

A Personal Comment about the Exhibition

The metaphor of life as a journey is as well-worn as any of the itineraries on display in this exhibition. Yet we still find it a useful one, at least with hindsight. Never have any of the destinations I've mapped out for my life been reached, yet the unexpected places along the way have all been enjoyable and instructive.

I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, USA, amid the plains of the Midwest, but moved to Georgia at a young age and grew up in Atlanta. I attended Emory University, then moved back to the Midwest for graduate school at the University of Chicago. After spending six years gaining a PhD, I took a job with the English Department here. Other than the rhyme in Chicago and Otago, the two places have little in common, and despite all the talk about a native sense of place, I was very glad to get away from the flat Midwest.

As an experiment, I sailed in January 2001 from Wellington to Nelson on the full-size replica of Cook's *Endeavour*. I learned a lot about traditional sailing ships, and my appreciation for the skills and courage of earlier travellers was greatly increased. This short trip also confirmed my view that sailors were a special breed: very tough physically, socially challenged and probably a bit odd, but incredibly loyal and determined.

My interest in travel, however, does not really derive from my own movements. I am most interested in publishing history, and travel books offer a convenient and entertaining genre to study what makes a book sell and what readers look for in books. Thus my guiding principle in this exhibition has been to choose books that are visually and textually engaging, but also show us something about the taste of their original readers or the intentions of their publishers. It is not, therefore, an accurate history of travel writing in English, or even a representative survey. However, I hope that my remarks on the topics and individual books will make you see them in a new way. It is that slight, but memorable, alteration of perspective that the best travels and travel books produce, and if this exhibition achieves that in any way, I shall feel that I've enlarged the prospects of happiness.

I'd like to thank Jean Klemp for all her unsung efforts in making this exhibition possible. I may know something about the books, but she knows much more about exhibitions and how to make them attractive.

Enjoy!

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