

LANDS THAT HOLD ONE SPELLBOUND: A STORY OF EAST GREENLAND. By SPENCER APOLLONIO. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2008. Co-published with the Arctic Institute of North America. ISBN 978-1-55238-240-0. Northern Lights Series, No. 11. xx + 322 p., maps, b&w illus., glossary, bib. Soft-bound. Cdn\$34.95.

The author of this work introduces it as “an informal history of East Greenland” (p. ix). To enjoy this volume, which is well put together and divided into six more or less chronological chapters, the reader will need to ignore the several misconceptions that are embodied in the early pages of this volume (p. ix–xx).

The claim by the author that “its history has never been told” (p. ix) and by the publishers that this volume is the “only known overview of the history of this region” is somewhat inaccurate. Even discounting the numerous and varied histories of exploration in Danish handbooks and atlases, there are many accounts in English dealing with the parts of the region that comprise Apollonio’s expanded definition of “East Greenland.” Apollonio unfortunately complicates understanding of his volume by ignoring the established geographical divisions of Greenland (Fig. 1), and has extended his “East Greenland” or “east coast of Greenland” northwards to Kap Morris Jesup (p. xi). Peary Land features prominently in several chapters in this volume, but is geographically in North Greenland.

The history of East Greenland cannot be said to have been “neglected, overlooked, ignored” as Apollonio claims (p. ix); this generalization is manifestly untrue in Denmark, where there is an abiding interest in and demand for books about East Greenland. Briefly naming just a few of the works in English that describe exploration, Børge Fristrup’s impressive volume *The Greenland Ice Cap* (1966) describes all the early ice sheet crossings, as well as the later detailed work of the Expéditions Polaires Françaises under the leadership of Paul-Émile Victor; and John Haller’s geological description of northern East Greenland, *Geology of the East Greenland Caledonides* (1971), includes a 30-page history of geological exploration from 1822 (William Scoresby) up to 1958. Dan Laursen’s *The Place Names of North Greenland* (1972) provides very full details of all the expeditions that have visited North Greenland, and the English edition of Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen’s book on the 20th-century fox-trapping activities of Norwegians and Danes, *North-East Greenland 1908–1960: The Trapper Era* (2008), contains a substantial section on discovery and research in East Greenland from 1607 (Henry Hudson) up to the present day, as do the two previous editions of this book in Danish (published in 1994 and 2001). The Official Tourism Website of East Greenland ([www.eastgreenland.com](http://www.eastgreenland.com)) carries a 30-page summary of expeditions to East Greenland between 69° and 82° N latitude. Apollonio should have picked up at least some of these accounts in his research for this book, although it should be said that it is not obvious from their titles that these volumes include substantial histories of exploration.



FIG. 1. Map showing the geographical divisions of Greenland (Nord, Vest, and Øst = North, West, and East) and locations mentioned in the text. KML = Kap Morris Jesup, PL = Peary Land, KCL = Kronprins Christian Land, DLL = Dronning Louise Land, R = Rigny Bjerg, G = Gunnbjørn Fjeld, and KF = Kap Farvel.

Greenland was a colony of Denmark until 1953, when it became an integral part of the Danish realm. The double names used for towns in Greenland, such as Godthåb/Nuuk and Scoresbysund/Ittoqqortoormiit, have existed since the colonization period, with the Danish name given priority. The granting of Home Rule in 1979 led naturally to the Greenlandic names’ being given prominence; thus, town names became Nuuk/Godthåb and Ittoqqortoormiit/Scoresbysund. The Danish town names did not disappear, as Apollonio implies (e.g., p. 296), but since 1979 have gradually fallen into disuse. Both versions of the names are still found in modern Danish atlases of Greenland (Berthelsen et al., 1989; Jakobsen et al., 2000). Greenland retained its strong links with Denmark after 1979 (p. 297) not least because of Denmark’s substantial annual contribution to support the Greenland economy (the present-day annual grant is 3000 million D.Kr., ca. US\$500 million). Since 1979, usage of the Greenlandic name for Greenland, “Kalaallit Nunaat”

has certainly become much more common, but in Denmark it is still known as “Grønland” (or “Greenland” in English). I personally find it unhelpful that Apollonio uses “Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa” (e.g., p. 182) for the archipelago north of Russia that was known (and still is, in many reference works) as “Franz Josef Land.” Fortunately, he did not apply this “politically correct” approach to the title of this volume; if he had, his subtitle would have been “A story of Tunu,” or in translation, “A story of the backside.”

