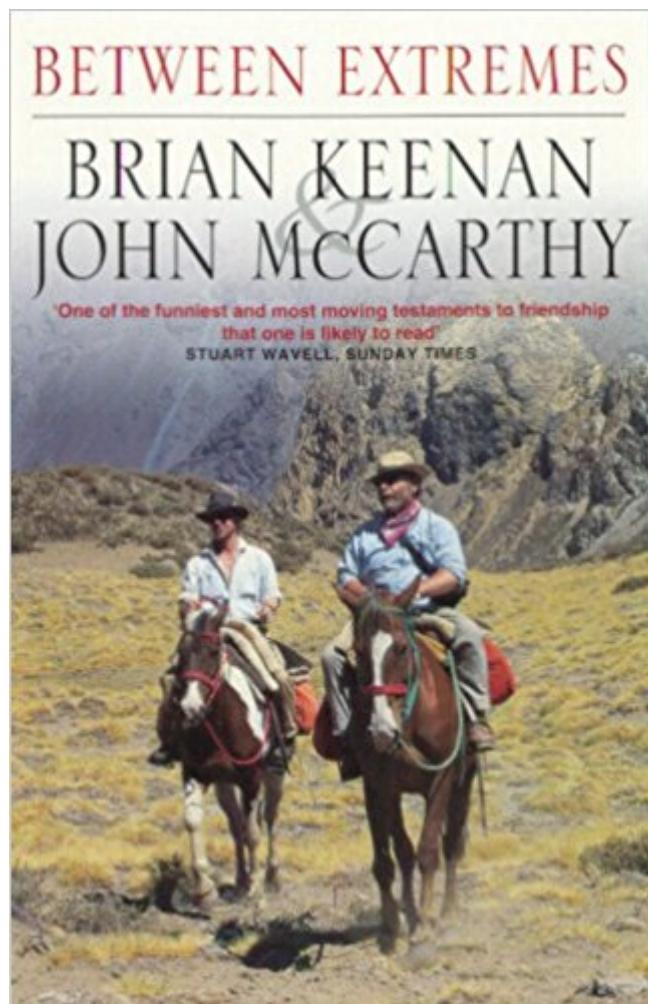


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Between Extremes



Synopsis

For four years, Brian Keenan and John McCarthy were incarcerated in a Lebanese dungeon. From the blank outlook of a tiny cell, with just each other and a few volumes of an ancient American encyclopaedia to sustain them, they could only wander the wide open spaces of their imagination. To displace the ugly confines of their existence, theyÃ Â imagined walking in the High Andes and across the wastes of Patagonia. Five years after their release, Brian and John chose to travel together again to see how the reality of Chile matched their imagination and to revisit their past experiences. Between Extremes is the story of that journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The authors, who spent four years in a Beirut prison together, wrote separate accounts of their shared incarceration: Irish poet and writer Keenan published *Evil Cradling* and British journalist McCarthy (with Jill Morrell), *Some Other Rainbow*. With nothing but old American encyclopedias to distract them from their boredom and suffering, they dreamed of travel. Years later, they fulfilled this dream by journeying to the "long skinny," geographically extreme land of Chile. The result is this joint travel memoir, told in alternating voices and filled with both humor and surprises. Traveling southward from Arica to Tierra del Fuego, they provide vivid descriptions of stark geographic contrasts: deserts by the sea, flamingos on salt flats, geysers, "lunar" landscapes, and gigantic volcanic mountains. As the acrophobic authors traverse the Andes by horseback, ascending and descending narrow paths and hairpin curves from Death Ridge to Mal Paso, armchair travelers will experience sheer terror. Recommended for public libraries. Margaret W. Norton, Oak Park, IL

"One of the funniest and most moving testaments to friendship that one is likely to read" -- Stuart Wavell The Sunday Times "Such an absorbing subject, so deeply and warmly expressed" -- Sara Wheeler Daily Telegraph "The best travel book I've read so far this year" -- Pete Carthy Time Out "They take us every step of the way with a wonderfully infectious joie de vivre" Independent on Sunday "Such a vivid and inspiring odyssey that captivated readers will be spurred into booking flights to Chile...Fun glows from every page even in wretched times" Irish Independent

OK book, but not the real Chile. This is a typical fast tour book with no time to savour the real Chile. I am married to a Chilean, we live in the U.S., and over the years have experienced Chile from top to bottom, but one segment at a time. To describe the Atacama desert as boring is beyond belief. It's still my favorite part of Chile. The authors' lack of rudimentary Spanish and general disinterest in even trying to speak the language for me is typical of British tourists. They complained of bland food when there is no mention of some of the outstanding dishes in this country. Because they stayed mostly in the altiplano, they didn't appear to have tried the absolutely amazing seafood unique only to Chile. Their primary objective was to go from top to bottom and say they had done it. They achieved that, but certainly as a knowledgeable book on Chile, they failed miserably. It is important to note that in 1998/1999 when this tour took place, Chile was just emerging from a very difficult political period. Today, Chile is the most stable country in South America. The Chileans are just beginning to realize the uniqueness and enormous beauty of the country and tourism is becoming a booming business. Please buy a more updated book on Chile like Lonely Planet. Better yet go and be amazed.

