

Extreme Rambling – Walking Israel's Barrier. For Fun.
By Mark Thomas. Ebury Press 2011.

Mark Thomas is an extremely funny comedian, as well as, in common with many other modern stand-ups, an acute and critical observer of all aspects of life and politics.

Extreme Rambling is the story of his journey along the existing 415 kilometres of the defensive wall/barrier/fence (delete as appropriate to your politics) that Israel has constructed in the teeth of international condemnation and criticism along its pre-Six Day War 1967 border. This enormous construction, while disfiguring the landscape, appropriating more West Bank land, dividing Palestinians from their farmland and making their lives even more difficult than is already the case has also achieved one of the main aims that underpinned it – the choking off of Palestinian terrorist attacks from the West Bank on Israelis and Israeli targets.

The Wall has its fierce enemies and critics, and its equally fierce defenders, and Mark Thomas gets to meet and hear from both as he proceeds on his way; it is a far from easy journey, made harder by bad weather, bureaucratic and military obstruction and repeated stops for Palestinian hospitality and stories of personal travail. But Extreme Rambling, as well as pointing out all aspects of the Wall, is also an entertaining read, and only the most rabid exponent of one side of the Israeli-Palestinian divide would accuse it of favouring one side or the other.

Extreme Rambling is an informative contribution to knowledge about one of the major issues of the Middle East conflict, and a telling reminder that what makes sense to one party may equal madness to another...and both may be correct.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh