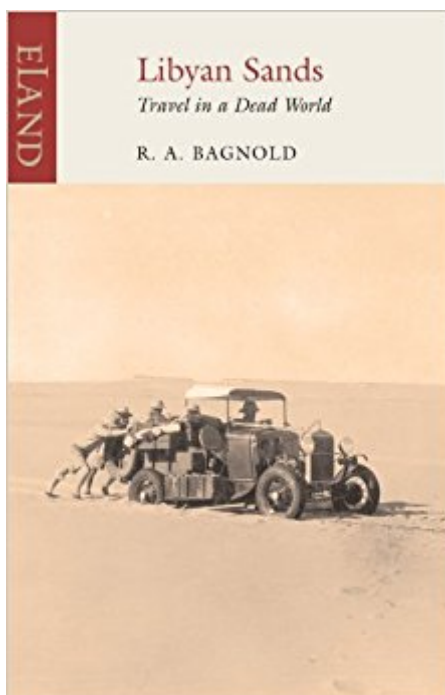


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# Libyan Sands: Travel In A Dead World



## Synopsis

Ralph Bagnold was among a group of eccentric British explorers who in the 1930's explored the deserts of North Africa using Model T Fords. This book describes his journeys into the region known as the Western Desert of Egypt or the Libyan Sahara. He is a central character in the group of explorers who would be later fictionalized in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. *Libyan Sands* is an exploration of the Egyptian western desert and the Libyan Sahara on the eve of the Second World War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Libyan Sands* is an evocative description of the author's motor car exploration of the Western Desert (Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Chad) during the interwar period of the 20th century. The insatiably curious Ralph Bagnold began by gathering fellow army officers to see the sites of Egypt -- the pyramids, monasteries, Roman ruins, oasis life, and the desert -- and to experience the joys of motoring in the early days of automobiles. This led to several trips to Sinai, Palestine, and Transjordan in 1926-27, sometimes pioneering new auto routes. Next came a series of long-range trips into the Western Desert in 1927-30. Bagnold and his companions solved a succession of problems --- lack of water (countered by an adaptation that recycled car radiator water losses), getting stuck in soft sand (rope ladders and metal chutes for providing tire traction, reduced tire pressure), navigation in featureless landscapes (invention of a sun compass), crossing sand dune barriers (discovery of sand properties that enabled cars to drive up certain kinds of dunes in certain conditions) --- and in the process explored vast expanses that had been unknown to modern

science. At the conclusion of one of the trips, at a Greek café in Wadi Halfa, he and his companions founded the Zorzura Club of desert explorers, named for the last "lost" oasis. A chance meeting with a travel colleague at the Royal Geographical Society map room, examining blank spaces on a map of North-East Africa, led to a return to Egypt. "The externals of Cairo change very slowly, and the atmosphere changes not at all." The 1932 expedition covered 6,000 miles, mostly across uncharted desert. Besides work on a plethora of `ologies --- geology, archaeology, ornithology, entomology, botany, topography --- the expedition was familiar with history (Herodotus, ancient Arabic texts, the Mahdi's uprising, preceding explorers) and took sympathetic note of human interaction: "The common-sense politeness of the people [of northern Sudan], their spontaneous helpfulness and their restraint in the display of any curiosity that might annoy are amazing in comparison with the people of other countries." One of the most memorable incidents was meeting an Italian army contingent at a remote oasis, a meeting celebrated with a dinner invitation and excellent Chianti, but a prologue to the desert war to come. The story is told with a vivid demonstration of practical scientific application, an impressive breadth of interests, contemplation on issues such as remoteness and exploration, and not a little lyrical appreciation of the desert. An epilogue by the author and an afterword by his son put the narrative into perspective. Bagnold was the greatest of the Libyan Desert explorers (first among his fellows, including the now better-known Count Almásy), a scientist of the first order (his *Physics of Blown Sand and Desert Dunes* has been a standard text on the subject for more than 50 years), and the founding leader of World War II's elite Long Range Desert Group (which arguably deflected the Italian army from overrunning Egypt and seizing the Suez Canal). These achievements are either described or foretold in this modest traveler's tale. The Eland edition is a welcome reprinting of a classic.

Bagnold is one of my heroes. I have read this book a few times. First as hardcover and later as e-book, just to easier check details. Having traveled myself as a geologist in Egypt's Western Desert in a modern 4WD is far cry from these guys driving in back stripped T Fords. Learning by trial and error how to drive in the dune-fields, inventing a simple cooling system, with primitive (but effective) navigation and mostly using their wits and respect for a piece of unforgiving nature if something would go wrong. They explored an uncharted desert just because it was there. Wanting to know what was beyond the horizon. Careful planned expeditions, carrying all petrol and water with no margin for mistakes. Their maps were key to the WWII battles between Rommel and Monty along the coast and the cat-and-mouse game of the long range patrols. Bagnold was so impressed by the systematics he noticed in the sands that he later became an expert in desert dune sand

depositional processes, again using the same pragmatic approach that characterises his expeditions in the real thing. The stories of his expeditions are captivating, but perhaps a bit more to somebody who has been there and felt the desert. You feel it in this book. A dead world, yes, but a fascinating one. Paris Dakar with all its high tech lacks what these men had so much of: real guts and explorers blood. On top of that Bagnold was a good writer who keeps you going.

Fascinating desert travels and descriptions by the future leader of the Long Range Desert Group. The famous reconnaissance unit of the British Army that also inspired the British SAS in the WWII North Africa campaign. He also describes inventions that allowed autos to travel in the desert without losing water and to navigate utilizing the sun. Modifications of these ideas are still used.

Having been a user of "The physics of blown sand and desert dunes" by RA Bagnold, I was interested in knowing more about his desert background. Libyan Sands: travel in a dead world was a well-written account of early motorised exploration of very sandy landscapes, though the author's later interest in the physics of sand movement was not really anticipated. The book was very enjoyable, covering a lot of political and social aspects of the use of deserts by their natural inhabitants as well as invaders

Driving Ford cars on narrow tires through deep sand Bagnold spent many years exploring the deserts of Libya between the wars, he learned where the cars could go. He rediscovered ancient caravan routes across the sand and stony wastes. Exciting and very well written, well worth the time spent reading it.

i enjoyed this book because it let me peer into a windshield view of a world many years buried in the sands of the immense western desert. The bravery, to drive fragile cars hundreds of miles into unknown territory. At a time when, if help were needed and if it came at all, would be weeks away, is hard to imagine. I recommend this to all would be explorers and those who just like a good read.

between the world war exploration of the desert by the english. The locals already knew things and had left the small signs but had not produced maps for outsiders to use.

An excellent read.

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