

Doubling Back: Paths Trodden in Memory

Linda Cracknell

Saraband (Feb 4, 2025)

Softcover \$17.95 (304pp)

978-1-915089-90-8

A fascinating, multifaceted collection of armchair treks, Linda Cracknell's travel memoir *Doubling Back* is about revisiting significant places on foot.

Cracknell's walks, undertaken sometimes solo and at other times with companions, took place over decades and across territories. She walked to maintain her mental health and fitness—among other reasons. On a visit to Boscastle, Cornwall, she traced a path trodden by Thomas Hardy and his then-future wife Emma, recalling her own teenage romance. Later, she considers the political significance and sensuality of walking barefoot in Kenya. Another essay details a grueling alpine climb meant to connect her to her father, who died in her early childhood before she had a chance to get to know him. A trip with pack ponies follows the route of long-ago drovers who were responsible for the safety of their animals. Over the course of these walks, relationships bloom and fade; Cracknell's body goes through various changes, as do her surroundings.

Divided into sections that are prefaced by short chapters set at a writing retreat in Switzerland, the text is interspersed with hand-drawn maps. Cracknell's impressive familiarity with landscapes and nature, and the precise language she uses to name and describe the flora and fauna in her path, makes her an amiable guide. Gaelic place names add texture to the prose. The book weaves historical and cultural details into recollections of her perambulations, too: When in Spain, for example, Cracknell noted a plausible relationship between book-making and path-making while considering the pluralism of ancient Toledo. And in the final walk detailed here, peat becomes a metaphor for aging.

Doubling Back is a travel memoir that's spiked with adventures and insights, reflecting back on inspired walks in various locales.

SUZANNE KAMATA (January / February 2025)

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