

EXPLORING ST HELENA: A WALKER'S GUIDE

by Trevor W. Hearl

St Helena has long needed a popular pocket-size guidebook, and now, in *Exploring St Helena* by Ian Mathieson and Laurence Carter, it has one. You do not have to be a Darwin or Gosse to appreciate that the way to see the real St Helena is on foot, and whether you want to potter around Jamestown or follow cliff-side goat-tracks in quest of exciting discoveries, "A Walker's Guide" offers an intelligent introduction to its topographical treasures.

With this silent companion you can choose your exploration according to taste, time and weather, from a range of 25 coastal and inland routes. I cannot vouch for the walks myself, sitting in Cheltenham, but the lively commentaries, sketch maps and illustrations past and present (18 in colour) will tempt even arm-chair explorers! For real walkers, however, guidance is given about clothing, refreshments and difficulties en route. Those prepared only for a stroll are catered for in a section describing short walks and places to visit. Historical views allow walkers to see for themselves how the Island has changed - or not - over the years. For example, 'Upper Main Street' (p.12) shows how well this historic townscape has been kept since 1857 despite the ravages of white ant - the shameful absence of Porteous's House not being apparent in this view. Not all illustrations are so well chosen either for content or clarity, unfortunately. A few are misleading or seem to have been printed in reverse; nor was proof-reading impeccable (e.g. 'Melliss'), with occasional factual errors (e.g. H.M.S. *Waterwitch* was sold in 1861, not lost "pursuing slave ships" (p.17); G.W. Melliss lived at Oakbank from 1845, not "until 1840" (p.52), etc., matters to be corrected, when, as we hope, a second edition will be required. For this is basically an attractive and well-designed book - with index and reading list in a remarkably compact 80 pages - published by Anthony Nelson for the St Helena Government to the credit of all concerned.

Exploring St Helena has, I believe, only two-predecessors. In the 1880's Benjamin Grant's *Guides* led visitors on horseback the length and breadth of the Island, detailing the businesses, country houses, estates, and personalities of the day; in 1969, Seamus Talbot-Phibbs' *Guide to Some Walks on the Island of St Helena* (a typescript tome weighing nearly 2 lbs!) briskly traced over 100 tried and tested routes without comment. Each reflected the interests of its author and its age. The present book, imbued with themes of 'conservation' and 'heritage', no less worthily mirrors the ethos of the 1990's.

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