

The Smithsonian Book of Mars

by Joseph M. Boyce

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Many 'popular' books about Mars are superficial in their treatment. The present text, happily, is not, even if it is aimed at a broad audience. It is also a timely book. As its author notes, it can truly be said that the 'second great era' of martian exploration has begun. Joseph Boyce is well-placed to have written this book, having been intimately involved in the NASA Mars programme for nearly two decades. I personally found his text very useful in bringing me up to date with current thinking about the martian interior and crust, areas of Mars research I have tended to neglect. Boyce writes with an excellent sense of perspective. Mars is reviewed historically in an introductory overview, and then examined from the centre outwards. The text ends with a look at future exploration, though Europe's first Mars probe (*Mars Express*, with its *Beagle 2* lander) receives only a brief mention. *The Smithsonian Book of Mars* is well illustrated (though more pictures might be given a scale) and printed on quality paper. It contains many helpful figures and tables, a glossary and a short 'further reading' list.

Boyce's style is clear and direct. Mostly it is analytical and descriptive, but there are flashes of unexpected humour. There are also some errors of fact, some unimportant typos, and a few odd grammatical constructions. On page 185 it would have been more accurate to have written that the polar hoods clear in late winter. The author often refers to 'global' dust

storms when he really should be using the accepted term, 'planet-encircling'. The HST images on page 2 are reproduced at much too small a scale to do them

justice, perhaps deliberately playing down the role of Earth-based imaging. On page 18, Huygens did not truly 'map' Mars; on page 27 'Higgins' should be 'Huggins', and on pages 26–27 the author neglects to mention that at least in the USA the 'canal controversy' was far from dead after 1909, even lingering into the 1960s upon the Rand Corporation's 'official' Mars charts prepared for NASA. But taken in context these are rather small criticisms.

I recommend Joseph Boyce's book without hesitation to anyone interested in the latest images and interpretations of the Red Planet. He is to be warmly congratulated upon a job well done, and I hope the book gains a wide readership.

Richard McKim

Richard McKim has reported BAA observations of Mars since the 1979–80 apparition. He has written extensively about the martian dust storms and about the history of Mars observation. He directs the Association's Mars Section from his home in Northamptonshire.

