

GHOSTS OF CAPE SABINE: THE HARROWING TRUE STORY OF THE GREELY EXPEDITION. By LEONARD F. GUTTRIDGE. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2000. 354 p., maps, b&w illus., notes, bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$37.99.

Depending on their personalities, explorers have always made a choice between pursuing dramatic geographical discoveries or doing quiet, competent scientific work. Some tried to play both sides, but the conservative ones could never quite match the dash of the sensation-seekers—who, for their part, feigned scientific aspirations but brought back few solid results. In the High Arctic, Robert Peary and Elisha Kent Kane are classic examples of the melodramatic explorer, while Otto Sverdrup exemplifies the ideal leader of a nineteenth-century scientific team.

The Lady Franklin Bay Expedition was to have been pure science, one of 14 expeditions sent to the Arctic and the Antarctic to gather data for the First International Polar Year of 1882–83. Conceived by Austro-Hungarian Karl Weyprecht, these expeditions were to mark a shift from the geographical claim staking of the day to cooperative scientific effort. It is thus ironic that this expedition became (except for the disappearance of Sir John Franklin and his crew) the most sensational Arctic tragedy of the nineteenth century.

But whereas the murky fate of Franklin has been reconstructed from crumbs of evidence glued together with educated speculation, the disaster that befell Lieutenant Greely and his 24 men is well documented. Not until now, however, has someone sifted through all those documents to create a modern historical analysis of the tragedy.

Leonard Guttridge, an amateur but careful historian whose previous works include *Icebound*, a similar study of the *Jeannette* expedition, spent years exhaustively scouring the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and other repositories of primary material near his Maryland home. He also attempted, with some success, to track down descendents of the key participants, at one point contacting most of the Bucks in the U.S. Midwest in the hope of learning more about the enigmatic Charles Henry Buck, whom Greely executed for stealing food. The resulting effort far eclipses earlier accounts of the expedition, such as Alden Todd's *Abandoned* (1961) and Theodore Powell's *The Long Rescue* (1961).

If the International Polar Year was Weyprecht's idea, it was the visionary scoundrel Henry Howgate who set the specific terms for the Greely project. In between bouts of embezzling over \$200,000 from the U.S. Army Signal Corps, Howgate tirelessly promoted around Washington his idea of a temporary Arctic colony. By the late 1870s, he had already picked a site: Lady Franklin Bay, near the northeastern tip of Ellesmere Island, had the advantage of a nearby coal seam, found by the recent British Arctic Expedition under George Strong Nares. Little was known about the Arctic in that era, but that did not deter confident people from making sweeping generalizations. Two of

Howgate's breezy assertions were particularly fateful in light of later events. First, the experiences of Charles Francis Hall in 1871 and Nares in 1875–76 had led Howgate to conclude that Lady Franklin Bay could reliably be reached by ship every summer. Second, he believed that ships were undesirable "cities of refuge" that hindered proper adaptation to the Arctic. The polar colony, he proposed, should be transported by ship, left with adequate supplies, and picked up three years later (Howgate, 1879).

Howgate's optimism seemed well founded when the *Proteus*, a refitted whaling ship, left the 25 men of the Greely expedition at Lady Franklin Bay in August 1881. A ship was to bring mail and supplies the following summer, and the pickup was scheduled for 1883. Adolphus Greely, an ambitious Signal Corps lieutenant who had done well stringing telegraph wire in the American West, proved less adept as a leader of men in an isolated colony. The copious journal excerpts that add color to Guttridge's narrative show just how discontented the men were with their by-the-book commander. "This man (I cannot call him a gentleman) comes among us like a serpent in Eden and creates eternal hatred toward himself," wrote Sergeant David Brainard, perhaps the most competent of the 25 expedition members (p. 154).

Overcoming the stresses of isolation and a rigid, defensive leader, the expedition did an admirable job of collecting data on natural history, meteorology, and magnetic and tidal variation. Despite the anti-nationalistic spirit of Weyprecht's Polar Year, they also achieved a new Farthest North, besting the earlier British record by four miles. During those first two years, there were a few broken bones but no deaths or serious injuries.

Unfortunately, a relief ship failed to appear in both 1882 and 1883. The first summer, it couldn't get through the ice and had to retreat; the second year, it was crushed in the pack and sank. Accenting these failures were vague orders about the leaving of food caches, unsympathetic politicians, an army-navy rivalry, and slipshod efforts by those in command, both in Washington and on the relief ships. Following his own orders, and against the opinion of virtually all his men, Greely decided to abandon the security of their still well-stocked station and head south on a nightmarish 51-day journey in small boats through the pack ice, as the polar winter closed in around them. Learning of the destruction of the relief ship through a cairn message, they eventually settled in for the winter at Camp Clay on Pim Island, a barren satellite off the coast of east-central Ellesmere Island. Here they built a metre-high rock enclosure, roofed it with one of their boats and a tarpaulin, and endeavoured to hibernate through the polar night with 40 days of food.

