

A WAY OF LIFE. Edited by ED HALL. Yellowknife: Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the Northwest Territories, 1986. 122 p., illus., photos, bib. Softbound. Cdn\$7.50.

In the midst of the current controversy about the trapping and hunting of fur-bearing animals, this book offers a welcome perspective. The "way of life" referred to in the title is that of northern people, native people especially but not exclusively, whose lives focus on living off the land and who have known hunting, fishing, trapping and self-sufficiency as a lifestyle for generations. It is a life won by hard struggle and age-old, tried and true technique. This book is a tribute to the people who know and live this life. It is a glimpse of the history, the personalities, the painstaking skills and the ingenuity of these people, who even today are a part of the fur-trade industry of Canada.

The first part of the book is a short historical perspective of the fur trade in the N.W.T. The profundity of the impact of this development is reflected in the words of Guy Hologak, in his address to Justice Berger during the Berger Inquiry in 1975-76:

The first white man I ever saw was Mr. Steffanson and his partner, Billy Banksland. That's the first time we saw a match being used. . . . Then in later years more white people started coming in and that's the time I saw my first rifle — musket rifles [p. 19].

This first section of the book also provides insight into the different histories of the fur trade in the Eastern and Western Arctic, the influence of the whaling era on the coastal communities and the effect of church establishments in the N.W.T. This brief history of the boom-and-bust economy that has been experienced in the North for so many years provides a useful perspective from which to view the rest of the book.

Turning to modern times, the book develops its major emphasis, portraying many facets of the involvement of northern people in the trapping industry.

Trapping in the north, however, should not be seen as an occupation in the same way that driving a truck or balancing a ledger is. It is but one part of an entire way of life. Other aspects include not only hunting and fishing, but also all the myriad skills and traditions associated with them. When a family moves out on the land for a period of time it is to re-affirm their ties with it as well as to reap its benefits [p. 27].

It is the "myriad skills" and close relationship to the land demonstrated by northern people that this book seeks to portray.

Through nine personal profiles of men who have lived and trapped in the N.W.T. almost all their lives, we get a sense of who these trappers are and of their vast experience in many fields. These men were not schooled in classrooms; rather they have had as their teachers their parents, grandparents, family, friends and, most importantly, Mother Nature — sometimes the toughest teacher of all. The stories of these men's lives bring warmth and reality to the book. The reminiscences of many other individuals interspersed throughout the text are a testimony to the all-too-seldom-heralded presence and involvement of northern people in every step of northern development.

Five detailed sections provide well-illustrated step-by-step instructions for preparing items that have been useful in bush or tundra living. They include: making snowshoes, making waterproof kamiks, making a spruce bark canoe, preparing and eating country food and setting traps. Another section is a collection of tips for repairing snowmobiles (especially when proper parts are not available), some traditional medical remedies (like chewing fresh young willow bark for its acetylsalicylic acid content when you have a headache), and various other bits of advice about travelling and trapping in the North.

What is special about the presentation of this material is that each individual is credited for his or her contribution(s) no matter how small. The book provides a forum where many northern talents come to light. Many people have passed on their best advice to the reader, so the book reflects the way in which much of this knowledge has previously been learned and passed on — by first-hand experience, by demonstration and by friendly advice. The need for spirit, physical strength and ingenuity is everywhere evident.

The last section of the book is of interest to anyone who has thought

about the fur-harvesting controversy. Many sides of the argument are presented, with lists of pro-animal organizations appearing alongside informative sections on leghold and killing traps, trappers' ethics and education and the role of the fur industry in Canada's economy. It provides a bird's-eye view of the status of and current issues concerning trapping in the N.W.T. and Canada.

The book is entertaining, informative and realistic. It offers the warmth of personal anecdote along with hard fact. The numerous illustrations and photographs, the variety in format and the juxtaposition of brief overview and in-depth consideration of issues makes it useful for light reading or as a reference book. Anyone interested in making any of the items described in detail will find adequate instruction. A teacher interested in provoking a discussion about fur-harvest issues would find ample suggestion here. Anyone interested in northern culture, lifestyle, concerns and issues will find the book useful.

