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NORTH POLE, SOUTH POLE: JOURNEYS TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. Bertrand Imbert. 1992. London: Thames and Hudson. 192 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-500-30010-0. £6.95.

The recently released 'New Horizons' series of books is claimed by its publisher to provide 'the perfect introduction to a topic: instructive, stimulating, intriguing.' By emphasizing photography and illustration, mostly reproduced in full-colour, the books attempt to attain the 'universal range of an encyclopaedia, the captivating beauty of an artbook, with in-depth coverage of each subject.'

North Pole, South Pole is the series' laudable attempt to capture in one pocket-sized (18 x 12.5 cm) paperback the entirety of the history of polar exploration. Written by Bertrand Imbert, the former director of the French Antarctic expeditions in the International Geophysical Year (all of the titles in the series have French authors), the book has two major sections. The first, covering two-thirds of the pages, is an overview of polar exploration from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, with special emphasis on the science of the past 50 years. The second part, entitled 'Documents,' notes interesting aspects of polar history and science, including Scott's message to the public, some of Hurley's photographs from Shackleton's expedition in *Endurance*, a review of the Northern Sea Route, an introduction to the study of Antarctic ice, and information about the Antarctic Treaty. There are also a chronology of polar exploration and science, a brief glossary of terms, suggestions for further reading, and an index.

This is a popular, non-academic account directed at a large non-specialist audience. It is not referenced, although it gives an extensive list of its illustrations and their credits. The artwork is indeed what makes the book special. There is a large variety of photographs, portraits, landscape paintings and drawings, and excerpts from books, newspapers, and magazines. Many of them are the standard pictures — including that of Scott's party at the South Pole — but others are more uncommon, such as a drawing of a feuding Cook and Peary from a 1909 edition of *Petit Journal*.

Polar exploration is certainly made interesting to the uninitiated, but the book suffers from several flaws in presentation. There are not nearly enough detailed maps, so that it would be difficult for someone with no background in the field to follow exactly what happened during, for example, the Franklin searches or the *Jeannette* expedition. Place-names are generally given in English,

rather than in the form officially used within the country concerned, making it difficult to locate on other modern maps places such as 'Northeast Land' (Nordaustlandet). That the crossheads in the text are in the present tense, while the rest of the book is in the past tense, is also confusing.

There are also significant factual errors. For example, it is stated that HMS *Investigator* was trapped in the ice for three years and did not return to England until 1853; in fact, McClure abandoned his ship in 1854 and the crew returned home on other naval vessels. There is occasional confusion in the use of names, which suggests a lack of familiarity with the topic: Nansen's companion Johansen, referred to in the book as 'Frederick,' did not go by that, his first name, but rather by Hjalmar; similarly, Nordenskiöld did not normally use his first name, 'Nils,' by which he is referred to in this account, but was known universally as Adolf Erik. In addition, the most avid sponsor of Frederick Cook in 1909 was *The New York Herald*, not the *Herald Tribune* (which it became in 1926).

There also could be questions about the book's emphases on specific expeditions or individuals. For example, three pages are devoted to Nobile's *Italia* expedition, whereas only two paragraphs are given to Amundsen's completion of the Northwest Passage in *Gjøa*, and no mention in the body copy is made of Greely's expedition to Lady Franklin Bay during the International Polar Year, Sverdrup's 1898–1902 expedition, or Bruce's Scottish National Antarctic Expedition. Likewise, John Rae is not mentioned by name in the section on the Franklin search, and Alfred Harmsworth is mentioned as one of a number of contributors to Scott's *Discovery* expedition rather than as the sponsor of the Jackson-Harmsworth Expedition.

Despite its weaknesses, this volume is the only introductory and inexpensive history of polar exploration that emphasizes photography and illustration more than words. As a historical account, it is no match for L.P. Kirwan's near-classic *The white road*, or for Pierre Berton's more recent (and more popular) *The Arctic grail*, but it could well interest a new set of young polar enthusiasts. (Beau Riffenburgh, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

OUT OF THE CHANNEL: THE EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND. John Keeble. 1991. New York: HarperCollins. 290 p, hard cover. ISBN 0-06-016334-8. \$22.95 (US).

The tragedy and ballyhoo of 1989, when a silent spring came to Alaska's Prince William Sound and irate consumers were destroying their Exxon credit cards, will remain fresh in many minds. And if those images of oil-soiled otters chewing off their paws are in danger of fading, we now have the investigative journalism of novelist John Keeble, who flew north two weeks after the human and environmental calamity to cover the story for *Village Voice*.

The tale begins in Valdez, with a pinch of Alaskan history and the hazards of the local weather and topogra-

phy. It continues with the sins and omissions of the pipeline consortium, Alyeska, prior to March 1989, such as the neglect and dissolution of its spill contingency plans and the shoddy state of its tanker fleet. Then comes the catastrophe itself, the progress of the spill, and the second (arguably greater) disaster — the fatal dalliance and the confusion over who was in charge and how to tackle the situation. Keeble evokes the atmosphere of heated press conferences and the media frenzy. For the environmental disaster junkies, here was the best thing since Bhopal.

