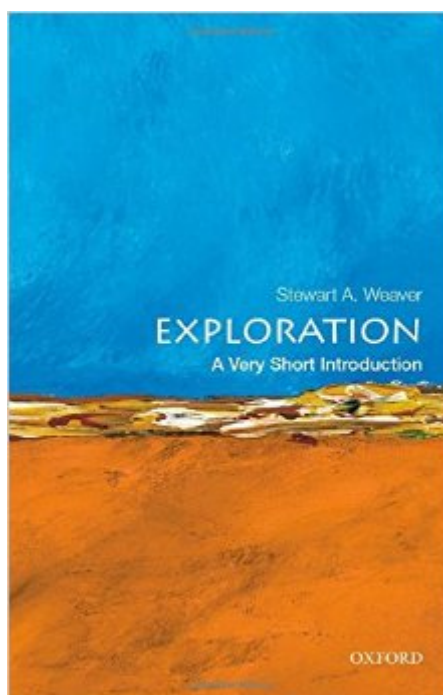


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Exploration: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

We live in an age of globalization on every conceivable level, but globalization has a deeper history than politicians and pundits often allow, and nothing is more significant to its history than exploration. Wherever trade or faith or empire followed, explorers usually led. Their motives were as many-sided and various as their actions; their legacies are contested and mixed. But none can doubt the significance of explorers to the making of the modern world. For as long as human societies have existed, people have felt the urge to venture outside of them, either in search of other societies or in search of new land or adventure. *Exploration: A Very Short Introduction* surveys this quintessential human impulse, tracing it from pre-history to the present, from east to west around the globe, and from the depths of volcanoes to the expanses of space. Focusing on the theme of exploration as encounter, Stewart Weaver discusses the Polynesians in the Pacific, the Norse in the Atlantic, and other early explorers. He reflects on the Columbian "discovery" of the Americas, James Cook and the place of exploration in the Enlightenment, and Alexander von Humboldt's epochal encounter with tropical South America. The book's final chapters relate exploration to imperial expansion in Africa and Central Asia, assess the meaning of the race to the North and South Poles, and consider the significance of today's efforts in space and deep sea exploration. But what accounts for this urge? Through this brief study of the history of exploration, Weaver clearly shows how the impulse to explore is also the foundation of the globalized world we inhabit today. *Exploration* combines a narration of explorers' daring feats with a wide-lens examination of what it fundamentally means to explore. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Book Information

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Expeditions & Discoveries

Customer Reviews

This short book is one of a quite extensive series (I've read several, they really are well-done, sometimes rather advanced for what is supposed to be a general introduction). It's a fairly quick read, but still manages to be rather meaty. The core of the book is Weaver discussing exploration of various kinds, including voyages seeking new lands (such as the amazing Pacific islander voyages), for potential advantage (as English seafarers seeking a Northwest passage), to conduct experiments (as in the famous Transit of Venus programs), and more. Weaver attempts to differentiate between exploration and discovery. I don't think he does so particularly well, it seems to me that discovery is what the explorer may wind up with. Weaver looks at another aspect of exploration: in recent decades many historians have indicted explorers and scientific ventures such as Cook's Pacific voyages (to map, explore and such) as part and parcel of European colonialism, some historians seeing the Reformation and the scientific revolution as so much imperialist claptrap (really!!). Weaver considers these charges and partly agrees with them. and partly sees curiosity as a human trait. There's also the point that the European discoverers discovered places that had long since been discovered--Hawai'i had been discovered by Polynesians a thousand years or so before Cook. Weaver's take on this is that yes that's true, but the era of exploration had important long-term consequences (some explorations did not, such as the Vikings in Greenland). The European discovery of America did in fact bring previously separated worlds together, with immense consequences.

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