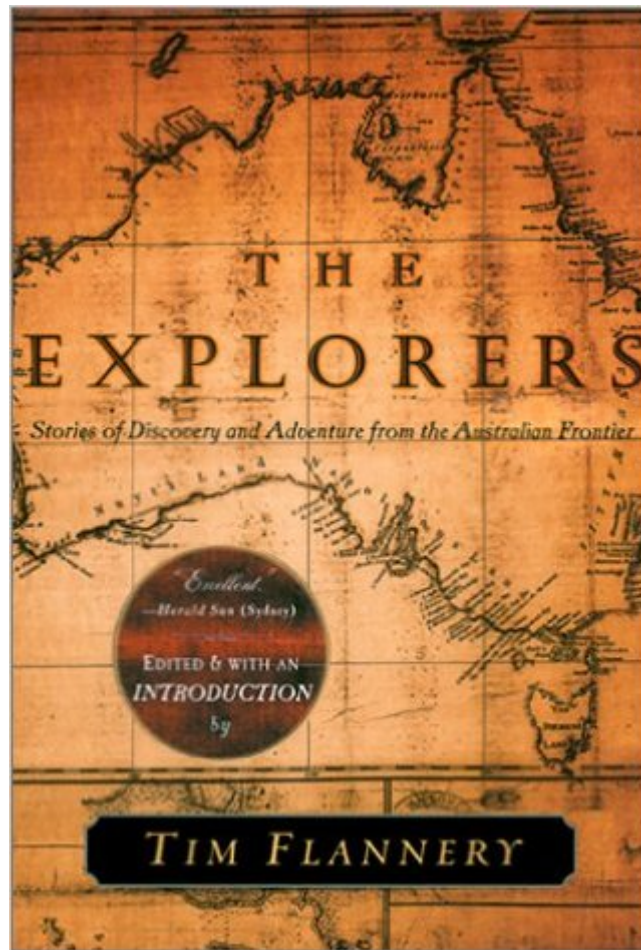


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The Explorers: Stories Of Discovery And Adventure From The Australian Frontier



Synopsis

A lively collection of extraordinary stories of adventure and discovery, *The Explorers* tells the epic saga of the conquest and settlement of Australia. Editor Tim Flannery selects sixty-seven accounts that convey the sense of wonder and discovery, along with the human dimensions of struggle and deprivation, which occurred in the exploration of the last continent to be fully mapped by Europeans. Beginning with the story of Dutch captain Willem Janz's 1606 expedition at Cape York -- the bloody outcome of which would sadly foreshadow future relations between colonists and Aboriginal peoples -- and running through Robyn Davidson's 1977 camelback ride through the desolate Outback deserts, *The Explorers* bristles with the enterprise that Flannery explains as "heroic, for nowhere else did explorers face such an obdurate country."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Look at a map of Australia. The interior of the continent will be marked with rivers, lakes and localities. But if you go there the rivers will be dry, the lakes just salt and the localities just a handful of people. This collection of first impressions by the first Europeans to see this wide brown land reveals their awe at the beauty and terror of the alien and essentially empty landscape. Drawn from journals, diaries and archives, these pieces convey the struggle for survival of Europeans in an environment where they were physically and culturally at a loss. The descriptions of early contacts with Aboriginal Australians written by the explorers themselves contain valuable insights into attitudes which informed the initial gropings for understanding across a vast cultural divide. As such they provide a sobering backdrop to inform us of the factual, cultural and emotional origins of the

reconciliation movement in Australia. Flannery lets the pieces speak for themselves with minimal introductions to set the scene. The result is a readable and moving story, and good history at the same time.

This is an anthology of excerpts from Australian Explorers journals ranging from early sixteenth century European Explorers to Australians in the early 20th century. Flannery's introduction for each provides an excellent, concise biography and set up to each explorer's excerpt. In many of the excerpts, an explorer faces death and disaster. The most intriguing initially was Charles Sturt writing of his attempt to find the mythical lake in the center of Australia. He brings a boat, experiences weather so hot it bursts a thermometer his party carries, they suffer from extreme scurvy, and Sturt's desire to be the first to reach the center of Australia. The second explorer I read in this collection was Ernest Giles. His excerpt focuses on an expedition with his assistant Gibson, who goes for help and manages to get lost, and then Giles slowly makes his way back to base camp. Reading *The Explorers* fascinated me enough that I wanted to read more about specific explorers like Giles, but also about Australian explorers in general.

My only criticism of Flannery's book is that it ends. I found myself wanting to read more of each story. But within a moment of turning to a new chapter, I was engrossed in another adventure. *The Explorers* is an outstanding selection of historical pieces and a fine example of the editor's art. First-person accounts like this truly offer a window into the minds and times of the people and places involved. (I recommend "Eyewitness to History" for those who enjoy this book.)

When I studied history for matriculation in New South Wales back in 1958-1959, there was no subject available to me called "Australian History". The two history subjects available were Ancient History and Modern History. Modern History was, in fact, the history of modern Europe. These days, it seems inconceivable that the school system at matriculation level back then could completely ignore the history of Australia, and the history of its nearest neighbours. Although the European settlement of Australia is relatively recent, the Aboriginal history of Australia covers millennia. The former received scant attention in earlier school years, the latter, none at all. (One presumes that Australian history is now accorded the place it deserves in the school curriculum, and receives a fuller and more balanced treatment). Because of this background, I found Tim Flannery's book of enormous interest. The meagre Australian history once taught consisted of drawing maps of the routes taken by explorers, and little else, or so it seems to fading memory. Tim Flannery relates his

own experience: "The men were just names, their journeys snail-trails across paper. No attempt was made to bring exploring to life, perhaps because the inconvenient details about Aborigines and barren wastes would have simply got in the way of the main message: that the Europeans had triumphed". We are indebted to Tim Flannery for redressing the balance in this book, in the course of which we can read some superb writing that would otherwise be hard to come by. Some Australian history may be dull, but the history of exploration, as told by the explorers themselves, is instructive, exciting, and still relevant.

What possesses a person to set off into the trackless wastes of Australia, with the almost certain knowledge that death lies waiting to welcome them into his scrawny arms? Reading this book gives you some of the answers and some of the idea of the pain and suffering undergone by these explorers (and in some cases the hapless Aborigines coerced into seeking water). There are some amazingly good writers within these pages, quite unexpected when you consider that many of them were ex-convicts or self-taught (and comparing them to some contemporary American explorers); there are some delightful descriptive passages and the occasional bout of whimsy, especially the anecdote of how 'Rocket' got his name - I was in hoots! An excellent read, which encouraged me to order several old copies of explorers' accounts. Thoroughly recommended!

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