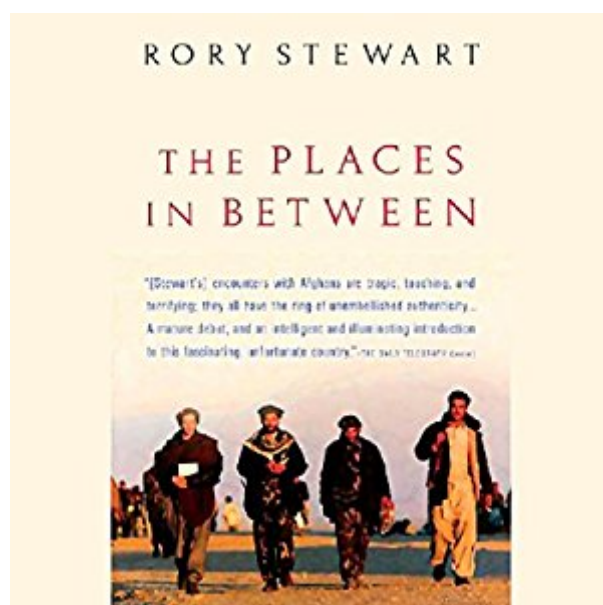


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# The Places In Between



## Synopsis

In January 2002 Rory Stewart walked across Afghanistan-surviving by his wits, his knowledge of Persian dialects and Muslim customs, and the kindness of strangers. By day he passed through mountains covered in nine feet of snow, hamlets burned and emptied by the Taliban, and communities thriving amid the remains of medieval civilizations. By night he slept on villagers' floors, shared their meals, and listened to their stories of the recent and ancient past. Along the way Stewart met heroes and rogues, tribal elders and teenage soldiers, Taliban commanders and foreign-aid workers. He was also adopted by an unexpected companion-a retired fighting mastiff he named Babur in honor of Afghanistan's first Mughal emperor, in whose footsteps the pair was following. Through these encounters-by turns touching, con-founding, surprising, and funny-Stewart makes tangible the forces of tradition, ideology, and allegiance that shape life in the map's countless places in between. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Someone in Kabul told me a crazy Scotsman walked from Herat to Kabul right after the fall of the Taliban" Thanks for the book. For it was indeed a journey of great spirit and determination. Mr. Stewart was well prepared for this trip with vitamins and various medications he knew would be necessary to successfully complete this challenge; ibuprofen, antibiotics, just name it and he had it; sharing with the villagers he met on his way when they saw what he had and begged him. Well written, well told. I was truly impressed with how hospitable the people of Afghanistan were; those whom he encountered and offered him rest and meals and at times water to wash with, at their

various humble abodes where he was invited to stay for the night. Even through they understood little English, Mr. Stewart was able to communicate to them by speaking Persian. I love reading about anything in the Eastern and Asian side of the world, so I was with him all the way. I felt like I was alongside him as he climbed those steep slopes and when he walked on the flat valleys. I drank tea with Mr. Stewart from glass cups, ate stale bread with him and soup, and enjoyed the rest at the end of the day, sleeping on a carpet or just on the floor. The attention given to him was enormous as he persevered onwards. My main concern was just before he got to Kabul when he had to travel through the deep powdery snow which was known to cause frostbite, making it necessary to amputate limbs for some in the past. I held my breath as he and his dog companion Babur made it out of the snow covered mountains, and alas into another bright day. God bless you Rory Stewart.

Walking across central Asia without ruminating at length about the political and military crossfire would seem like an odd diversionary tactic by a writer any less assured than Rory Stewart. However, the Scottish author manages to evoke a powerful sense of what Afghanistan was like during his arduous, often moving trek through the wartorn country in 2002. Unlike Chris Ayres' humorous adventure of being embedded with the troops in Iraq in his blistering account, "War Reporting for Cowards", the then-29-year old Stewart is more straightforward with a true adventurer's spirit and an anthropologist's eye, as he set out on his own with his wooden staff through the central mountain range to Kabul. His immersion into the country was obviously aided incalculably by his fluency in Dari, which is the Afghan dialect of Persian, and his in-depth knowledge of the cultural custom and history of the country. There is not a whit of romanticism in the author's vision, as he shares his experiences with people who have been grouped categorically by the news media with the hard-line Taliban. The most impressive aspect of the book is his ability to provide unique, almost idiosyncratic personalities to everyone he meets from the warlord Ismail Khan to his three Afghan traveling partners to a gregarious village headman to a war-beaten dog who becomes Stewart's constant companion. He names him Babur after the 16th-century Muslim emperor who traveled across Afghanistan to found the Mughal dynasty of India. Carrying the emperor's autobiography, the author draws compelling parallels with his own experiences and describes the Afghan people with becalming respect and admiration even if the ongoing threat of violence has hardened some of their sensibilities.

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