of their being -- not exactly kidnapped, but taken off for show in Europe.Marshall says "the hotel staff member broke into a practiced spiel." We may not be talking about the same man, I did not speak English with the Padaung man I went with, but I suspect the "practiced spiel" may be memorized word for word by someone who speaks minimal English, and may not have confidence in leaving the beaten path.I deeply feel that the Hupin is more than fair in its dealings with its staff, whether they be Burman,

Shan, Chinese, Kayan, or others. When I told the Hupin family what Marshall had written about them, they were quite hurt. Frankly, they are making enough money from tourists, they do not feel the need to exploit the workers. Marshall went to Burma expecting to see the disadvantaged being exploited, so when he saw the disadvantaged, he assumed they must be getting exploited. In the case of the Hupin, I can vouch that he was wrong.All in all, though, this is an excellent picture of Burma, including parts most of us will never see. I hope Marshall is hard at work on his next book. This is an author to keep an eye on.

The short of my opinion on this book is that if you are curious about Burma,(or think you could be curious) then buy this book. The writing is superb, the author has an exceptional capacity for observation and an endearing personality, the book is very dense(yet fun) on the score of interesting facts, and the basic conception is very imaginative. I admit that I've not read any other books on Burma, and only a few other travelogues, but regardless, - and I mean this in the most objective sense possible - this book is d*mnd good!Some of this has undoubtedly been included in other reviews, but... The whole structure of the book is woven around the travels through Burma of two people, the author and a 19-th century Victorian goomba, George Scott. Having two parallel story threads roughly a century apart, I felt, did a lot to put things in persective, and at times really set my imagination on fire. Reading one page, I'm(armchair-wise) traveling with the author to a distant, intriguing village high up in some beautifully forested and rice-terraced hills; on another page I get to read about some Shan chief who, killed by the British, was boiled into some kind of goo by Shan rivals and decanted into vials which were sold as potions for bravery; on another I'm wondering if the author is going to be beaten by soldiers and dumped in the fog-ensnared mud while undertaking some foolhardy quest in a northern Wa drug state, trying to find a mythical lake; and on another I get to witness George Scott defuse the mistrust of a xenophobic Wa village, armed with nothing but a sense of humor that apparently transcended culture.And interwoven with all these wonderful, exotic stories, are many facts, historical and contemporary, on various customs, superstitions, political circumstances, human rights violations, and on every other matter of conceivable relevance. Such as the efflorescence of soccer in Burma in the 19-th century, for example.In summation, the author has a sharp eye for detail, the ability to make very intelligent writing, a sense of adventure and an abundance of curiosity, and the wit and passion to put it all together into a very satisfying read, and this he has done.

I picked up several books to read on my Kindle while traveling to Burma in December, 2013. I was

with a tour group, which is basically how you have to go at this point, and our first stop was at the Scott Market in Yangoon. This book is based on the author's fascination with George Scott, who was an eccentric mixture of colonial and ethnographic fervor. The author tells us a lot about Scott and then leads us in Scott's footsteps through Myanmar of recent years. Things are changing so fast that a book published even a few years ago is somewhat out of date, but the stories Marshall tells feel very contemporary. It was the most valuable book for the trip.

A great book about tragic events in a beautiful country. The author shadows the travels and travails of Victorian adventurer/administrator, George Scott. The result is a narrative that is readable and engrossing. Marshall presents a wealth of historical material in a relatively short volume (quite unlike the typical contemporary non-fiction book). He is at his weakest when he romanticizes Scott's relationship with the locals in Burma and skirts the excesses of colonial rule. He also neglects Scott's more patronizing and condescending writings about the people of Burma. On the other hand, Marshall presents a very readable account of comtemporary history in the country and a credible portarait of the current regime.I have visited Burma in the past few years and Marshall's descriptions of people and places were quite evocative of what I saw. Hopefully, the same will be true for other readers, regardless of whether they have traveled there or not.

A picture of a population living under a life sentence with no future unless the outside comes to their aid. Vividly authentic and real.

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