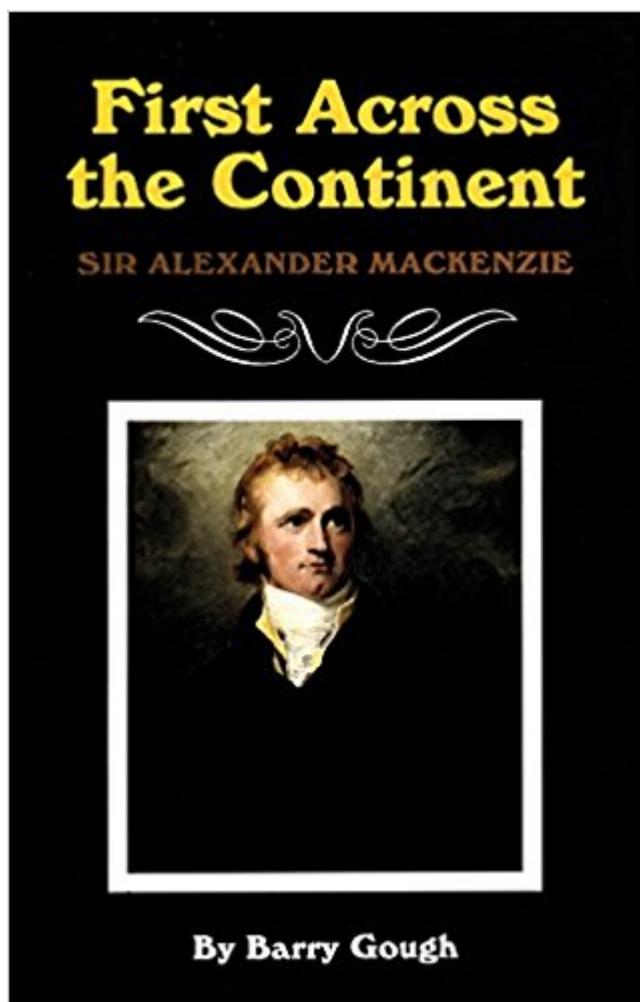


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# First Across The Continent: Sir Alexander Mackenzie (The Oklahoma Western Biographies)



## 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

Series: The Oklahoma Western Biographies (Book 14)

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: University of Oklahoma Press; First Edition edition (September 15, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0806130024

ISBN-13: 978-0806130026

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,541,909 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > History > Americas > Canada > Exploration #30 in Books > History > Americas > Canada > 19th Century #268 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Canadian

## Customer Reviews

The first white man to cross North America, Scottish-born Alexander Mackenzie (1764-1820) was typical of his generation of explorers: this bold adventurer who surveyed the untamed wilderness with impressive accuracy was also a hardheaded businessman who ventured into unknown Canadian territory in search of profits from fur trading. Canadian historian Barry Gough admires Mackenzie's toughness and daring without glossing over the towering ego and knack for self-promotion that won him a knighthood from England in 1802. *First Across the Continent* is another enjoyable entry in the University of Oklahoma's Western Biographies series.

A well-crafted biography of a little-remembered explorer of the Far North who helped open the frontier to trade and settlement. Gough (History/Wilfrid Laurier Univ., Ontario) charts the life of Scottish-born explorer Alexander Mackenzie, who from 1789 to 1793 worked his way along the rivers and mountain ranges of Canada in search of the fabled Northwest Passage. He did not find that geographical chimera, but he did locate the vast river that now bears his name, map the lower reaches of the western Canadian Arctic, and eventually reach the Pacific Ocean--a full decade, Gough patriotically remarks, before Lewis and Clark made their famous crossing of North America. Mackenzie, whom Gough calls ``a northern Sinbad," did not strictly have the interests of the British Crown in mind when he undertook his mission; driven from Scotland by poverty, he organized a fur-trading company whose itinerant employees expanded our knowledge of remote places and people--but who viewed these newfound territories as ``important peripheries of business relationships tied to the banking and warehousing interests of Montreal and New York." These early global capitalists were less tied to national loyalties than they were to their companies, Gough writes, and they fought bitterly among themselves. Mackenzie's chief rival was another Scot, Thomas Douglas, the fifth earl of Selkirk, who sought to break the hold of the fur traders and introduce a farming economy in the Canadian north. Selkirk eventually carried the day. Broken in business, Mackenzie returned to Scotland, where he was knighted for his labors and died in 1820 of chronic nephritis. He is remembered in Canadian history largely through the many places that bear his name. Gough's careful biography affords readers of North American history a detailed and welcome view of this important and too often overlooked explorer. (25 illustrations, six maps, not seen) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I was bit disappointed, seemed a bit dry considering the epic content.

Very interesting to read about the early exploration of the Northwest territory and location of the Pacific Ocean on the North American continent.

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.

Great book for Canadian history aficionados. Very specific to history buffs taste.

This is a great book. I would recommend this to anyone who wanted a better understanding of the Canadian Fur Trade.

excellent

The book was heavy on the French and English fur trade and their business', and very short on the travels of Mr. Mackenzie. I expected something on the order of the Lewis and Clark journals. This book was not even close to any thing written about Lewis and Clark.

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.

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