



**Burton Holmes Travelogues:
The Greatest Traveler of His
Time, 1892-1952**

by Burton Holmes

Taschen, hb, pp366, £29.99

A terrible case of itchy feet

According to his eulogy, Burton Holmes was the greatest "traveler" (sic) not just of his own time but "perhaps of all time". A pretty big claim, but there's evidence here to back it up. Over a 60-year period, Holmes visited nearly every country on the planet, photographed all he saw, and invented the term 'travelogue' to describe the exhibitions-cum-lectures that he subsequently mounted back home in the USA,

which were attended by thousands. He became a star, moved to Hollywood and hobnobbed with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford – but any suspicion that great showmen depend on hype dissipates on opening this book, which contains the best of his photographic archive.

The pictures are stunning, both as social history and as art. Holmes photographed

everything: the dead on Manchurian battlefields; the running of the bulls in Pamplona; a mule train hauling borax through Death Valley. A sequence of Vesuvius erupting in 1906 includes a shot of a woman under an ash-strewn sky that is positively apocalyptic, but Holmes's work wasn't restricted to the large canvas – he was as capable of capturing an intimate portrait of a chicken vendor in a

Burton Holmes Archives (5)

Bangkok market as of revealing "the vastness and intricacy" of the construction of the Panama Canal.

The photo captions, adapted from his lectures, are charming, describing, for example, how he crashed the coronation of Haile Selassie: "This I accomplished by a gentle ruse: suitably attired in high hat, tails... and an aristocratic air – I ventured forth." A gorgeously produced treasure trove. **Mick Herron**