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The Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains. By John C. Fremont, with an introduction by Herman J. Viola and Ralph E. Ehrenberg.

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**The Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains.** By John C. Fremont, with an introduction by Herman J. Viola and Ralph E. Ehrenberg. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988. xv. 327 pp. \$14.95 Paper.

This is part of the Exploring the American West series, an effort by the advisory board of the Smithsonian Institution to make available the letters, journals, and reports of military officers and government employees who journeyed west of the Mississippi River during the nineteenth century. Most of these old reports, which are valuable to scholars and often make fascinating reading, have long gathered dust in the dark corners of libraries that contain House and Senate serial sets and other government documents. Bringing these writings to light provides a valuable service to scholars and students interested in the American West; indeed, the Smithsonian editors believe that re-publishing such material, which still conveys "the excitement and lure of the West," will reveal the motives of the "explorers" and demonstrate "their unique contributions to the westward movement" (page vii).

But are the editors aware that a comprehensive reprinting of Fremont's writings has already been accomplished recently? The three-volume *Expeditions of John C. Fremont*, edited by Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence and published by the University of Illinois Press, is still available. The first volume, released in 1970, not only recounts Fremont's 1842 and 1843-1844 expeditions (as does the Smithsonian version), but includes many letters and other correspondence of the explorer, has a new index and bibliography, is printed in legible type, and is suitably edited by Jackson and Spence. The Smithsonian issue, on the other hand, lacks index and bibliography, is reproduced in its original, outmoded type, and contains no editing. Why then, this reviewer wonders, did the Smithsonian bother with this project? Although Herman Viola of the Smithsonian and Ralph Ehrenberg of the Library of Congress include a brief introduction that explains how Fremont came to write the reports, they provide no new information on the explorer or his motives.

Fremont's reports of the 1842 and 1843-1844 expeditions have been discussed and reviewed many times previously, but they still make interesting reading and subscribers to this journal should be aware of them. What makes them valuable are Fremont's descriptions of the American West and its peoples. After

they were first published in 1845, the public hailed Fremont as the great pathfinder of the vast American West. He mapped the trails through the mountains that would assist later travelers on their way to Oregon and California; he described the land and told of the wondrous sights—the majestic mountains and rivers, the buffalo, bears, elk, deer, and other game, and the various Indians that he encountered during this journeys.

The reports tell that in 1843 Fremont and his men trekked across the Kansas prairies on their way to the Rocky mountains. The adventurers had attempted the same trip a year earlier, but this time they intended to go farther than to the base of the Rockies; they would cross the mountains to Oregon and California, journey down the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, cross the Mojave Desert, and then head north again, back through the mountains and across the plains and prairies to St. Louis. Throughout the journey, Fremont kept detailed notes of the flora and fauna and the geological characteristics of the country. He recognized the great commercial and strategic potential of the land. “Commercially, the value of the Oregon country must be great, washed as it is by the north Pacific ocean—fronting Asia—producing many of the elements of commerce—mild and healthy in its climate—and becoming, as it naturally will, a thoroughfare for the East India and China trade” (page 277). It is clear that Fremont was a true champion of America’s Manifest Destiny.

The Indians, he realized, stood in the way of that destiny. Although Fremont’s descriptions of the Indians and their customs were often open-minded, like other nineteenth-century travelers, he generally lumped Indians in with the rattlesnakes and other hazards one encountered on the road. He frequently lapsed into the ethnocentric rhetoric typical of that era, especially if the Indians in question were hostile to white men tramping uninvited through their territory. Of one band of Indians (possibly Utes), for example, Fremont wrote that he had been “forcibly struck by an expression of countenance resembling that in a beast of prey; and all their actions are those of wild animals. Joined to the restless motion of the eye, there is a want of mind—an absence of thought—and an action wholly by impulse, strongly expressed, and which constantly recalls the similarity” (page 267).

Despite such ethnocentric passages, Fremont’s journals, dictated at home to his young wife Jessie Benton Fremont follow-

ing each expedition, are remarkably well-written. Readers might compare his writings to those of William Least Heat Moon, a modern author whose *Blue Highways* is an account of a motor trip along the back roads of modern America. The writer of *Blue Highways* makes clear, however, that he is neither explorer nor pathfinder, blazing new trails for others to follow. Ethnocentrism and racism, moreover, have no place in Least Heat Moon's heart. Almost all of his roads are paved, and he encounters people, even overweight tourists driving motor homes and campers, in the most out-of-the-way places.

Fremont also encountered many people on his way west. He hired guides to take him through mountains and deserts, but even then he often found himself hopelessly lost. Everywhere he turned there were Indians as well as Mexicans, ranchers, traders, mountain men, trappers, and gold seekers. He even ran into wagon trains: seeking a new life in Oregon, American families lugged their possessions and livestock westward through the Rocky mountains. These greenhorns helped point the "Pathfinder" in the right direction. Fortunately for Fremont, motor homes had yet to be invented.

It is clear that Fremont blazed no new trails; but neither do the Smithsonian editors in this reprint of an account that is still available in a far better format through another publisher.

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**Among the Sioux of Dakota: Eighteen Months' Experience as an Indian Agent, 1869-70.** By D. C. Poole; with an introduction by Raymond J. DeMallie. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988. liii, 241 pp. Paper.

Faced with escalating hostilities on the Great Plains after 1865, a war-weary Congress felt compelled to reassess its Indian policies. Estimating that it would prove less expensive to feed the native people on reservations rather than fight them in endless skirmishes, Congress appointed several special commissions between 1865 and 1868 to investigate Indian affairs, and to negotiate peace terms with the warring tribes.

While at Fort Laramie in 1868, white emissaries concluded a