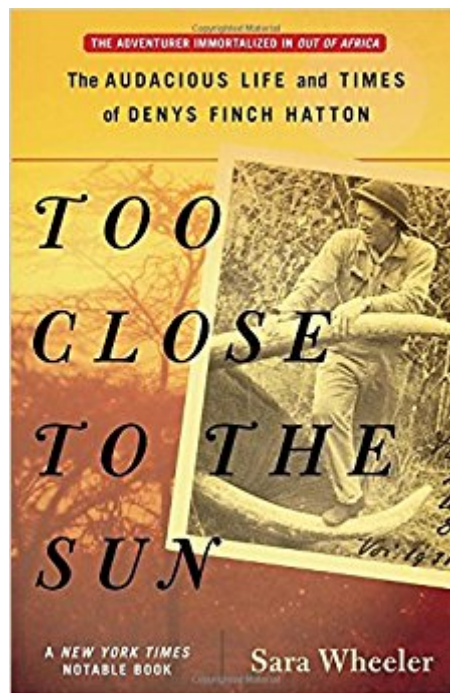




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# Too Close To The Sun: The Audacious Life And Times Of Denys Finch Hatton



## Synopsis

A champion of Africa, legendary for his good looks, his charm, and his prowess as a soldier, lover, and hunter, Denys Finch Hatton inspired Karen Blixen to write the unforgettable *Out of Africa*. Now esteemed British biographer Sara Wheeler tells the truth about this extraordinarily charismatic adventurer. Born to an old aristocratic family that had gambled away most of its fortune, Finch Hatton grew up in a world of effortless elegance and boundless power. In 1910, searching for something new, he arrived in British East Africa and fell in love with a continent, with a landscape, with a way of life that was about to change forever. In Nairobi, Finch Hatton met Karen Blixen and embarked on one of the great love affairs of the twentieth century. Intellectual equals, Finch Hatton and Blixen were genuine pioneers in a land that was quickly being transformed by violence, greed, and bigotry. Ever restless, Finch Hatton wandered into a career as a big-game hunter and became an expert bush pilot. Mesmerized all his life by the allure of freedom and danger, Finch Hatton was, writes Wheeler, “the open road made flesh.”

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (July 14, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812968921

ISBN-13: 978-0812968927

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 83 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #70,520 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Africa #189 in Books > History > Africa #312 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Nature Travel > Adventure

## Customer Reviews

A superlative athlete with an enormous capacity for friendship and a chronically underachieving, charismatic loner with eternal wanderlust, Denys Finch Hatton (1887–1931) emerged as an iconic figure in the memoirs of two lovers, Karen Blixen’s *Out of Africa* and Beryl Markham’s *West with the Night*. In childhood, this earl’s son—who would later reject the trappings of worldly success, saw his family fortune depleted, developed a passion for hunting from a nonconformist uncle as well as an appreciation for strong, artistic women like his

mother. He found Eton a "youthful paradise," says Wheeler, that made it possible for him "to believe in the African dream." The nonconformist in him was drawn to the freedom the Dark Continent promised; after settling in East Africa, he fought on the WWI battlefield there and later became a hunter shepherding rich clients. Hatton, who died when the plane he was piloting crashed, left no diaries and his inner life remains unknowable, as Wheeler (Cherry) acknowledges, yet in this thoughtful, satisfying work, she masterfully captures his allure through the memories of others and through her deft interpretation of both his East African and British milieus in the tumultuous years surrounding WWI. Photos. (Apr. 24) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Denys Finch Hatton has achieved a measure of fame as the lover of Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen) as portrayed in her memoir *Out of Africa*. Much has been written about their relationship, and the film version, with Robert Redford portraying Finch Hatton, has added to public interest. Wheeler, in a well-written and engrossing biography, focuses on the full span of Finch Hatton's life. He was born into a family of "fallen" British gentry who were, typically, land rich but cash poor. As a youth, he seemed a "golden boy" with a bright future; he was strikingly handsome, a superb athlete, and blessed with immense personal charm. Yet part of that charm was an intriguing but frustrating aloofness. Even in Kenya he found it difficult to sustain commitment, as his prolonged but erratic affair with Blixen illustrated. This thoroughly enjoyable work casts a light on an attractive but enigmatic figure, but a true understanding of him remains tantalizingly out of reach. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Sadly, the book is unreadable. Faced with few facts about the man, yet a real love for the romance of his life, the writer fall back on an attempt to write as Blixen would have done if she had cared to write about him this way at all. The result is a disaster. Take this line: "The bride had copper pre-Raphaelite hair, aspirin-white skin, and large grey eyes that sheltered under broad red brows." Yikes! The writing is so poor, so overly, badly wordy. I'm sad the writer did not use her own voice, her own style. It would have been a greater (possible) read.