A person inexperienced with northern cultures might find it difficult to separate the skills in the book according to which culture they represent: Dene, Metis or Inuit. For most of the material, it does not matter; the knowledge or skill is widespread across the N.W.T. Some of the skills are obviously from within the tree line, therefore probably Dene or Metis, while skills involving sea animals are most likely Inuit. If anyone finds this a particularly perplexing problem, there are maps available of the N.W.T. from the same publisher that will help locate the community of the contributor and thus usually reveal the cultural group. A map of all N.W.T. communities would perhaps have been useful in the book, but these are readily available from G.N.W.T.

Ed Hall, the editor, lives and works in Yellowknife and has contributed a great deal to conservation education in the N.W.T. The other book that he coordinated, and that I had the pleasure of assisting with, is *Arctic Animals*, another well-illustrated, well-researched publication about animals above the tree line in the N.W.T. (G.N.W.T., 1985).

One last word. The book is dedicated to Al Bourque, whom I once met while he was a Wildlife Officer in Fort Simpson in 1975. He would have had his own book to write, I am sure, in which he would have shared with all of us the kind of tip he once gave several of us about hunting moose. He told us to get an empty can (a large juice can, for example), punch a hole through the bottom and insert a wet string through the hole with a knot inside the can to hold the string in place. As you run your fingers quickly down the string, the can will bellow like a rutting moose and attract moose to you.

Al, like all the other contributors to *A Way of Life*, had so much unwritten knowledge. It is good to see some of it recorded now. Perhaps others will be encouraged to do the same.

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L'OURS POLAIRE ET LES INUIT. By VLADIMIR RANDA. Paris: Société d'Études Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France, Ethnoscience 2, 1986. 323 p., 6 maps, 5 tables, 12 figs., 11 schemas, 15 sketches, 2 photos, bib. Softbound. 160F00.

Randa has assembled a large volume of information on the relations between the polar bear and the Inuit, revealing how their two apparently different worlds overlap. Through his fascination for polar bears, Randa wishes to tell the reader what they represent for the Inuit.

The author, an ethnologist, relied on a thorough search of published documents to yield information for his dissertation research. The core of the information was therefore collected from explorers' and missionary reports, ethnographies and scientific reports in biology. To this he later added a few interviews with Inuit from the Eastern Arctic.

The introductory chapter begins with bear cults through time — from the Palaeolithic to the last century. It is followed by two sections: the

first on the natural history of the polar bear; the second on the rapport between polar bears and the Inuit. That latter part is of particular interest to the social scientist since it deals with the bear in terms of what it represents in Inuit subsistence and ritual.

The chapter on natural history is concerned with the evolution of bears in general, with special emphasis on polar bears. While cursory for a specialist, it succeeds as a scientific popularization of the data.

Chapter 3 deals with polar bears on a pan-arctic basis. The sections on ecology and biological adaptations remain at a general level, suggesting that the author has not mastered all of the information. Data on bear ethology, though, were taken from a narrower pool of information and the author's treatment is definitely of a superior quality. Particularly fascinating is the treatment of bear social organization and communication.

Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the relations between the Inuit and polar bears. We learn here how the hunter became the hunted. There is an informative discussion of Inuit bear-hunting technology, and techniques, as well as comments on the sharing system among the Inuit after a successful hunt.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the author reveals his skills as an ethnologist. Randa does justice to the rich documentary sources and presents a superb synthesis of the rites surrounding the bear hunt among the North American Inuit. Moreover, his survey is accompanied by memorable quotes from Boas, Jenness and Rasmussen. The final chapter is concerned with mythology related to polar bears. It is not an analysis of myths but rather an enumeration of what oral tradition contains on various themes. What struck me most in this last section is the similarity of myths from regions as far apart as the Eastern Arctic and Siberia.

The book is stylishly written and can be confidently recommended to anyone interested in the importance of the polar bear in past and present arctic societies.

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FOREST ECOSYSTEMS IN THE ALASKAN TAIGA: A SYNTHESIS OF STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION. Edited by K. VAN CLEVE, F.S., CHAPIN III, P.W. FLANAGAN, L.A. VIREECK and C.T. DYRNESS. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986. Ecological Studies Vol. 57. x + 230 p., figs., tables, index. Hardbound US\$47.50.

This is a major work, and predictably so because we have been familiar with its forerunners over the past decade — many scientific papers reporting the result of investigations into forests of the Alaskan taiga by members of the University of Alaska, Institute of Northern Forestry of the U.S. Forest Service, as well as other cooperating institutions.

