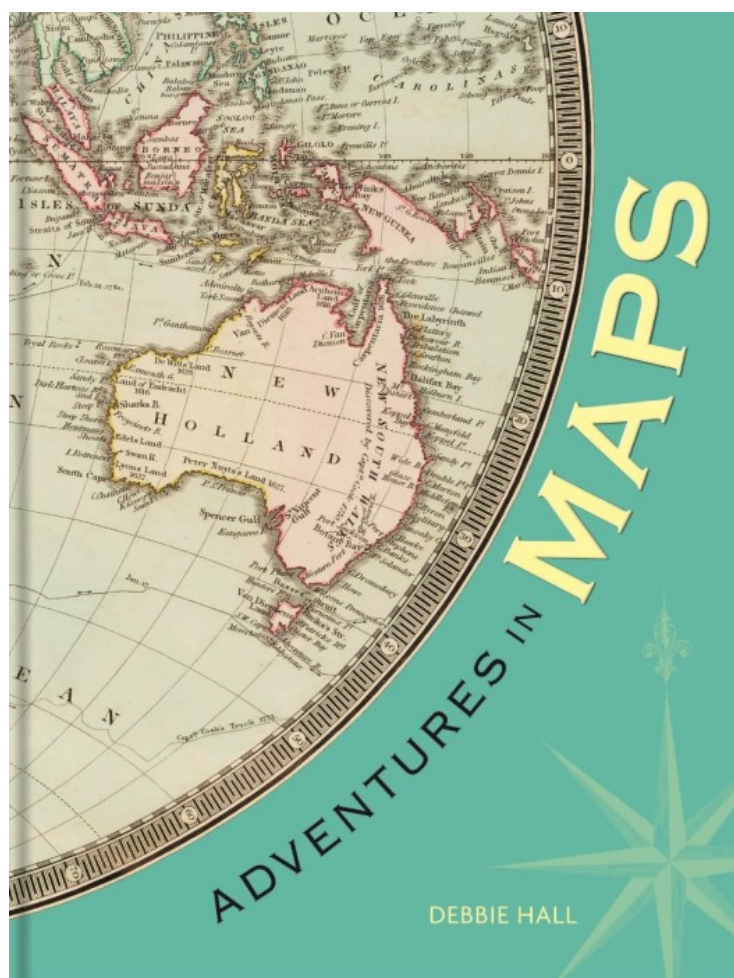




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Book review: Adventures in Maps

reviewed by Jack Tieszen



Hall, Debbie. *Adventures in Maps*, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2024, 218 p. \$40. ISBN: 978-1851245451

In the first line of *Adventures in Maps*, author Debbie Hall tells the reader that “maps intersect with journeys in many ways,” and this is the base for the text that follows (1). Hall shows that she is interested in maps beyond the geographic representations that they display. She wants to know why they were created, how they were utilized, and most importantly, what they can tell us about the people



behind them. The book is arranged into two distinct sections, featuring 20 stories of varying locations across (and even beyond) planet Earth. Each chapter is highly decorated with over 70 scans of maps, paintings, brochures, and other similar visuals to illustrate these journeys and provide additional context to the stories being told.

The first section of the book, titled “Traveler’s Tales,” is composed of “stories involving individual travelers and their journeys, illustrated where possible with the maps they either made themselves to show their adventures, or if not with maps that show the route they took (11).” These tales range in focus and size from local rambling to international expeditions. Structurally, the chapters generally follow a similar pattern, starting with an introduction to the journey or journeys that will fill that section of the book. A short profile of those involved follows this intro, which is further followed by an overview of the adventure/adventures through references to travelogues, memoirs, or other written accounts.

Occasionally, Hall will interject with some modern context (such as a discussion of Aurel Stein taking artifacts from the “Caves of the Thousand Buddhas (76)” in Dunhuang) or an opinion (such as Hall writing about how a part of David George Hogarth’s expeditions near the Euphrates sounded terrifying) though these particular interjections are less frequent in the text (60). Hall tells these stories chronologically, starting in 1482 and ending in 1978. This lengthy timeline of documented history showcases the breadth of experiences platformed in this text, though, I will mention that the focal point of most of these journeys is British, despite these tales ranging significantly in geographic location. This isn’t surprising considering the publication is from the Bodleian Library in Oxford and as such, most of the maps used came from this collection much like with Hall’s previous book *Treasures from the Map Room A Journey through the Bodleian Collections*.

The second section, titled “Adventures in Wayfinding,” focuses on “maps to enable travel,” such as the creation of Thomas Cook’s Tours or the surveying of the Bengal region by James Rennell. (102). Once again, the content ranges significantly between chapters, adding more geographic variety to the text. However, while the focus of the content in this section changes, the general structure stays consistent with the template that Hall developed in the first section of an introduction, then a profile, and then a discussion. Even the interjection types maintain their consistency across the second section as Hall continues to weave the tales amongst the images of maps.



From a purely cartographic point of view, Hall fills each chapter in this book with various images of maps. However, despite the large number, there are issues with the images that lie not in the maps themselves nor the number of maps in the text but rather in the book's physical size. *Adventures in Maps* is 6.93 x 8.98, and due to this limited space, the maps within are small, sometimes leading to the text being minimized to the point of illegibility. For example, a full-page image depicting Cook's straight in New Zealand (31) has text that is difficult to decipher without magnifying equipment. The issue is reduced with some of the maps that get a full two-page spread, such as with a scan of a canal survey of the River Aire from 1772, but the text can still be fairly small (136 - 137). Additional information and contexts about specific maps can be found in the various captions spread across the book, however the maps and the text directly within them can still be challenging to read. This isn't true for every map in the book, but it is an issue that came up while reading it.

In addition to the small size of the book, the chapters are short, ranging from six to thirteen pages, with a mix of images that reduce the overall word count. Hall's intent for this book seemed to focus on getting these stories and maps out to the public to get the reader interested in the accounts scattered throughout the text rather than for it to be used for in-depth research or as a comprehensive history of any of the journeys or figures profiled. Hall herself explains that this book was composed during the period of the COVID pandemic when travel was difficult. Because of this, a reader should engage with this book by reading vicariously, enjoying the second-hand accounts of these journeys in the comfort of their home (11). Through this lens, the importance of this work for the field of geography and cartography is a less relevant metric to judge this text. It isn't trying to add to a growing discourse, nor is it attempting to unearth previously unknown information from an archive. This book is attempting to be an enjoyable series of adventures in maps, as the title suggests. From this perspective the book's promise has been delivered.

In conclusion, *Adventures in Maps* is a book about using existing accounts of exploration and leisure and combining them with either the maps used on these journeys or maps to contextualize them along with other valuable images. It would qualify for a more casual audience and, as such, would sit comfortably among a public-facing collection of similar map storybooks. However, given the overall depth of the book's content, I wouldn't recommend it for an academic library collection.

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