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AROUND THE WORLD IN 700,000 WORDS

THE FOLLOW-UP TO A MASSIVE ENCYCLOPEDIA ON WORLD TRAVEL
WAS WORTH THE WAIT...

Raymond Howgego has been termed “the Michael Palin of academic travel scholarship” in that he combines an enthusiasm for travel with an ability to convey that enthusiasm to a wide audience. Howgego, a remarkable polymath, has not been affiliated with any academic institution nor apparently any academic research granting bodies. Yet he has managed to produce two massive reference volumes, with a third to come, on the history of world exploration, travel and colonization.

The first volume, published in 2003, covering the period up to 1800 was acclaimed by reviewers around the world, including Alberto Manguel who named it as one of his books of the year for *The Spectator* magazine. The second volume, covering the period 1800 to 1850, runs to 704 pages, with 732 articles, and contains some 700,000 words. Howgego’s author and thematic approach is supplemented by comprehensive indexes of over three thousand travellers and a thousand ships.

The period 1800 to 1850 is clearly a much shorter period than that previously covered. Entries are necessarily more condensed because far more travel was undertaken during this period. Thus for example, in 1787 the fleet commanded by Arthur Phillip took the better part of nine months to sail from England to Australia. By 1850 that voyage could be done in weeks. The introduction of steam-powered engines was clearly a major reason behind the increase in exploration. But this expansion was also brought about by educational and financial improvements in society, and Western colonial expansion. Travel literature was also on the up. Steam-powered printing presses made it easier and cheaper to publish books about explorers’ voyages. Howgego notes in his introduction that we even begin to see the embryonic emergence of the professional travel writer.

In his review of the first volume published in the *Rare Book Review* (then *ABR*) in 2003 Peter Robb concluded with the observation that ‘the promised sequel will be a very different book. By 1800 the world was mapped and most of it was spoken for by the imperial powers. The thrill was gone, and so was a little of the horror.’ The second volume is very different. Whilst it largely covers primary sources, Howgego has had to be much more selective. He has had to adopt stricter criteria as to the geographical boundaries of the traveller. Thus, Howgego

omits any traveller, for example, who travelled no further than the Eastern borders of modern Turkey, Syria or Palestine or who kept to the Western side of the Caspian Sea, concentrating rather on 'those who penetrated the upper reaches of the two Niles.' However, as in the first volume, the depth and breadth of Howgego's research is astounding. He has managed to include a large number of little known travellers including military men, tradesmen, and scientists.

A third volume covering 1850 to 1920 is expected to be published in the relatively near future. The Encyclopedia of Exploration is a truly global production in that it is written in England, published in Sydney, Australia, typeset in Scotland, printed in China and distributed around the world. No research library worth its name should be without a copy of this massive reference work, a topographical feature in itself.

Howgego, noted in the first volume that he had introduced one deliberately erroneous article in the text and his publisher, the Hordern House, offered a case of champagne to anyone spotting it. There is no such teaser in the second volume but by last month no one had claimed the prize. It is very difficult indeed to challenge a polymath.