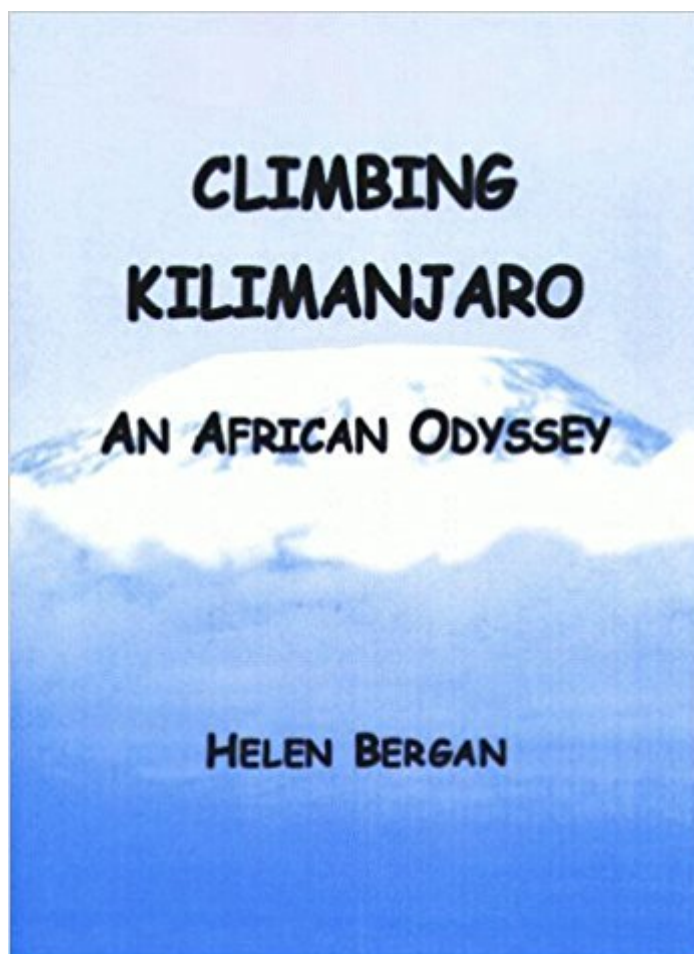




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Climbing Kilimanjaro: An African Odyssey



Synopsis

The idea of traveling around Africa on crutches could be as daunting as the thought of climbing Kilimanjaro would be for most travelers. But that didn't stop Helen Bergan from setting off alone for an African odyssey in 1968. In *Climbing Kilimanjaro*, she invites readers to travel with her and share her adventures in nine African countries. To see a non-tourist Africa, Helen traveled by local bus and visited outdoor markets throughout the continent. Despite obstacles presented by her disability, and as a woman traveling alone, she took a Dutch freighter from Kenya to South Africa and a Nigerian ship from Lagos to London. With an adventurous spirit and her sensitivity to Africa's history, Helen describes encounters with people she met who either lamented or applauded the changes that independence brought to Africa. In each country, she sought out authentic African food and, in this book, shares some of her favorite recipes adapted for American kitchens. Like those who climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, Helen describes the splendid view of her Africa.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Although Helen Bergan traveled alone on her African odyssey, she makes the perfect companion for any armchair traveler who reads *Climbing Kilimanjaro*. With humor and a flair for understatement, Helen describes incongruous situations she got herself into as a blonde woman traveling in post-independence Africa. She doesn't dwell on the limitations her disability caused, but in indirect ways, acknowledges it. Always in the background of the journey is the amazing continent with its diversity of people, exotic wildlife, and magnificent scenery.

Occasionally, during dinner parties in my home-especially if I had cooked African recipes-I would tell stories of my three years in Ethiopia or my journey traveling alone around Africa on crutches. Friends often suggested that I give more details of those times by writing a travel book. When life in the States seemed too busy I often wished for those slow-moving days on the cargo ships when I had nothing to do but sit on the sunny side of the deck reading a book. Now those who read my book can experience those times with me and see where one of my favorite tales-about Missy, the cat who was always a cat-fits into the entire journey.

An engaging personal story about visiting several African countries in 1968, shortly after decolonization. A valuable historical look into the social and political conditions at that time.

This book reminded me a bit of Martha Gellhorn's (Travels With Myself and Others) experiences in Africa. It is amazing to me how both of these women could write so fluently of trips taken decades earlier. They must be terrific note takers. Anyway, women who might hesitate to embark alone on an adventurous undertaking can take heart from Helen Bergan's story of how she found herself with the opportunity to take a few months explore Africa on her own and just decided to go for it! This would be inspiring even without the polio and the crutches.

Ok, not "adventuress" in the commonly accepted sense. This memoir of a single woman's travels through Africa is a page-turner full of humor, suspense, and charming anecdotes, as well as delightful recipes adapted for the American kitchen. I've given copies as gifts to several friends, and found the book exceptionally entertaining and enjoyable. Add to this the fact that the "adventuress" was on crutches taking a trip most fully able persons would find daunting and you have a truly compelling adventure story!

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There's so much to like about this book: an autobiographical travelog of the late 1960s without self-aggrandizing, and with insightful reflections about the people she encountered and the places she visited. The recipes she collected along the way add special "flavor" to the book, a real bonus.

I have just read Helen Bergan's book, *Climbing Kilimanjaro*....it is wonderful and I highly recommend it to you! It is a fascinating travel odyssey of a young woman traveling home to the US from Ethiopia in the 60s. Her observations are both informative and amusing, her stories great, and as an added bonus, the book is peppered with tasty recipes of things she mentions throughout the text. Don't expect this to be a sniveling book on travel with a disability, it is not! Her mention of her crutches appears at times when it is appropriate and had a bearing on her actions. She, like the majority of us, lived her life as she saw fit and to the fullest with an occasional acknowledgement of her limitations. She put me to mind of John Hockenberry and his *Moving Violations*...what they were doing is simply fascinating, disability or not. If you're looking for a great trip to Africa the easy way, get this book and read it.

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