



# Traversa

*Fran Sandham*

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## **Traversa** Fran Sandham

Inspired by the legendary explorers who first crossed the African heartland, Fran Sandham left the daily grind of London to undertake an extraordinary adventure. He traveled on foot across Africa from the Skeleton Coast on the southwest tip of the African continent through Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania, until he reached the Indian Ocean. *Traversa* is the fascinating account of the hardships and hilarity that he experienced during his epic solo journey.

Sandham describes his brushes with lions and snakes, land mines and bandits, his two-month battle with a syphilitic donkey, malaria, cockroaches the size of mice, and the other everyday troubles that arise when walking across Africa. Underpinned with the stories of his forerunners--David Livingstone, Sir H. M. Stanley, and Sir Francis Galton, among others--*Traversa* is the enthralling account of a real-life modern-day adventure against the elements.

## **Traversa Details**

Date : Published 2007 by Duckworth

ISBN : 9780715637029

Author : Fran Sandham

Format : 274 pages

Genre : Cultural, Africa, Travel, Nonfiction, Walking, Eastern Africa, Zambia, Tanzania

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# From Reader Review Traversa for online ebook

## Pat Stearman says

Reading group book. Took me a little while to get into it but thoroughly enjoyed once I did (and once I worked out it was a bloke!!) Some parts are hilariously laugh out loud funny, some are horrific but he drives the narrative along and you really want to know more. Half tempted to follow up by reading more about Livingstone and Stanley - hadn't realised a) how many other expeditions Stanley had done and b) what a nasty piece of work he was!

He doesn't really answer the question we all wanted answering tho - why did he do it!!!

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## Rafa? Sobol says

I found myself absolutely glued to the book from the very beginning up until the end. Mr. Sandham proved himself a skilled writer, splendidly going between describing his own journey and retelling stories of the Victorian ages' explorers. His writing style is very nice - not terribly stiff, with a few well-placed explicit words here and there, but then again absolutely not annoyingly loose.

I recommend this book to anyone, even those who don't generally fancy travel books. It's a great read, I assure you.

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## Rachel says

I loved this book. It was captivating. I feel like I've travelled across Africa with him, obviously without the challenge of walking 5000km.

You'd think after reading a book about a man walking across four African countries, from Skeleton Coast to Bagamoyo on the coast of the Indian Ocean, I'd have some awesome and poetic quotes for you, but my favourite passages were:

"On the outskirts of Karonga I sit outside a little shop, eating a slurp as I watch the world go by. A cow stands patiently on the opposite side of the road, minding its own business; a local guy approaches, and for no apparent reason gives the cow a hefty kick as he passes, then turns and grins at me. What am I supposed to do, applaud politely? The cow's response is to give the man an incredibly human look - intelligent, dignified and full of pathos. It's as though it's saying: 'Look, I may only be a cow, but it's still not fair for you to kick me just because you feel like it.'"

I bet he was glad he walked across Africa to witness that... Next:

"Just outside of Morogoro I stop beside the road to fix my rucksack, facing the direction in which I've come. A bus races up behind me; as it passes, a young guy leans right out of the door and whacks my arse with a large stick. 'Come back here, you FUCKER!' I shout rather impotently after him..."

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## Chris Steeden says

With a mix of adventure and history this is a fantastic book. Also very inspiring. We follow Fran as he treks across Africa from the Skeleton Coast to Zanzibar and, my word, what a journey it is. He did it on his own under his own willpower, strength, determination and bloody mindedness. Fantastic.

The book is free-flowing and damn is it interesting. I love the way that Africa is so vast that at one point Fran looks at two places on a map and realises it is not too far to walk in comparison to what he has already done and then when related back to Britain it is like walking from London to Glasgow.

From Namibia to Zambia to Malawi to Tanzania to Zanzibar. Just a little walk then Fran? He throws in nuggets of history from other explorers experiences of the places he visits including Livingstone, Stanley and Ewart Grogan.

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## Maliades says

If there is one burning desire in my life right now, it is adventure! This book choice seems serendipitous, having just watched the series premiere of 'Expedition Africe' on the History Channel last night. In Expedition Africa, the journey begins in Zanzibar, and in Traversa, the journey ends in Zanzibar. Both sets of travelers seem to be loosely re-creating the journeys of Livingstone and Stanley. I shall read this book with great pleasure (hopefully) while I dream of foreign lands and travel!

Now I've finished the book, and I must say that it was very enjoyable. At times I cringed at the difficulties he faced: questionable food, huge blisters, stubborn donkeys, or merely his having walked so many miles across harsh land... it sure must not have been easy, but he did it! Wow. I appreciated the history peppered throughout the book, and the stories of the people he encountered. I do wish he would have included more technical information on his supplies, and I found it mind-boggling that he'd eat so much junk food and drink so much alcohol on such a hard, physical journey... but he did it! And the book was enjoyable. Anyone who is yearning for travel or adventure should read this.

