



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Narrative of an Expedition of Exploration in North Western Australia* by Herbert Basedow. Hesperian Press, Carlisle (WA), 2009, 248 pp., plates, map (in back folder), ISBN 978-0-85905-453-9, hard cover with dust jacket, RRP \$80.00.**

Published as part of The Western Australian Explorers' Diaries Project, this facsimile is a wonderful addition to the range of affordable early works on the Kimberley. It was originally published as *Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australia Branch*, vol. XVIII, session 1916–1917, pp. 105–295, and reprinted in Adelaide in 1918. Copies of the 1918 volume are rare, fetching upwards of \$300 when they become available.

The book contains journal entries for a trip (March to June 1916) on which the author visited several Kimberley stations and missions while undertaking geological and ethnological investigations. Basedow and his offsider, Gilbert St John Sanders, operated mostly out of Derby, having sailed there via the west coast on the s.s. *N2*, a wartime prize once known as the *Prinz Sigismund*. In Derby, they 'soon adopted the local mode of dress, which meant discarding all but pants and singlet'.

Their first excursion was eastward to Meda, Kimberley Downs and Napier Downs Stations, then up the Lennard and Barker Rivers to examine a lead-zinc deposit at Narlarla. Basedow mentions people met en route, often by name, and he describes incidents that occurred. Of particular interest, at least to this historian, are his jottings about the stations and the Aboriginal names for those places and geographical features. Botanists, ornithologists and others will likewise find his natural history notes of interest, while a much broader group will seize on his anthropological notes. The same can be said of his coverage of the later trips, one of those being by cutter from Derby to Sunday Island Mission and Port George IV Mission. Basedow then went to Wyndham on the *N2*, and, from there, he accompanied the Reverend Ernest Gribble on a visit to Forrest River Mission.

In the introduction to the facsimile edition, David Kaus, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs, National Museum of Australia, provides a brief but interesting biography of Basedow. Further detail is available in works that include Kaus's book *A Different Time. The Expedition Photographs of Herbert Basedow 1903–1928*. Describing Basedow as an Adelaide-born scientist, physician and explorer, Kaus credits him with being 'one of Australia's most highly qualified scientists of the first decades of the 20th century'. His expertise was in the biological and geological sciences, and in ethnology, but it was anthropology that was his passion.

In the book, the journal entries finish at page 239, followed by Special Reports written by Basedow and others on such topics as geology, fossils, molluscs, insects, fish, crustaceans, corals, and plants. Pages 196 to 234 present plates that include scenes in and near Derby, expedition campsites, flora and fauna, people, and carvings on boab trees. The quality of the plates, copied from the originals – many of them being glass negatives – is excellent. A detailed index completes the volume.

The volume is well summed up in the words of Kaus:

Basedow's journal is an important record of a trip to the Kimberley at a time when the area was undergoing rapid change. It not only constitutes a record of the people and places encountered by Basedow, nearly a century ago, it is also a reflection of the operation of Basedow's scientific work. Illustrated with 61 photographs taken during the expedition, it is of a different time long passed.

This book is available in selected bookshops or can be purchased direct from [Hesperian Press](http://www.hesperianpress.com.au).

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