The dramatic eight-month ordeal, during which all but seven perished, has been covered before in books by Todd, Greely, Brainard, and others, but Guttridge has drawn extensively on all the men's journals, not just two or three. Some previously anonymous characters come to life for the first time. Sergeant David Ralston, really just a name in earlier

accounts, becomes a man who married for money and, when it ran out, abandoned his wife to join the army. William Cross, the alcoholic engineer who was the first to die, acquires character through his gruff journal entries, usually colorful knocks at Greely, whom he labeled “Old Stubbornness” or “STN (our shirt-tail navigator)” (p. 157, 173).

Guttridge’s fairness and the depth of his historical research are striking. If there is a drawback to *Ghosts of Cape Sabine*, it is that the 80-year-old author has no personal experience with the Arctic he writes about and thus makes many small errors. Dutch Island lies within a few metres of mainland Ellesmere, not two miles offshore; the photo caption of Pim Island misidentifies Cape Sabine; and contrary to what Greely himself believed, the small seabirds the party hunted at Camp Clay were not dovekies: they were guillemots. More importantly, the author overlooks key issues in the tragedy because of his lack of familiarity with the area. In February 1884, when Sergeant Rice and the Greenland native Jens Edward tried to cross Smith Sound to reach Greenland for help, they were stopped by open water. Guttridge assumes, with earlier writers, that the Sound simply did not freeze over that winter. But Pim Island lies at the fluctuating edge of the North Water Polynya. Some years an ice bridge forms right at Cape Sabine, but often a detour to the north is necessary. In 1914, under ideal conditions, the American explorer Donald MacMillan (1918:51) crossed from Greenland to Pim Island in six hours, following the same line attempted by Rice and Edward in 1884. Yet in 1909, Frederick Cook (1912:434) claimed to have been forced to make a 60-mile detour north of Cape Sabine before finding ice. Cook’s numbers are rarely reliable, but it is not uncommon for the ice bridge to begin around the north end of the Bache Peninsula, some 35 km beyond Camp Clay. From their lookout knoll, Greely’s men would not have been able to see the solid ice in the distance. Guttridge seems unaware of the vagaries of the Smith Sound ice bridge and simply assumes, as Greely did, that if the direct route didn’t work, nothing would. Several such points prevent this book, good as it is, from being definitive.

Nevertheless, one cannot help thinking that, if as meticulous a person as Guttridge had been in charge of relief efforts, all members of the expedition would have come back alive.

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BARK, SKIN, AND CEDAR: EXPLORING THE CANOE IN CANADIAN EXPERIENCE. By JAMES RAFFAN. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1999. ISBN 0-00-638653-9. xiv + 274 p., maps, b&w illus., notes, index. Softbound. Cdn\$19.95.

Bark, Skin, and Cedar will surely make for informative and inspirational reading for housebound canoe enthusiasts this year. Unlike conventional canoe books that narrate individual journeys or explain how to handle a canoe in whitewater, Raffan’s new book is an amiable, discursive ramble across Canada, with little more holding the volume together than a desire to share excitement about canoes. *Bark, Skin, and Cedar* meanders from anecdotes about personal experience, through a study of competition in the canoe-building industry, toward an understanding of the values gained from experiencing the world from a canoe.

The book is organized into 11 chapters, each one developing some aspect of the canoe in Canada. Its organization is spatial, moving from Labrador in the first chapter, then sweeping through the Maritime provinces, westward through Quebec and Ontario, and west and north as far as the Bering Strait. One of the best features of the book is that, as the geographical focus shifts, Raffan takes a different tack on how he explores the canoe and its cultural trappings. For example, in the initial chapter, he lays down some basic canoe-building terminology as he discusses the development of the Gander Bay boat and its similarities to the Beothuk canoe. The next two chapters, which focus primarily on the Maritimes, largely concern themselves with Micmac birchbark canoes and with aboriginal stories about the origin of the canoe. Chapter Four addresses the development of the canvas-covered canoe and the cedar-strip canoe through an interesting and informative history of three major canoe manufacturers—the Chestnut Canoe, the Old Town Canoe, and the Peterborough Canoe companies. The fifth chapter, entitled “Lachine,” evokes the heyday of the North West Company, especially attending to Governor George Simpson and his ceremonial use of the canoe, which Raffan ties to a discussion of the Canadian voyageur and the 1967 Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant. Chapter Six provides anecdotes related to canoe-camp life in Quebec and Ontario and to the values those camps strive to instill in young modern-day voyageurs. The next chapter, a refreshing shift from well-worn