

Reviews

RUSSIAN TRAVELLERS IN ALASKA

RUSSIAN EXPLORATION IN SOUTHWEST ALASKA; THE TRAVEL JOURNALS OF PETR KORSAKOVSKIY (1818) AND IVAN YA. VASILEV (1829). VanStone, James W. (editor). 1988. Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press (Rasmuson Library Historical Translation Series 4). 120 p, maps, soft cover. ISBN 0-912006-27-7. US\$15.00 plus \$1.50 postage and packing.

This excellent series seeks to fill a major gap in the historiography of exploration of Arctic and sub-Arctic America: the work of Russians in Russian America. The present volume gives us an English version, by a very experienced translator, of two original journals of which microfilms are available at the University of Alaska; and translates also the instructions given to the writer of one of the journals by his superior, the general manager of the Russian American Company, a document recently published in Russian.

The longer account is by P. Korsakovskiy, a company employee, and describes his travels round the shores of Bristol Bay in 1818. The party travelled in baydarks — canoes with one, two or three hatches — and met many natives, with whom relations were generally good. The journal contains some useful information on anthropology and natural history. The second account, by I. Ya. Vasilev, another company man, concerns his journeys in the same general area ten years later. It is shorter and less informative than Korsakovskiy's, but is preceded by ten pages of interesting instructions from his much more knowledgeable superior, P. Ya. Chistyakov.

The texts are well annotated by Professor VanStone, who also writes a succinct and pertinent introduction. But the other editorial aid, maps, are rather less successful, some needing clearer distinction between land and sea and others taxing the eyesight. The translation reads smoothly, but, to pick a nit, kayur is surely a dog driver, not a 'displaced person doing forced labour in an artel'. (Terence Armstrong, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER UK.)

MAN OF DESTINY

THE NOOSE OF LAURELS: THE DISCOVERY OF THE NORTH POLE. Herbert, Wally. 1989. London, Hodder and Stoughton. 395 p, maps, hard cover. ISBN 0-340-41276-3. £16.95.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica in its entry for Admiral Robert Edwin Peary describes him as 'usually credited' with the discovery of the North Pole on 6 April 1909, a clear hint at the controversy surrounding that historic claim. Did Peary prove conclusively that he had stood at latitude 90°N? If so, had the victory perhaps been preempted by Frederick Cook's claim a year earlier? Maybe neither had been there. And so the battle has raged inconclusively over the years, fuelled by Peary's own

obsessive secrecy concerning his field records and the subsequent reluctance of the family to make these records public. Now, at last, they have been made available to Wally Herbert, whose knowledge of the Arctic and empathy with Peary himself recommended him to the National Geographic Society as a properly qualified arbiter. Three years of researching the Peary archives have resulted in an engrossing account of the explorer's arctic expeditions and a fair delineation of his complex persona.

That Peary regarded himself as a man of destiny whose God-given purpose in life was to gain the North Pole for his country is well documented; what is less well-known, as the author makes so abundantly clear, is the ruthlessness of his methods. No other must be seen to steal his limelight. The challenge of his former friend and fellow explorer, Frederick Cook, and the consequent official enquiry as to his claim, nearly led to Peary's own undoing. For as Wally Herbert clearly demonstrates, 'Peary's need to reach the North Pole distracted him from his obligation as an explorer to observe and record'. A masterly analysis of Peary's field records reveals a suspiciously incomplete log clearly tinkered with after the event, a failure to check longitude for lateral ice drift, a failure to take observations for magnetic variation, and distances and speeds that seem barely credible. These and other incongruities lead the author to conclude that Peary failed to reach 90°N — and knowingly concealed the truth. The laurels and gold medals for which he hungered and which in most respects he so richly deserved, in the end destroyed him. This absorbing analysis of the man and his work, though it demolishes the central myth, still leaves him as essentially a hero, albeit a flawed one. (H. G. R. King, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER, UK.)

IN SEARCH OF FRANKLIN

THE JOURNAL OF ROCHFORD MAGUIRE 1852-1854: TWO YEARS AT POINT BARROW, ALASKA, ABOARD HMS PLOVER IN THE SEARCH FOR SIR JOHN FRANKLIN. Bockstoce, John (editor). 1988. London, The Hakluyt Society. Second Series, No 169. 2 vols. 584 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-904180-24-7. £30.00.

During the nineteenth-century search for the Northwest Passage, most voyages were made from Great Britain westward to Davis and Hudson straits, gateways to the supposed sea route to the Pacific. Activity focussed on the eastern parts of the North American Arctic rather than the western regions, mainly for logistical reasons. By the circuitous route around Cape Horn, Bering Strait was six or seven times farther from Britain than Davis Strait. But the distant Pacific approaches to the Northwest Passage assumed a new importance during the search for Sir John

Franklin's expedition of 1845. Ships had to be on hand in the west because, if Franklin's men managed to complete the transit while searches were being undertaken for them in the east, they would almost certainly need assistance, food, and medical attention.

