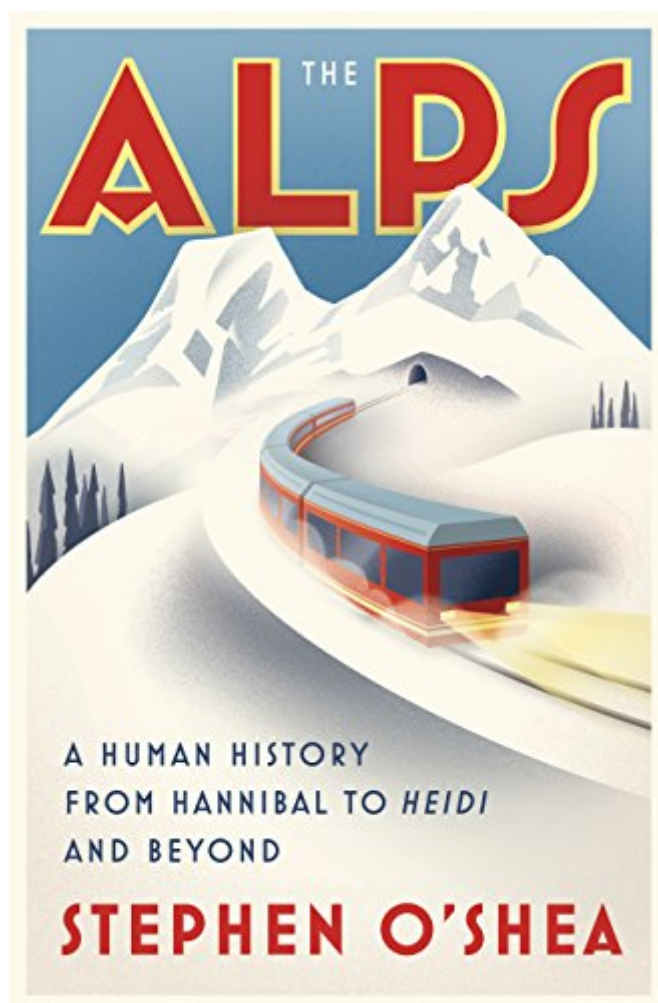


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The Alps: A Human History From Hannibal To Heidi And Beyond



Synopsis

A thrilling blend of contemporary travelogue and historical narrative about the Alps from “a graceful and passionate writer” (Washington Post). For centuries the Alps have seen the march of armies, the flow of pilgrims and Crusaders, the feats of mountaineers, and the dreams of engineers—and some 14 million people live among their peaks today. In *The Alps*, Stephen O’Shea takes readers up and down these majestic mountains, battling his own fear of heights to journey through a 500-mile arc across France, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Germany, Austria, and Slovenia. O’Shea, whose style has been hailed for its “engaging combination of candid first-person travel writing and absorbing historical narrative” (Chicago Sun-Times), whisks readers along more than 2,000 years of Alpine history. As he travels pass-by-pass through the mountains, he tells great stories of those (real and imagined) who have passed before him, from Hannibal to Hitler, Frankenstein’s monster to Sherlock Holmes, Napoleon to Nietzsche, William Tell to James Bond. He explores the circumstances behind Hannibal and his elephants’ famous crossing in 218 BCE; he reveals how the Alps have profoundly influenced culture from *Heidi* to *The Sound of Music*; and he visits iconic sites, including the Reichenbach Falls, where Arthur Conan Doyle staged Sherlock Holmes’ death scene with Professor Moriarty; Caporetto, the bloody site of the Italians’ retreat in World War I; and the Eagle’s Nest, Hitler’s aerie of a vacation home. O’Shea delves into Alpine myths and legends, such as the lopsided legs of the dahu, the fictitious goatlike creature of the mountains, and reveals why the beloved St. Bernard dog is so often depicted with a cask hanging below its neck. Throughout, he immerses himself in the communities he visits, engagingly recounting his adventures with contemporary road trippers, watchmakers, salt miners, cable-car operators, and yodelers.

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Customer Reviews

Very interesting tour de force of the Alps. Only regret is that you want to keep reading about the Alps, but not many books available on the topic of the culture of the Alps. Highly recommendable.

I loved this book. Part travel narrative, part history lesson, part cultural comparisons, part snarky observations (which were too funny) all add up to a brilliant whole. I didn't want the trip to end. I hope the author will write more books like this one.

O'Shea has written a wonderful travel book. The title is somewhat misleading, because it is not a history book, nor is it a guide to the Alps. It's really a kind of account of a summer's travel in the Alps, with many many stops, en route from the French Alps to the mountains near Trieste and Slovenia. It's difficult to describe, really. The charm is partly his wry, sometimes self-deprecating humor. He frequently interacts with local people (his French appears to be fluent), and his character sketches are extremely good. He often describes driving, and gives a good sense of the heights, and European driving habits (he's not really fond of the Dutch). His descriptions of the places he visits, including museums, viewing points, town centers and such, are just as good as his character sketches. History is blended in in a way that even people who don't like history will find palatable. He's originally Canadian, lives in France, and is a practiced writer. I have not read his other books, but sure will check them out after this one.

I'd already read and relished Stephen O'Shea's other books, in which he'd proven himself master of a hybrid prose style that combined first-rate historical research, genuine eloquence and a galloping storyline. What was new in this book was the extent to which he interpolated himself, and a good

thing too. As we follow O'Shea on his dizzying sweeps up and down the Alps and through history we are wowed by his erudition and charmed by his dexterous sentences but it is the hilarity of his endless misadventures that finally bewitch us. Toss the best of Jonathan Raban and Geoff Dyer in a blender, hit Pulse a few times, and pour out The Alps.

Travel book about a solo auto trip through the Alps, with many historical anecdotes and asides. Interesting, funny at times, and well written. Anyone who has traveled in the Alps or is thinking of doing so would, I believe, enjoy this book.

This is an absolutely beautiful read. It's a history, as the title implies, but it's more than that too. O'Shea takes us along on his summer driving adventure, taking us through Switzerland, France, Austria, Italy, and Slovenia, and from the beginning it is clear that we, the readers, are in good hands. O'Shea manages to weave in all kinds of topics - from film history and archaeology to geology to and the zen of muscle car maintenance - in a narrative that is learned, insightful, witty, funny, and occasionally quite touching. It has been a while since I last enjoyed a book as much as I did this one, and towards the end, in order to savor it just a little bit longer, I limited myself to a certain maximum number of pages per day. This is a beautiful work by an accomplished writer and historian. You, and your bookshelf, will be all the richer for having it.

This book is a rich mix of history, cultural analysis, and humor. We were inspired by its vibrant, insightful, funny writing, and, in fact, visited the Alps after having read the book. It was a hoot to experience so much of what O'Shea recorded and commented on-- the ubiquitous Alpine people and phenomena were rendered more interesting for having heard O'Shea's take on 'em. Actual Alpine travel or no, this book is just a terrific armchair traveler experience. We are fans of O'Shea's marvelous Walking the Front-- his account of walking the French front lines of the Great War-- and knew to expect that he would, once again, keep us engaged and amused even as he shovels heaps of informed and important stuff at us. Last note: in this era of American nuttiness, O'Shea's book is a great reminder of the fact that there is so much more to pay attention to than the lower half of North America and its inhabitants.

This book describes the authors auto trip through the Alps. There is a mix of history, geography and local color as well of descriptions of scary roads. The book is well written and easy to read. I a basically covered the entire book on a cross country air trip. Found it OK; but, not super interesting.

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