Women Explorers

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Please note: * indicates an item from our Special Collections. ID may be required to view these items.

Images: Isabella Bird (l); Gertrude Bell (r)

Ida Pfeiffer (1797-1858)
Austrian traveler and writer who made two Round-the-World trips in the mid-19th-century.

- Visit to the Holy Land, Egypt and Italy (1852) SR 915.694 PFE*

Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839)
British socialite, traveler and adventurer whose archaeological expedition to Ashkelon in 1815 is considered the first modern excavation in the Holy Land.

- Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope (1846: 3 volumes) B STA
- Lady Hester Stanhope (1909) – Julia Roundell B STA
- Star of the Morning: The Extraordinary Life of Lady Hester Stanhope (2008) – Kirsten Ellis B STA

Edith Durham (1863-1944)
Traveler, artist and anthropologist whose writings on the Balkans – and particularly Albania – were considered pre-eminent. Her work is illustrated with her own sketches.

- The Burden of the Balkans (1905) 914.96 DUR

Alexandra David-Néel (1868-1969)
Belgian-French explorer, spiritualist, Buddhist and anarchist, whose writings on Tibet influenced Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

- My Journey to Lhasa (1983; originally published 1924) 915.15 DAV

Josephine Diebitsch Peary (1863-1955)
American author and Arctic explorer, alongside her husband, Robert Peary.

- My Arctic Journal (1893) 919.8 PEA. For further accounts of Arctic exploration, see our separate guide Arctic Exploration

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Images: Isabella Bird (l); Gertrude Bell (r)
General Histories of Exploration

- A History of Exploration: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day (1950) – Percy Sykes 910.9 SYK

General Histories of Women Explorers

- Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers (1989) – Dea Birkett 910.4 BIR
- On Top of The World: Five Women Explorers in Tibet (1976) – Laura Miller 915.15 MIL

Yorkshire Explorers

Amy Johnson (1903-1941)

Born in Kingston-upon-Hull, Amy Johnson was a pioneering avatrix and the first female pilot to fly alone from Britain to Australia.

- Amy Johnson (1977) – Constance Babington Smith B JOH
- Amy Johnson: Queen of the Air (1980) – Gordon Snell YB JOH
- Amy Johnson (1987) – Eva Bailey YB JOH

Isabella Bird (1831-1904)

From Boroughbridge near Harrogate, Isabella Bird was a 19th-century explorer, writer, photographer and naturalist. She was the first woman to be elected Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

- Unbeaten Tracks in Japan (1880) Y 915.2 BIR
- Korea and Her Neighbours (1898 – writing as Mrs. Bishop) 951.9 BIR
- The Yangtze Valley and Beyond (1899 – as Mrs. Bishop) Y 915.1 BIR

Other Women Explorers

Freya Stark (1893-1993)

Recipient of the Royal Geographical Society’s Back Award in 1933, Freya Stark was best known for her travels in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

- The Valley of Assassins: And Other Persian Travels (1934) 915.5 STA
- Baghdad Sketches (1939) 956.7 STA
- The Southern Gates of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut (1940) 915.33 STA
- A Winter in Arabia (1948) 915.33 STA
- Traveller’s Prelude (1950) B STA
- Beyond Euphrates: Autobiography, 1928-1933 (1951) B STA
- The Coast of Incense: Autobiography, 1933-1939 (1953) B STA
- Ionia: A Quest (1954) 915.61 STA
- The Lycian Shore (1956) 914.95 STA
- Alexander’s Path: From Caria to Cilicia (1958) 915.61 STA
- A Tower in a Wall: Conversations with Dame Freya Stark (1982) – Alexander Maitland B STA

Gertrude Bell (1868-1926)

One of the most influential individuals of the 20th-century, Gertrude Bell was a traveler, writer, political officer, administrator, spy and archaeologist who played a pivotal role in mapping the boundaries of the Middle-East.

- The Desert and the Sown (1907) 956 BEL

Mary Kingsley (1862-1900)

English explorer and ethnographer whose writings helped shaped European perceptions of African cultures.

- Travels in West Africa (1897) 916.7 KIN
- West African Studies (1899) 966 KIN
- The Life of Mary Kingsley (1932) – Stephen Lucius Gwynn B KIN