



The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom

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Cavalry officer Slavomir Rawicz was captured by the Red Army in 1939 during the German-Soviet partition of Poland and was sent to the Siberian Gulag along with other captive Poles, Finns, Ukrainians, Czechs, Greeks, and even a few English, French, and American unfortunates who had been caught up in the fighting. A year later, he and six comrades from various countries escaped from a labor camp in Yakutsk and made their way, on foot, thousands of miles south to British India, where Rawicz reenlisted in the Polish army and fought against the Germans. *The Long Walk* recounts that adventure, which is surely one of the most curious treks in history.

The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom Details

Date : Published December 1st 1997 by The Lyons Press (first published 1956)

ISBN : 9781558216341

Author : Slavomir Rawicz

Format : Hardcover 242 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Adventure, Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, Survival

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From Reader Review The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom for online ebook

Lee Bridgers says

This book was a real disappointment, so stupid a lie that it is almost as hard to believe that so many people fall for it--oh well, the Bible comes to mind. I love non-fiction, especially books on mid 20th century history. I had just finished reading One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and found this book in the Falcon Press racks at an airport. I began to read it, and inch by inch I started to feel the lie. Ivan Denisovich is a made-up story (based on the author's actual experience, but fictionalized) and it feels true at every turn, but Long Walk never feels true. It feels like a fantasy from the get-go. At the point where I finally found the incredibly obvious lie that made me finally give in and admit that this book was BS, I looked at the name of the publisher. Globe Pequot. I am an author of a book they published, not a very good club to be in from my experience. And I had yet to read about the Yeti sighting, which should have put me off when I first read blurbs about the book. I put the book down, not caring about the rest of the made-up story--it is now emergency toilet paper. I felt like my mind had been raped, much like the pretty girl in the story would have been if the story were to ring true. Here is the back breaker, if you want to understand just how stupid it gets: The tale of "going for days without water" in the Gobi Desert and the subsequent portrait of the "oasis" are completely laughable. I live in a desert climate and have to tell you for your own safety that you will not survive longer than a day without water, especially if you exert yourself in the heat of day, which is what our hero said the group was doing for many days on end. Just ask search and rescue workers in Arizona or New Mexico! You don't last long without water, and if you finally find some water in that condition, it is probably hallucination. Maybe this is the lesson of the book. We are so thirsty for a good read, that we will believe pigs fly and men don't eat each other when the going gets extremely rough.

Tj says

I found this book truly inspirational and gripping. I read it in 2 nights. There is some banter about whether or not it is true. I'm still not decided on what I think about this debate. What I do know, from having lived in Russia for a number of years and having toured an obscure KGB "prison" in Lithuania 3 times, that the author's description of his torture in Minsk and in Moscow were especially haunting. From what I saw in Vilnius, he was actually given light treatment. Some of the rooms in that prison possess possibilities for torture that normal humans can barely comprehend. I have no doubt that if Slavomir had been a prisoner of war in Siberia (records indicate he was) then he most likely experienced what he claims on the way to camp 303. As for his escape, I also know many Mongols, and they are as kind as he describes. All in all, an excellent read, fiction or fact. I recommend it to all.

AMEERA says

Wow

Chrissie says

OK, here is my gut feeling. I do not know if all of this is true. Right smack in the beginning sections just did not seem believable. Once I started thinking this way my feelings toward the book were wrecked. If there is one inconsistency, do you believe the rest? I will list some of the points that I found quite unbelievable. I must add, that for none of these points can I prove I am right. That there is ALWAYS a good explanation for each peculiar instance is almost another complaint. Everything is so fullproof, that it doesn't ring true. I am a born sceptic.....

1. First of all, why are there no notes that document these experiences. To believe this I need the notes.
2. Seven men escape from a gulag in Siberia just south of Yakutsk. The seven men manage to get themselves all placed in the same building, a building located near their escape route. How did they pull this off? Other men were sleeping in the barracks and none of the others awoke. Is this believable? I certainly hear when someone gets up or even moves in my bedroom. I know. I know. These men were exhausted, but still I find it strange. Furthermore the author, the instigator of the escape plan, is aided by the wife of the commanding officer of the gulag..... I mean give me a break. Everything is explained so well, that I do not believe it. Real life has hitches.
2. When they escape they are never chased. Nothing.
3. They manage to survive the Siberian cold and get through the Gobi desert. Three of the seven do die.
4. Along the way they are joined by a woman. She does die in the desert. But the whole thing is kind of "cute".
5. Then the final bit is just too much..... They meet the, not one but two, Abominable Snowmen. The way it is described is just too much. They are drawn up as couple. When the group departs the text reads:

"We pushed off around the rock and directly away from them. I looked back and the pair were standing still, arms swing slightly, as though listening intently."

