



BEWILDERED:
Leaving Everything Behind for
3,000km in the Wilds of New Zealand
by Laura Waters

• Affirm Press (via bookdepository.com)
• £16.61 (paperback)

■ In an era of books about 'first' and 'fastest' accomplishments, it's refreshing to become absorbed in something as simple as an intimate, personal journey through the great outdoors. Laura Waters is no great explorer,

nor does she ever pretend to be. Instead, we bear witness to a raw, honest account of someone overcoming personal struggles through the method of a robust long walk (similarities abound with Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, with a light sprinkling of *Eat, Pray, Love*).

Te Araroa ('the long pathway') is a 3,000km trail in New Zealand stretching from Cape Reinga in the north to Bluff in the south — think of it as John O'Groats to Land's End only with more volatile weather and considerably more extreme alpine landscapes. But *Bewildered* isn't really about the track itself, even though that's where 99 per cent of the action occurs. Instead, it's a story about the experience of testing your body and soul through immense hardship — in this respect, any long track would probably have sufficed — and the impact it has on the individual involved.

On an emotional level, why do hikers put themselves through the discomfort required to complete such journeys? Why seek them out? Waters answers this question emphatically, through her flashbacks to recent misery and heartbreak, and the contrast between them and the happiness and freedom she discovers out on Te Araroa. Both in a physical and psychological sense, she is vulnerable, yet willingly so, and that sense of agency provides a growing sense of confidence and empowerment that she captures in remarkably vivid language. Despite the need to cram 3,000km into less than 300 pages, she carries us along for the ride, sharing both miserable nights in freezing mountain huts, and ecstatic moments of liberation. 'Walk the path in safety,' she records from a trailside plaque. 'Look deeply and learn. From your surroundings.' In this, she has undoubtedly succeeded.

CHRIS FITCH



Hiking the
Te Araroa in
New Zealand



**WRITER'S
READS**

Raja Shehadeh is Palestine's leading writer. He is the winner of the 2008 Orwell Prize for Palestinian Walks. His new book, *Going Home*, is out now

■ **Parisian**

by Isabella Hammad (2019)

Though the events of this superb first novel by Hammad take place before the Palestinian Nakba it provides the background for what came later.

■ **Season of Migration to the North**

by Tayeb Salih (1966)

Has at its heart the impact of British colonialism and modernity on the rural Sudanese society. The novel was described by Edward Said as one of the six great novels in Arabic literature.

■ **Footsteps**

by Richard Holmes (1985)

Retraces Robert Louis Stevenson's famous journey through the Cevennes. A charming and informative mix of travel and personal memoir.

■ **The Last Life**

by Claire Messud (1998)

The story of a French-Algerian family brought to the brink of destruction by a single reckless act. It is a testament to making sense of an unruly past and the attempt to constitute an identity.

■ **My Happiness Bears**

No Relation to Happiness

by Adina Hoffman (2009)

The biography of the Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali whose life spans the tragedy of the Palestinian people. It tells the story of the Palestinian Nakba like no other book does.

■ **The Enigma of Arrival**

by VS Naipaul (1987)

Reflections on the nature of our perceptions of the surroundings in which we live and how much these are affected by our misconceptions of a place.

■ **Howards End**

by EM Forster (1910)

One of the best English novels about social conventions, codes of conduct and relationships in England. A real gem.

■ **The Child in Time**

by Ian McEwan (1987)

Through the exciting events of this haunting novel the author in his clear well-chiselled prose explores the theory that time is relative.

The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot

by Robert Macfarlane (2013)

■ Macfarlane walks through a vast ancient network of routes, that include Palestine, through places and journeys that inspire and inhabit our imaginations.