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Great Explorers

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Media type:

Book

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'Humans are born explorers,' writes author Jim Pipe. 'We want to know what's out there for ourselves.' From the outset the author is keen to stress that although this impulse stirred brave men and women to go to the ends of the earth, in many cases travellers were 'exploring' lands where people lived, rather than 'discovering' them. He also points out that many explorers were reliant on local guides and translators. Nonetheless the excitement of discovery and exploration is evident throughout. The book is organised by continent, and within each section chronologically by explorer. The author includes detail such as the bitter rivalry between individuals such as Burton and Speke in the search for the Nile, and the practical difficulties, illness and disease that beset them. The scope of the book means that he can only skim the surface, yet he always picks out interesting nuggets. Factboxes, biography panels and boxes on survival skills include details such as the lucky escape of Mary Kingsley, saved from an animal trap by her thick worsted skirt. On his deathbed Marco Polo, whose tales are full of dragons, unicorns and men with tails, said 'I have not told half of what I saw.' A fitting epithet for this encyclopedic history of exploration.

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