

Review for the American Polar Society's *The Polar Times*.

by

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Encyclopedia of Exploration 1850-1940 Raymond John Howgego (Potts Point, NSW, Australia: Hordern House, 2006), 724pp. AUD\$245.

When you see this volume for the first time (or either of the other two earlier volumes) two things will be immediately apparent: This is a beautifully produced book, crisply designed and printed, well and strongly bound, and a joy to read, either for the occasional dipping-into or for more in-depth reference. Your other reaction is likely to be one of wonderment - how could such a lengthy and wide-ranging treatment result from the efforts of one person and not a raft of editors and contributors?

Indeed, the author Raymond John Howgego-who is described on the dust jacket as "an independent researcher, scholar and traveller..."-did it all and is now hard at work on the fourth and final volume which will focus on the 'temperate continental mainlands'."

There have been several polar or Antarctic encyclopedias issued in recent years (see my overly exhaustive treatment of these at www.antarctic-circle.org) but the *Encyclopedia of Exploration* stands out from the rest in several ways. As already mentioned, the book's design and production are superb. The entries are more detailed and run longer than those in any other work (longer still when you consider the lack of any illustrations, the large page size and the small yet readable text). The wordiest entry of all, not surprisingly, is that of Captain Scott, a full 19 pages; Shackleton is runner-up at 16. The average is around 2-1/2 pages. The writing is more literary than that found in other polar encyclopedias: the entries are often captivating but never dry, and in perusing the book I find myself getting sidetracked and learning about things totally non-polar. And even with the polar entries, I continually come upon little-known facts (who knew that Richard Byrd "had come face to face with bandits in the Philippines"?). There's humor here, too: Nearly a page is devoted to Walter E. Traprock, a totally fictional character who led the "celebrated Traprock Polar Exploration" and in retirement was a prune farmer in Over Derby-on-the-Housatonic! The focus of the encyclopedia is clearly historical-biographical, and science in any hard sense is not to be found. For me, this is precisely what I want given my interests; but the scientist might be better served by one of the other titles, particularly Riffenburgh's recently published *Encyclopedia of the Antarctic*.

The subtitle of this volume is *The Oceans, Islands and Polar Regions*, so there is a lot here that the polar enthusiast might find superfluous (Hawaii as an example). If we include volume 2 of the series (*Encyclopedia of Exploration 1800 to 1850*) -which was issued in 2004, includes many Arctic and Antarctic entries and really should be on your

shelf as well - there are a total of 1,374 pages of which the equivalent of about 150 are devoted to the Antarctic and 200 to the Arctic. In other words, about a quarter of the two volumes is devoted to the polar regions.

Howgego organizes his encyclopedia alphabetically by explorers not expeditions with the occasional entry for islands. He terms the entries as "major entries" - there are 66 of Arctic-Antarctic interest-but this doesn't mean that there aren't many more persons receiving attention. Tom Crean, for instance, doesn't have his own entry but rates about a third of a page in Scott's entry. Most of the entries stand alone but in the instance where an explorer has been on several expeditions, each one is often treated separately, one after another. Shackleton rates six: The *Nimrod* expedition (*Discovery* appears in one of Scott's entries); the *Endurance* expedition; the *Endurance* expedition - Ross Sea Party; the *Endurance* expedition - notes on the participants; travels in South America, Svalbard and Russia; and the *Quest* expedition.

What other features distinguish the encyclopedia? There's an Index of Persons which stretches for 13 pages; an Index of Regional, Island and General Articles; and an Index of Ships, Boats, Aeroplanes and Airships (six pages). Each entry closes with an often very extensive bibliography which at times is divided into primary and secondary sources, biographies and general works.

What are some of the encyclopedia's failings? I haven't come upon anything major. There could be a map or two and perhaps some illustrations, specifically portraits as the entries are almost exclusively people. But stretching to 724 pages as it does, such inclusions might make it unwieldy (it weighs in at nearly five pounds!) There is no electronic version or accompanying CD/DVD which is too bad; perhaps these will come later. I've looked carefully but can find no details on the paper: one hopes it is acid free. A word about the price: At AUD\$245 this fine book will cost you about US\$200. Given the breadth, quantity and quality of the content, I think that's a reasonable price. This is less than half the price of Riffenburgh's *Encyclopedia of the Antarctic*. On the other hand, if you were to purchase both volume two and three, you'd be paying just about that amount.

Those who would like more information should consult the publisher's website which is really very good and should be a model for all publishers - www.hordern.com/publications/explorers.htm . It lists all those people mentioned and also lets you order a sample entry of your choice which will be e-mailed to you.