

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Oxford Companion to World Exploration*, by David Buisseret, Editor in Chief. Oxford University Press, NY, and Newberry Library (Chicago), 2007; Vol. 1 (A-L), Vol. 2 (M-Z), 478p and 501p; \$250.00 Online edition\* to be available in Fall 2007 [[http://www.oxford-digitalreference.com/title\\_list](http://www.oxford-digitalreference.com/title_list)]

*THE OXFORD COMPANION TO WORLD EXPLORATION*, an impressive two-volume set compiled in encyclopedic form, would constitute a fine addition to any exploration buff's library of reference works. The first paragraph of the introduction describes it best: "It is hard to know what a Companion is meant to be. Perhaps it is what its name implies, a sort of friendly handbook, ready with ideas that invite further reading and reflection.

As a recent reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* explained, [the word] implies something more intimate and less predictable . . . I have come to imagine [a Companion] as a person, perhaps a woman of a certain age and reassuring heft . . . She is informed but not infallible, quirky, opinionated, worldly, yet parochial. You need to be companionable yourself to do her justice." If all this sounds a bit chauvinistic, as classic exploration has tended to be in earlier times, fear not, as a number of the over 800 entries relate to women explorers, both of the past and more recent times, as well.

Thus, *the Companion* provides a refreshing departure from earlier male and Eurocentric perspectives, reflecting a broader spectrum of sources, such as women's travel logs and stories from Arabia and China. The temporal scope ranges from the ancient cultures of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Byzantium, China, Polynesia, and Rome, to space exploration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To accomplish this monumental work, the Editor in Chief was ably assisted by four eminently qualified Section Editors who recruited additional contributors in areas of their own expertise. These include exploration and discovery, in general; Spanish expeditions; mapmaking; and women's contributions to the field, as mentioned above. Augmenting this team was an Advisory Board of twelve equally qualified scholars, each with their own areas of expertise, including African themes, Chinese cartography, history of space exploration, Russian explorers, and broad cartographic knowledge. In addition, there are several renowned authorities on matters of polar exploration, amongst a host of other contributors and themes.

Structurally, Volume 1 starts off with an alphabetical "List of Entries" that includes such topics as individual explorers, broad subject areas made up of geographic locations, technology breakthroughs, literary interests, organizations designed to foster either exploration and/or retrospective inquiry, and certain war periods, to name a few. Some examples include Amundsen, Roald; Armstrong, Neil; Bancroft, Ann; Barents, Willem; Barrow, John; Africa (sub-divided into sub-topics); Compass, Magnetic; Globes; Hubble Space Telescope; Exploration Texts; Libraries and Archives of Exploration; Explorers Club; Hakluyt Society; and Napoleonic Wars. This is but a very small sampling of the over 800 entries one might find of interest in this veritable *Companion*.

Each volume includes two sections of color plates (45 in vol. 1, 34 in vol. 2), each of which is intended to amplify the textual content in many of the entries, and they are cross-referenced accordingly. Also, each entry cross-references other entries of related interest and includes a brief Bibliography to steer the reader to more in-depth information, ending with the name of its author. This reviewer was most impressed by the recent scholarship of many of the references cited. In addition to the color plate sections there are numerous black-and-white illustrations incorporated into the text throughout the publication.

At the end of Volume 2 is a "Topical Outline of Entries" categorized by subject: Place; Rivers and Bodies of Water; Polar Exploration; Air and Space Exploration; The Ancient and Medieval Worlds; Wars; Ships and Navigation; Movement of People and Goods; Conferences, Organizations, Sponsors, and Supporters; Science, Medicine, and Technology; Maps and Mapmakers; Historiography and Political and Philosophical Themes; Literary and Visual Representations; Extracts from Primary Sources; Fictitious People and Places; and People. This listing gives one an idea of the broad scope of topics covered.

Next is a "Directory of Contributors" which includes each contributor's name, affiliation, and list of entries. Although a great majority of the authors are affiliated with academic institutions, worldwide, there are also many independent scholars represented. And, finally, pages 399-450 comprise a most comprehensive Index which allows the reader to go directly to the volume and page that contains information on his or her area of interest.

Content-wise, I can only say that this reviewer became thoroughly engrossed in each of the entries he read, knowing full well (and guided so through each of the bibliographies provided) that there was a wealth of information that could not be included in each synopsis. And with that said, I'll finish where I started—"this two volume set . . . would constitute a fine addition to any exploration buff's library of reference works."

Capt. Charles Burroughs [retired, NOAA]

### Court Confirms Public Records Law

On May 18, 2007, the Superior Court for Santa Clara County validated the right of citizens to have access to county GIS parcel base map data, as required by the California Public Records Act.

Although the California Public Records Act (CPRA) requires state and local government records to be provided to anyone requesting them for no more than the cost of duplication, until recently, 21 of California's 58 counties sold their GIS digital parcel base map data for significantly higher prices. The recent court decision affirms the legislative intent stated in the CPRA (Government Code §6250) that "access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business is a fundamental and necessary right of every person in this state."

Affordable access to the GIS base map means that the media and ordinary citizens will have a powerful tool for judging government performance in such areas as tax assessments, zoning variances, and equitable deployment of public services. The decision ("CFAC vs Santa Clara County, No 1-06-CV-072630") recounts how analysis of the GIS base map data, used in conjunction with other data, "could allow a property owner to question why, all else being equal, one particular parcel is assessed more than another."

The Court has confirmed that CPRA applies to GIS data, enabling citizens to access their government's data and thereby hold their governments accountable. "This is a validation for all of California's citizens," said Bruce Joffe, organizer of the Open Data Consortium ([www.OpenDataConsortium.org](http://www.OpenDataConsortium.org)) and technical advisor to CFAC's legal team. [The full text of the Court's decision (27 pages) can be downloaded from [http://www.cfac.org/content/cfac\\_v\\_santaclara.PDF](http://www.cfac.org/content/cfac_v_santaclara.PDF)]