

have been planning to expand the discussion of these topics upon finishing the book, but we, regrettably, have lost the opportunity for further discourse.

The maps Burch created to demonstrate human and caribou distributions and complement the text are clear and detailed enough to orient oneself in Northwest Alaska. The map legends could have been in a larger font so that readers, particularly older readers, could more easily discern the scale of caribou distributions across a vast landscape. The photos of human and *Rangifer* activities contribute to the historical setting of the book. More photos would have been a treat, but the spectacular panoramic photo on the back cover, which shows a large concentration of caribou, in itself justifies purchasing the book.

Greg Finstad

*Program Manager, Reindeer Research Program
School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
University of Alaska Fairbanks
PO Box 757200, AHRB 180
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7200, USA
gffinstad@alaska.edu*

THE LAST VIKING: THE LIFE OF ROALD AMUNDSEN. By STEPHEN R. BOWN. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2012. ISBN 978-1-55365-937-2. xxii + 356 p., maps, b&w illus., note on sources, selected bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$32.95.

During the summer of 2012, a Norwegian crew was busy planning the salvage of the remains of Roald Amundsen's former expedition vessel, *Maud*, from the freezing waters of Cambridge Bay on the south coast of Victoria Island. Making up for its ignoble final use as a storage place and telegraph station for the Hudson's Bay Company, the Norwegian government had secured rights to bring the old wooden vessel home to its birthplace in Norway. The salvage team members may have reflected on the fact that in the fall of 1905, *Maud's* original owner had skippered his first wooden vessel, *Gjøa*, through those same waters on the first successful navigation of the Northwest Passage.

Roald Engelbregt Gravning Amundsen is the subject of Stephen R. Bown's latest book, a biography of one of the most impressive explorers of the polar regions. As a student of Arctic exploration, I was curious to read this book, wondering what more could be revealed about Roald Amundsen that had not come to light in other publications, including his autobiography (1927) and Tor Bomann-Larsen's Norwegian biography (1995).

In the prologue, Bown catches the reader's attention by describing the somewhat absurd vision of an Italian flag and fascist standard celebrating the attainment of General Umberto Nobile's flight over the North Pole in the airship *Italia* in 1928. The subsequent crash of the airship led to a massive international rescue effort and set the stage for Roald Amundsen's final entry into the history books as he

ventured out on a hastily conceived and hazardous rescue flight. In Part One, Bown uses a similar approach to fire the reader's imagination by opening the first chapter with a scene of Amundsen and his men scurrying onboard their single-masted wooden vessel, *Gjøa*, in June 1903. They were taking a hasty leave of Christiania Fjord (now Oslo Fjord), with creditors closing in, trying unsuccessfully to stop what became an epic conquest of the Northwest Passage.

Some people are born to a life of adventure, or so it seems. A distaste for the ordinary and a hankering for testing boundaries are in their nature. In that way, Amundsen reminds me of his contemporary Danish Arctic explorer and adventurer, Einar Mikkelsen. Amundsen grew up in a country that after centuries of Danish domination simply slipped into Swedish hands and had yet to experience its own sovereign status. The author describes a young man whose scholastic ambitions were promoted mostly by his mother and whose interest in learning English led to a fascination with the fate of Sir John Franklin and the commander's fatal search for the Northwest Passage.

One man in particular provided Amundsen with exceptional examples of exploration daring: the scientist, explorer and diplomat, Fridtjof Nansen, who in 1888 led the first crossing of Greenland's ice cap by skis and sleds. In the following two chapters, the author describes other polar events that shaped Amundsen's future expedition life. In 1896, Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen returned to great jubilation in Norway after spending a winter in a hovel they built on Franz Josef Land. The two men had left their ship *Fram* during its slow ice drift over the Polar Basin, and many had given them up for dead.

The following year Amundsen joined the Belgian Antarctic expedition under the leadership of Adrien de Gerlache. The expedition was the first to winter in the Antarctic ice pack, an experience that taught Amundsen much about how isolation and dietary deficiencies affect both the minds and bodies of expedition members. One of his shipmates was Dr. Frederik Cook, a man who had many things to teach the eager Norwegian about survival and travel in polar regions.

In chapters 4 and 5, Bown takes the reader back to the hasty departure on *Gjøa* and the successful "conquest" of the Northwest Passage in the 70-foot, former herring fishing vessel. In a small bay on the southeast coast of King William Island, the seven men spent two winters before proceeding westward. Amundsen's keen observation of the neighbouring Netsilingmiut, their igloo building, winter clothing, and use of dog sled transportation served him well during later expeditions.

