

Reviews

THE TRANS-ALASKA PIPELINE CONTROVERSY: TECHNOLOGY, CONSERVATION AND THE FRONTIER. Peter A. Coates. 1991. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses. 447 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-934223-10-6. £39.95.

The proposal of whether — and where — to construct the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was initiated and carried out amidst heated debate. Interested voices included, among others, state residents who wanted to 'open up' Alaska for development, oil companies, a myriad of federal agencies (who were by no means of one opinion), commercial fishermen, Native Alaskans engaged in subsistence hunting as well as commercial fishing, sports hunters (and their guides), conservationists, preservationists, people who had moved up to Alaska to 'get away from it all,' and people who had never seen Alaska, but who wanted to preserve a sense of pristine wilderness as part of their American heritage. To a significant degree, the rhetoric used by virtually all of them drew upon an image of Alaska as 'the final frontier,' using it to validate their quite divergent goals. Coates' work places this controversy in a broad historical perspective, examining the metamorphoses of the concepts of 'frontier' and 'wilderness' as they have been applied to Alaska during the past century. Although he never allows the reader to fall into simple dichotomous assumptions, Coates analyzes in particular the use of these images by those he calls 'boosters' (people who feel Alaskans' destiny is to develop in relative freedom and for whom 'wilderness' signifies unlimited development potential) and their opponents. He traces their rhetoric — as well as their tactics — from the debates over ratifying the purchase of 'Seward's Folly' in the mid-nineteenth century, through the construction of the Alcan Highway in 1942, the successful opposition to proposed atomic testing known as Project Chariot (1958–63), and the likewise successful resistance to the proposed Rampart Dam during the 1960s. All of these reveal themes that enhance one's understanding of the processes leading up to the laying of the first section of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline in 1974.

The work is well-researched, carefully documented, and, I believe, unique in its focus. I, an Alaskan resident who was involved in a number of events related to oil development between 1980 and 1986, learned a great deal. Coates clearly delineates differences between 'conservationism' (natural resources should be conserved through controlled use), 'preservationism' (the preservation of wilderness has value in and of itself), and, more recently, 'environmentalism' (which posits a need to preserve wilderness as an environment that affects global ecology), examining the different values they have placed on 'wilderness' in relation to their opposition to 'boosterism.'

The author exposes the complexity of issues involved

in decisions regarding 'development' and resists the temptation to simplify. In that I am not sure who he has decided the audience is meant to be, the 'through-line' seemed to lose focus at times; the result is a sometimes confusing welter of information for the non-specialist and an occasionally puzzling lack of discussion for the expert. A single throw-away line in the chapter on the Rampart Dam, for instance, revealed that the Canadian government opposed the project on the grounds that it would threaten an existing treaty between the US and Canada that protected the latter's unimpeded access to the sea. This must have had some importance in the Federal government's position; to introduce such information only to ignore any of its implications is simply frustrating to the reader.

In his conclusion, Coates mentions recent work that treats 'the frontier' as a zone of conflict involving 'cultural technology,' thus moving 'frontier' away from a model of 'wilderness' toward one of social interaction, in this case between indigenes and Euro-Americans. If he is going to support this model, and I certainly find it convincing, then he needs to be braver about including Native Alaskans in his narrative. He has clearly done significant research concerning Native Alaskan activism, particularly in relation to Project Chariot, but he hesitates to use it to its fullest extent. The intensity of indigenous political activism, and the general absence of 'inhabitants' (who would be Native Alaskans) in much of the rhetoric concerning 'wilderness' are both too germane to Coates' argument to sidestep by saying it is beyond the scope of the work to include them. Coates does include enough information to convince this reader that he knows a great deal. I only wish he had addressed the issues a little more openly and at greater length. One of the strongest points of the book is its potential to broaden the concept of 'frontier' beyond that of 'west/rest' confrontation. His entire story is the tale of conflicting cultural models; the frontier demarcates borders not only between Native Alaskans and 'others,' but also between conservationists, preservationists, boosters, and environmentalists. In this, he introduces an argument of serious importance. (Barbara Bodenhorn, Pembroke College, Cambridge CB2 1RF.)

THE HISTORY OF PLACE-NAMES IN THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC TERRITORY. Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith. 1991. Cambridge: British Antarctic Survey (Scientific Reports No.113). 670 p in 2 volumes, 2 line figures and 3 maps in a back pocket, soft cover. ISBN 0-85665-130-3. £48.00.

'There are 4350 officially accepted place-names in the British Antarctic Territory, and 1414 unofficial or redundant names in various languages have also been recorded, together with about 14 000 synonyms. Since 1945, the