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## Daren says

OK, close enough to the end of 2017 for me to determine my favourite reads. Traversa wins my hard to determine 2017 BEST TRAVEL BOOK.

I really enjoyed this book. It has a lot going for it (in terms of appealing to me): it is slightly unorthodox travel, it is written in a relaxed and easy style, it is very funny, and the author doesn't hold himself up for glory.

So, what did he do? He completed **the Traversa**.

Page 2: *While many Victorian explorers became obsessed with the notion of being the first white man to set foot in some particular place, a few individuals came to regard crossing Africa overland from coast to coast as a goal to rival the discovery of the source of the Nile. This overland crossing of Africa became known as 'the Traversa'.*

For the author's Traversa, he not only planned this as overland, but was walking, carrying his own pack and equipment. Commencing in Namibia, on the Skeleton Coast at the Atlantic Ocean coastline, through Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania to reach the Indian Ocean.

This is quite the epic stroll. Over 5000 kilometres, through desert (extreme hot and cold), through the Caprivi Strip to the Zambezi, and to Victoria Falls, where food was largely unavailable, through wet season downpours, up the west side of Lake Malawi and on to Bagamoyo, and his goal.

There are trials and tribulations - a small donkey, a donkey cart, a mule - there are insects, lots of insects! - there are medical situations, mostly related to feet and insects - and there is that 40kg pack.

For me, he got the writing bang on. Enough history to be informed about the places he is, and quotes from and talks about the more famous explorers where they cross his path. He also does not fall into the trap of repetition. He calmly states "Four days later, I arrived at..." without feeling he had to labour over four uneventful days. For a journey of over a year, this was essential to being able to document his travel. He also uses self-deprecating humour, and isn't afraid to question his own actions, which is refreshing. It is also apparent that the author has a genuine affection for Africa and its people.

A quote - P221

*And new physical problems are arising almost daily. I'm getting problems from a painful trapped nerve in my shoulder, where my rucksack strap has been pinching it, and I can't straighten my arm above shoulder level - soon I will be limping like Richard III. By now my back is covered with eczema, the result of a perpetually sodden shirt and rucksack pressed against it day after day in this heat. In one place my pack has rubbed a painful hole in my skin through the eczema; carrying my rucksack was unpleasant before, but now it is purgatory. This eczema must be partly due to eating bad food for so long - I never had this problem at home. I'm expecting my teeth and hair to start falling out before long, and I've got more or less a permanent acid indigestion from eating so much junk. Week after week I've lived on lukewarm Coca-Cola, stale buns and doughnuts, slurps, green bananas, powdered milk and far too many cigarettes. With all the rubbishy food and sugar soft drinks I've been consuming, I'll see the east coast through a hypoglycaemic haze.*

Great stuff, five stars.

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## John says

Incredible story of trekking from Namibia's Atlantic Coast to the Indian Ocean (ending up at Zanzibar). Although the author's attacked by neither man nor beast (just insects aplenty), he has his share of troubles, starting with recalcitrant wild donkeys, and finishing up with a week of malaria treatment (apologies if that proves a spoiler). Terrific writing skills and a great sense of humor make this book one of my top books for the year. Highly recommended.

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## Carol says

A stunning memoir of Sandham's lone walk from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to Zanzibar. A trek of 5000km where water and insects are constant problems and landscape and wildlife are both dangerous and awesome. Never sentimental, often self-mocking, with a weakness for cigarettes and a longing for oat porridge,

Sandham develops complete respect for the continent and its people. We see poverty which we cannot conceive and generosity which stuns him and us. Terrifically researched and quotations from Livingstone et al's journals, the while read is rich and enriching.

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### **Marie Knock says**

An excellent book charting one man's coast to coast walk across Africa.

I love Africa, and therefore loved hearing about so many different cultures, people, animals and environments that the author experienced along the walk. His determination to complete the trip is as admirable as it is crazy at times, he encounters all kinds of dangers and dilemmas. Ultimately this book left me eager for more and inspired... if only I had the guts to try something like this.

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### **Greg says**

An entertaining account of the author's 'traversa' across Africa on foot from Namibia to Tanzania. Sandham tells the story with self-deprecating humor and anecdotes from the great African explorers like Stanley and Livingston of how he backpacked across the continent entirely on his own.

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### **Linda Wallis says**

Reading Group book.

Thoroughly enjoyed this.

Finally finished as was distracted by 2 other books.

Did wonder sometimes why he was doing it, as was so unpleasant for him on occasions.

Learnt things I didn't know and he made me laugh out loud too at times.

Highly recommended.

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### **GUD Magazine says**

It's hard to read many travel books without a sense of 'Why? Why are you putting yourself through all this?' and Traversa is no exception. Those who sit at home may not understand what drives some people to these lengths, but that doesn't stop us lapping it up and asking for more.

