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Review by John Hemming

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF EXPLORATION, 1800 TO 1850. By Raymond John Howgego. (Hordern House, Sydney, 2005) Pp. 704, quarto. A\$245.00.

In 2003 Raymond Howgego amazed everyone involved in the history of discovery and travel with his Encyclopedia of Exploration up to 1800. Singlehanded, he had produced a definitive study that would normally have been the product of teams of specialists. A mere two years later, he continued this feat by taking the story forward to the mid-nineteenth century.

Howgego's first volume embraced many nationalities, from the classical world to Muslim, Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese voyagers. But the second volume is dominated by northern Europeans. It was a glorious half century, when learned societies were springing up everywhere, a new reading public was avid for information about the world and its scientific wonders, there were still blanks on the map, and scientific collectors had almost virgin territory in so many realms of nature.

This volume is even more efficient than the first, with more consistency of style in its 732 entries - although I missed the occasional quirkiness of the earlier encyclopedia. Howgego tells some anecdotes, such as Johann Kraft being mocked because he said that he had seen snow on top of Mount Kilimanjaro on the Equator, he but misses some others. He tells us about Richard Lander's canoes on the Niger but not his extraordinary portable iron boat (now in the Exeter Maritime Museum); Joseph Hooker gets an entry, but not his father William who really founded Kew Gardens; and Charles Waterton is not credited with being this country's first 'green', the first to praise tropical forests or to sue a polluting factory owner. There is no mention of discoveries named after Alfred Russell Wallace or his friend Henry Walter Bates: the Wallace Line (the total difference in fauna between Borneo and Sulawesi); and Batesian Mimicry (in insect camouflage). In fine entries on Robert Schomburgk, there is no word of his remarkable circuit in 1838-9 up the Uraricoera, down the Orinoco-Casiquiare and Negro, and up the Branco headwaters of the Amazon - a feat never repeated since, one that would earn an RGS medal to this day; and there is nothing about Schomburgk's racier younger brother Richard, who later introduced wine vines to South Australia. In four excellent studies of Sir John Franklin, it does not emerge strongly enough that his was the greatest disaster in the annals of British exploration, the role of his widow Jane in organizing searches is undervalued, and it might have been added that the search for the remains of his ships and men continues unabated every summer.

Every entry has a bibliography. These are more consistent and up-to-date than in the earlier volume, and they are a most valuable resource in their own right. The entries are arranged alphabetically. But from time to time there is an essay about a place or region, and these can be unexpected and inconsistent: such are Ascension Island, Central America, Iowa, Namibia and Namibia Missionary Activity, Falkland islands (a brilliant summary that would have been helpful at the time of the Falklands War), Yukon and many others. There is no index of these essays: the reader just stumbles across them. Indeed, there is no index of places just of people, and of ships), which is a drawback in so geographical a book. Maps might also have made it easier to use.

These are trivial criticisms of a monumental book, one that can be opened at random and read with pleasure. It inspires awe, at both the achievements and gusto of the explorers, and the research by Raymond Howgego. It is handsomely produced, and for me this series does for exploration what Grove did for music. This really is an essential work of reference. Every library should have it.

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