

itself and to its dark side: the triumphs and thrills of Soviet achievements in the Arctic were paid for by the repressions and forced labour on which they depended. Ultimately, these successes in turn became a justification for the immense sufferings of the Soviet people. But the author goes beyond this to claim that what he calls Stalinist attitudes persist to this day and that this is likely to remain the case so long as the country remains proud of its achievements in the Arctic. He is concerned with the lingering difficulty of 'destalinising' Soviet (as it was in 1991) Arctic activity. But there is a theoretical problem. He acknowledges terror as integral to the Stalinist enterprise. So what kind of Stalinism remains when this terror is removed? The answer is ultimately unclear, because the author's approach lacks the sociological or cultural analysis that would allow him to delve into the abstract essence of Stalinism itself, or to discuss whether an essentialist approach is justified at all (a fundamental problem with -isms). He acknowledges that Conquest's understanding in the late 1960s is inadequate (in fact, it was itself a form of anti-Soviet propaganda), but does not use the sophisticated and enlightening new literature of the 1980s.

In the last few pages, the author speculates on the continuing nationalist and conservative bent of the collective culture of the Soviet Arctic world under *perestroika*, and here his analytically unrefined concept of Stalinism truly flags, as it is drawn in to explain even this. There may be something in it, but one does not have to look to Russia or to Stalin to find a combination of nationalism and conservatism in the Arctic. A theory of empire, both eastern and western — and of its decline — might have allowed him a broader interpretation. Here, the polar regions appear as the only parts of the Earth that allow a relatively unchallenged fantasy of a landscape without people of its own (significantly, Siberian peoples do not appear in this book at all), a fantasy that is not brought up short by the radicalism of large, complex local populations as happened in the British tropics or in Soviet central Asia.

The bibliography is astonishing, amounting to 40 pages. Most of the references are to works in Russian, so that it serves as a valuable source. However, it falls between two stools. It surely far outstrips the number of works actually cited in the text, but would be hard to use for any wider purpose because it is not annotated. The seven-page index has no chance of living up to this list of sources. Thus, the bibliography lists Russian translations of books by or about 'Shaklton,' 'Piri,' and 'Scott' (spelt unaccountably with a 'c' rather than a 'k'); but nothing in the index helps the reader to find the discussion of these books in the text. (Piers Vitebsky, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

**CATCHERS AND CORVETTES: THE STEAM WHALECATCHER IN PEACE AND WAR 1860–1960.** John H. Harland. 1992. Rotherfield: Jean Boudriot Publications. 448 p, illustrated with 380 line drawings and 200 photographs, hard cover. ISBN 0-948864-09-5. £65.00.

A book for shipping buffs, this must surely become the

definitive account of the history and evolution of steam whalecatchers — the sturdy little steamships that for a century and more hunted whales in the world's oceans. Replacing sailing ships, they served the industry almost until its demise, being overtaken in the final years by motor vessels. This is also a book for whaling enthusiasts and for anyone else who is interested in how a mobile, inventive workforce met and solved a succession of day-by-day technical problems in engineering. The simplicity and ingenuity of many of the solutions are quite extraordinary; had the industry been devoted to anything other than killing whales, we would be hailing the engineers responsible as industrial pioneers of a high order.

The author is impartial and very thorough. Well-illustrated chapters cover the origins of steam whalers, development of hull shape, engines, armament, deck layout, accommodation, power, steering, accumulators, winching, and radio. Some catchers went to war, where their speed and manoeuvrability were appreciated: World War II corvettes owe points of their design to them, and were equally uncomfortable in rough seas. There is also a useful account of the development of whaling itself in the post-sailing period. If the same author could now be persuaded to turn his attention to the evolution and development of whale factory ships, he would most usefully close another gap in the history of a modern industry.

There is only one note of caution: check when buying, because in the review copy a printing fault left several pages blank. (Bernard Stonehouse, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

**DARWIN'S DESOLATE ISLANDS.** Patrick Armstrong. 1992. Chippenham: Picton Publishing Limited. 147p, illustrated, maps, hard cover. ISBN 0-948251-55-7.

This work is one of several in which an author has reconciled the observations of Charles Darwin about a particular place with its present circumstances. This has required a familiarity with Darwin's published and manuscript notes for the theoretical aspects, and a visit to the place in question for the practical ones. In March–April 1833 and the same months in 1834, Darwin made visits to the Falkland Islands while aboard HMS *Beagle* during a circumnavigation and surveying voyage from 1831 to 1836; the author visited in the autumn of 1989. As well as his scientific observations, Darwin was present during, and recorded many elements in, a period of special interest in the islands' history.

