Travelling with
MARIANNE NORTH
ADVENTURER, BOTANIST & ARTIST
On the Old London Road in Hastings stands a large, white house in which, in 1830, Marianne North was born into a comfortable existence. Self-educated, she detested school, Marianne was intelligent and sensitive with a lively sense of humour and a talent for singing. Her family, wealthy and well-connected, eschewed Victorian conformities, all of which stood her in good stead and undoubtedly helped to develop the remarkable person that she was to become.

She spent her winters at Hastings Lodge "a large house with lots of bells, servants and visitors surrounded by gardens. There were three glass houses: one for orchids, another for temperate plants, and another quite cool for vines and cuttings" where Marianne and her father would "work like slaves". Summers were spent in Rougham, the family’s country home (where she owned a pet parrot called ‘Twenty Pounds’), and travelling in Europe, North Africa and The Levant.

It was her passion, some would say obsession, shared with her father, for plants, flowers, nature and travelling that secured her place in history. These along with her magnificent paintings now housed in her gallery at The Botanic Gardens, Kew. From her first visit to Kew’s Temperate House in the 1850s, Marianne dreamed of exploring the world to paint all things beautiful and exotic in nature. From 1870 she followed that dream, hunting out plants across the world bringing hundreds of gloriously rich oil paintings of flowers, trees and animals to an astonished audience in England. She also kept a journal, edited into the intensely personal, beautifully descriptive and evocative ‘Recollections of a Happy Life’, that tell of her remarkable experiences.

In 2018 the Exploring Marianne North Project worked with a group of 10 women in Hastings to research and discover more about Marianne. Their research, deliciously illustrated by her paintings, has been compiled into this booklet to give a taste of her experiences. We hope you enjoy ‘Travelling with Marianne North’.
Packing Inventory

- Portmanteau
- Travel Bag
- Travel toiletry set
- Underwear including bloomers, chemise, corsets, modesty petticoat
- Satchel for everyday use
- Stockings
- Leather boots
- Woolen overcoat & shawl
- Hair accessories
- Travel hat
- Opera glasses & Spectacles
- Art supplies: brushes, tubes of paint (cobalt blue, lead white, orange, green), inks for sketching, paper and travel easel
- Letter writing materials & letters of introduction
- Journals for recording adventures and reading matter
- Natural Tints: To be made along the way, using Madder or Rubia Tinctorum

Transport

Marianne used whatever means available to her to track down the subjects she sought to paint across the globe. Travelling was often an adventure in itself!

By Sea
- Ocean Liners: for example Cunard Line and Royal Mail Steamers Line

By Land & River
- Steam Trains: passenger and freight, bullock and horse drawn coaches including Cobb and Co. coaches (Australia), horseback, donkeys and mules (some ill-mannered), canoe (for shooting the rapids), jinricksha, on foot

Cobb & Co

Jinricksha
North America 1871, 75, 81

The dream begins in North America and Canada 1871.
Set sail 13th July on the SS. Malta from Liverpool.
Arrived 22nd July, Boston, Massachusetts.

“I had long had the dream of going to some tropical country to paint its peculiar vegetation on the spot in natural abundant luxuriance; so when my friend Mrs. S. asked me to come and spend the summer with her in the United States, I thought this might easily be made into a first step for carrying out my plan.”

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Elkridge
Huckleberry Pudding

Ingredients
1 pound of flour
1 pound of light-brown sugar
8 eggs
1 quart of berries

Instructions
Beat the flour, sugar, and eggs as sponge cake, and add the berries, nicely picked, washed, and allowed to dry, bake as sponge cake. This may be served with sauce, either hot or cold.

By steam train to Yosemite

“The still heat was very trying, the ground covered with dazzling sand, with a few scrubby trees loaded with mistletoe and cacti, some like pillar-posts thirty feet high, others branching like candelabra.”

Painting 187 Niagara Falls
Revisiting North America in 1875 and again 1881 to paint the great Redwoods.

“There was no difficulty in finding the trees; only in choosing which one to paint, and how to get far enough away from such big objects as to see the whole of any one. Fifteen feet through, at a yard from the ground and two hundred or nearly three hundred feet high, were the measurements of the largest.”

“...we walked over the cliffs to find a most curious cedar tree, perfectly shaved at the top like an umbrella pine by the sea winds, with its branches matted and twisted in the most fantastic way.”

Once settled into Mrs S’s house near West Manchester, USA

“The food on those days was always extra good. Huckleberry puddings with cream were quite divine, and corn-cakes and chowder...”

