

Book Reviews

THE ARCTIC WHALING JOURNALS OF WILLIAM SCORESBY BY THE YOUNGER. C. Ian Jackson (editor). Vol. I: The voyages of 1811, 1812 and 1813. 2003. London: The Hakluyt Society (Series III, No. 12). lxi + 242 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-0-904180-82-4. Vol. II: The voyages of 1814, 1815 and 1816. 2008. London: The Hakluyt Society (Series III, No. 20). xxxvii + 308 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-904180-92-3. doi:10.1017/S0032247409990301

The Hakluyt Society is in the process of publishing nine of William Scoresby's whaling journals for 1811–1820. The first volume containing the voyages of 1811–1813 emerged in 2003; the second covering 1814–1816 came out in 2008. The volume completing the series is expected later this year. Apart from providing researchers with convenient access to important source material otherwise tucked away in archives, what possible merit might transcripts of log-books have to a reading audience, even to one which is to more than an average extent interested in everything Arctic? Quite a lot, it would seem. The reason is partly Scoresby's extraordinary position in the history of Arctic whaling and scientific exploration, and partly the high scholarly standard of the society's edition. This review, which is based on volumes I and II, will comment on these and other aspects.

It is probably not required for readers of *Polar Record*, but a few biographical remarks will provide a backdrop against which we can fully appreciate the significance of this edition. William Scoresby was born in Cropton in the revolutionary year 1789 as the third child of whaler William Scoresby the elder and his wife Lady Mary, née Smith. Shortly afterwards the family moved to Whitby, where William Sr. in a few years established himself as one of the most successful whaling captains in the trade. He took his young son with him to the Arctic for the first time in 1800, and from 1803 William Jr. became a regular crew member. In 1806 he was made first mate on his father's *Resolution*, which during that whaling season set a furthest north record of 81° 30'N near Spitsbergen. In 1811, just 21 years old, he was left in command of the *Resolution* when his father took over the *John* of Greenock. For more than a decade William the younger sailed as whaling captain to Spitsbergen, gaining a reputation of success on a par with that of his father. In 1823 he made his last voyage, after which he quite literally changed vocation and became a student of theology at Cambridge. Two years later he was ordained and served as a curate and vicar, ending up in Torquay where he died in 1857.

His career as outlined above is quite extraordinary by itself, but it is his achievements as explorer and scientist that sets William Scoresby apart. In 1806–1807

and again in 1809–1810, in between whaling seasons, he studied science at the University of Edinburgh and was encouraged to make observations during his Arctic voyages. In particular Professor Robert Jameson had a great influence on him, introducing him to the scientific community of Edinburgh. Of equal importance was his meeting in 1807 with Sir Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society, with whom he later corresponded frequently. Scoresby was himself elected Fellow of the Royal Societies of both London and Edinburgh and published sixty papers listed by the RS. However, his lifetime achievement is no doubt the massive, two volume *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, which was published in 1820 (Scoresby 1820). This widely acclaimed work pretty much represented the state-of-research concerning the Arctic in general and whaling in particular and has remained a standard work in many respects for two centuries. The journals of the whaling voyages 1811–1820 constitute important data sources and documentation, not only for the description of whaling, but also for the scientific observations and analyses in *An Account of the Arctic Regions*. It is in this context we must assess the significance of their present publication.

The sources of these journals are part of the Scoresby Papers in the collections of the Whitby Museum. It should be noted that the present edition is based on transcripts of the originals that were made after the publication of *An Account*, that is after 1820, and probably not by Scoresby himself. As might be expected of a scholarly edition the possible problems of not using the primary sources have been compensated by systematic comparison with the originals and corrections are indicated in footnotes. Words or passages that have been difficult to interpret are rendered in brackets and commented. We may rest assured that no effort has been spared to retain the source value of the originals.

C. Ian Jackson, who has carefully researched and edited the present volumes, maintains that although thousands of log-books were kept during the period of Arctic whaling, only few have survived to posterity (vol. II: xix). This is perhaps a too pessimistic assessment. An inventory of accessible whaling logbooks and journals made by Stuart C. Sherman and published in 1986 lists over five thousand manuscripts in public collections (Downey and Adams 1986). Admittedly, this inventory covers worldwide whaling from 1613 to 1927, but still there is substantial number of 18th and 19th century log-books kept by Scoresby's contemporary colleagues. It is true, however, that hardly any of these were available to scientists or the public in general at the time and only few have been published since. It may also be assumed that none of them, if published, would compare to the standard

of Scoresby's journals when it comes to richness in detail, systematic observations or even literary qualities.

