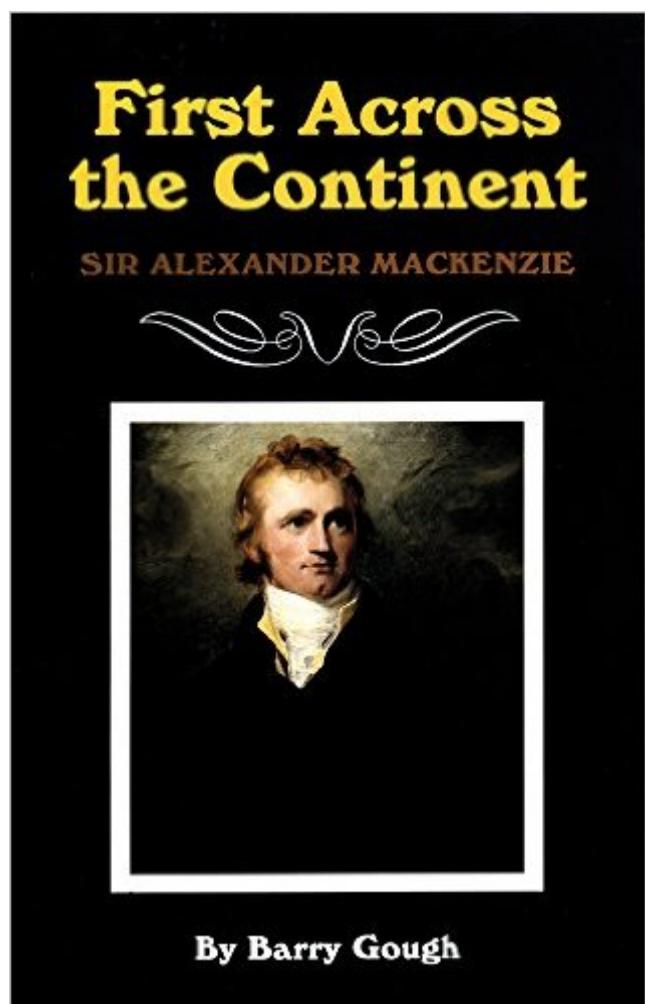


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First Across The Continent: Sir Alexander Mackenzie (The Oklahoma Western Biographies)



Synopsis

Seeking the Northwest Passage and the fabled like to Russia, Japan, and Cathay, Alexander Mackenzie drove himself and his men relentlessly, by canoe and portage, across the uncharted rivers, valleys, and mountains of North America. Mackenzie's 1789 journey to the Arctic Ocean and his arduous journey to the Pacific in 1793 predate the Lewis and Clark expedition. By the age of thirty-one Alexander Mackenzie had become the first man to cross North America from the northwestern hub of the interior trade, Lake Athabasca in present-day northern Alberta, to the Pacific Ocean. He had opened the continent to trade and exploration. Mackenzie was a man of enormous ego and overpowering ambition. He left Scotland in search of opportunity in the North American fur trade and achieved success through a combination of bold exploits, grim determination, and business acumen. Mackenzie returned to his homeland late in life to be knighted, marry, and live a more genteel life, leaving behind a Métis family in North America. His celebrated book *Voyages from Montreal* remains an enduring classic of world travel literature. In his research, Barry Gough traveled from Mackenzie's birthplace to his tomb and from Montreal to the Arctic Ocean and to the Pacific. He takes the reader along with Mackenzie on his hazardous travels and voyages, using contemporary accounts to bring to life the problems and perils faced by the young explorer. *First Across the Continent* reveals the international impact of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's expeditions and places him among the elite of New World explorers, illuminating his vital role in the history of the fur trade and the American West.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a well-written, concise (200 pages) biography of Alexander Mackenzie, the great Canadian explorer, best remembered for two important journeys made in western Canada, one to the Arctic Ocean in 1789, the other to the Pacific in 1792-93. Mackenzie was born in Scotland in 1762 and came to America as a teenager. He lived first in New York State around Johnstown, but moved to Montreal in 1778, where he entered the fur trade. By the 1780s, Fort Chipewyan, on the southern shore of Lake Athabasca, had become an important fur trading post, and this became Mackenzie's base of operations for his two explorations. The first, in 1789, took him north to Great Slave Lake and the river that would later bear his name, down which he ventured to the Beaufort Sea. Three years later he journeyed west from Fort Chipewyan along the Peace River and then over the Continental Divide to the Fraser and finally overland to the Pacific near Bella Coola. Thus Mackenzie and his men became the first to travel to the Pacific from an interior post on the continent (basically the first to cross the continent from sea to sea). He wrote an excellent account of his travels in 1801 (Lewis and Clark studied it thoroughly), much of it having to do with the Indians he encountered and which also included a history of the Canadian fur trade. He was knighted in 1802 and settled in Scotland. Although the book is a full biography, Gough focuses on the two journeys, the itineraries of which he has made extensive explorations of his own, and details the routes carefully, explaining much of what the explorers would have seen and experienced. He's a compelling writer and the book is a most interesting one. Highly recommended.

Pretty good book. Gives a rather matter-of-fact account of MacKenzie's life. Not a lot of detail or passion in either of his 2 great voyages. Interesting in all the other people brought into the story. Now I want to read about Peter Pond, MacKenzie's predecessor. Short and a quick read.

An interesting narrative about an interesting man. I am glad to add it to my library and glad to recommend it to others. I have read plenty about US history. It is often refreshing to learn about the exploration and settlement of our Neighbor to the North.

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