I don't have the energy to quote more.

On the other hand, if this book is true I feel like a total creep. There are elements that seem to bring forth a romanticism to sell the book. There is a huge bear playing music on a tree trunk. OK, bears do play. Do you see what I mean? There is always an explanation. In the end I feel uncomfortable. Is the book true? I believe parts are true. I believe the description of the prisons and the torture procedures - they rang true. Oh yes, at one point the author is punched in the face and all his teeth on that side fall out. Then the guy beating him says to head is off balance. He slugs the other side, and those teeth fall out too. However later in the book, it is mentioned that one of the group has trouble eating their rough food because he has no teeth. The author never has this problem. But I thought his teeth were punched out. They clattered on the floor!

What I did like was the description of the people in Tibet. You got close to these people and saw a glimpse of their lifestyle. There were also two excellent maps. The writing style is just factual, neither exceptionally bad nor good.

If this is true I feel terrible. The author has raised money talking about his experiences. This money has gone toward helping orphans in Poland. Knowing this, I do feel a bit uncomfortable criticizing the book. I have to tell you how I see it.

Amy says

I am constantly amazed at the human spirit and will to survive. I often wonder, after reading books like this, if I would be one to make it. I'm not sure I would. This reminds me of Life and Death in Shanghai and of David Faber's story. How is it possible for humankind to be so diverse and affected by governments that you

would find it in yourself to treat people the way prisoners are treated at times? How can you be so convinced of the "common good" that you allow yourself to degrade another living creature to the point of standing in their own excrement for hours and days on end? But then to have that same persecuted individual want to live so badly, that he walks over 4000 miles to safety and health? Along the way he sees the other side of humanity, the beauty of selfless giving and hospitality. There really are no words adequate enough to describe the horror and then the beauty of such a journey.

On a side note... my sister and I talked about how he makes a statement in his foreward- almost a warning- about governments and their vision of the "common good." Its scary to see and hear how many of our speeches coming from our so well intentioned government include the goal of the "common good." wow.

Chana says

Slavomir Rawicz is in the Polish army and is arrested by the Russians, accused of spying. He spends a year in Russian prison, then is given a trial and sentenced to 25 years labor. He is transported by train from Moscow to Irkutsk, then is on a forced march in chains with hundreds of other prisoners to Camp 303 in Northern Siberia. After a few months he decides to escape, gathers a group of like minded men, is helped by the Camp Commander's wife who is sympathetic. They successfully escape the camp and so begins the long walk south from northern Siberia to India. This includes crossing the Gobi desert and climbing through the Himalayas!

This is a very well-written book but so fantastic that I felt like I was reading Life of Pi, or maybe the Bible (ram with horns stuck in the thicket, the long exodus out of slavery, and (for the Christians) the virgin. I didn't see how the story could possibly be true, but on the other hand, maybe it was. I can't judge because I simply have no information except what the author is telling me. I choose to believe him, or at least not disbelieve him. The story is very moving in many ways but I didn't really have an emotional reaction to it until the end with the incident with Paluchowicz. I just couldn't believe it, after all the hardships. When they finally reach India I let out the breath I hadn't even realized I had been holding and cried with the men as they said goodbye to each other.

Reading reviews and articles: Looks like it wasn't true. It was still an excellent story. Life of Pi and the Bible.

Jrobertus says

The Long Walk, by Slavomir Rawicz, purports to be the true story of an heroic flight to freedom. He claims to have been a Polish officer grabbed by the Russians in 1939, imprisoned and marched to "camp 303" in Siberia. From there he and six companions escape, with the help of the commandants wife. They begin a year long trek south, past Lake Baikal, through Mongolia, across the Gobi, over Tibet and to India and freedom. Hurray! What a triumph of the human spirit. The book had the taint of improbability all along, especially the part about observing a Yeti couple! Subsequent investigation shows the book is a fraud. None of the events can be substantiated. He claims to have convalesced in a British military hospital in India for a month, but there is no such record. He claims to have trained with the Polish contingent of the RAF, but there is no record of that. Russian records show no camp 303; they show Rawicz was a prisoner of war, but was pardoned in 1942 and sent to a refugee camp in Iran. So there you go.

