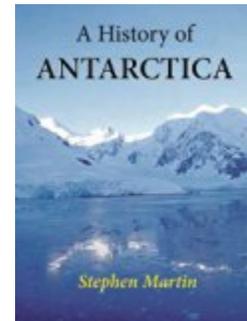


Stephen Martin. *A History of Antarctica*. Kenthurst: Rosenberg Publishing, 2013. Illustrations. 280 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-921719-57-8.

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## Antarctic: Ancient Times to Modern Events

This book is a revision of one with the same title published by the State Library of New South Wales in 1996. The author, Stephen Martin, is a senior librarian of the Mitchell Library in Sydney and has the advantageous situation of combining a theoretical and literary knowledge of his subject with the practical aspects of visiting Antarctic regions. The 1966 and 2013 editions follow similar lines but many of the changes that occurred during the passage of almost two decades have been incorporated in the new edition. As with the first edition, the book is very timely with the several centenaries of the “heroic age” of Antarctic exploration currently being commemorated. Indeed it is particularly significant for an Australian audience with the commemoration of the centenary of Sir Douglas Mawson’s Australasian Antarctic Expedition.

The Mitchell Library has one of the most comprehensive collections of Antarctic material, especially where relevant to Australia, which the author has used effectively. Among this is a large collection of photographs, pictures, and other illustrative items. The book includes reproductions of many of the rarer images, as well as the famous ones that have rightly become well known. The early chapters give a general account of the geography and history of the Antarctic, which, as a geographical region, has proven not easy to define. While many small islands in the Southern Ocean are reasonably included, the emphasis appears somewhat indefinite (for example, the inclusion of a reference to the Falkland Islands associated with the potential of exploitation of Antarctic hydrocar-

bons is difficult to justify, especially as major oil and gas fields farther south have been exploited for at least half a century).

The historical account has the advantage of dealing with the sealing industry which flourished during the 1800s after a late 1700s start and slow extinction in the early 1900s. This major exploitative aspect of the Southern Ocean is too often neglected in Antarctic histories. As a consequence of their activity, sealers were responsible for many Antarctic discoveries during a period when they made well over a thousand voyages in the Southern Ocean.

Martin describes the essence of the “heroic age,” a brief but intense period of continental exploration between 1898 and 1918. He offers accounts of several expeditions in detail, but his treatment appears uneven. The earliest wintering of scientific and exploration voyages aboard *Belgica* (winter 1898) and on land at Cape Adare (1899) are described in detail over many pages. Of the three, making coordinated observations, that sailed in 1901 only Captain Scott’s *Discovery* expedition is covered comparably (although it is credited with an attempt on the South Pole rather than an exploration in that direction). Erik Drygalski’s and Otto Nordenskjöld’s voyages, aboard *Gauss* and *Antarctic* respectively, which made major contributions, are treated in barely a page each. William Bruce’s Scottish National Antarctic Expedition (1902-04), which established what became the longest continuous Antarctic meteorological station (now with

110 years of data), gets half this and the subsequent Argentine operation only a paragraph. Jean-Baptiste Charcot and Wilhelm Filchner fare little better despite their pioneering achievements.

The book deals extensively with the attainment of the South Pole. After Robert Falcon Scott's first southern journey, Sir Ernest Shackleton found a way into the interior plateau which was extended by Scott who reached the pole where he found he had been forestalled by Roald Amundsen. The brief, but fascinating, Japanese expedition aboard *Kainan Maru* appears here. Mawson's major contributions are described in detail, and are well illustrated as are those of the unfortunate *Endurance* expedition led by Shackleton, which failed to reach the coast of the continent when *Endurance* became beset. This chapter ends with a summary pointing to, among other developments, questions of sovereign claims.

After the exploitative period of the sealers came the second one with whalers who were active in the Southern Ocean for much of the 1900s, especially between the world wars. Martin describes the interests of the expeditions during this period with increasing questions concerning exerting national claims. He treats extensively Admiral Richard E. Byrd's expeditions and use of aircraft. The *Penola* and *Schwabenland* expeditions appear with lesser detail (although as Cape Horn is not in the Indian Ocean, surely Cape of Good Hope was intended). The author summarizes the section with comments on developing technology and other consequences of war elsewhere on the earth.

The evolution of the Antarctic Treaty is an enigmatic subject that is introduced by a description of developing territorial conflict. I am doubtful about the "cold war" assertions regarding the United States and Soviet Union in the Antarctic, although this was very much the case in the Arctic. This was also a time when Australian interest concentrated on the South, thus there is a good account of the establishment of Mawson station in 1955 almost on the Antarctic Circle. Although a total of twelve countries participated in the programs of the International Geophysical Year, the descriptions of many of the activi-

ties are merely perfunctory. A list of stations might have been helpful (fifty-four were open during the first winter) as well as of the countries involved.

Endnotes and sources are comprehensively listed, and the numerous illustrations well selected (as one would expect with the involvement of the Mitchell Library). The index is ample and helpful. The lack of maps of specific regions is unfortunate as it presupposes a greater knowledge of the region than might be expected from readers seeking an introduction to the Antarctic. Admittedly the end-papers are maps but, because these are continental in scale, they are of limited use for specific locations (and one, derived from Wikipedia, has more errors and inconsistencies than desirable).

In such an extensive and detailed work, it is all too easy to find errors of fact as well as omissions. There are many more than this reviewer would have expected and it appears that a proportion have persisted from the first edition. While the author is a specialist in his own right, it is unfortunate that he did not have a colleague read the text carefully which would have eliminated many (the "there, but for the Grace of God, go I" principle is relevant here). It would be invidious to list these in a review—but hope for amendment in any subsequent edition remains.

The other problem is to select which expedition to describe in detail, which may be dealt with briefly, and which might be entirely omitted, is fraught with difficulty. The information presented would have been clearer if the author had explained his choices, for, in addition to quite different treatments of comparable expeditions, there are many significant ones that are entirely omitted or perhaps dealt with in merely one or a few sentences. Several major private expeditions by adventurers are not mentioned, although they have achieved much recent publicity and some have made contributions to geographical knowledge. These days much attention is being given to the preservation of the historic huts that are of special interest to tourist visitors—little is mentioned about this aspect of Antarctic history. It is a useful introductory reference but, with greater attention to detail, could have been so much better.

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