

## Reviews

**COLD COMFORT: MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE ARCTIC.** Graham W. Rowley. 1996. Montreal, Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill–Queen’s University Press. xiii + 255 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-7735-1393-0. \$Can 29.95.

The author’s introduction to the Arctic came in 1936 as archaeologist to a small British expedition exploring the west coast of Baffin Island. He continued to work in the area until 1939 and excavated the first site of the pure Dorset culture near Igloolik. Moreover, the expedition was one of the last in the region to depend on traditional methods. Therefore, even if this book were a mere record of the expedition and its sequel, it would deservedly be high on the list of priorities for reading by any person who had Arctic interests.

But it is much more than this. One of the most damning points ever made by any reviewer was the famous comment that the work being reviewed was hard to pick up and very easy to put down. Quite the opposite is the case here. This reviewer found it absolutely impossible to put the book down and, as he was in hospital at the time, the author’s work was doubly appreciated.

The reason for this is the sheer fascination of the tale that Rowley has to tell. Those were quite literally the days! A young man in Cambridge receives a two-line note and off he goes light-heartedly to the Arctic on what amounted to a University expedition. The story of the book covers the doings of that expedition and those of the author when it became clear that more could be accomplished in his area of research by working separately. Much of the book is devoted to the learning process that the author went through during his time there and this largely related, of course, to his being taught by the Inuit. Much relevant information is given, and one suspects that there are few alive now who would not learn something not only from the author’s description of methods of travel, preparation of clothing, camping techniques, and the like, but also in the way life was led in the 1930s. For example, this reviewer was astounded to be informed that there was a squash court on a transatlantic liner in which Rowley sailed!

But the chief merit of the book is the way in which it is written. The author has a pleasant matter-of-fact style of writing that quite disarms any critic. There is no flummery, just a simple tale superlatively well told. Moreover, the author has the gift of making his characters come alive on the page. Especially excellent in this respect are his pen portraits of the various missionaries and HBC staff that he met on his travels. Here is one: ‘...Henry Voisey hated the radio with an intensity that made him incapable of learning the morse code. The conditions of the transmitting licence obligated the station to serve the whole community, but the prospect of sending messages reduced Henry to such a

state of nerves and misery that nobody had the heart to initiate any without a very pressing reason’ (page 171).

Moreover, there is a clear feeling of the respect, even awe in places, with which the author regarded the area and the people living within it. It is not in any sense intended to be disrespectful to comment that the author gives the impression of being very slightly naive, at least in the first few years, and this lends charm to the book.

A further point is the utter hilarity of much of the author’s writing, which is enhanced by his straight-faced way of telling a tale. This is a representative sample: ‘The *Nascopie*’s scows brought bags of government coal from the ship to the shore to be unloaded by the Inuit for the use of the RCMP detachment. The same scows were being loaded by the same Inuit with bags of HBC coal from Salmon River to take from the shore to the ship for the Company’s use at Clyde River. This must have puzzled the Inuit, who then knew little about how government operated’ (page 149).

In complete contrast is the description of the death by drowning of Reynold Bray. Here the author’s sparse style is perfectly fitted to the topic, full of pathos as it is.

The quality of the work is enhanced by the illustrations. There are 48 contemporary photographs, and these themselves constitute an important historical document of the work of the author and of the people referred to in the text. The most beautiful of these are the three of objects excavated by the author. There are also several sketches distributed throughout the text on such subjects as how to build an igloo, which incidentally makes it look very simple, and birds and animals. There are a few well-chosen maps although, almost of necessity, some places are referred to in the text that are not marked in them. There are also interesting appendices.

To sum up: a gem of a book and one that could and should be read for pleasure, and perhaps profit, but mostly for pleasure, by all polar enthusiasts. (Ian R. Stone, Laggan Juys, Larivane Close, Andreas, Isle of Man IM7 4HD.)

**ANTARCTIC COMMUNITIES: SPECIES, STRUCTURE AND SURVIVAL.** B. Battaglia, J. Valencia, and D.W.H. Walton (Editors). 1997. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 464 p, hard cover. ISBN 0-51-48033-7.

This large and well-bound volume is the distilled outcome of a symposium held in mid-1994 in Venice. Sponsored by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), it was the sixth in a prestigious series of Antarctic biological symposia initiated in 1962. The published proceedings of each of these have provided benchmarks of progress and signposts for future work. The latest contains 63 high-quality contributions selected by the symposium steering