

Book Reviews

THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS OF ALASKA: LIVING ON THE EDGE. Kenneth Wilson (Editor). 2008. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. xvi + 143 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-1-60223-045-3. \$45.
doi:10.1017/S0032247410000033

This most attractive book presents a portrait of the Aleutian Islands and their peoples in the form of what amounts to a photo-essay with interlinking text. In landscape format, one's first impression is that this is yet another coffee table volume of the sort that merely merits a cursory examination and that if one misses a page or so, it does not matter. But this book is very much more than that. The editor, a photographer of vast experience has assembled a stunning collection of images but instead of simply presenting captions for them, as is common in the case of works that ostensibly seem similar to this one, he has taken the trouble to acquire a set of essays, by a wide variety of authors, that collectively present the practicalities of life on the islands, their histories, and stories of the Unangan inhabitants, who have lived there for centuries, together with those of more recent immigrants.

The book focuses on a particular area within the Aleutian chain. This is the island of Akutan, the island of Unalaska, with Dutch Harbor, the village of Nikolskoi on the island of Umnak, the uninhabited islands of Four Mountains, and the island of Atka. The text is divided into seven sections. The first is introductory and relates to the Unangan themselves and provides comment on, among other matters, the pivotal position that the Orthodox Church came to occupy among them and which continues to the present day. The present reviewer was somewhat surprised to note that the second 'chapter' is on the topic of 'The devastation of World War II.' This provides information on the Japanese attacks on Dutch Harbor in June 1942 and on the occupation by the Japanese of the islands of Attu and Kiska. It also mentions the forced evacuation of the population of all the islands west of Atutan Island and the account does not mince its words with regard to the suffering imposed on the peoples that

resulted from it. The third section is on life in the islands today specifically touching on problems of communication much of which is provided by the ubiquitous Grumman Goose amphibian aircraft. The fourth is entitled 'Traditions; an ancient culture endures' which is self explanatory. Particular reference is made to the efforts of the community in transmitting and practising ancient customs and crafts and many sub-sections illustrate this in action. Fine and colourful examples of this are the old tradition of hat making which is fully illustrated as is the skilful craft of the basket maker. One passes on to commerce with the title 'From otter pelts to seafood for the world' in which the centrality of seafood processing with regard to the economy of the islands is made explicit. It accounts 'for virtually all the development in the region' but this in itself is stimulating a search for diversification. We then pass on to a short chapter on the vulcanicity of the islands and to a conclusion on the Alaska maritime national wildlife refuge.

However the main purpose of the book is to present the editor's photographs. All are good and some are unusual and wonderful. In particular one should draw attention to the pictures of wildlife (can there really be that number of eagles in the Aleutian Islands?), volcanoes, and Orthodox churches. The pictures of people, of which there are a large number inserted in boxes in the text, are rather less successful and have much in common with the style characteristic of American popular magazines. The associated texts are also rather weak, adopting a wholly Panglossian view of life on the islands. Everyone is happy, content to do their part in promoting public welfare, there are no social pressures etc etc. This might of course be true but one is inclined, from experience in remote communities elsewhere, to doubt it.

But this is to cavill. As a presentation of the landscapes and wildlife of the islands this book could hardly be bettered. The pictures are wonderful and the text is, at least, thought provoking. Those who wish for an armchair excursion to the islands in question could not do better than to peruse this volume. (Ian R. Stone, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

ARCTIC DOOM, ARCTIC BOOM. THE GEOPOLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ARCTIC. Barry Scott Zellen. 2009. Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishers. Xi + 232 p, hard cover. ISBN 978-0-313-38012-9. \$49.95.
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In *Arctic doom, Arctic boom* Barry Scott Zellen, research director of the Arctic Security Project at the Center for Contemporary Conflict at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, argues that the Arctic 'often display[s] a seemingly paradoxical blend of competition and collaboration'. Such a statement could be

brushed aside as being rather obvious. But what is often lacking in the debate on the future Arctic is a multilevel approach to the region, putting emphasis on both the international structures and the domestic level. In this respect Zellen's work is both timely and intriguing. The Arctic is at the top of the agenda amongst both politicians and academics, and Zellen offers new thinking on the subject. His point of departure is that the long awaited 'Age of the Arctic' predicted by Oran Young in 1986 'is coming, and coming fast.'

The book runs to 232 pages and consists of six chapters. In chapter 1 the broad picture is painted with emphasis on climate change; '... the climate is rapidly warming, threatening to bring an end to the Arctic as we know it, creating much