Ida Pfeiffer Encyclopedia Article

Ida Pfeiffer

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Ida Pfeiffer

1797-1858

German explorer and writer who made a noted trip to present-day Indonesia. Pfeiffer was born in Austria as Ida Reyer. After a childhood in which her father encouraged her to learn and become physically strong and self-sufficient, she married in 1820 and raised two sons. In 1835, when her sons established their own homes and she was free of family obligations, she separated from her husband and began traveling. Pfeiffer published many books; her most famous was *A Lady's Voyage 'Round the World.* She traveled alone and on a tight budget. Pfeiffer shocked the established world with her visit to the East Indies (now Indonesia). While there, she met with the Batak tribe, renowned for cannibalism. Perhaps no previous European had ever been allowed into their territory, and she was the first person to report on the Batak way of life. The Bataks treated her as a curiosity and passed her from tribe to tribe. She became uneasy after the Batak gestured that they wanted to kill and eat her. Pfeiffer replied in broken Batak that she was too old and tough to make good eating. They were amused and eventually let her escape unharmed.