Clif Hostetler says

When this novel was first published in 1956 it created a sensation. It claimed to be a memoir of a man, who with seven others, had escaped from a Siberian prison work camp in 1942 and managed to walk all the way to British India. The story was eagerly consumed by the cold war era public who were enamored by the tale of an escape from the evil empire of the Soviet Union. It was an incredible story of endurance that required walking across the Gobi Desert and over the Himalayan Mountains.

Research of Soviet records since the cold war has revealed that while it is true that the author had been a prisoner in Siberia in the early 1940s, he did not escape in the manner described in this book. Instead he was released as part of a 1942 general amnesty and subsequently transported across the Caspian Sea to a refugee camp in Iran. He did end up living in Britain and probably passed through India on the way there.

I'm surprised that anybody believed the story in the first place because of its many technical flaws. If the author had called the book a novel I would criticize for being unrealistic and in need of additional research into means of survival in the desert and mountains. Unfortunately, the author claimed it to be a true memoir of his experiences. I say unfortunate because it clearly makes him to be a liar.

If there is any possibility of truth in the story it may be that Slavomir Rawicz stole the story from another person who actually walked such a journey. I think it's possible that prisoners from Siberia managed to escape to India, but I'm quite confident that they didn't do it by walking across the Gobi without equipment and a map. Their crossing of the Himalayas has similar problems. And the book's claim that they saw Abominable Snowman (i.e. The Yeti) establishes the fact beyond all doubt that the book is fiction, and fiction not very well done.

But the fact remains that the idea of escaping from Siberia to India is a heck of a story. The 2011 movie "The Way Back" is based on this book. Maybe the movie is more realistic, but I've not seen the movie so I can't judge it. The movie's popularity caused the book to be republished and consequently brought to my attention.

You can read more about the controversy regarding the authenticity of the book at this [Wikipedia article](#).

The following review from PageADay's 2007 Book Lover's Calendar was how I first learned about the book:
BACK IN PRINT

Rawicz's memoir is one of the most extraordinary and harrowing you will ever read. A young Polish officer in World War II, Rawicz was captured by Soviet forces and sent to a work camp in Siberia. In 1941 he and six fellow prisoners escaped and, with only an ax head and a makeshift knife, trekked thousands of miles through Siberian tundra, the Gobi desert, and over the Himalayas to freedom in British-occupied India. The New York Times calls Rawicz "a poet with steel in his soul" and Sebastian Junger (*The Perfect Storm*) calls the book "one of the epic treks of the human race."

THE LONG WALK: THE TRUE STORY OF A TREK TO FREEDOM, by Slavomir Rawicz (1956; The Lyons Press, 1997)

El says

I'm not going to get all wrapped up in whether or not this account is true as the book claims. It's a remarkable story regardless, much like the book I just read, *Das Boot: The Boat*, was a remarkable story and may have some kernels of truth from the author's real life. The story itself is good and empowering, and that's all that

really matters to me.

That's a lot of walking, even for fictional characters.

Julia says

An amazing true story of the human spirit's will to live. Russia invaded Poland in 1939 and took hundreds of thousands of Polish soldiers prisoner...

One man, the author of this book, not only survived torture in Russian hands, and an inhumane train ride and walk to a Siberian labor camp... but after all that, he decided to escape. He recruited 6 other prisoners to join him and the 7 of them walked to India. Through Siberian blizzards, the Gobi desert's deadly heat, the treacherous landscape of the Himalayas. Took them over a year, and some died along the way, but 4 made it all the way.

We've all heard of incredible survival stories, but you have never read a story like this. A detailed account of an entire year, highlighting the day-to-day challenges of survival. The amazing strokes of luck that saved their lives, like the generosity of the peoples they came across in Mongolia and Tibet, people who fed them along the way. It is truly amazing how the human body survived the ordeal, and even more impressively, how they managed to keep their integrity, their spirits, and humanity intact.

