

REVIEW

POLITICS IN HIGH LATITUDES

[Review by Terence Armstrong* of Willy Østreng's *Politics in high latitudes. The Svalbard archipelago*, translated by R. I. Christophersen. London, C. Hurst and Company, 1977, 134 p. £8.]

In international politics, as well as in physical geography, Svalbard is a most interesting place. Its political regime as a part of Norway stems from an international treaty (the Svalbard Treaty) signed at Versailles in 1920. But the sovereignty thereby conferred on Norway was qualified by obligations which detract from it: notably the obligation to accord all signatories of the treaty the same economic rights as Norwegians, to treat them all equally, and to prevent militarization of the area. The situation became potentially difficult when the Soviet Union proved to be the only foreign power claiming these rights and establishing a permanent presence on the islands. This book seeks to show how Norway has made out, and does it in a very honest, open, and objective way. The author is a research associate of the Fridtjof Nansen Foundation at Polhøgda, so he is not himself officially involved in Svalbard affairs.

After giving necessary and useful background information, he considers what has happened, in the 50 years since the treaty was signed, to the principle of equal treatment, the principle of demilitarization, and the other aspects of Norway's commitment. (He helpfully prints as appendices the treaty, the Norwegian Storting's Svalbard Act of 1925, and the Svalbard Mining Code of the same date.) In doing so, he touches on a number of interesting and topical points: the preferential treatment accorded to the Russians in some contexts, the mechanisms within the Norwegian government for dealing with Svalbard matters, the argument about rights over the Barents Sea continental shelf, the famous case of the Soviet double beds at Svalbard airport. He has a chapter on Norway's alternatives, as she faces the probable appearance on the Svalbard scene of major foreign and multi-national oil companies. He is moderately optimistic here that the Russians will come to accept the constraints of Norwegian law, since they would be unlikely to want newcomers to enjoy the same freedom from some controls as they themselves now enjoy.

The impression the book gives is of a small country standing up courageously to a very large neighbour, and being able to do so because she has nothing to hide.

EARLY COASTAL EXPLORATIONS IN NORTH-WEST ALASKA

[Review by Terence Armstrong of *A. F. Kashevarov's coastal explorations in northwest Alaska, 1838*, edited by J. W. VanStone and translated by D. H. Kraus. *Fieldiana Anthropology*, Vol 69, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, 1977, 104 p, illus.]

When the Russians were the owners of Alaska, their interest was largely in collecting the pelts of sea otters, and this kept them to coastal regions of the Pacific littoral. There was little exploration to the north of Bering Strait or inland. One quite significant contribution, a coastal voyage in Eskimo skin boats from Cape Lisburne to just beyond Point Barrow in 1838, has remained little known because the account of it has been unavailable in English (and in Russia, published only posthumously, in 1879). This book remedies that omission. A. F. Kashevarov's journal of his voyage is translated and annotated. The chief interest is in his comments on the natives he met, and the volume includes a translation of his 'Notes on the Eskimos in Russian America' (1846). He was born in Alaska of a Russian fur-trading father and either an Eskimo or an Aleut mother, so his account is not just that of an explorer making a once-only visit.

The translation reads well and the commentary is full and informative. Many place-names would be difficult indeed to identify without the editor's help. There are some small inaccuracies: Cook

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was in the area in 1778, not 1788, Shishmarev's ship was the *Blagonamerenny*, Vasilev's name is spelt variously. But there are useful maps, and a good index, and the work is a worthwhile addition to the sparse literature on north-west Alaska in the early 19th century.

EXPLORATION OF NORTHERN CANADA 500–1920

[A review by E. E. Rich* of Alan Cooke and Clive Holland's *The exploration of northern Canada*. Toronto, The Arctic History Press, 1977, 549 p, plus 26 p maps. \$60 (\$50 to readers of *Polar Record*).]

Based on many years of work at the Scott Polar Research Institute, *The exploration of northern Canada* is a revised and expanded version of 11 articles which were published in *Polar Record* during 1970–73. In book form, with over a thousand condensed summaries of voyages arranged in chronological order, it should make available to scholars and to students a mass of information in a way which the series of articles could not emulate. The only drawback is the price. For although preparation has been assisted by the History Division of the National Museum of Man in Montreal, the book sells at \$60 to the general public. The outcome must be that few individuals, especially few young academics, will be able to possess this valuable work of reference, to reach for it in the night-watches from their own shelves. But no library with an interest in the Arctic should be without it.

Starting with a seemingly scepticism about the alleged voyage of St Brendan to the North Atlantic coast around 500 AD and about some (but not all) of the Vinland voyages, the book gives summaries of every known voyage to Canada up to 1920—the year in which an American trading expedition concluded that there was no profit to be had by opposing the Hudson's Bay Company's activities in the bay. This might appear to indicate a conclusion on the note that the grip of the past on the Canadian Arctic is unbroken. But in fact it was then that aircraft began to come into more general use, thereby creating a new era of exploration.

Each summary account of a voyage is supported by reference to the source summarized; only by inference, by the occasional use of the word 'supposed' or a statement that a narrative lacks support, are the summaries critical. The aim is to guide the user to sources in which he can check authenticity and add detail. The exceptions are the accounts of the numerous expeditions made by the Hudson's Bay Company. Some of the more notable of these expeditions are recorded in published works, which are cited, but many, especially the recurrent supply voyages, are described only in the unpublished archives of the Company. Confirmation and expansion of the summary of such voyages will require special facilities, but it is useful to have them listed.

The definition of northern Canada is something about which the authors find it difficult to be explicit. The end-map covers the whole of Canada and the series of detailed maps covers down to 55°. It is a pity that detailed coverage could not have been extended down to 45°, for many an expedition which ended in the north of Canada started in the south. Nevertheless, the maps add greatly to understanding, and the other additional material is exceptionally useful. The index of 42 pages in double-columns refers the reader to dates, not to pages, and makes cross-reference easy. This, in its turn, is supported by almost 100 pages of a roster of names of men (some five thousand of them) who took part in the expeditions—the seamen, cooks and guides as well as the leaders. The bibliography amounts to over 50 pages.

Edward Umfreville's 1784 expedition to discover a route to the north-west via Lake Nipigon has not ranked in this book as being of relevance to northern Canada, even given the elasticity of the southern boundary of that area. This omission leads to the thought that, although the Hudson's Bay Company archives contain two summaries of all shipping voyages, there is no such 'skippers' guide' for land-borne expeditions. It is almost certain that a whole network of overland expeditions will be revealed as the journals of the different posts are studied in greater detail than has yet been possible. For example, the journey in the 1770's of the egregious Eusebius Kitchin, chief at Moose Factory, would tie into a series of efforts, in anticipation of Philip Turnor, to open up the country south of the bayside posts. But the fact that there remains work yet to be done does not in any way detract from the excellence of this chronological account, nor from a feeling almost of awe at the volume of information which the authors have amassed and made available.

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