Amazing Traveler Isabella Bird, 2nd edition

Evelyn Kaye

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Isabella Bird, a Victorian woman, was an amazing traveler. In a world (1831–1904) where women were offered few opportunities outside the home, she dared to live her adventurous dreams despite the culture of the times.

With the help of various historical texts, private letters from Ms Bird to her family and friends, and personal investigation, the author tells a tale of adventure travel all over the world (Hawaii, the western United States, Japan, Persia, Korea, and China) by an unlikely solitary “well-bred” woman. Several humorous quotes remind us of this courageous woman’s upbringing and the challenges it dealt her. About conventional western riding style, Ms Bird explains her “unladylike” behavior to her sister, “. . . It was only my strong desire to see the volcano which made me consent to a mode of riding against which I have so strong a prejudice. A great many of the foreign ladies on Hawaii have adopted the Mexican saddle also for greater security to themselves and ease to their horses, and often wear full Turkish trousers and jauntily-made dresses reaching to the ankles.” About her guided ascent of Colorado’s Long’s Peak (the second woman ever to summit), “. . . I had various falls, and once hung by my frock, which caught on a rock, and Jim severed it with his hunting-knife. . . .”

Ms Kaye tells an interesting story, with appropriately placed quotes, but uses adequate background to remind the reader of the challenges of the era. Sketches and photos from the actual expeditions help tell the tale as well.

This book will interest any who are intrigued by 19th-century travel and specifically those interested in women adventurers.

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