Painting 207 An old Red Cedar on the rocks near West Manchester, Massachusetts

Painting 154 The Calaveras Grove of the Big Tree, or Wellingtonia, in the evening

Painting 185 Vegetation of the Desert of Arizona

Painting 187 Niagara Falls

President Grant went to great lengths to welcome me: I could not think what I had done to deserve all this; but after I left it came out, Mrs. Grant talked of me as the daughter of Lord North, the ex-Prime Minister of England. I always knew I was old, but was not prepared for that amount of antiquity.

Photo credit: Library of Congress
Jamaica 1871, 72, 85

Set sail 15th December, Jamaica Steamer from New York.
Arrived 24th December, Kingston, Jamaica.

“I was in a state of ecstasy, and hardly knew what to paint first... I painted all day, going out at daylight and not returning until noon, after which I worked at flowers in the house, as we had heavy rains most afternoons...”

“At last we turned into the forest... and rode through the Fern Walk; it almost took my breath away with its lovely fairy-like beauty;”

Painting 179 View in the Fernwalk, Jamaica

At Clifton Lodge

“...the Doctor humming-bird, with green breast and two long tail-feathers, used to dart about the garden in the company of his wife, who was like him, minus the tail.”

Painting 134 Leonotis Nepetaefolia and Doctor Hummingbird, Jamaica

Painting 179 View in the Fernwalk, Jamaica

Breakfast

“I asked Charles Kingsley and others to give me letters to Brazil and the West Indies, his book, ‘At Last’, having added fuel to the burning of my rage for seeing the Tropics.”

“I soon felt myself at home in Rio... at the top of the hotel... both the Sugar-loaf and the Corcovado mountains... were within sight.”

“... we never started without a cup of hot coffee and a biscuit—a great security against the bad effects of a cold damp morning ride.”

On the road to Corcovado Crag

“The common snail of Brazil introduced itself to me on that road; it was as large as a French roll and its movements were very dignified. It had a considerable appetite for green leaves (as I afterward found after keeping one as a pet in a foot-pan for a month), its eggs were nearly as large as a pigeon’s...”

Painting 825 View of Corcovado Mountain, near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Painting 142 Ground Orchid, Carqueja and Giant Snail, Brazil

Lunch

“I found some difficulty about food for luncheon; if I put meat into a tin box it went bad, if I took it in paper the ants ate it up for me, even eggs they contrived to get into, and at last I came to the conclusion that oranges and bread were the best provision to take.”

“... in the West Indies at last! Christmas Eve... I landed entirely alone and friendless, but at once fell into kind and helpful hands...”

Painting 826 View of Corcovado Mountain, near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Painting 142 Ground Orchid, Carqueja and Giant Snail, Brazil

© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Japan 1875

Set sail 16th October 1875 on the Oceanic from San Francisco. Arrived 7th November 1875, Yokohama, Japan

“...a white horse was kept in case God came down and wanted a ride... a stuffed horse is kept in another shed close by, to be ready, in case the holy beast should die, to fill his place and not disappoint the equestrian Deity.”

Travel by Jinricksha

“A kind of grown up perambulator, the outside painted all over with marvellous dragons... they started into the city at full gallop, tearing round the corners and yelling like wild things, and finally fell down like a pack of cards, upsetting me at a street corner. I heard my skull go crack against the wall of the house.”

Wild Cherry Tea

“The smell was delicious, the taste only fit for fairies, and very hard for big mortal tongues to discover. The tiny girls who served us were very pretty, and merry over our gigantic and clumsy ways. I felt quite Brobdingnagian in Japan.”

Brazil continued...

“The mules became quite unmanageable... and we all took to galloping violently up and down the steep paved streets, which were now torrents of liquid mud - such a clattering, splashing, umbrella-grinding procession!”

Stayed a week at Mr. S.’s home in Puerto di Orotava enthralled by the garden

“The ground was white with fallen orange and lemon petals; and the huge white Cherokee roses covered a great arbour and tool-house with their magnificent flowers. I never smelt roses as sweet as those in that garden. I scarcely ever went out without finding some new wonder to paint…”

“Any one who likes bread and chocolate can live well all over Spain; I did not care if I got nothing else.”

Painting 652 Entrance to the Temple at Kobe, Japan

Painting 527 Rose in Close-up

Painting 658 Distant View of Mount Fujiyama, Japan

© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Tenerife 1875

Set sail New Year’s Day 1875 from Madeira. Arrived 13th January, Santa Cruz.

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“We were given a special order from the Mikado to sketch for three months as much as I liked in Kioto, provided I did not scribble on the public monuments or try to convert the people, for it was a closed place to Europeans.”

