

LOST IN THE MISTS. LESLIE RUSSEL BLAKE: MAWSON'S CARTOGRAPHER AND HERO OF POZIÈRES. Herbert J.G. Dartnall. 2014. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd. xxii + 382 p, softcover, illustrated. ISBN 978-1-925003-18-5. A\$ 49.95.

This book celebrates the contribution made to the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) 1911–1914 by Leslie Russell Blake, one of Mawson's team of young scientists. Blake described himself as a geologist and surveyor. Like many young men, he was then confronted with the realities of World War I 1914–1918. Drawing on Blake's diaries and correspondence, with numerous annotations, the author develops his portrayal of a talented professional, on the brink of a promising career, whose life ended suddenly, a few weeks before peace was declared.

The book is structured in three main sections: *The expedition* (particularly Blake's experience on Macquarie Island), *The war* (World War 1), and *Biographies* (concise, informative accounts of Blake's colleagues and other people who feature in the book). In the first section, Blake's diary, essentially a work-related diary, gives details of preparation for the expedition and of work on the island, with less introspection than some AAE diarists. Blake's diary entries are often followed by extracts from the diaries of other AAE men, by wireless communications, or by the author's comments. The diary content is interspersed with text boxes, which provide a plethora of background information, historical details, lists of personnel on ships or at bases, tables and maps. At the end of each month, a summary of the meteorological data for Macquarie Island is given. This section is liberally illustrated; historic black and white photographs are supplemented by several colour plates, with interesting 'then and now' comparisons.

It is always difficult to present a multi-layered account of historic events like the AAE. Beau Riffenburgh succeeded with *Aurora: Douglas Mawson and the Australasian Antarctic expedition 1911–14* (Riffenburgh 2011), in which he skilfully wove parallel timelines, events from each of Mawson's bases, into the narrative. The focus in *Lost in the mists* is on Blake and associated biographical details, and while the additional layers of contemporaneous information in the first section are welcome, and edifying, the longer text boxes could be distracting, as the focus continually shifts away from Blake. However, it

could be argued that if material in the text boxes were presented as endnotes, it may be too far removed from the diary reference. Minor errors in transcription, such as SS *Palovena* for SS *Paloona*, *Acalelpha* for *Acalepha*, or 'indented sandstone' for 'indurated sandstone' can result from almost illegible words in handwritten diaries, but these could be considered in the next edition.

The reader follows Blake's journey, from the initial exhilaration of his leaving on the expedition, to his experiences on Macquarie Island where he was stationed for almost two years, then his voyage to Antarctica on the ship that rescued the stranded Mawson and six other men, before his return to Australia. His assignment on Macquarie was to make geological observations and to map the island. He extended this to charting the coastal waters, an area noted for submerged rocks, a constant danger to shipping. Blake described the island's topography, the wildlife, and the weather which was such an important factor in his field work. Isolated with four other AAE men and a few sealers, he also described the tensions that arose, the excitement of wireless communication, his dislike of cooking duties, his accomplishments and disappointments, his field trips, and his obvious appreciation of the company of Mac, the dog he adopted.

His stay on Macquarie Island was followed by the ship's detour to Antarctica before returning to Australia; then, after a brief hiatus, by his wartime experiences in Europe. *The war* is a very interesting and very personal section of the book. It has a simpler presentation featuring Blake's correspondence with accompanying explanatory comments by the author. Blake's letters to his family, as well as to Mawson and other associates, documented his concerns and thoughts prior to and during the war. This section more clearly communicates Blake's personality, and brings the reader much closer to this dynamic young hero.

With so much detail between its covers, the next edition of this book would benefit from the addition of an index but, overall, it is a carefully researched and informative work and it must be welcomed as an important reference. (Anna Lucas, Maritime Museum of Tasmania, 16 Argyle St, Hobart TAS 7000, Australia (lucasmail2002@gmail.com)).

Reference

Riffenburgh, B. 2011. *Aurora: Douglas Mawson and the Australasian Antarctic expedition 1911–14*. Norfolk: Erskine Press.