

JOHN LABAND AND JEFF MATHEWS: ISANDLWANA. CENTAUR PUBLICATIONS, PIETERMARITZBURG, 1992. 98 pages R20-46.

The battle of Isandlwana on January 22, 1879 is an event of great significance in the history of the Zulu, Natal, the British Empire and South Africa. The Zulu take a great pride in the fact that they defeated the mighty British Empire. The site at the sphinx-shaped mountain is still visited by great numbers of people. Controversy and mystery still enshrines many aspects of the Anglo-Zulu War and the battle of Isandlwana in spite of numerous publications and intensive research.

This small and very readable volume, developed in cooperation with the KwaZulu Monuments Council, is a very balanced, impartial and systematic analysis of the battle. It is primarily intended for school children. It's usefulness is greatly enhanced by the comprehensive set of exercises and activities represented in the last 24 pages of the book.

Perhaps the description of events and the explanation of motives and consequences tend to be a little oversimplified. But it does present a good example of

sound and rational historical argument and reconstruction. The reasons for the war is briefly explained: the British claim that they simply wanted to remove an unpopular king, who actually represented a stumbling block to their own designs. The authors emphasise the fabricated nature of Sir Bartle Frere's motives. There is no evidence that the Zulu wanted British intervention or that the Zulus were dissatisfied with King Cetshwayo. The preparations for the war on both sides, the development of the war and the Zulu strategy at Isandlwana is neatly discussed. For the first time a computer-based method for the creation of a historical battle map is used. This made a number of new detailed maps of the battle area possible and established a better appreciation of the Zulu strategy and the reasons for the British defeat.

This is a most useful book for putting into practice a skills-based approach to history teaching.

T.D.