



EXPLORER'S ATLAS - for the Incurably Curious

Authors: Piotr Wilkowiecki & Michal Gaszynski

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Size: 34.5 cm x 27 cm (13.5 inch x 10.5 inch)

Cost: £20 (RRP) and available from £14

The title of this book attracted me to offer to review it as I had just completed a 53,000 mile 60-day Round the World trekking trip exploring continents and countries I had never seen. It would have been interesting to have explored this atlas before my world trip as it is not as I first thought, a historical atlas of exploration, but an atlas for explorers who wish to seek out some of the world's curiosities before embarking on a journey. The two Polish authors have produced a book of interesting and curious facts portrayed spatially on basic outline maps in the

form of an atlas. It has sections arranged by Continent and Country with factual categories for Science, Economy, Geography, History, Social, Flora and Fauna. In addition, there are special sections for Geographic Features based on largest, smallest, longest, highest etc. The 144-page atlas contains 3277 facts of which 1051 come under the category Geography, it could be a great source for a pub quiz e.g. did you know that Denmark produces approx 19 million Lego bricks each year. While a book like this cannot of course cover ever fact or map feature, I find it surprising that two modern wonders of the world that I recently visited, the Great Wall of China and Machu Picchu in Peru are omitted. However I have learnt quite a few new and interesting facts from the atlas, e.g. the shortest river in the world is the Tamborasi River in Indonesia at 20m long; the Taal volcano crater lake in Sulawesi, The Philippines is the world's largest lake on an island in a lake on an island; Ferdinand Magellan credited with the first circumnavigation of the world (1519-22) died during the voyage in 1521 and only 18 of the original 270 sailors completed the voyage.



Each map is extensively annotated and symbolised with curious and not so curious facts which holds the reader's attention on each page. In fact, there are an incredible 434 different well-designed point symbols in the atlas, some easily identifiable, some not so, but that only adds interest and mystery to what they may represent. Unfortunately, from a cartographic design perspective I find the atlas disappointing due to the lack of colour on each map and often poor contrast between the area colours and the

annotations/symbols. While acknowledging the authors desire to have a standardised and simplified map design throughout the atlas, I personally would have found the maps more visually appealing if a more conventional cartographic design style had been adopted. Each continent had a fixed colour scheme for its maps using a single strong saturated colour and a second mid/light brown/gold colour for annotations, names and symbols. I often found the annotations difficult to read unless I used a really bright table lamp to illuminate the maps. The most legible atlas pages were the 'Greatest Explorers' map which uses a pastel area colour with dark grey/brown annotations/symbols and the 'Largest Countries' map which uses strong saturated area colours with white annotations, both maps succeed in meeting the cartographic design criteria of good contrast.

While I would recommend this atlas to those planning to travel the world and or those who wish to learn more about the world and its curiosities, I would not rank it high on my list of must have atlases. It is however a very interesting and fascinating atlas book which I thoroughly enjoyed over the many days it took to read, ever page had some new fact to explore.

Mike Shand