“...the taste only fit for fairies, and very hard for big mortal tongues to discover. The tiny girls who served us were very pretty, and merry over our gigantic and clumsy ways. I felt quite Brobdingnagian in Japan.”

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© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Marianne North Travels
1871-1884

Marianne often travelled on Cunard Line ships

1871 Traveled from Toronto to Detroit in a Pullman
"...for 75 cents extra I was in solitary glory till 8 o'clock at night..."

1871 Traveled from San Francisco to Yokohama
"On the 26th of October I took possession of a splendid, large, airy cabin on the Oceanic one of the finest steamers afloat...

Arrived 7 November 1875

Marianne often travelled on Cunard Line ships

Painting 561
Nepenthes northiana
A new pitcher plant from the limestone mountains, Sarawak, Borneo

Painting 501
Northia seychellana
Foliage, flowers and fruit of the Capuchin Tree, Seychelles

Painting 602
Crinum northianum:
A Bornean Crinum

Painting 367
Kniphofia northiae
A giant Kniphofia near Grahamstown, South Africa

Notice to Passengers
This Train Does Not Stop for Meals

Supper is now served in Pullman Pullman cars of the Cunard Metropolitans

Sample menu included:
- Chicken Salad Sandwiches
- Strawberries & Cream
- Assorted Cakes
- Vanille, Lemon and Strawberry Ice Cream

Wine menu, including Chateau Lafitte and Champagne

Returned via Ceylon where her friend, famous photographer Julia Margaret Cameron
"dressed me up in flowing draperies of cashmere wool, let down my hair, and made me stand with spiky coco-nut branches running into my head..."

Photo credit: Julia Margaret Cameron
© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

"the greatest pleasure was to see new and wonderful countries, and the only rival to that pleasure was the one of staying quietly at home. Only ignorant fools think because one likes sugar one cannot like salt;"

1876-80 Borneo

© Allamy
First visit in 1876
Travelled on a little steamer to Singapore then on to Borneo

...where I was warmly welcomed by the Ranee Margaret, ‘A very handsome English lady’ and her husband, the Rajah of Sarawak.

Second visit in 1880
Travelled from Singapore on the Rajah’s gunboat, the Alarm, to Sarawak. Arrived 25th May.

“...in this perfect world of wonders... There were great metallic arums with leaves two-foot long, graceful trees over the streams, with scarlet bark all hanging in tatters, and such huge black apes! One of these watched and followed us a long while, seeming to be as curious about us as we were about him. When we stopped, he stopped, staring with all his might at us from behind some branch or tree-trunk; but I had the best of that game, for I possessed an opera-glass and he didn't, so could not probably realise the whole of our white ugliness.”

“...My friends... got a canoe with a mat and pillow, and two Dyaks to paddle and push; so I gained once more the pleasure of shooting the rapids, lying on my back... sometimes shooting swiftly down through deep-green water and white foam, while the men clutched at rocks and tree-stumps...”

“There was a state dinner of twenty-four one night... The party was quite funereal in its solemnity... I got into disgrace by preferring to sit and look at the moonlight and lights of Kuching reflected on the water, on the cool verandah, instead of joining the dismal circle round the glaring lamp-lit drawing room.”
India & Ceylon 1877

Set sail 10th September 1877 on the Tagus from Southampton. Arrived 15th November 1877, Galle, Ceylon; then, after a few days with friends, on to Tuticorin or Thoothukudi.

“Nassick, a most picturesque old town, with steep busy streets; the river banks lined with temples most beautifully ornamented... and many causeways across”

Edward Lear’s letter of introduction to Dr Arthur Coke Burnell, an English scholar of Sanskrit based in Madras:

“If this is given to you by Miss North, please do all you can for her as to sights - particularly flowers, etc., etc., as she is a great draughtsman and botanist, and is altogether aciously clever and delightful.”

Dr Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–1882) was a great scholar and amassed a large collection of Sanskrit manuscripts which are now in the British Library. Burnell was planning to write about the sacred plants of the Hindus and had a selection ready for Marianne to paint.

Laura Ponsonby in the British Library SAALG newsletter: Issue 2

Australia & New Zealand 1880

Set sail 18th April 1880 on the Sindh from Marseilles with old friends via Sarawak, Singapore and Borneo. Arrived Brisbane 8th August 1880.

“Charles Darwin... was, in my eyes, the greatest man living... he thought I ought not to attempt any representation of the vegetation of the world until I had seen and painted the Australian. I determined to take it as a royal command and go at once.”

“In one place I sat down, and without moving could pick twenty-five different flowers. The banksias were quite marvellous, their huge bushy flowers a foot in length, and so full of honey the natives were said to get tipsy sucking them.”