Author is very factual, almost dry and understated, which I think, is how he survived. Still rich in detail and captures the pain and suffering without wallowing in it. Have to move on, as do the words and chapters... like the travelers, you don't want to stop moving once you get going (start reading).

Misty Hobbs says

Cavalry officer Slavomir Rawicz was captured by the Red Army in 1939 during the German-Soviet partition of Poland and was sent to the Siberian Gulag ...more. This book has had a huge influence in my life. It is the book that I read when I need to be reminded of how much the human heart and body can endure. It is the story I think of when I feel that my life is out of my control. When I need to be reminded that my life is not that bad that I really don't have it as tough as I think I do. What Rawicz endures opens my heart to human suffering outside of my own and I am so grateful to him for sharing his story.

Gary says

A memoir must be an unrewarding thing to write today. So many have been discredited as either full of untruths or completely fabricated. Jerzy Kosinski's "Painted Bird", Carlos Casteneda's "The Teaching of Don Juan", more than a few of Oprah-publicized books, and now (a revelation for me) "The Long Walk", a book that has sold half a million copies since it was first published in 1956. I started to get suspicious about 1/3 of the way through this book. There were too many implausible incidents, starting from his insistence that he was completely innocent of spying or any other any crime against the Soviets (they claim he killed an NKVD officer), his extraordinary long interrogations, the long march from Irkutsk to the camp chained

behind a wood-burning truck, his ability to interview and then reject candidates for the escape without anyone ratting him out, the help he got from the commandant's wife, and his naive view of the natural world. He claimed that the only living things in the Gobi desert were snakes, which they caught and ate (what did the snakes eat? Were they cannibals?). They evidently just laze around in holes with only their head sticking out. All of the snakes I have ever seen were either lying or crawling over the ground. It sounds more like gopher or night-crawler behavior to me.

Then there were the pair of Yeti they spotted! Now I know there was a lot of interest in the Yeti, Sasquatch, and Loch Ness monster back in the 50's when this book was written, but really now, are we supposed to take this seriously? I haven't researched the disbelievers extensively, but Outside did a scathing review in 2003 (<http://outside.away.com/outside/featu...>) and the BBC did an expose in 2006 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6...>).

The current edition of the book has the usual testimonials on the back cover, including a glowing one from Sebastian Junger (The Perfect Storm), "One of the epic treks of the human race" he says. Well Sebastian, I've now got you calibrated! How does such obvious fabrication go unquestioned by so many people for so long (read some of the angry comments at the end of the BBC article)? Part of it may be the desire to believe a compelling story of incredible hardship and adventure, and part of it must be the West's fixation during the cold war with the evils of the Soviet Union. Anybody who can tell a story that makes them look like fools has got to be believed!

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_mem... for more about other fake memoirs. Also see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavomir...>

SoManyBooks SoLittleTime (Aven Shore) says

InCREDible adventure story. Unbelievable what people are physically able to endure and survive. Just riveting.

This man, and others, walked, after escaping, from a work camp in Siberia, through Mongolia (desert), oh, and then OVER the Himalayas. Walked. Several of them died.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Amazing true account of courage and determination. 4.5 stars.

This group of men escaped from a Siberian prison camp in 1941 and spent a year making their way to safety in India. They crossed very harsh terrain including the Gobi Desert and the Himalayas. Sadly, not all of them survived the journey.

Most interesting were the locals they met along the way, especially the Mongolians and Tibetans.

Very well edited and not too long. Reads like a novel.

Lyn says

Tragic and difficult but also hypnotic.

The reader may question the complete veracity of the account and may be somewhat disappointed to learn of the amount of criticism and doubt surrounding his story. Essentially, a group of political prisoners in a Soviet prison in Siberia literally walk out of captivity. The idea is that an escaped prisoner will die in the bitter cold and unforgiving wilderness of eastern Asia. The group walks across Siberia and into the Gobi desert and then to the Himalayas. Did they really see a Yeti?

A very interesting book.

