

disciplines of the natural sciences, which continue to monitor the causes and extent of environmental change. Research on environmental issues has tended to be predominantly science-based, partly because it is assumed that global environmental change requires scientific interpretation. However, the present ecological crisis, in its regional and global senses, is a complex of social and environmental conditions arising from human activity. Yet, comparatively little research demonstrates the diverse and intricate ways in which humans engage with and influence the natural world, and how environmental change modifies human activity. While social science is well equipped with the theoretical and methodological tools to understand the human dimensions of global environmental change, there has been little progress in the social sciences beyond outlining 'strategies for research.'

The 10 essays in this volume address this imbalance from the perspectives of anthropology, archaeology, and human ecology, and in doing so make a significant contribution to the literature on the human dimensions of global environmental change. The contributors take an anthropological approach to understanding the dialectical nature of human–environment relationships in historical context. They argue that historical ecology, or 'the study of past ecosystems by charting the change in landscapes over time' (page 6) can help to explain how changes in demography, subsistence, land use, and environmental perception have caused people to modify (whether intentionally or not) the global environment. Such an approach contrasts with other, more traditional, anthropological assumptions that, in pre-modern cultures, problems arising from human–environment interactions had only local consequences.

Instead of viewing the environment as something that people live in, exploit, and are influenced or constrained by, one of the aims of the book is to address the problem of denying 'the environment a meaningful role in history' (page 2). In this sense, the contributors argue that the study of human–environment relations is to be placed at the centre of any discourse on global environmental change if it is to be made sense of and the implications understood.

Several contributors (Crumley, Winterhalder, Ingerson, Gunn, and Patterson) explore the theoretical challenges global environmental change poses to the study of human–environment relations, while others illustrate historical ecological processes in a number of case studies (Schmidt on equatorial Africa, McGovern on Norse Greenland, Hassan on ancient Egypt, and Marquardt on southwest Florida). These case studies demonstrate, for example, how people in the past lived beyond their means, existing on scarce resources, or how they were forced to adapt to new environmental conditions brought about by changing technology and agricultural methods. As a number of contributors (such as McGovern and Patterson) argue, by examining how humans related to their environments in the past, we are in a better position to understand the temporal and spatial processes of environmental change and to act on this understanding.

As anthropologists are now demonstrating in increasingly sophisticated ways, conceptualisations of, and interactions with, the environment inform social relations and human action. By understanding how such conceptualisations, and, indeed, human actions, have changed through time, *Historical ecology* demonstrates that the (not always wide) gap between the natural and social sciences can be bridged, and that a new holistic environmental science is possible by assuming an interdisciplinary perspective on environmental change. For this reason alone, *Historical ecology* should appeal to those in the social and natural sciences who are concerned with developing new theoretical insight into regional and global environmental change. (Mark Nuttall, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

**SS EAGLE: THE SECRET MISSION 1944–45.** Harold Squires. 1992. St John's: Jesperson Press. xii + 113 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-921692-37-4. \$Can11.95.

*SS Eagle: the secret mission 1944–45* is a first-hand account of a wartime voyage made by that ship, the last of the Newfoundland wooden-walled sealing steamers, to 're-establish British claims in Antarctica' (page 64). This aim was to be achieved through the founding of a scientific base at Hope Bay. In the author's words: 'Antarctica was now considered of strategic importance....The British Government felt very strongly that Argentina should not at this time control the southern side of Drake Passage' (page 48). Indeed, control of Hope Bay was to be further reinforced by the establishment of British jurisdiction over Deception Island, thus preventing any further repetition of that island's use as a refuelling and supply depot by enemy shipping.

Squires' narrative charts the progress of *SS Eagle* and her crew from Newfoundland to Antarctica and back again. Throughout its pages, scenes of day-to-day life blend with more spectacular events: appalling storms, close shaves with icebergs, fatal accidents, and the near-destruction of the ship herself when her bowsprit and bow were torn off by an iceberg. It is an unusual story of a risky mission in an elderly vessel manned by an unusually determined crew.

