



## An Affair with Africa

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Alzada Carlisle Kistner put aside her plans for a doctorate in biology and for the next forty years or so became her husband's fieldwork companion. David Kistner, a professor at California State University, Chico, is a world authority on "ant guests," rare and peculiar beetles that live within ant nests, relying on the ants for food, and as food, constantly in danger of being discovered and killed.

*An Affair with Africa: Expeditions and Adventures Across a Continent* is neither a scientific treatise nor an account of the political turmoil since 1960 when the Belgian Congo declared its independence and the Kistners took their first expedition. Instead, the author presents more of a family travelogue in a brisk, informative, and well-paced style.

There is little repetition in the story of five safaris, culminating with a nine month trip across southern Africa. The couple's two young daughters were also part of the expeditions, and together the family frequently contended with poor food, mold in the beds, flat tires, political uprisings, as well as encounters with hippos, lions, elephants, sand, and mud. And they fell in love with Africa.

Alzada and her husband spent hours sucking beetles into plastic tubes with an aspirator, and their labors have produced descriptions of more than 500 new species and a greater understanding of insect evolution. Yet it was Africa itself—dry and wet, spartan and elegant, greedy and caring—that finally captivated the author.

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