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Road Through Kurdistan



Synopsis

In 1928, Archibald Hamilton traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan, having been commissioned to build a road that would stretch from Northern Iraq, through the mountains and gorges of Kurdistan and on to the Iranian border. Now called the Hamilton Road, this was, even by today's standards, a considerable feat of engineering and remains one of the most strategically important roads in the region. In this colorful and engaging account, Hamilton describes the four years he spent overcoming immense obstacles--disease, ferocious brigands, warring tribes and bureaucratic officials--to carve a path through some of the most beautiful but inhospitable landscape in the world. Road Through Kurdistan is a classic of travel writing and an invaluable portrayal of the Iraqi Kurds themselves, and of the Kurdish regions of Northern Iraq. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

Hardcover: 331 pages

Publisher: Ams Pr Inc (June 1970)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0404562752

ISBN-13: 978-0404562755

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #8,192,264 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #97 in [Books > Travel > Middle East > Iraq](#) #191 in [Books > Travel > Middle East > Iran](#) #2424 in [Books > History > Middle East > Iraq](#)

Customer Reviews

Independent on Sunday (4 stars out of 5): "It's full of derring-do, dynamite and splendid fellows smoking pipes.

Archibald Milne Hamilton was born in 1898 in New Zealand. An early interest in all things scientific would endure throughout his life. After having graduated from university with a Bachelor of Engineering, Hamilton worked on several projects in New Zealand and in 1926 joined the British Admiralty team involved in designing the new Singapore Naval Base. In 1927 he became engineer in charge of Diwaniyeh in Iraq and later transferred to Kurdistan, where he would spend the next four years of his life. He died, aged 74, in 1972. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable

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This is one of those rare books that one finds by someone "on the ground" who writes accurately as well as entertainingly. A story of road building through one of the most interesting "remote areas " of the region, building on both history as well as the culture, but especially the incredible feat of putting in a vital road, still in use today and using only local labor. For those of us (Westerners) who have lived there, it is difficult to find writers who resurrect our emotions so vividly of the people and cultural interrelationships as this Scottish road builder. It is a gem.

the print size is too small. I won't be reading it (not unless I want to bring on sore eyes, the need for glasses, and a headache). If I'd known the print was this small I wouldn't have bought it. Sadly to return it will cost, and so is not an option.

A highly readable and fascinating insight into the road and the lands across which it was cut. The narrative is very easy to read and portrays a vivid picture of what it was like for a British administration official (he was a New Zealander) to have to work in Iraq, and be transferred to Kurdistan and how he had to "cut his way" through tribal societies to ensure he got the job done. Having myself traversed a good part of the Hamilton Road in 2015, I can attest to the beauty (in Spring especially) and the front cover is a typical mountain scene...It is really not difficult to imagine as you wind your way from Erbil on the hotter lower plains, albeit above much of even hotter Iraq, through the roaring mountains in the west and lazy goat-herds still dotting the hillsides, that nothing much has actually changed since the book was written. Certainly a few holiday towns like Shaklawā have risen into more scattered concrete houses dotting the hillsides but beyond this the lands sweep into beautiful vistas cut across by rivers and boulder strewn mountainsides. Also it passes near ancient Neanderthal cave territories of "Shanidar Man". What a feat to cut the road at a time when motorcars had not been seen there! It is an entertaining read (there are a few black and white photos in my Indian reprinted copy found in Erbil Souk) and with the typical dry humour that one might expect.

"Those rocks had stood there since before the birth of the first Kurdishman, would they not stay yet another thousand years? 'The ... engineer is just a little mad,' they said, 'but otherwise harmless; let him alone and see what happens.'" - the opinion of the local tribesmen on Hamilton's labors to build his road "I looked and was satisfied that all was as it should be, and signaled to the men that it was

done. And up from the depths of the canyon there arose the exultant roar of men's voices that reached almost to the mountain-tops." - Hamilton's recollection of the moment when the Rowanduz River Gorge was successfully bridged. After the First World War, the League of Nations assigned the subject territories and overseas colonies of the vanquished nations to the governmental administration of the victors. Such lands were known as "mandates." Mesopotamia (Iraq), formerly a province of the Ottoman Empire, was given to the United Kingdom as a Class A Mandate, and the U.K. administered the area from 1920 to 1932, when Iraq itself became a member of the League. In 1927, New Zealand-born and trained civil engineer, Archibald Milne Hamilton, was sent to Mesopotamia as part of the Public Works Department. Soon after his arrival, he was given sole responsibility for completion of the Arbil-Rowanduz road through the mountains of Kurdistan, an area heretofore inaccessible by motor transport and barely so by animal caravan. The most daunting obstacle to the road's completion was the dramatically rugged Rowanduz River Gorge, through which the paved highway needed to be constructed. It took Hamilton four years to do it, but it was ultimately a miracle of contemporary engineering. ROAD THROUGH KURDISTAN is Hamilton's personal account of the project's undertaking and achievement. Written in the matter-of-fact, detailed, markedly lucid (and always engaging) style that one might expect from a trained engineer, Hamilton's narrative is of a job well-done with a multinational workforce drawn from historically antagonistic factions and amidst terribly difficult terrain and always-dodgy tribal support. Occasionally - and all too infrequently by my mind - the author displays a dry wit, as when he describes the process of calculating his workmen's pay: "I sat in my little tent, and computed the amounts due to each man according to his attendance and his rate of pay, while scorpions and large brown beetles clinging to the sides of the tent took stock of my columns of figures." Though arguments can and will rage over the benefits, or lack thereof, of imperialism in general to the lands and societies of the ruled, there can be little argument, I think, that Hamilton and his road represents British imperialism at its finest. The King could never have stood prouder than after the service of this fair-minded, generous, and extremely capable servant of the Empire. Honor is due. ROAD THROUGH KURDISTAN contains thirty-three photographs and two maps. And, for those so interested, the author's observations about the Kurdish people will perhaps serve as the beginning of an appreciation for the nature, strength, and resilience of their independent spirit which has proved so problematic for their neighbors - the Iraqis, Iranians and Turks - who even today would wish to bring them to heel, but can't.

The book "Road Through Kurdistan" is a fascinating first hand account of A.M. Hamilton, a civil

engineer from New Zealand, who built roads in the mountainous Kurdish area of Iraq along the border with Iran. He provides a detailed description of the Iraqi and Kurdish peoples who he worked with in building the roads through incredibly steep and treacherous terrain. It was a formidable effort. I read a first edition (1928) of "Road Through Kurdistan" belonging to a Swedish geotechnical engineer who designed and built two dams in the 1950's for the Iraqi government in essentially the same region. One dam was located at Bekhme on the Greater Zab River north of Arbil and west of Rowanduz, very close to Mr. Hamilton's road. The other dam was at Derbendikhan on a tributary of the Tigris River, northeast of Baghdad. To pass his spare time in Iraq, my Swedish friend, Svante Hjertberg, read A.M. Hamilton's book with delight. Now I had the same joy reading the book and sharing Svante's experiences in Iraq. The fact is, Svante could have written the book himself because he had so many similar experiences, working and traveling in Kurdistan, as Mr. Hamilton. When Saddam Hussein came to power and began killing his enemies, the U.S. engineering companies working for the government of Iraq were forced to pull out. The book contains unique photographs and maps and is a great read for anyone wishing to learn about the terrain and peoples of Kurdistan and the issues of constructing public works facilities in remote, inhospitable countries using indigenous people.

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