Amy says

Perhaps I've been missing references to this book and gulags for years, but now I see them everywhere. The night after I finished this book, I laughed uproariously to find this book (and its movie) being referenced in the new Muppets movie. I think I was the only person in the theater who got the joke when the actress that played Christina in the movie started doing ballet against scene cuts of Muppets treacherously traversing snowy mountains and hot deserts to get to Kermit the Frog in his Siberian gulag. Or maybe I'm the last person to have seen the movie and read the book and the pop culture aspect of it is old news.

I remember my International Relations professor referencing Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his writings about the Russian gulags (Russian forced labor prison camps), but it was only a vague reference without much background. Somehow I missed that Stalin began placing people in gulags in 1930 and had already imprisoned 1.5 million inmates in gulags by the beginning of World War II with numbers rising as high as 2.5 million inmates in the 1950s. The majority of these camps were located in Siberia. And it's the journey to and the escape from one of these Siberian gulags to India (by way of the Gobi Desert, Tibet, and the Himalayas) that is the subject of this book.

The history of this book is a convoluted one. The tale within the book occurs from 1941-1942 and was originally ghost written for the author in 1955. A few years ago, it came out that it was impossible for this to have been the true story of the author since he was released from the gulag in 1942 to a refugee camp in Iran rather than escaping to India in 1941. Another man, Witold Głuchowski, then claimed that the story was true, but that it had happened to him instead.

Regardless of what is true and what is not, it's a fascinating story of survival and perseverance. The movie and book became instant favorites of mine. I think that, more than anything, I was amazed that the U.S. allied with Russia in World War II when Stalin was very much still reigning terror down upon those whom he saw as a threat to his rule and spread of communism. It was a selfish alliance in some ways, but a wise alliance in others. But what was happening in Russia during World War II (and afterward) isn't depicted in movies and literature nearly as much as the horrors of Hitler. In toll of lives, Stalin was directly or indirectly responsible for far more than Hitler. Still, I suppose it could have been worse.

I watched the movie version of this book ("The Way Back") first, and it left out the horrifying fact that a large part of the journey of Russia's political prisoners to Siberia was done on foot. Prisoners were chained together poorly dressed for the cold weather and made to walk 1000 miles or more with only bread and water to sustain them. Many died along the way. One thing that struck me in the book was the author's observation that a decade in age made a huge difference in how well a man was able to endure and survive the journey and the work expected of them upon arrival. I suppose that if you've already endured and survived a 1000-mile trek, you're more apt to think that a 4000-mile escape route from Siberia to India might not be impossible.

Once the prisoners escaped into the wilderness, I found it odd that they never found a way of carrying water with them. They could have hollowed out a tree trunk, used the bladder of the deer they killed, rummaged in the garbage of villages they passed for some sort of vessel, etc. But they never had more than a mug between them for cooking or carrying water. At the point that they realized they were wandering into a desert, surely they would have realized their need for a way to carry water. It's amazing how often they went forward on their journey with simply the hope that they'd eventually encounter food and water if they kept going. I suppose that you do what you have to do. I'm still amazed that more of them didn't die in the desert with only the occasional mud puddle and snake to sustain them. And I'm amazed, too, that they managed to get to India without a map. I'm thinking about how difficult it would be for me to attempt a similarly lengthy journey from here to Alaska on foot with nothing but a general directional idea and no map. Christopher McCandless' version of that journey was harsh enough in *Into the Wild*. Luckily, poor peasants are far more accepting of a ragamuffin group of travelers than your average city dweller. If you saw a band of half-starved dirty travelers walking down your street, you'd be more likely to lock your doors than kill a lamb to feed them.

Whether this story was completely, partially, or not at non-fiction, it still stands as a grand tale. I highly recommend it to those interested in history and tales of survival.

Katie says

This book says it's the "true story of a trek to freedom" and I began reading it as such. It takes the reader on a harrowing journey beginning with Soviet imprisonment where the Polish author is eventually sentenced to 25 years in a Siberian labor camp. The trip to the labor camp alone was a torturous mix of walking and riding in a packed rail car. Once at the camp, the author begins making plans and choosing associates to break out. His group of 6 prisoners is ultimately successful... and so begins "the long walk". The journey takes them on a year long escape to India via the Gobi desert, the Himalayas, etc... As I got pretty far into the journey I started to wonder about the authenticity of the journey. Upon further investigation I found that the book's credibility is in serious doubt. It's even questionable whether this is the author's own story... or one he "stole" from someone else. Too bad. Ruined it for me. If the author had just presented it as "historical fiction" and established that pieces have been fictionalized, I would have been totally fine with it. However, I've learned that many Polish prisoners- including entire families- did endure extremely "long walks" to freedom although obviously not to the extent this author presents. May this book be a tribute to their experience... if not the authors. People endure amazing privations for freedom.

