

Challenging Mountains Reviews:

5 stars "A Journey through History" Rosemary Morris

Some of the characters in *Mystic Mountains* and *Distant Mountains* feature or are mentioned in *Challenging Mountains* the third novel in the *Settlers* series set in 1840 in the colony of New South Wales. The colony is expanding now that convicts are no longer transported to the East Coast, and free squatters settle on lands between Sydney and Port Philip in the south.

Tim is bored by his position in a government office. Jo, whose parents were killed at the gold mines by bush rangers, is equally bored with her life. When Tim is about to leave for Port Philip with his Uncle Carlos, Jo, dressed as a boy, accompanied by Billy, a native, who wants to find his family, arrives. She is determined to join them and insists she can cope with the month-long-journey, says she has enough money for her needs and that Billy, who promised her father to look after her, will be an asset. In search of adventure and a new life in Port Philip, a new settlement, they set out. Jo thinks she can take care of herself. She ignores Tim's advice about avoiding predatory males. "Despite Jo's, at times, stubborn ways, she is a beautiful, talented woman." Tim cannot decide if he wants to marry her. "There were times when he thought Jo was wise beyond her years. In comparison he was like a green youth. Then again she would offer him challenges he would relish."

The author introduced me to the history of New South Wales, which I knew little about. She also took me on an interesting journey from place to place, during which the characters encountered 'the good, the bad and the ugly'. After naïve Jo, dressed as a young man, is assaulted, they are deserted by their wagon master and his team. From then on, they encounter almost naked natives, are attacked by bushrangers, make dangerous river crossings and are horrified by a murder. Halfway to Port Philip, they no longer think of their expedition across challenging mountains as an adventure.

When I reached the end of *Challenging Mountains* I was completely satisfied and, with regret, parted with Tim and Jo.