A good view of cultures and the ensuing issues of people of other lands. An opportunity to learn about another's culture and one's candid view of it.

The authors - one English, one Irish - have a certain celebrity status, having been kidnap victims in Lebanon in the late eighties. This was the reason I bought the book, I probably won't have bought the book for its content alone. The central conceit of the book is that, while in Lebanon, they had imagined the landscape of Patagonia and this had kept them going. The book is a description of their actual journey through Chile to Patagonia, its delights and disappointments, with some stray reflections on their captivity and the comradeship which it induced in them. From what I knew of

them before I read the book John McCarthy is a quick-witted Englishman from whom I would have expected many jokes, but not much insight, while Brian Keenan seemed to me to be quite reflective and serious. The journey starts in Northern Chile, a barren region, with significant mining interests and border tensions with Peru. The book consists of intertwined pieces from each man's journal - sometimes describing the same incident; it's possible to get some idea of each personality from the contrasts between their entries. As expected McCarthy is more straightforwardly descriptive, and he comes across as the organiser, planner of the pair. I warmed to his personality though, as he was both realistic and generous in his descriptions of Keenan, and of his admiration of, and debt to, his friend. Keenan, on the other hand, I liked less as I read more. Keenan adopts a conceit that he has 'spiritual guides' on the journey - one being Bernardo O'Higgins an revolutionary founder of Chile in the 1800's, the other being Pablo Neruda, a famous Twentieth Century Chilean poet, three volumes of whose work Keenan quotes from through the book. I felt his speculations about these 'guides' were overdone, it seemed to me that Keenan was trying to affect an intellectual air and the overall tone was contrived. In the flesh, he seemed to snore and swear and be generally disorganised and somewhat boorish, so I thought this was too much of a contrast. In general, neither man seemed to have warmed to the journey. Keenan seemed the more inspired by Chile, but both journals emphasized the tedium and hardship of the travel arrangements - McCarthy gently emphasized Keenan's snoring. I was quite disappointed that neither man mentioned much about what happened to them in the years after their release; while I could understand their need for privacy, there is the fact that the book is trading on the public's curiosity about them, as much as it is a travel book. They actually mention meeting someone who has read Keenan's book about his captivity, who criticizes him for not putting in a afterword describing how he adjusted on this release, Keenan makes the point that he needs privacy. In particular the campaign to seek John McCarthy's release had been run by his then-girlfriend Jill Morrell, a campaign which lasted five years. Yet there is a silence about this, McCarthy refers to 'Anne' periodically, who I presume is his partner now.

One would be better off discovering what their friends and family have been up to on their recent holidays. John's and Brian's so called journey through the entire length of the country is nothing more than a sightseeing getaway, riddled with interactions with tour guides, staying in hotels, and barely learning more than a few sentences of the local language, one of the easiest languages to learn too. Their writing style leaves much to be desired too, with lacklustre descriptions and awful metaphors. As someone who has been to similar locations elsewhere in south america and wanted to get some insight into chile, or at least to delve in entertaining or informative travel writing, this

book failed me.

I found this a funny, emotional, fantastic and honest description of a unique country. I have lived and worked in Chile now for 8 months and similar to the style of the two mens writing; (of Chile) I love it and loath it. It is not an optimistic over the top view of all things amazing and beautiful about Chile, and for this, I feel it is more real and honest. As they say, there are things that disappointed and annoyed them about Chile and the people, yet so many times things that happily exceeded any of their expectations. Which is exactly my sentiments about Chile and their people. At times the two writers do seem emotionally overdescriptive, dragging on about how they dreamed it would be and how Neruda described is beloved country, or how their minds were blown by something seemingly unimportant. But again, the amount of times I find I can't pinpoint well enough why these seemingly minor things move me so much, these two rather differently styled writers have perfectly articulated my sentiments. Different strokes for different folks. Just as I understand why some people wouldn't/don't like Chile and others who would rave about it. I can see some people loving this book and others not.

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