Ed says

There is much controversy as to whether this account is fact or fiction. I googled the author's name and the book title and after reading dozens of articles and opinions, I'm still not sure, though I lean towards thinking that the narrative is actually a composite of a number of experiences including Rawicz's.

As was said in an account on the web entitled "#18 Anderson's Long Walk Expedition", in which a group of people retraced Rawicz's journey, although on camels not on foot:

Attempting to find truth in every written word of the Long Walk dooms the book to skepticism. The two most poignant examples of this are Rawicz and his companions crossing the Gobi desert without water for 13 days and sighting the yeti in the Himalayas. However, both of these events occurred when Rawicz was close to death due to extreme environmental conditions. Other sections of the book, such as the descriptions of the

local people and their customs are so accurate it seems impossible a Polish immigrant living in England could have made up such details without experiencing them first hand.

Giving Rawicz some creative leeway, considering English was his third or fourth language and he wrote the book more than 15 years after the walk occurred, the events in the book take on a more believable tone.

You can find the complete article on the Polartech web site.

I certainly enjoyed reading the book whether or not it was a completely true re-telling of Rawicz's experiences or not.

The story was actually transcribed by Ronald Downing, a British reporter. I'm sure he took some creative liberties, especially in describing the Yeti encounter, due to his desire to find eye-witness accounts of just such meetings.

The story is exciting and moves along briskly. The prose is sparse but captures the emotion of these survivors very well. I recommend reading the book, if for no other reason, than to make up your own mind about the controversy surrounding its veracity.

Buggy says

Opening Line: *"It was about nine o'clock one bleak November day that the key rattles in the heavy lock of my cell in the Lubyanka Prison and the two broad-shouldered guards marched purposely in."*

Wow what an amazing story, epic is I guess more the word I'm looking for. I read this after watching the movie *The Way Back* and as is usually the case the book is much better, vastly different yet obviously maintaining the gist of the year long trek across an entire continent to freedom. As a point of interest (or not) Colin Farrell's tattooed gang character does not exist in the book. Anyways...

Slavomir Rawicz wrote this memoir in 1959 as a form of therapy to escape the memories that still haunted him. It has lost nothing with time however and remains one of the most incredible journeys of strength, endurance and human spirit you'll ever read.

Its 1941 and "Slav" has just spent two years in a Soviet prison. After multiple beatings and interrogations at the hands of the sadistic prison guard "the Bull" he is eventually found guilty of espionage (?) and sentenced to 25 years forced labour in a Siberian work camp. (These sections were actually some of the most brutal in the whole book)

Thus begins his journey. Transferred during the dead of winter Slav somehow survives the 3000 mile cattle car train ride and subsequent chain gang death march into inner Siberia and camp 303 in Yakutsk After enduring starvation, cold, illness and brutality he and six other prisoners escape.

Together they cross an entire continent on foot with nothing more than an axe, a knife, a weeks worth of food and an unbreakable will to live. Covering some of the most inhospitable conditions on earth they travel out of Siberia and through China, across the Gobi dessert into Tibet and finally over the Himalayas and into British India. This is where the epic part comes in because their journey is so brutal, so filled with despair and suffering its at times unbelievable and also impossible to put down.

The LONG WALK is written factually and Slav doesn't ever tell us how he feels, he just gives a meticulous account of what is taking place. However for this type of storytelling it was perfect. Included in this 1997

version is an afterwards with some of the readers most persistent questions answered. What Slav's life was like after The Long Walk, What happened to the other men? Did he ever see them again?

This is a story I won't ever forget and I highly recommend. I mean they walked from Siberia to India, just think about that for a second.

Javier Calle says

Una increíble novela de aventura y superación que tiene el aliciente extra de estar basada en hechos reales, lo que te permite conocer parte de la negra historia de los campos de concentración rusos. Muy bien escrita y con un ritmo que te lleva de página en página hasta el final.
