

A co-founder of New York's Explorers Club, the discoverer of an Australian tree kangaroo and a Mexican pine, Carl Lumholtz was a well-known author a century ago, and not just in his native Norway. His trips to Queensland, Borneo, Arizona and (especially) northern Mexico brought him into close and sustained contact with Aboriginal groups who still retained many of their ancient ways of life. On most of his journeys, Lumholtz made sure to take at least one camera. This book, an exercise in advocacy, makes a strong case that his black-and-white photographs of indigenous peoples and Mexican landscapes are worthy of sustained attention.

From its title onwards, alas, *Among Unknown Tribes* is marred by old-fashioned rhetoric and occasionally shoddy thinking. It's disquieting to come across a new book from a major scholarly press whose introduction speaks of "primitive cultures that obviously lived without modern comforts" and of "remote, dangerous, unexplored corners of the planet". Unexplored by whom? Fortunately, the essays get better as the book proceeds, just as Lumholtz appears to have outgrown some of the attitudes expressed in his first book, *Among Cannibals*, where he described black

Australians as "a race of people whose culture – if indeed they can be said to have any culture whatever – must be characterized as the lowest to be found among the whole genus homo sapiens". He did not, apparently, take any photographs during the four years he spent in Australia during the 1880s.

Among Unknown Tribes concentrates on Lumholtz's Mexican journeys in the decades that followed; it devotes bafflingly little space to his Borneo travels and photographs. In Mexico, one of the authors claims, he showed a "deep, genuine curiosity about the culture of

Snap judgements

MARK ABLEY

Bill Broyles et al

AMONG UNKNOWN TRIBES
Rediscovering the photographs of explorer Carl Lumholtz
317pp. University of Texas Press. \$75.
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Huichol shamans, Teakata, near Santa Catarina, 1895

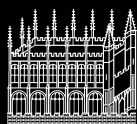
indigenous people and an ability to enter at least partially into their outlook". That "at least partially" is a necessary hedge, because on the

following page a frustrated Lumholtz is quoted as saying, "Will these natives ever reveal to me their thoughts, and throw any light on the early stages of human culture?". To claim that he "loved" indigenous people may be wishful thinking.

For all the deficiencies in its prose, *Among Unknown Tribes* performs the valuable service of making a generous selection of Lumholtz's photographs widely available. He had a gift of revealing the mood and character of his subjects, many of whom were depicted more informally and candidly than by other photographers of his day (Edward Curtis, for instance) could manage. Lumholtz was also a superb photographer of the natural world – although, as one of the contributors suggests, "the frontier he was expanding was, primarily, his own". Richard Laugharn, the author of the finest chapter, praises "the quality of understated but rapt attention" that shines through both Lumholtz's text and his photographs of indigenous people in the Sonoran desert. The book *New Trails in Mexico* (1912) still matters, Laugharn argues, for "it represents the moment when our culture pivoted from acquisition toward an imperfect but resolute appreciation".

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