

BROWN, S. 2003. *“With a camera in my hands”: pioneer glaciologist. A life story, as told to C. Suzanne Brown.* Fairbanks, AK, University of Alaska Press, 184 pp. ISBN 1-889963-46-1, hardback US\$59.95; ISBN 1-889963-47-X, paperback, US\$29.95.

“With a camera in my hands” is nominally the autobiography of pioneering glaciologist William Field as told to, and edited by, Suzanne Brown. As such, it is the history of an interesting phase of exploration in Alaska and Canada (and even the central Caucasus) and of some of the colorful characters involved. In fact the book is much more than just a history, because of Brown’s background in glacier research and the first-hand knowledge she gained as a volunteer helping Bill Field organize his notes and photo collection. The result is a biography richly illustrated with photographs, some of which are of major historical interest since they show glaciers as they were in the late 19th century. Brown’s notes, keyed to the text, make an informal presentation also scholarly. The book continues after Field’s death in 1994 with sections sampling his maps and photographs. These are organized to show 100 years of glacier change, particularly in southeast Alaska. Field’s collection and the support which he provided for its processing now reside at University of Alaska Fairbanks, along with the aerial photo collections of Austin Post and Bradford Washburn.

Bill Field had an appetite and energy for travel and exploration, and came from an old New York family which had the means to indulge it. This happy state of affairs will surely be appreciated by contemporary scientists who spend an inordinate amount of time writing proposals. His first trips west were to the Canadian Rockies, mainly for hunting and mountaineering. Trips to Europe began in 1923, and his first trip to Alaska was in 1925. By then he had developed an interest in glaciers. The following year he went to southeast Alaska with a clear goal: to document the state of

glacier change since the observations that had been made late in the 19th or early in the 20th century.

Field’s entry into the area of glacier monitoring came at an opportune time. There had been a flurry of activity in Alaska around the turn of the century, with the Alaska–Canada boundary survey, the Harriman and the Tarr and Martin expeditions and several other projects. But between then and World War II little was done. Thus his observations fill a critical gap. He continued glacier observations in coastal Alaska for many years, but as his career developed he took on new responsibilities. As a start, he was probably the first person to realize the importance of developing a glacier archive. From his base at the American Geographical Society he became an informal clearing center for information about mountaineering and glaciers, and a member of international planning committees. These included the planning for long-term mass-balance programs and for the International Geophysical Year (IGY; 1957/58). Part of the IGY activity inspired by Bill Field was the topographic mapping of nine sample glaciers as a baseline for measuring future change. Unfortunately, he died just before this work bore fruit when his glaciers were remapped by aircraft altimetry in the 1990s. The least tangible but possibly the most important of his activities was to inspire a generation of younger people. Suzanne Brown considers him to be the father of American glaciology.

Brown has done a remarkable job of preserving an interesting piece of history in an entertaining way. Anyone, with or without glacier expertise, interested in the history of exploration will find this a fascinating story.

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