

GRIFFITH TAYLOR: VISIONARY, ENVIRONMENTALIST, EXPLORER. Carolyn Strange and Alison Bashford. 2008. Canberra: National Library of Australia. 283p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 978-0-6422-7668-1. US\$22.

The first thing that is noticeable about this excellent biography of the geographer and Antarctic explorer Griffith Taylor is its striking visual quality: the book is full of photos, sketches, diagrams, and maps. Such a visual approach to written biography is somewhat unusual, but is completely appropriate for its subject. From the moment he left England in 1893 at the age of twelve to start a new life with his family in Australia, Taylor kept a daily diary in which he sketched and mapped the world around him. Steaming past Italy, the twelve year old sketched Mount Stromboli, labeling 'the town, the crater, and the smoke.' Throughout his life, Taylor was a highly visual thinker, and the images in the book help Strange and Bashford to capture the fascinating and multifaceted character of their subject.

Following in the footsteps of his mining engineer father James Taylor, 'Griff' (he never used his first name Thomas) was attracted to the study of geology at the University of Sydney. Along with his classmate Douglas Mawson, Taylor fell under the tutelage of Professor Edgeworth David. David was the 'Grand old man of Australian science,' and he instilled in his charges a strong sense of patriotism: scientists had a duty to serve their country through their research. Although Taylor was on a scholarship in Cambridge at the time of Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition of 1907–1909, it was largely through his contacts with David and Mawson that he received his invitation to head south as a geologist on Captain Scott's *Terra Nova* expedition of 1910–1913.

An Antarctic historian might quibble that the subtitle of Strange and Bashford's biography is back to front. Taylor made much of his reputation as a young man on the *Terra Nova* expedition, and was therefore an explorer *before* he was either a visionary or an environmentalist. In preparation for the expedition Taylor walked from Cambridge to London with Charles Wright in order to demonstrate his fitness for the rigours of Antarctic exploration. On the voyage south, Taylor proved himself to be a popular and cheerful member of the expedition. He was rewarded, after some discussion, by being given command of the western geological party during the first summer season. Along with Frank Debenham, Charles Wright, and Edgar Evans, Taylor spent a little over a month investigating the physical geography of the regions around the Ferrar and Koetlitz glaciers and in the McMurdo dry valleys. As a result of this journey, Taylor proudly became a 'geographical entity' as Scott approved Taylor's name for the Taylor glacier at the head of the Taylor dry valley. Somewhat surprisingly, Strange and Bashford make little of the protracted feud that ensued between Taylor and Hartley Ferrar, Scott's geologist from the *Discovery* expedition, over the naming of the glacier.

Following a winter at Cape Evans, Taylor set out for a second geological expedition to the western McMurdo Sound region shortly after Scott's polar party began its ill-fated journey southwards. Taylor's second western journey did not go quite as smoothly as the first, ending in a desperate race to meet the *Terra Nova* and return to New Zealand. Over a year after his

return from Antarctica, Taylor learned of the deaths of Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Oates, and Evans. But Taylor was still able to see the positive outcomes of the expedition, suggesting in the name of his account of the expedition that science offered a *silver lining* to the tragedy of Captain Scott.

Taylor's experiences and journeys in Antarctica provided plenty of material for the young geologist to write a doctoral thesis at the University of Sydney that was published in 1922 as 'The physiography of the McMurdo Sound region'. This was an excellent work of scholarship, which Strange and Bashford suggest was Taylor's strongest work of 'pure' science. Unlike several of his Antarctic companions, however, Taylor did not focus his career on Antarctica; in fact he never returned to the ice. Instead, Taylor became increasingly interested in the relationship between people and the world around them. The authors suggest that unpopulated Antarctica was unable to satisfy Taylor's increasingly eclectic interests.

In the years after his return from Antarctica, Taylor became one of the pioneers of academic geography in Australia. His approach to the subject was strongly determinist and increasingly racist in its focus. His ideas were summed up in his 1927 book *Environment and race*, which Taylor personally considered his *magnum opus*. While winning him friends such as Ellsworth Huntington in the international geographical community, Taylor's environmentally deterministic thinking alienated many of his fellow Australians. Most interwar Australian politicians regarded Australia's population potential to be almost limitless, at least one hundred million people. Taylor believed the country's carrying capacity to be much less, and his more sober analysis got him into trouble with the country's powerful boosters. Partly as a consequence of the hostility generated by his work, Taylor decided to leave Australia in 1928 to take up a professorship in geography at the University of Chicago. In the United States and later in Canada at the University of Toronto, Taylor continued his geographical work, with occasional references to Antarctica.

After retiring from the University of Toronto in 1951, Griffith Taylor and his family decided to move back to Australia. Much of the earlier controversy had died down in the intervening years, and Taylor settled into a productive retirement in the attractive Sydney suburb of Seaforth. Antarctica returned to the centre of Taylor's interests during these later years with Taylor viewing the International Geophysical Year of 1957–1958 and the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 to be examples of a new approach to international relations which he referred to as 'geopacifics.' Even in his own mind, however, Taylor was never quite able to reconcile this internationalist approach to his own Australian nationalism, especially as it referred to Antarctica.

Over the course of his life, Griffith Taylor's interests ranged widely, and in seeking to follow these interests the authors make a small number of factual errors. Robert Forde and Trygve Gran, for example, are mixed up in the label of a picture of the second western sledge journey. Such mistakes, however, detract little from what is an excellent biography of a fascinating individual. Strange and Bashford perfectly capture the personality of Griffith Taylor with all his complexity and contradiction, and this biography has much to offer polar historians. (Adrian Howkins, Adrian.Howkins@colostate.edu)