

TRAVELOGUES

Far from Holmes – a homage to the greatest traveller.

In 1883, at the tender age of just 13, the globe-trotting Burton Holmes (1870–1958) visited the Boston World Exhibition and spent all his pocket money – US\$10 – on a camera. His first shot was of a tramp sleeping on a bench in the local park. Holmes was the only child of wealthy stock yet his preferred motif was the common man, which consistently remained his photographic subject for over 70 years, although the settings became increasingly more exotic and far-flung. Three years after his shooting his first roll of film, Burton's grandmother invited him on a cruise of Europe – to England, Germany and France; a trip he repeated four years later. The tours provided enough material for his first public presentation at the Chicago Camera Club. The event was a success and members soon realised that Burton was not only a competent photographer but also a formidable entertainer.

In 1892, Burton Holmes ventured on a five-month tour of Japan, marking the beginning of a lifelong journey that would take him to almost every nation on the planet, where he would shoot more than 30,000 photos and almost 153,000 meters (500,000 feet) of footage. He used these images in his two-hour shows, entitled *Travelogues*, which featured hand-tinted glass lantern slides and film. The sold-out shows drew crowds to some of the finest and largest theatres and auditoriums in America. In all, Burton Holmes performed 8,000 shows between 1892 and 1952.

Despite his celebrity status – highlighted by a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame – the legacy of Burton Holmes has all but faded. In 1983, much of his private archive of films, photos, negatives and vintage cameras mysteriously disappeared. But when 200 cans of his unique documentary films miraculously reappeared in a disused storage room in Los Angeles in 2004, public interest in his amazing travel photography was rekindled. And now a new richly illustrated book, *Burton Holmes Travelogues – The Greatest Traveler of his Time, 1892-1952* has been published by leading Burton Holmes expert Genoa Caldwell. This homage to Holmes features some of his best and most dramatic imagery and bears witness to his masterly photography.

Photographs courtesy of *Burton Holmes Travelogues – The Greatest Traveler of His Time*, Genoa Caldwell ed., Taschen. 368 pages.

– Anders Peter Mejer



Opposite page: "There is probably no dizzier viewpoint accessible to ordinary tourists anywhere in this wide world, no view point at the same time so perilous and yet so little feared," Yosemite, California, 1903. Top: Sunset, Giza, Egypt, 1906. Middle: Burton Holmes juggles his slides in his Hollywood home wearing one of his favourite Japanese kimonos, ca. 1930. Bottom: 'Fantasia' in the Moroccan desert, 1894: "There is nothing better calculated to take one's mind off ugly possibilities than to view those possibilities through the tiny finder of a camera."