“Mrs. Ellis Rowan, the flower painter I had heard so much of, kept a room for me, and at once introduced me to quantities of the most lovely flowers.”

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Painting 292 Nassick, in the Bombay Presidency

Painting 338 Mount Everest or Deodunga from Sadukpho, North India

Painting 294 The Sacred Lotus of Puidma

Painting 775 A West Australian Banksia

© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

© The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
**South Africa 1882**

Set sail August 1882, Grantully Castle, from Dartmouth. Arrived 18 days later at Cape town to be met by two friends.

“...the slightest touch to the end of its blue arrow (when ripe) jerks out the pistol and stamens... I dissected one of the great flower-heads, and found at least a dozen young flowers, with their gaudy bracts, tucked away in their honey-bed inside.”

**Seychelles 1883**

Set sail 27th September 1883, on the Natal, from Marseilles.

“I was lucky enough to... see the gradual entrance into life of the birds... The one I painted, half in half out, turned its head to look at each person who spoke, and seemed to be attending to what we said.”

**Chili 1884**

About the middle of November 1884, I started on my last journey...

“With the kind help of Sir T.F., a cabin was secured all to myself all the way to Valparaiso and 'till we reached Bordeaux all was enjoyment. Then my nerves gave way again (if they were nerves!), and the torture has continued more or less ever since.”

“I would not give up and was rewarded at last by the mists clearing, and behold, a great group of the noble flowers (Puya) standing out like giants, at first, then gradually coming out with their full beauty of colour and form.”

“They said I must sleep out, be eaten by pumas, or carried off by Indians, a noble race which had never yet been conquered by white man. Others declared the trees no longer existed, having been all sawn up for sleepers for railways; but as usual I found when I got nearer the spot, that all difficulties vanished.”

Painting 026 The Blue Puya Cactus at home in the Cordilleras, near Apoquindo, Chili

Painting 004 Puzzle Monkey Trees, and Guanacos, Chili

Painting 369 Strelitzia augusta at St John’s Kaffraria, Seychelles

On the Ostrich Farm at Groote Port

“At last we put up sail and ran into the valley of the coco de mer: a valley as big as old Hastings, quite filled with the huge straight stems and golden shiny stars of the giant palm: it seemed almost too good to believe that I had really reached it.”
On 11th August 1879 Marianne wrote to Sir Joseph Hooker, her friend and the Director of Kew Botanic Gardens, offering to donate her collected works to the gardens along with a building suitable to house them. Her donation was graciously accepted although her request to have tea and coffee served there was politely declined. Marianne commissioned her friend, architectural historian James Fergusson, to design the building after the colonial structures she had admired in India, and when it was completed, she carefully arranged all her paintings in a dense mosaic on the walls, sorted according to geographical location of subject.

This prolific and astounding celebration of her life’s work opened on 7th June 1882 to great acclaim. Following more travels an extension was added in 1883 to house more paintings. The gallery now houses 946 of her rich and vibrant works.

Marianne’s wry humour and determination show amongst the floral displays around the interior doors, designed and painted by herself. Above two doors are delightful illustrations of the tea and coffee plant, so giving her the last, and enduring word regarding tea and coffee at the gallery!

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"Her gallery at Kew is a monumental work: to finish it she fought bravely against increasing illness, when it was done her strength was also gone..."

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"Afterwards [final visit to Jamaica] I returned straight to England, where it took me another year to finish and rearrange the gallery at Kew. Every painting had to be re-numbered, so as to keep the countries as much together as possible, the geographical distribution of the plants being the chief object I had in view in the collection.

"After that was finished, I tried to find a perfect home in the country..."
“I have often thought how much her natural stately presence, and simple yet dignified manner, helped her in facing all sorts and conditions of men in those long distant journeys. She inspired respect wherever she appeared, and good men everywhere were ready and eager to help her. Her work was always her first point. She could never be idle.”

— Janet Symonds, Marianne North’s sister

Exploring Marianne North project with Creative Force

Design by Kristina Alexander at Super8Design.com - Edited by Teri Sayers-Cooper for Creative Force

Marianne North quotes are from her ‘Recollections of a Happy Life’, Volumes 1 and 2

Volunteer Participants

Special thanks to the 10 participants who researched and contributed to ‘Travelling with Marianne North’

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Julie Gidlow
Amanda Jobson
Jasmin Kobayashi-Maier
Louisa Sington
Sarah Wilson

CF works with local partners and communities to develop programmes that inspire and empower people, foster community spirit and nurture change.

creativeforce.org.uk

Thank you to Christine Blakemore and the North Family for their invaluable support

Finally our thanks to the Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. For information about visiting the Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens, go to www.kew.org

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