Two vessels, HMS *Investigator* and HMS *Enterprise*, were sent through Bering Strait into the arctic islands to search actively for Franklin, while HMS *Plover* played a waiting game in northern Alaska, ready to help the overdue expedition and communicate news of its safe arrival to an anxious world. Under commanders Moore (1848–52) and Maguire (1852–54), *Plover* spent six consecutive winters as depot ship in the western Arctic, enduring a longer continuous period of arctic residence than any other discovery or search vessel. In summers she was assisted by HMS *Herald* (1849, 1850, 1851) and the privately sponsored yacht *Nancy Dawson* (1849), while a succession of naval ships (HMSs *Daedalus*, *Amphitrite*, *Rattlesnake* and *Trincomalee*) kept her supplied with food.

Despite the lengthy arctic sojourn, *Plover's* voyage did not give rise to any books by participants, and the history of the western search for Franklin has been known mainly through narratives arising out of the more dramatic expeditions of McClure and Collinson to Banks and Victoria islands. Maguire's journal, which has lain more or less undisturbed in the National Library of Ireland for half a century, provides much insight into the less glamorous, but equally important, operations of ships in the Bering and Chukchi seas. The journal makes surprisingly exciting reading, not merely because the ship and crew faced challenging environmental conditions half-way round the globe, but mainly because relationships with the Point Barrow Eskimos were precarious and tense, particularly during the first winter. The Eskimos, much to the discomfiture of *Plover's* crew, were inclined to swarm over the vessel, playing irritating practical jokes on the sailors, begging incessantly for tobacco and other articles, stealing anything loose and portable, and even cutting off slices of wood and lead from the hull. When they outnumbered sailors ashore they became aggressive. When offended they drew weapons and assumed hostile stances. This sort of brinkmanship brought Europeans and Eskimos close to warfare more than once. The men of *Plover* had to remain vigilant at all times, while exercising self-control.

As commander, Maguire faced the difficult task of devising measures which would eliminate pilfering before the ship was reduced to a hulk, without antagonizing the natives. Nearly a thousand Eskimos lived along the coast between Icy Cape and Point Barrow but *Plover* contained only a few dozen men. The survival of the Europeans was at stake, and every effort had to be made to win the friendship and cooperation of the coastal people, in case Franklin's expedition, or a search expedition, emerged from the arctic islands in need of assistance. To his great credit Maguire displayed tolerance and good judgement in the face of provocation, where other men might have resorted to excessive force of arms. Under his skilful

diplomacy catastrophe was averted and the two groups came to appreciate and understand each other better. In the ameliorating climate of personal interaction Maguire and his surgeon John Simpson were able to learn much about the Eskimos, about whom Europeans then knew little. This journal is unique among the narratives of maritime voyages in search of Franklin, because it contains so much ethnographic information, and its value has been enhanced by the inclusion, as an appendix, of Dr Simpson's long essay on the Eskimos of northwestern Alaska.

In the comprehensive introduction of 55 pages Bockstoce describes the Eskimos of northwestern Alaska, summarizes their contact with Europeans, outlines the Franklin search in the western Arctic, and provides biographical sketches of Maguire and HMS *Plover*. The journal itself, abridged by almost a third from Maguire's original manuscript, nonetheless comprises over 380 pages, spread over the two volumes. The last 140 pages contain bibliography, index, and seven useful appendices, of which four are narratives of coastal surveys undertaken in open boats. Two of these voyages, under Pullen and Moore, were made before Maguire took command of the ship in 1852; their inclusion expands the scope of the publication. Editing has followed the usual rigorous, scholarly style of the Hakluyt Society, in which the author's errors, eccentricities, and inconsistencies of word choice, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and form are faithfully retained, with some insertions within brackets by the editor where clarification is necessary.

The two volumes contain three good location maps, two interesting historical maps and five illustrations. Some of the black and white reproductions of paintings are disappointing, suffering from too little or too much contrast, and in both maps and illustrations the text of the reverse sides of pages is visible through the paper. But these are picayune drawbacks in a work of such outstanding merit and interest. John Bockstoce is no armchair editor. By umiak and yacht he has cruised the waters traversed by HMS *Plover*, and his intimate knowledge of the region and its people qualify him superbly for the difficult task of preparing Rochfort Maguire's long journal for publication. Appropriately, only a few months before the first volume came out, he completed the final stage of navigating his motor-sailer *Belvedere* through the Northwest Passage from the Pacific Ocean to Greenland. (W. Gillies Ross, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield road, Cambridge CB2 1ER UK.)

ONE MAN'S ARCTIC WORLD

TO THE ARCTIC: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAR NORTHERN WORLD. Young, Steven B. 1989. New York, John Wiley (Wiley Science Editions). 354 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-471-62082-3.

Despite its title this is not a travel book or, like Jeanette Mirsky's *To the Arctic!* (1934), a history of Arctic exploration. The sub-title describes it as an 'introduction to the