The volume's editors, named above, are major contributors, all long-established scientists with extensive experience in the region, and the other contributors include foresters, biologists and soils scientists from Alaska, other states, Canada and the United Kingdom: from the University of Alaska — V. Alexander, M.M. Billington, J.P. Bryant and J. Yarie; from the U.K. — J.M. Anderson, J.P. Grime and O.W. Heal; from the University of British Columbia — J.P. Kimmins; from San Diego State University — W.C. Oechel; from Stanford University — P.M. Vitousek; from the University of New Brunswick — R.W. Wein; from the Institute of Northern Forestry — C.W. Slaughter, R.A. Werner and J. Zasada.

The city of Fairbanks, site of the University of Alaska and the Institute of Northern Forestry, is uniquely situated for research into the boreal ecosystem. It is located centrally within the interior Alaskan taiga, and it has a long history of ecologically oriented studies dating back at least to 1919. There has been a burgeoning of environmental

research since about 1950, including the work of such noted soils and forest scientists as Péwé, Lutz, Hopkins, Kellogg, Tedrow, Rieger, Benninghoff, Heilman, Wilde and a host of others representing many disciplines and too numerous to name.

The consequence has been the accumulation of a wealth of pertinent information on the ecology of the region, despite the fact that the entire region is, relatively speaking, remote from the rest of the United States and, one must admit, quite distant from the usual conceptual horizon of ecologists elsewhere.

Then in the period 1975-80 there began an intensive study of interior Alaskan forest ecosystems, resulting in a most impressive series of scientific papers appearing in many of the appropriate journals, and in 1983 an entire issue of the *Canadian Journal of Forest Research* was devoted to a summary of the findings in the form of a series of papers by the participants detailing the methods, results and implications of what was surely a most impressive ecosystems analysis.

With the current volume we now have a concise distillation of these findings; more importantly, we have the interpretations of those who carried on the study, conclusions that may earlier have become buried under voluminous data, or implied rather than stated, and perhaps not placed in full relationship to other aspects of the study. This book, in summary, describes the environmental parameters that characterize major forest types of the Alaskan interior, emphasizing such critical factors as soil temperature and moisture, organic matter accumulation, decomposition and soil chemistry, all as they correlate with ecosystem structure and function.

The book is surely a fitting culmination of one of the major research programs in the field of ecology in recent times, equal to any of the well-known IBP studies that have resulted in treatises, for example, on the arctic tundra and the American prairies (Brown *et al.*, 1980; Risser *et al.*, 1981), and, it is to be hoped, prologue to the filling in of remaining gaps in knowledge revealed by the analysis and, ultimately, to discerning the critical factors that limit forest development at various successional stages — in short, the kind of information needed to model, and manage, the forests for whatever ends are considered desirable for conservation of the resource on a permanent and long-term basis.

The effort, thus, is not a study of the synecology of the taiga plant communities but is, rather, a quantitative analysis of the structure and function of major forest ecosystems, and as such the book should not be criticized for something it did not attempt, even though the expectation, or preference, of reader or critic might have been more directly satisfied had it done so. My own preference leans toward classical community ecology, seasoned modestly with palaeo, and evolutionary, interpretations, as well as chorography of past and present communities and their responses to the environment. But this preference is, in a sense, a holdout against the march of time, with ecology in an early post-descriptive phase in which we search for correlations and causes of the response of populations to environmental factors and events.

There is, however, enough in this book to satisfy even the most rigid synecological traditionalist, for here is abundant supporting and confirmatory evidence for our fine traditional beliefs — such as that climate is the underlying factor at work in establishing major vegetational zonation. But the work of Van Cleve *et al.* is, in final analysis, not distributional and classificatory but rather ecosystematic, with emphasis not on the individual species (other than the trees, which define the forest types) but rather biomass and the controls that govern the ecosystem processes — soil chemistry, microbiology, mineralization, recycling of nutrient minerals, and so on.

As Van Cleve and Yarie point out in the chapter on the interaction of temperature, moisture and soil chemistry: "The principal emphasis in this research has been to examine control of system processes among forest types. In this regard, temperature played the role of dominant controlling environmental variable." The results of the analysis indicate that, in terms of the indices of ecosystem function, temperature controls annual tree production, element uptake, litterfall biomass, element recycling, litter decomposition, forest respiration. In the book, all of these various aspects are, of course, delineated in great detail and,