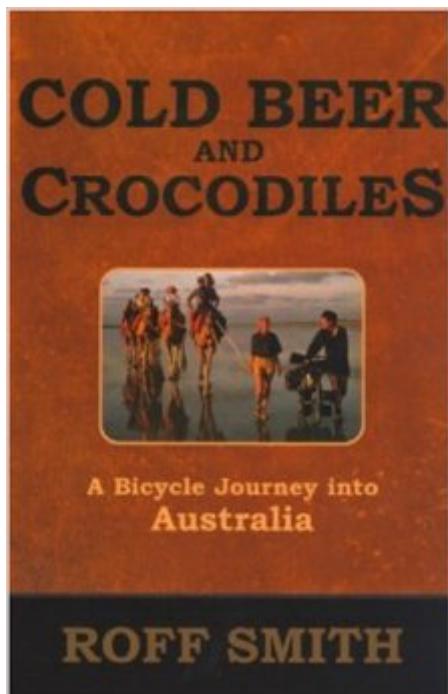


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Cold Beer And Crocodiles: A Bicycle Journey Into Australia



Synopsis

The born wayfarer takes his time, stays close to the land, and lives by its rhythms, always ready when a friendly nod turns into a dinner invitation but just as happy to camp alone under the Southern Cross. He's a free spirit, following the road map of his own adventurous imagination. When he happens to be a keen observer and a vivid writer as well, the result is a classic travel book. American Roff Smith had been living in Australia for 15 years when he quit his job, pared his life to what could be carried in the panniers of his bicycle, and pedaled off on a 10,000-mile circuit of the continent. By the time he coasted back into Sydney nine months later, he had discovered an Australia that eludes the casual traveler; "Cold Beer and Crocodiles" is his evocative, eventful report from the highways and byways of "Oz," an affectionate portrait of his adopted country and its colorful people. It's a tale worthy of the bold explorers who lived -- and sometimes died -- to open up this vast, isolated, beautiful world, from chilly Tasmania to the arid, blistering outback, where temperatures soar to 140 degrees in the midday sun. On a good day, 100 miles or more might unreel smoothly beneath Smith's tires; on a bad day, he often staggered into a desert roadhouse, exhausted, out of water, and all but dead. There are narrow escapes, wild tropical storms, a grisly crash, and a wonderful variety of unexpected scenes that capture the many faces of Australia and the men and women who call it home. We meet rancher Rob Macintosh and his family, who offer Smith a warm welcome and a job on a working sheep station, and a quartet of matey diggers who whisk him off to a lush canyon oasis hidden between the folds of an apocalyptic landscape. We meet soft-spoken Aborigines of unfailing courtesy and generosity, as well as drifters and tourists, craftsmen and farmers, roadhouse keepers and their trademark customers -- the fabled long-distance drivers who barrel across the empty sands in the cab of a road train as long as a football field. Though there's a wealth of good company here, this is a book that savors solitude, too, the quietly stunning moments that reward the self-sufficient traveler -- a black-velvet sky studded with stars, the green flash at the instant of sunset in the old pearling port of Broome, restless swells that sweep in from the South Pole to crash against breathtaking cliffs at the desolate edge of the world. With a sure sense of place and an engaging, entertaining, and above all honest voice, Roff Smith interweaves the history and lore of Australia with his own hard-won journey of discovery -- the kind of revelation that rewards those who travel not through a country but into it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Cold Beer and Crocodiles (crocodiles barely feature at all!) is an excellent travel adventure which will appeal to anyone who cosily enjoys the vicarious experience of someone else battling to survive in an extreme landscape: in this case, the Australian Outback. Having lived in Australia for 15 years without developing any emotional attachment to the country, Roff Smith quit his job at Time magazine to undertake a mammoth 10,000 mile round trip of Australia, his rationale being a desire to try to find the 'real' Australia and 'real' Australians, engage emotionally "with the country I'd lived in as a stranger all these years". His chosen mode of transport, a 21 speed touring bicycle would let him get close to the land, experience Australia, its sights, sounds and smells. In the early stages, Smith expends much pedal power shaking off the Sydney suburbs and running the gauntlet of heavy, aggressive traffic. City and suburbs sloughed off, six months of gruelling Outback travel follow: it's when he hits the furnace of the Outback that the words blaze off the page as he is plagued for months on end by flies, thirst, dust, scorching heat and feelings of loneliness; is overtaken by huge triple roadtrains, horns blaring, barrelling down desert highways; witnesses spectacular thunder and sizzling forked-lightning desert storms; bivouacs in scrub under night skies "full of stars as sharp as needles"; works in sheep and cattle stations in the guts of the country - the barren interior; picks melons; visits an Aboriginal Community; duels for weeks on end with the vast, hostile expanses of empty reddish plains baking under the blistering sun - "so much nothing out there...just miles and miles of nothing". Surviving to the next roadhouse is the order of each day!

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