

Anmore Ladies' Book Club (Gentlemen Welcome)  
Review of  
A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush by Eric Newby

The Anmore Ladies' Book Club (Gentlemen Welcome) was hosted by Andrew Robertson of Thomson Road on Monday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>. While the inclement weather and the flu season played havoc with the number of participants, a small but hearty group participated in the discussion of the 1958 travel story, 'A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush by Eric Newby.'

Mr. Robertson had researched the context for the book and was well prepared with questions to guide the discussion. The newest member brought some interesting perspectives and is very much welcomed into 'The Anmore Ladies' Book Club (Gentlemen Welcome)'. After some themed munching on delicacies such as the rare Afghani chicken, and snow capped, jam-filled, mountain cookies, the discussion began in earnest.

In an understated and very humorous travel story, two novice British climbers plan to climb to the summit of 19,880 foot Mir Samir in North East Afghanistan and at the same time to visit Nuristan next door. This seems a preposterous idea when you discover that Eric Newby isn't an experienced mountain climber, nor is his traveling friend, diplomat Hugh Carless.

To prepare for the trip the two novice climbers 'practice' for four days in Wales before embarking on their ill-prepared adventure. Their instructor, a Welsh waitress and part-time climber, sends them on their way bolstered with a brochure on how to climb in ice and snow. The rest of the story is about their challenges, misadventures, naïve climbing techniques, the local people, the topography and the climbers' ultimate accomplishments.

Newby has an endearing, self-effacing style, and writes in a very humorous way. The descriptions of these rank amateurs, one in ill-fitting Italian boots on this formidable terrain, shivering and dealing with grumbling stomachs, irascible locals and each other, were often 'laugh out loud' funny. For example, while Carless had the rudimentary language skills for communicating with the locals, Newby was forced to interact using a phrasebook of the Afghan Bashgali language, which reportedly contains opening gambits like 'How long have you had a goitre?', 'I have nine fingers; you have ten', 'A dwarf has come to ask for food' and 'I have an intention to kill you'.

While it took a while for some of the readers to become engaged in the story, and the writing was a bit tedious at times, the general consensus was that A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush by Eric Newby was well worth the read. Clearly this interesting travel story is an excellent guide on how not to climb mountains!

