



The Real Mars

by Michael Hanlon

Constable, 2004. ISBN 1-841 19-637-1. xiv + 250 pp, £25.00 (hbk).

This new coffee table work by the author of *The Worlds of Galileo* demonstrates that the general science writer can continue to offer a fresh and perceptive viewpoint. This book impressed me, in the same way that Oliver Morton's *Mapping Mars* (2002) did. Its large format is appropriate and the quality of the printing and paper very high.

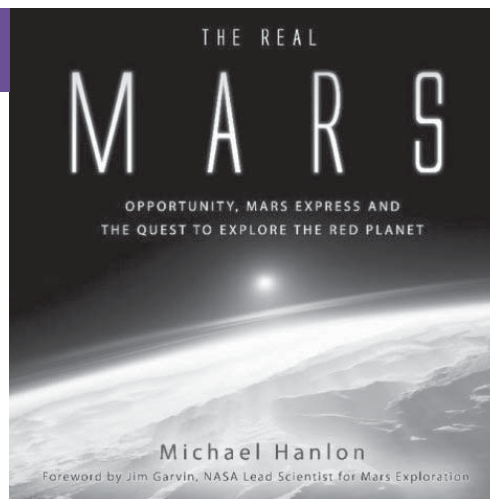
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The author, Science Editor on the *Daily Mail*, encounters Mars telescopically for the first time – appropriately enough – with the 60cm Clark refractor atop Mars Hill, Flagstaff: ‘I had hoped to see Lowell’s Mars, through Lowell’s telescope, and it was not there.’ Indeed not: it never was, as the author goes on to explain. But he does notice the polar cap, *Syrtis Major*, and a dark streak, which fellow Marswatchers reckoned was unlikely to have been the martian Grand Canyon *Valles Marineris*.

This is a well-crafted popular descriptive work, and includes a well-informed discussion of the interior and surface. There is much less detail about martian meteorology and, naturally, nothing for the practical observer. Subtitled *Spirit, Opportunity, Mars Express and the quest to explore the Red Planet*, Hanlon’s book primarily introduces and discusses the superb images from the latest series of Mars orbiters and robot rovers. In the context of the search for water and life, and the history of Mars exploration, the book succeeds especially well. For background material to illustrate our shifting opinions on the question of martian life there is much historical science fiction, too. Classic (and inevitably hostile) martians are revived and illustrated, although my personal favourites – the fire-breathing Martian rock snakes of Gerry Anderson – are absent!



If I have one quibble it is that the author introduces certain historical ideas such as the martian ‘Violet Layer’ (in passing) and then fails to explain what really happened to them, so the story is left unfinished in a few places. I can recommend *The Real Mars* to the general reader. If you do not possess a large-format Mars book, this is well worth having, and very good value for money.

Finally, could Hanlon have spotted *Valles Marineris* with Lowell’s Clark? Yes, easily! I have seen it well with 15cm or even less.

Richard McKim

Dr Richard McKim directs the Mars Section and has reported all BAA Mars observations for a quarter of a century. Though he has never observed Mars from Flagstaff, he once handled Lowell’s original notebooks and viewed Jupiter and Saturn with Lowell’s telescope.

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