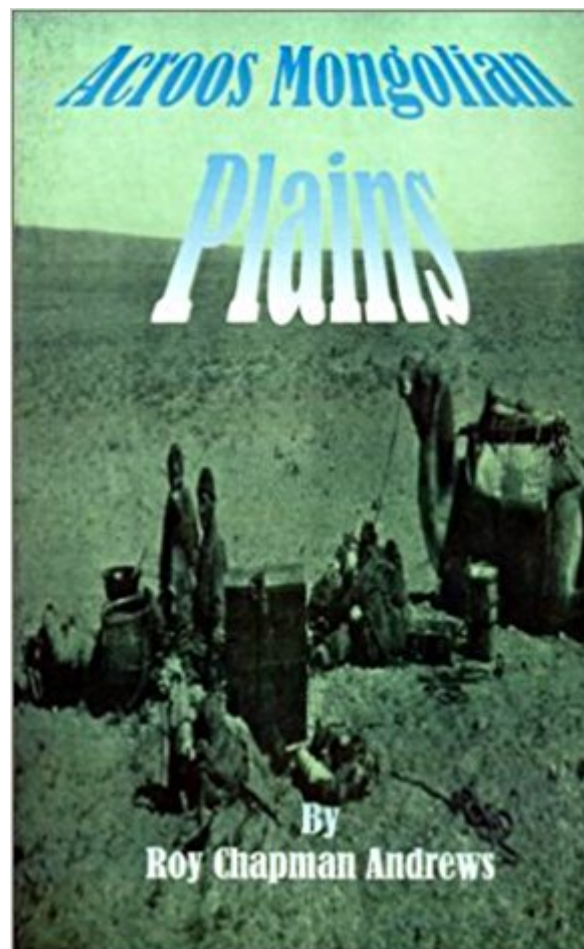




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Across Mongolian Plains: A Naturalists Account Of China's "Great Northwest"



Synopsis

This book is a narrative by Roy Chapman Andrews of his work and travels in Mongolia and North China. The book is written entirely from the sportsman's standpoint and has purposely avoided scientific details which would prove uninteresting or wearisome to the general public. Asia is the most fascinating hunting ground in all the world, not because of the quantity of game to be found there but because of its quality, and scientific importance. Because of unceasing native persecution, lack of protection, the continued destruction of forests and the ever increasing facilities for transportation to the remote districts of the interior, many of China's most interesting and important forms of wildlife are doomed to extermination in the very near future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This edition is the anastatic copy of the original 1920's book. As all attempts of this kind it has its drawbacks, that in this case consist mostly of the absence of the photographs, that in the original edition were by Andrews' wife Yvette. This book is the abridged journal of what was successively known as the Second Asiatic Zoological Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History carried out in 1920 in Mongolia and parts of China. Roy Champman Andrews was a great explorer and communicator and had already written two books one on whale hunting and another together with his wife of a previous expedition in China in 1916-17. After a brief introduction on the history of Mongolia and its political turmoils, the book is essentially a journal of a year of roaming through the rolling plains of Northwestern China and Mongolia, with the intent to hunt animals for the Museum's permanent exhibitions. The first journeys are by car, from which it is easier to shoot at the fast

antelopes and wolves of the plains. After a stay in Urga (the modern Ulan Bator, capital city of modern Mongolia), that is maybe the book's most interesting part because of the description of the temples and ceremonies that do not exist anymore, Andrews and his wife decide to spend some time as the nomads do on horse back. They hunt marmots and enjoy the plains among the friendly nomads. Successively Andrews decides to visit the Northern Forest above Urga, but the hunting is too dangerous for his wife, that is left back. Together with Harry Caldwell they look for and savagely hunt roe buck, wapiti, argali, goral and whatever else moves. This book is obviously dated, and if a modern naturalist reads it the hair will surely stand straight on his head. The last chapters are really a slaughter house of some of the world's most beautiful animals with the intent of conserving them for knowledge of the future generations. However, if read in the appropriate frame of mind it is a fantastic documentation of long ago ideals, mentality and facts, that are described with impartiality but absolutely no empathy differently to what will successively be done by for example Lattimore and others. Andrews reaches almost a poetic evocation when he describes landscape and colors, especially that of the fur of the animals he kills. This book reminded me of the film "Dersu Uzala". A very interesting antiquarian read.

Entertaining insight into what it must have been like to work in what was then such a remote and challenging land.

RC Andrews shoots animals across Mongolia..How he ever found anything and how he kept his job is a mystery to me.

With my Android G2 and/or trusty Kindle 3 I found this book a really great read. Be forewarned this book is full of anarchisms, sexism, racism and almost every other kind of 'ism' out there. It is capable of being at times stark and honest in its renditions. Mr. Andrews is a gifted story teller and it is the year 1918 after all. Sometimes all of the gleeful animal killing described by Mr. Andrews and his companions did depress me a bit. However, as much of a humanitarian that I think I am, I would hope that not a single word is changed in this text out of concern for present day political correctness or censorship. Tell it like it is Mr. Andrews. Because it's a more or less faithful reflection of a world that once existed. At times the author's prose resounds with inspired poetic phrasing in his descriptions of Mongolia, its fauna and landscape. Other times his so called 'scientific' and colonial attitudes of the day come shining through. Mr. Andrews tends to paint ethnic minorities with a very broad brush. The man is a good writer who offers a unique perspective of a fading colonial era. A

must read. My only disappointment is that the book is utterly devoid of the original photographs, maps or graphics. It would be nice if the ebooks being offered for the Kindle could somehow indicate if photographs/graphics were included. As a side note when I visited the newly opened Google Bookstore today I noticed that this same book did include the original scanned pages and photographs. And that the text was also available in flowing text on Androids and iPhones. Interesting! I think Google with all of its scanned books and with its marketing muscle should put together a cross exchange commercial arrangement that would delight all of us as well as be mutually profitable. No?

I have a copy of the 1921 Blue Ribbon "popular" edition (possibly an undated later reprinting) of "Across Mongolian Plains," and will not contribute to the debate on the quality of the paperback edition (see the two earlier reviews). I do think it is important to point out that the book belongs to the early twentieth century, and reflects its values. Readers should be prepared to make allowances for this, or not bother. Of course, those who pass it by will be missing some first-class storytelling. Andrews, who first came to the attention of scientists as a skilled taxidermist, shows his enthusiasm for turning live animals into specimens for mounting. Despite praise of individual Asian acquaintances, he falls into ethnic stereotypes whenever he deals with nations or groups for any length of time. Some of his judgements on foreign cultures must have seemed odd, even at the time. Maybe the decline of Lamaism would restore the "virility of the Mongol nation" -- whatever that means. But if it means anything, why would he find it so desirable? If Andrews didn't remember Genghis Khan, the Chinese and the Russians certainly did! Ironically, the expedition seems to have made both the first and last Western observations of some traditional Mongolian Buddhist religious observances, later swept away in the aftermath of Russian and Chinese revolutions. Anyone hoping for accounts of fossil-hunting in the Gobi Desert will also be in for an unpleasant surprise. That belonged to subsequent expeditions, in later years. Readers interested in the context of this and later Andrews expeditions will probably find Charles Gallenkamp's "Dragon Hunter: Roy Chapman Andrews and the Central Asiatic Expeditions" their most helpful guide. (Reposted from my "anonymous" review of September 10, 2003.)

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