In this enthralling book, Sandham brings his solo walk from the aptly-named Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean to life. He comes across, variously, as courageous, determined, bloody-minded, and completely insane. By the end of the book, it's easy to feel, as he does, that he has earned his right to be in Africa, even among people so poor that a man who has scrimped, saved and given up chocolate biscuits to be there, is immeasurably rich.

Throughout, Sandham places his experiences in a historical context, evoking the horror of being preserved from shipwreck only to die of thirst, the shame and waste of the slave trade, and butchery in wars over

territory that match anything Europe has achieved in that line. As his traversa progresses, he moves from a theoretical understanding of Africa to a genuine affection for the place and its people.

The book is filled with dry self-deprecation and humour--there's a disastrous donkey, and we can only imagine Sandham's problems with his mule, as he declines to go into details--and some of the characters he meets are portrayed as so much larger than life that there's a temptation to believe they're imaginary. Perhaps the best example of the man's courage is when, having invested time, effort and money in a donkey (diseased), a donkey-cart (beautifully painted), and a mule (disobedient), he's able to walk away from all three. Many people would have persisted even in the face of so much discouragement, but Sandham knows when to cut his losses. He probably wouldn't have made it across Africa without that knowledge.

Apart from the not-so-tame domestic animals, there's lions. Real, live, traveller-eating lions. Fortunately, the threat they pose is more perceived than actual; some people have been eaten, but Sandham gets through. There's also explosive diarrhea, a very unpleasant, if probably inevitable, attack of malaria, and, of course, blisters. Yet day after day, he gets up, and gets going. Even after side trips to investigate mules or donkeys, he insists on being driven back to the point where he stopped walking, so he can start again. He knows when he's idled somewhere too long, and somehow gets himself going. There's no cheating on this journey, even though the temptations must have been enormous.

This book entertained and saddened me by turns, and I heartily recommend it--reading what Sandham has to say is the only way even partially to answer the question, 'Why?'.

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## **Abby says**

Former bookseller Fran Sandham has always been fascinated by Africa and the Victorian explorers who opened the continent to trade (with apologies to the Portuguese who came before). One New Years Eve he decides to do it himself: walk across Africa, from the west coast to the east. Scrimping and saving for the next year, Sandham fills his rucksack, gives up his flat in London, his job and sets out.

### **Why I Picked It Up:**

I love reading stories about people doing crazy things, especially things that I'd never dream of doing. I guess I'm the ultimate armchair traveller. :) Sandham's journey provides a window to an Africa rarely seen since his walk takes him away from the major tourist routes and through the less populated and popular areas. Sandham's reflections of his own reactions are honest and open, a welcome change from the usual platitudes and pollyana-isms from other while travelers in Africa.

**Who Would Like It:** Julia B, who I think would appreciate the ballsyness of the author and would maybe want to follow in his steps, and Tess who loves a good story.

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## **Linda says**

Fran Sandham is a British writer who worked for years as an editor for the Rough Guide Travel Series. Tiring of the hustle and bustle of London, he decided to walk across Africa. Even as a child he had been fascinated by the stories of the African explorers, such as Stanley and Livingstone. The walk became a real test of endurance. He wouldn't accept rides, and often spread his sleeping bag in an inconspicuous place at

night rather than stay at a hostel or guest house. His pack was much too heavy at the beginning of his trip and he even considered getting a donkey or a mule to carry his pack, but eventually lightened his pack as much as he could and went on alone. He started at Namibia's Skeleton Coast near Swakopmund and crossed Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, and finished at the Indian Ocean coast of Tanzania. He writes well, and is well-read, so that he uses literary allusions and tells tales of those who have been there before him. I particularly enjoyed it because our family has traveled in Namibia and we have been to some of the places he visited. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Andrea says**

Travel narrative is a subjective taste. So, I always feel a little guilty giving a relatively low rating to a book with very good points. Sandham walks from the Skeleton Coast in Namibia to the Indian Ocean in Tanzania. He follows a strict rule of accepting no rides and he does not have a support team nor a sponsor, so he does the entire trip on a shoestring budget. There are several sections where Sandham does a nice job of succinctly explaining important historical events in the regions he passes through, although they are rather standard narratives. For my taste, I prefer a narrator who spends more time describing either human interactions or the natural history of the areas he passes through. Too much of this book is about the various other backpackers/white travelers Sandham either daydreams about seducing or spends time getting drunk with and, a minor point, I suppose, but for someone who supposedly spent a year preparing for the trip, Sandham spends an awful lot of time describing his blisters, which never seem to heal. Not that blisters aren't a big issue for long distance walkers, but when it is literally the only thing I learn about weeks of the journey, I hope I don't sound hardhearted in saying I lost interest in those sections pretty quickly.

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