Anyone who followed the media coverage will re-encounter all the familiar themes and essential images. Communities divided between grief and glee over the lucrative clean-up wages. Scientists torn between outrage and elation at the tremendous research opportunities. The panicky Alaska tourist industry's notorious, Exxon-funded, nationwide Marilyn Monroe advertisement. The tanker captain's history of alcohol offences, the mosquito fleet, and the ongoing litigation. We are again treated to the absurd spectacle, in a high-tech age, of rocks being scrubbed with absorbent pads. And, of course, there are the stricken otters and statistics for the cost of each rehabilitated otter. Keeble does a thorough job of consolidating a multitude of contemporary reports, reactions, and scenes. Interlaced are some cosmic reflections on 'dimensions' and some grave remarks on the oil dependency of western civilization — sharpened by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait at the time he was finishing his study.

The tone and content of the book (whose only polar aspect, incidentally, is the Arctic origin of the spilled oil) is predictably angry and condemnatory. Unless written by the oil industry or one of its allies, how could it be otherwise? Keeble takes the right side instantly, dedicating the book to the perished creatures of Prince William Sound, rather ponderously giving all their scientific names. The spill, which he proclaims the most devastating in world history, was 'a disaster waiting to happen.' Yet he avoids the temptation to single out Captain Hazelwood as the supreme villain, flaying the bungling and machinations of Big Oil, and ultimately preferring to take the more chilling and intractable 'I have met the enemy and he is us' line.

This account is grounded chiefly in conversation, interviews, observations, and some degree of participation. Keeble points out that the scientists who monitored the spill, in contrast to local fishermen, largely remained 'watchers.' Yet his own participation was restricted to a day or so spent cleaning (ungrateful) cormorants. But then his duty as a writer was to bear witness, so he had to move on. The author is everywhere, flying over the crippled tanker, sailing with the scientists, mingling with the fishermen. Nevertheless, he pays due homage to official reports and other more traditional documentary sources in his bibliography.

Keeble's style will stick in some throats. He gets across the point that events in late-twentieth-century Alaska are a reprise of the time-honoured frontier conquest with a typical metaphor: 'the replay tape is running at high speed.

It's the last such tape the United States gets to play within its own boundaries' (page 11). Some analogies are rather forced. He seeks to locate Hazelwood within the ambiguous adventurer's tradition of James Cook and Lewis and Clark. More than once he refers to the 'Third Reich appearance' of the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline terminal at Valdez. Oil-despoiled beaches are 'ghettos' (page 137).

Other analogies are misconstrued. The Cordova fishermen represent for him the 'Hamiltonian ideal of the independent producer' (page 13), although what he means is the Jeffersonian ideal; the Hamiltonian ideal was its antithesis. His blow-by-blow reconstruction of the events of the evening and night of the spill tells us more than we ever need to know: the length of the tanker, the exact minute the loading of oil was completed, what the captain ate and drank before returning to the ship. Surprisingly, we don't learn what toppings he had on his pizza. Keeble has a penchant for one-line summations of his characters' attributes and appearances. A marine biologist has 'light red hair and a complexion inclined toward pinkness' (page 114). People are always taking off their caps and running their fingers through their hair. In one chapter he makes a lot out of the frequent tears of scientists who aren't supposed to cry. Some will consider this welcome 'human interest'; others will find such material irritating and distracting.

It is too early to say whether the spill has truly fulfilled the darkest predictions of eco-catastrophe, and Keeble, rightly, does not try to arrive at a final judgment. One aside, however, does beg the question and serves to place the spill in perspective. Clearcutting in southeastern Alaska's Tongass National Forest, he notes, is probably a much greater threat to wildlife.

This is actually not the first book on the Exxon disaster. Art Davidson's *In the wake of the Exxon Valdez* (1990) provides much of the same engaging (and sometimes excruciating) detail and shares Keeble's 'in their own words' approach. But it also supplies a more systematic and incisive analysis of causes, background, and players, displaying Davidson's greater knowledge of Alaska and its politics, and his involvement in the issues. There is room and plenty of time, however, for further journalistic studies of the spill before historians enter the field. These ought to devote greater attention than Keeble or Davidson to the Native Alaskan impact and perspective and look more closely at the role of 'outside' environmentalists. (Peter Coates, Department of Historical Studies, University of Bristol, 13–15 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB.)

POLAR PORTRAITS: COLLECTED PAPERS.

A.G.E. Jones. 1992. Whitby: Caedmon of Whitby. 428 p., illustrated. ISBN 0-905355-37-7. £25.50 hardcover, £14.50 soft cover.

Those interested in the literature of polar exploration or British maritime affairs have undoubtedly long been familiar with the work of A.G.E. Jones, who, in more than four decades, has published an impressive number of articles on the history of these subjects. Now Caedmon of