I fell in love with Finch-Hatton as a teenager, when reading *Out of Africa*. Cried my eyes out at the end of that book. I enjoyed very much to now more about this fascinating and wild man. No wonder Karen Blixen fell in love with him. Many of us like an untameable man.

Fun and informative about both Finch Hatton and the colonial period in Africa. Gives some good back stories on how that continent breakfast it is today, good and bad. Very good read.

Having lived in Kenya, I looked forward to Sarah Wheeler's book. Her tremendous research is apparent in the loving care afforded to specific details, especially concerning the early settlers in Kenya. I very much enjoyed the historical backdrop which gave context to behaviors and attitudes. However, Ms. Wheeler's view of Finch-Hatton is almost hagiographic. When the word "selfish" is floated in connection with his seemingly aloof response to Karen Blixen, Ms. Wheeler immediately counters with its romantic counterpart "elusive." She claims that this "elusiveness" was part of Finch-Hatton's charm and his attractiveness for women. I also have to agree with another reviewer; Karen Blixen is virtually excoriated throughout a good deal of this book. Ms. Wheeler's conclusions may be the result of interviews with Blixen's and Finch-Hatton's families. However, the trashing of Ms. Blixen's fiction seems particularly uncharitable and subjective. From this book, it appears that Finch-Hatton was the result of a pampered childhood and early schooling at Eton where he never recovered from being an "adored tyrant", and felt unable to "engage" with anything or anyone despite the devotion of many friends and lovers. Ms. Wheeler appears to agree with Beryl Markham who states that Finch-Hatton "was a great man who never achieved arrogance." However, Finch-Hatton seems more reminiscent of Henry James' John Marcher in "Beast in the Jungle" who waits for some great life-defining event to take place. Unlike Marcher, Finch-Hatton may never have understood that he allowed his life to slip away from him.

Good book, I enjoyed reading it. Somewhat awkward and dry reading at first but it picked up after a few chapters

Too Close to the Sun, The Audacious Life and Times of Denys Finch Hatton is as much a detailed history of British East Africa--the country known today as Kenya--as it is the story of Denys Finch Hatton's life. In other words, the focus is keener on the times than on the life. Finch Hatton, a notorious and romantic character portrayed in *Out of Africa* (Modern Library), the book of stories by Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) and the in the film played by Robert Redford, didn't keep a journal or, for that matter, write many letters. As a result, a great deal of the exhaustive research on him compiled by dedicated author, Sara Wheeler, is derived from Dinesen's fiction and other contemporary, Beryl Markham's autobiography, *West With the Night*. Generally well written, a

bit on the formal side, the prose wavers between colorful and descriptive and textbook laborious. (Have your dictionary nearby!) The subject, Finch Hatton, might have been better left to the material written by his former lovers than the subject of an entire biography. What I enjoyed most about this book was the trip to Kenya and the stunning visuals it provided. Having spent time there, including a visit to the town now known as "Karen," and a tour of Blixen's house, the pages of this book gave it a living history quality. Wheeler also clarifies Finch Hatton's character as more than the uncommitted lover of Karen Blixen ("Tania")--"They were living in different mental worlds, as unhappy lovers do, coexisting like the twin beaters of a rotary whisk, spinning in time by never touching"-- but also notes he was one of the first to point out the dangers of uncontrolled hunting on safari endangering Africa's wildlife. "For the first time in his life, he had found something he believed in, a cause that was worth commitment." Hence, his legacy as "an eternal wanderer on a perpetual quest for knowledge and experience," which is the main thrust of this dissertation. Michele Cozzens, author of *I'm Living Your Dream Life: The Story of a Northwoods Resort Owner*.

Great Characters, A Great Time To Be Alive and the most beautiful setting the eye can behold . Oh Yes, I Almost Forgot . All of this occurs through the written word as there are very few pictures around 1920 . You can imagine Denys and Karen(Tania) flying through the African highlands with flocks of Pink Flamingos(thousands),herds of Cape Buffalo and hippo and rhino and of course thousands of of Elephants . These people were truly stewards of the land .Denys took his share of game but was also a conservationist and big game photographer as well as a pilot .He respected his African workers and didn't want them turned into little englishmen His Gypsy Moth killed him at 44 from water in the gas but I'm sure Denys would have looked the Grim Reaper in the eye and winked at him as if to say "Let's have at it old boy " . He feared nothing, but one thing.Getting old and alone by himself . Here's to you Finch Hatton . The world could use a thousand like you,each generation . I'll leave the reader the same way he left Karen von Blixen each time "I Bless You When I Think Of You, and that is very,very often" .

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