



The art of adventure

In times gone by, the sketchbook was an essential piece of kit for explorers. As a new book celebrates its humble origins, **Matt Glasby** uncovers some extraordinary travellers' tales

Back when photographs seemed, at best, impractical and, at worst, like magic, explorers relied on an altogether more genteel method of mapping their discoveries: the sketchbook. Whether detailed watercolour, spidery pencil drawing or something improvised on the spot – as in the case of David Livingstone, who used crushed berries and a copy of the *Evening Standard* to record a Congolese massacre in 1871 – their jottings, collected here by authors Huw Lewis-Jones and Kari Herbert, are a testament to the 'eerie durability of paper and ink: its ability to survive across centuries, and to preserve not just data but also textures of feeling and imagination'.

From the banks of the Amazon to the heart of Africa, from Mayan ruins to great mountain ranges, from the Mongolian plateau to the sublime icescapes of the far north – all these lie between the pages of the small notebooks, field diaries and cloth-bound sketchbooks here,' explain the authors. You'll also find entries by legendary figures such as Charles Darwin, Ernest Shackleton and Captain Scott, and lesser-known ones such as broken-hearted, brandy-swilling lepidopterist Margaret Fountaine (1862-1940) or pioneering oceanographer William Beebe (1877-1962). The former died, aged 78, on a dusty Trinidadian highway, butterfly net in hand. The latter braved the Caribbean sea by bathysphere in the early 1930s, reaching depths of 923 metres. Beebe dictated details of the creatures he saw down in the spotlight depths to the surface by telephone. 'I can only think of one experience which exceeds in interest a few hours spent under water,' he said later, 'and that would be a journey to Mars.'

Collected here, in alphabetical order, are the works of John White (d 1593), the watercolourist who gave Elizabethans their first glimpse of America, a 'peculiar and bountiful new Eden'. During a 1585 voyage to Virginia under Sir Walter Raleigh, he crafted one of the earliest charts of the New World, complete with Raleigh's coat of arms, dolphins, whales and other sea beasts. His sensitive drawings of the Algonquian Indians conferred a humanity they would not experience firsthand from such interlopers for years.

'The greatest pathfinder our country ever had,' Meriwether Lewis (1774-1809) was the first to

map a route across North America with William Clark from 1804-1806. Included are the extensive journals he kept – and treasured – arguing that, in the event of robbery, he preferred 'death to that of being deprived of my papers, instruments and gun'. Lewis got his wish in 1809, dying of (possibly self-inflicted) gunshot wounds while delivering the volumes to his publisher.

Not long after, taxidermist/painter Titian Ramsay Peale (1799-1885) followed in Lewis and Clark's footsteps, mapping the species he saw rather than the land. Peale spent months with the indigenous people of the Great Plains and The Rockies, and later joined the last fully sail-powered circumnavigation of the globe (1838-1942), keeping written and actual mementoes of his time in the field to inspire future artworks. To this day, his vivid representations of birds and insects look they might jump – or flutter – from the page.

In Europe, meanwhile, mountaineer/painter Edward Norton (1884-1954) became one of the first men to climb without bottled oxygen to the so-called 'death zone' – the area above 8,000 metres where staying alive is a climber's only goal. He joined the 2nd British Mount Everest expedition in 1922, and made delicate recordings of the pretty flora and perilous landscape. 'I sketched feverishly,' he recalled, 'my water freezing as fast as I put it on paper, as also my fingers.'

In our own era, you'll find the collected notebooks of Wally Herbert (1934-2007) – Kari's father – who made the first surface crossing of the Arctic Ocean in 1968, and is pictured, fondly, with his trusty pipe clenched between his teeth. The wonderful workspace in the main picture belongs to Wade Davis (b 1953), author and National Geographic Society explorer-in-residence, whose assertion that, 'If we travel with open eyes and minds, exploration will never end,' could be the tagline to this fascinating book that traverses time and space.

It is the latter that represents the next blank canvas. On 14 July 2015, a robotic spacecraft conducted the first flyby of Pluto, sending back photographs of its immense mountains. The parallels with the work of White, Lewis, Norton and co is striking. After all, the authors remind us, new worlds, however far away, are always first revealed in images. ♦

OFF THE GRID

Who says the age of discovery is dead? Here are three intrepid trips

The Sudd, Sudan
This swampy lowland region in the Nile basin is one of the world's largest wetlands. Impassable in parts, it's only inhabited by the Nilotic Nuer people.

Krubera Cave, Georgia
The deepest known cave on the planet is in a remote mountain region in Georgia. As close to Jules Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth as you'll ever get.

Tibetan mountains
An incredible 159 of the 164 peaks over 6,000 metres are still unclaimed in this politically unstable country. Experienced mountaineers take note – and take care.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: John White's chart; Titian Ramsay Peale's drawings; Wally Herbert's diaries; Edward Norton's watercolours; the journals of Meriwether Lewis; more Peale; Wade Davis's workspace