Regarding natural history — an old but useful concept including geology, biology, and meteorology — the author has carefully followed much of Darwin's travels from Port Louis and elsewhere on East Falkland; this is well indicated by contemporary and modern maps. Many of the problems considered by Darwin, such as the origin of stone runs with some rocks 'as big as churches,' the development of the deep peat beds, and plutonist and neptunist theories about the islands' geology, are commented upon in the light of modern knowledge (although

some mysteries remain: stone runs are still somewhat enigmatic). Darwin's remarks on the behaviour of *Dusicyon australis*, the Warrah or Falkland Fox, are especially interesting, as the species became extinct in 1876. In 1833 the principal introduced species in the Falkland Islands was cattle (still extant but largely replaced by sheep introduced in 1840). Darwin comments on the 'struggle for existence,' notes their abundance, and refers to the absence of 'droughts, or injurious fleas, or ticks or bats [vampires, as in South America], and the cattle are magnificent animals and have multiplied greatly.'

Darwin also made enlightening descriptions of the population and events during the turbulent period of his visits. In 1833 he reported the British flag was flying, a French survey vessel wrecked, and administrative arrangements somewhat unsettled. One observation was prophetic, although almost 150 years premature. On 30 March 1833 he wrote: 'By the awful language of Buenos Ayres one would suppose this great republic meant to declare War against England!' Notes about the settlers, gauchos, the Port Louis murders (particularly of Matthew Brisbane), and the despoilation of property, are of particular interest as they were made with the same accuracy as his natural history observations. On his first meeting with Matthew Brisbane, Darwin noted details about the South Shetland Islands and other Antarctic archipelagos that Brisbane had visited.

The author provides a good introduction in which he indicates how studies of insular biology were highly significant in the development of Darwin's theories of the origin of species and evolution. Although the *Islas Galapagos* provided stronger evidence, the inception of the concept may well have been in the Falkland Islands. A description of Darwin's methods indicates his careful observations, strongly comparative treatment, deductive analysis, emphasis on progress and change, refining of ideas with further evidence, and willingness to change opinions. Concluding sections provide a concept of the long-term significance of Darwin's visits and include a comprehensive bibliography with a list of unpublished sources. The illustrations are from Darwin's journals and the author's photographs, the maps (some based on Captain Robert Fitzroy's surveys) are well provided, the design of the book is generally acceptable, and the dust cover removable. (R.K. Headland, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

#### BRIEF REVIEWS

**CROOKED PAST: THE HISTORY OF A FRONTIER MINING CAMP: FAIRBANKS, ALASKA.** Terrence Cole. 1991. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. 163 p, soft cover. ISBN 0-912006-53-6. \$8.95 (US).

Originally published in 1981 as *E.T. Barnette: the strange story of the man who founded Fairbanks*, this is a reprint of the 1984 second edition rather than a new work. Cole's entertaining account of the life of E. T. Barnette uncovers

much that its subject would presumably preferred to have been left in decent obscurity. But Barnette was in many ways not untypical of his time, a former inmate of an Oregon penitentiary and one of many who joined the Klondike gold rush of 1897 only to reach Dawson City too late to stake out a worthwhile claim. Like others, Barnette then tried Alaska — in his case the Tanana Valley rather than Nome — where, after many vicissitudes, he proved luckier as a tradesman than as a miner, founding a trading post at the confluence of the Tanana and Chena rivers, which developed into Fairbanks. Barnette's great good fortune occurred when he was forced to establish his settlement here, where a major gold rush was shortly to occur, rather than further up the Tanana as he had originally intended. This book is of more than purely local interest, and this broader interest is undoubtedly better expressed by the new title than by its predecessor, misleading as this title change may be for unwary librarians and Alaskan bibliophiles.

**SOVIET STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE NORTH.** Kirsten Amundsen. 1990. London: Pinter Publishers. xii + 153 p, hard cover. ISBN 0-861870-18-2. £37.50.

Books of this kind are easily overtaken by events, and the danger is increased when the subject is the former Soviet Union. This book evidently went to press in 1989, and there is therefore no mention of the dissolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union nor of the similar fate of the Warsaw Pact, to name just two events of fundamental importance to Dr Amundsen's thesis. A main strand in her argument is that the Soviet Union (in 1989 she could not call it anything else) could well be continuing to plot an assault on Scandinavia, something that nation is known to have done in World War II. Not many, I reckon, will be inclined to follow the author this far. But she adduces some interesting figures on such topics as the recent frequency of accidents involving submarines in the Baltic, and the book's main value, one could argue, is in bringing together this sort of information.

A few quibbles: 'the north' in the title would more accurately be 'Fennoscandia and the Kola Peninsula': there is no discussion here on the Pacific sector, the central Arctic Basin, or even Greenland. Nor is it correct to say (page 19) that 'the Murmansk Fjord can be kept open throughout the year only with the aid of icebreakers.' Dr Amundsen writes clearly and economically, her documentation is exemplary, and one can only feel sympathy for her — and her series editor — for appearing to lose out in this lottery of a subject.

**ARCTIC EXPLORATION & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 1900–1932.** Nancy Fogelson. 1992. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. xiv + 221 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-912006-61-7. \$15.00 (US).

On the surface, this book promises to be an important work, linking Arctic exploration and international relations in the first third of the twentieth century. The effect