Part Two, chapters 6 to 9, is devoted to Amundsen's daring and successful conquest of the South Pole, a feat considered by most people as his most masterful accomplishment. The story has been told by many, scrutinized by many more, and received with acclaim or contempt, depending on the nationality of the reader. Bown presents the sequence of events, public response, and political reaction with sensible

objectivity. We learn about the surprise announcements by both Frederik Cook and Robert Peary, each claiming to have reached the North Pole, thus casting Amundsen's own polar ambitions into disarray. The author makes a strong claim in support of Amundsen's decision to plot a surprise attack on the South Pole masked as a brief diversion from his proclaimed North Pole plans. Supported by an impressive group of men, hard-working dog teams, and his own meticulous planning, Amundsen, Oscar Wisting, Sverre Hassel, Helmer Hansen, and Olav Bjaaland planted the Norwegian flag at the South Pole on December 14, 1911.

In Part Three, chapters 10 to 12, Bown describes the exultant return of the polar heroes (perhaps with the exception of Amundsen's presence in England, where the public still awaited news of Scott). Yet hanging over Amundsen's head was what must have seemed a dreary prospect, the resumption of his "interrupted" North Pole plans. *Fram* was no longer in useable condition, the pole had been claimed (however questionably), and funding was, as usual, hard to come by. One suspects that enthusiasm was also in short supply. However, there was light on the horizon; the age of flight was rapidly evolving, and hydrogen-filled dirigibles floated through the air over long distances with apparent ease. Undaunted by the changing times, Amundsen learned to fly. There remained, however, the business of the polar drift. A new vessel was required, and *Maud* was built to replace *Fram*. A plan to bring *Maud* to the polar pack through the Panama Canal had to be cancelled and replaced by another route through the Northeast Passage before the drift could begin. Amundsen's private life had become a bewildering maze of difficult affairs of the heart, messy economic episodes, and humiliating battles with friends and family. Even his long-time relation with his brother Leon eventually soured. The author presents a well-documented account of these turbulent years leading to Amundsen's essential abandonment of *Maud* before the end of its drift, reminiscent of Nansen's abandonment of *Fram*.

In Part Four, chapters 13 to 16, the author describes Amundsen's conversion from using dogs and ships to airborne transportation in the North. It had been Amundsen's great luck to find wealthy supporters in the nick of time. In chapter 14, we meet one of these last-minute economic saviours: Lincoln Ellsworth, son and soon-to-be heir of a wealthy American businessman. Airplanes were purchased, and Amundsen's spirit soared as the airborne expedition headed for the North Pole in two planes. Although the attempt was a disaster that could easily have cost all lives, neither Ellsworth nor Amundsen was discouraged. They now cast their eyes to Italy and the purchase of Colonel Nobile's airship *N-1*, renaming it *Norge*. Unfortunately the fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, insisted that the expedition should be a joint Norwegian-Italian venture, with Nobile sharing the limelight. As described in chapter 16, *Norge* lifted off in May of 1926 from King's Bay, a place crowded with competitors vying to be the first to reach the North Pole. *Norge* not only became the first aircraft to pass over the pole, but proceeded to fly across the polar basin all

the way to Alaska. Once again there were festive crowds greeting Amundsen and his co-explorer Ellsworth. Nobile was less than delighted with the outcome and soon planned his own polar flight in *Italia*.

In Part Five, chapter 17, the author takes the reader on Amundsen's final journey, a hastily arranged and poorly planned attempt to locate and rescue Nobile and his crew, who had crashed in *Italia*, somewhere on their return to King's Bay. On June 18, 1928, the French Latham biplane with Amundsen and crew was observed by a Norwegian fisherman as the plane disappeared into a fog bank, never to be seen again.

As Stephen Bown points out in the epilogue, Amundsen packed an immense amount of adventure into his 56 years of life. He was one of the greatest explorers of his time. The author correctly notes that Amundsen's reputation and the often critical commentary made about him in the British and even the Norwegian press were very different from the enthusiastic reception he always enjoyed in the United States. The British love of heroic failure and Norwegian wariness of its new sovereign status in the world undoubtedly caused Amundsen to seek a warmer berth in America whenever he could. I highly recommend the book.

Peter Schledermann
#312, 9919 Fourth Street
Sidney, British Columbia V8L 2Z6, Canada
schleder@ucalgary.ca

ARCTIC SHOREBIRDS IN NORTH AMERICA: A DECADE OF MONITORING. Edited by JONATHAN BART and VICTORIA JOHNSTON. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-520-27310-8. Studies in Avian Biology 44. xiii + 302 p., 21 contributors, maps, appendices, references, index. Hardbound. US\$80.00.

For shorebird enthusiasts in North America, the 1990s were a stimulating time, culminating in the publication of the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan (Donaldson et al., 2000) and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (Brown et al., 2001). An offshoot of these collaborative efforts was the formation of the "Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring" (PRISM), whose goal was to estimate population sizes and trends of North American breeding shorebirds. As an early participant, I remember the initial discussions about the difficulties in monitoring shorebird populations whose annual life cycle can span continents. One scientist dismissed the idea that it was possible to adequately monitor North American shorebird populations, but one person, Jon Bart of the U.S. Geological Survey, stood out in his enthusiasm for tackling the issue of designing a rigorous and statistically valid shorebird monitoring program.

Jon, with a dedicated cadre of other biologists, was especially intrigued by the possibility of a monitoring program