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Review by Dr. Milton E. Osborne

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## EXPLORING FOR EMPIRE

*Encyclopedia of Exploration, 1800 to 1850*, compiled by Raymond John Howgego; Hordern House Rare Books, 2004, \$245

Hard on the heels of the widely acclaimed first volume of Raymond Howgego's *Encyclopedia of Exploration to 1800* comes this second volume, carrying the compilation to the middle of the nineteenth century. Once again, a reader cannot fail to be impressed by the energy and scholarly achievement of Raymond Howgego, who has turned the exact skills acquired in his training as a physicist into the meticulous scanning of literally thousands of sources in order to provide this overview of one of the great periods of travelling and exploration.

As he points out in his introduction, the compiler has not chosen the fifty-year period from 1800 to 1850 simply on the basis of chronological convenience. Rather, he shows how the first half of the nineteenth century represents a distinct period in the history of exploration. These fifty years saw a renewed British interest in the search for the Northwest Passage, the consolidation of European control over the territory of the continental United States, and a steady extension of exploration into South-East Asia and the Pacific.

Of the greatest interest for Australian readers is the fact that this volume covers some of the most important expeditions that charted this country's interior and found that much of its territory was inhospitable to settlement. The great explorations of central Africa undertaken by such famed figures as Burton, Speke, and Livingstone came after the cut-off point of this volume, though details of Livingstone's early African travels do receive attention.

As was the case with the first volume, a reader will find pleasure in this compilation in a variety of ways. Dealing solely with Australian exploration, for example, there is the expected information to be found about such well-known figures as Matthew Flinders, the Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson trio, and Charles Sturt. But, just as importantly, detail is provided on less familiar figures.

Short of specialist knowledge, many readers will, like this reviewer, be grateful for the information provided on men like the Anglo-French surveyor and engineer Francis Luis Barralier. In 1802 Barralier, accompanied by four soldiers and five convicts, set out to cross the Blue Mountains. Whether he did, indeed, reach the summit of the Great Dividing Range remains uncertain, but the importance of his expedition has been overshadowed by the later successful crossing achieved in 1813.

Other names associated with Australian exploration that do not trip lightly off the tongue but receive due attention include the German geologist Johann Menge, who established the presence of South Australia's mineral riches and assisted in the settlement of the Barossa Valley, and the Scots botanist Charles Fraser, who not only laid out the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney but was also involved in the exploration of both the Swan and Brisbane rivers.

South-East Asia and the Pacific occupy a much more important place in this second volume than its predecessor. Although the interior of New Guinea remained unexplored, the smaller islands of the Pacific were visited frequently, while Burma now became a target of imperial rivalry and Thomas Stamford Raffles took the momentous decision to establish British settlement in Singapore.

Almost inevitably, in a work of remarkable scholarship compiled by a single person, readers with their own specialist knowledge will find, or think they have found, the omission of a name or an expedition. The only example this reviewer offers is the understandably obscure French missionary priest Charles-Emile Bouillevaux (1823-1913), who travelled to the ruins of Angkor in December 1850. It may well be that Howgego has opted to include a reference to Father Bouillevaux when he provides details of the sustained exploration of the temples at Angkor that began with, and followed, the visit to them by the much better known French naturalist Henri Mouhot in 1860.

Of Particular value are the extensive bibliographies, dealing with a number of broad topics, such as European contacts with China and Indo-China, Portuguese expeditions in Central Africa, and lesser travellers in South Africa, to mention only a few. As with its predecessor, this volume has been produced to the highest standards of publishing with excellent paper stock, clear print, solid binding as befits a reference book and, infrequently seen nowadays, the provision of no fewer than three silk page markers.

This reviewer will be one of the many readers looking forward to the next volume, which will take up the story of the heroic expeditions that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. As before, this is a book for travellers, whether actual or from their armchairs. No less than its predecessor, the appearance of this volume is a publishing event of real consequence.

*The ninth edition of Milton Osborne's **Southeast Asia: An Introductory History** has just been published by Allen & Unwin. He reviewed the previous volume of the **Encyclopedia of Exploration** in the April 2003 issue. Both volumes are published by Hordern House Rare Books of Potts Point.*