However rare the whaling journals of William Scoresby may be, their publication now is pertinent. Not only do they offer a first hand account of navigation and whaling in the northern Atlantic over a consecutive period of six years, but they also tell us about the formation of young Scoresby as a scientist. The maturing researcher can be seen through the gradual augmentation of observations and introduction of experiments during the whaling voyages, particularly after 1814. The journals themselves grow from an already substantial 68 pages and near 25,000 words in 1811 to twice the size only two years later. This reviewer must admit that it is not always exciting to plough through daily records of wind, weather and navigation. The journals definitely become more interesting to read when Scoresby involves scientific thinking and practice, for example his reflections on 16 May 1815, over what causes the colour of the sea (vol. II: 165–167), or his studies of plankton, hydrographical measurements and observations of climatic phenomena. Hopefully and presumably there will be more of this to explore in the yet unpublished journals of 1817, 1818 and 1820. There are also many entertaining passages describing the work processes and life on board a whaler, and of course the whale hunt itself. The dramatic crux is no doubt the near wrecking of Scoresby's ship *Esk* in June 1816, a story which also is retold in *An Account*, vol. II.

For all their qualities as sources of information these journals would not be so valuable without the fine scholarly work by editor Ian Jackson. In the first volume he gives a well researched 41 page introduction to the journals, the Scoresbys and whaling as it was conducted in their time. For the latter he relies a lot on Gordon Jackson's *The British whaling trade*, which is a very sensible thing to do, a better synthesis is hard to find (Jackson 1978). Volume II has a shorter introduction, but adds interesting perspectives on Scoresby's scientific and even spiritual development. Both volumes contain a glossary and tables of quantities and conversions, which this reviewer finds extremely helpful. Each has a decent general index and also an index of whaling ships, and of course the mandatory list of quoted literature. For every year's journal a modern map has been constructed showing the approximate route of the whaling ship, its accuracy being limited by Scoresby's sometimes approximate navigational observations. With regard to the latter, volume II holds a very instructive appendix by George Huxtable explaining the challenges and methods of 19th

century Arctic navigation with examples from Scoresby's practice. Volume II also contains a 'bonus track', namely the 1814 journal of young Charles Steward, who was invited to join the whaling voyage of *Esk* that year. All the journals are systematically annotated with comments on the transcription and additional, for the most part useful information. Marginal notes in the original manuscripts are also faithfully reproduced in footnotes. In short, for a researcher there is little left to wish for in this edition.

Scoresby's journals are of obvious interest to anyone concerned with maritime history, whaling history, geographical exploration and the Arctic in general. Especially when read in context with *An Account* and Scoresby's scientific papers these journals provide insight regarding the evolution of polar research as a specialised field in the 19th century as well as the transformation of a keen amateur into a proficient scientist. Scoresby's observations over a decade from Spitsbergen and the Greenland Sea may also have an information potential for biologists and climate researchers today, at least as regional historical snapshots.

True to tradition the Hakluyt Society presents the editions in lavish cloth-bound volumes, printed on high quality paper that makes the text eminently readable. On this matted paper photographic reproductions of original drawings, handwriting and engravings fare less well than the modern typeset illustrations, but this is definitely a minor complaint. One certainly hopes that in due course the society will also issue a similar scholarly edition of *An Account of the Arctic Regions* to complement the original and the now rare facsimile edition from 1969. For now the two volumes reviewed here are a pride to any bookshelf; just be sure to leave some free space for volume III. (Thor B. Arlov, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NO-7491 Trondheim, Norway).

References

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- Scoresby, W. 1820. *An account of the Arctic regions with a history and description of the northern whale-fishery*, 2 vols., Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and co. (Facsimile edition with an introduction by Alister Hardy 1969, Newton Abbot: David & Charles Reprints.)

ICE TRACKS: TODAY'S HEROIC AGE OF POLAR ADVENTURE. Angie Butler. 2008. Eccles, Norwich: The Erskine Press. iii + 151 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 978-1-85297-100-7. £14.95.
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There are many reasons why people travel: curiosity about faraway lands, the urge to experience an exotic culture,

or the chance to start a new life, unhindered by the narrow definitions of 'right' and 'wrong' held by one's Parole Officer. However, none of these reasons fit the travellers who populate Angie Butler's intriguing book, *Ice tracks*. That's because these are travellers who seek 'adventure' and a personal challenge in the wildest parts of the planet. Not for them a package tour or even a brief excursion to some untouched natural wonder. Instead,