This is self-evidently not an academic book, and it would be invidious to treat it as such. It lacks such scholarly necessities as an index, bibliography, and extensive footnotes, but equally it does not lapse into that species of academic dryness that can make some scholarly works deadly to anyone but specialists in a similar field. Instead, this is a personal history, the wartime recollections of Radio Officer Harold Squires, an ordinary man involved in an extraordinary series of events.

The narrative is recounted in Squires' own words and expressed in his own inimitable style. 'Scalding hot tea' and 'raisin duff' are *de rigueur* at the mess table, the ship's rigging howls pitifully 'like a human soul lost in eternal torments' (page 27), and the menace of German U-boats

prowls constantly through the narrative's pages. It is structured so that chapters resemble short episodic diary entries. It is also well served by two maps, the author's own photographs, and an appendix replete with details of the ship's crew. If this book lacks a certain amount of careful polish (for example, Nicholas is first spelled correctly, but misspelled a page later, and there are a few grammatical slip-ups), it nevertheless retains a clarity and crispness not dulled by the passing of almost 50 years. (Ian Higginson, Centre for the History and Cultural Studies of Science, Physics Laboratory, University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NR.)

### BRIEF REVIEWS

**FIFTY YEARS BELOW ZERO: A LIFETIME OF ADVENTURE IN THE FAR NORTH.** Charles D. Brower, in collaboration with Philip J. Farrelly and Lyman Anson. 1994. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. xxvi + 324 p., illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-912006-68-3. US\$20.00.

This is the third book to appear in the University of Alaska Press Classic Reprint Series. It comprises the memoirs, heavily rewritten and edited, of Charles Brower, who, for more than 50 years to 1945 when he died, lived at Point Barrow, Alaska. The book was first published in 1942 and has been reprinted very many times, so that it is one of the best-known volumes of Arctic reminiscences. The present edition has, as well as the original introduction by Vilhjalmur Stefansson, a useful and interesting preface by Terrence Cole, general editor of the series. The book is valuable both because of the intrinsic interest in the information presented — notably that relating to the Alaskan people — and as an example of a journalistic style of writing now almost extinct, although common in the 1940s and 1950s. This was largely due to the collaborators: Brower freely admitted that his 'spelling was bad; and....punctuation...worse,' and that his work required rewriting 'by someone that knows how.'

The book is attractively presented, and the contemporary photographs are interesting in their own right and serve to illuminate the narrative. However, the two maps are very similar; the first is rendered redundant by the second. *Fifty years below zero* is highly recommended to those who do not know it already.

**TO THE ARCTIC: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAR NORTHERN WORLD.** Steven B. Young. 1994. New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore: John Wiley and Sons Inc. 354 p., illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-471-62082-3. US\$16.95.

This is the paperback edition of Steven Young's well-researched and informative guide to the Arctic regions that was released in hard cover in 1989. It is a book aimed at the general reader, containing sections on flora and fauna, polar weather systems, glaciology, and polar ecology. The final chapter assesses the archaeological evidence for when and where the first people came to the Arctic regions.

**VERTEBRATE TAPHONOMY.** R. Lee Lyman. 1994. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xxvi + 524 p., illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-521-458404. £24.95; US\$34.95.

One of the excellent Cambridge Manuals in Archaeology series, *Vertebrate taphonomy* has been published simultaneously in hardback and paperback. Taphonomy is the "transition of organic matter from the biosphere into the organic world", and this concise volume, containing up-to-date techniques of analysis, will be of value to palaeobiologists and zooarchaeologists working all over the world at archaeological sites containing human or animal matter. Although none of it relates specifically to the polar regions, the manual outlines the basic techniques of taphonomy, how to interpret the accumulation and dispersal of skeletal remains in the field, and the effects of biostratinomic factors such as butchering, weathering, burning, and burial practices. Lyman's textbook on taphonomic processes will be a valuable contribution to any archaeologist working in the polar regions wishing to interpret skeletal material.

### Publications received

**DIE ERSTE DEUTSCHE NORDPOLAR-EXPEDITION IM JAHRE 1868.** 1993. Karl Koldewey. Gotha: Justus Perthes Verlag. x + 77 p., illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 3-623-00750-1. 56 DM.

**LAND RIGHTS AND MINORITIES.** Roger Plant. 1994. Brixton: Minority Rights Group. 42 p., illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 1-897693-35-4.