The six chapters of this volume are in fact well written, with just the right balance of factual information for each exploratory phase. The successive waves of Eskimo migration are helpfully linked with the equivalent Eskimo cultures of North America. The Norse settlement voyages to Greenland are briefly covered, but unfortunately without discussion of the landmarks (Hvitserk and Blåserk) in the sailing instructions of the Icelandic sagas that Tornøe (1935) has convincingly argued are identical with the present-day Gunnbjørn Fjeld and Rigny Bjerg (Fig. 1). William Scoresby’s 1822 observations and mapping of the central part of East Greenland are rightly given prominence, as are the early Danish expeditions (by Wilhelm Graah, Gustaf Holm, Vilhelm Garde, Carl Ryder, and Georg Carl Amdrup) to southern East Greenland and the German (Karl Koldewey) and Swedish (A.G. Nathorst) expeditions to northern East Greenland. Strictly speaking, the activities of Robert Peary and Knud Rasmussen in Peary Land, which is geographically in North Greenland, are outside the scope of a history of “East Greenland,” but they are in fact well linked with the search expeditions that followed the tragic loss of three members of the 1906–08 Danmark Expedition.

The British expeditions of the 1930s aimed at exploration of East Greenland’s highest mountains are described individually; the highest summit, Gunnbjørn Fjeld—the Hvitserk of the Icelandic sagas—was climbed by a party led by geologist Lawrence Wager. Little is said, however, about Wager’s geological discovery of arguably the most famous layered intrusion in the world (see [www.skaergaard.org](http://www.skaergaard.org)). The photographic voyages of Louise Boyd are well described. (Her stunning photographs, published in two volumes [Boyd, 1935, 1948] by the American Geographical Society, exemplify the raw beauty of northern East Greenland that inspired Apollonio’s title.) The author clearly indicates the importance of Lauge Koch’s geological expeditions to northern East Greenland in the conflict between Denmark and Norway over sovereignty of East Greenland, which was settled in favor of Denmark by majority decision of the International Court at The Hague in 1933. However, the Danish and Norwegian fox-trapping era in East Greenland, which also played a vital part in the sovereignty conflict, is mentioned only briefly. The full story has recently been related by Mikkelsen (2008). Lauge Koch’s 1938 flights from Spitsbergen to North Greenland yielded important information about the interior of Peary Land, but failed to find the supposed land off the coast of East Greenland sighted by Ivar D. Papanin’s 1937 ice-drift expedition. Known informally as *Fata Morgana Land*, this mythical

land may have been the small group of islands 70 km east of the coast at 79° N that were rediscovered in 1993 by the German icebreaker *Polarstjern*. The Second World War saw Danes and Norwegians working together in defense of Greenland as members of the Sledge Patrol.

After the war, Lauge Koch’s geological expeditions continued on an annual basis until 1958, and Danish and Norwegian fox trapping resumed and continued until 1960. Eigil Knuth’s return with small groups to northern East Greenland and North Greenland is well covered, while the last major expedition described in detail is the British Expedition to northern East Greenland that surveyed and mapped Dronning Louise Land in 1952–54. Brief mention is made of the re-establishment of the Sirius Dog Sledge Patrol in 1950. This 12-member military group still exists, with its main task the patrolling of the uninhabited regions of East and North Greenland (not just the “northeast coast,” p. 291) to maintain Danish sovereignty. The moves that led to establishment of a Northeast Greenland National Park are well told. However, the surge of climbing expeditions visiting East Greenland (Fantin, 1969), notably the Stauning Alper NW of Scoresbysund and the inland mountainous regions north of Tasiilaq, are inadequately covered in just a few words (p. 290).

The few pages devoted to “East Greenland in our time” (p. 290–296) notably lack any reference to the major expeditions by the Geological Survey of Greenland (now GEUS), which from 1968 to 1998 geologically mapped all of East Greenland, as well as all of North Greenland. These self-supporting large-scale expeditions made extensive use of helicopters and Twin Otter aircraft. Published geological maps at scale 1:500 000 now cover all of Greenland, but a by-product of the East Greenland work has been the production of new topographic maps at 1:100 000 of all areas north of latitude 70° N. Nor is there any mention in this volume of the ice-core borings on the Inland Ice carried out from the 1970s onwards, many of them within the East Greenland sector, that have revolutionized studies of the last ice age and have great relevance to the present-day climate-warming debate. A minor detail, but it is not only Tasiilaq that has acquired a tourist office (p. 303), but also Ittoqqortoormiit, which can no longer be said to receive “relatively few visitors” (p. 296). An average of 15 cruise ships now call at Ittoqqortoormiit/Scoresbysund annually, landing upwards of 1000 passengers each year.

There are numerous minor errors with respect to the place names on maps and in the text, but they do not affect the understanding of the narrative. Apollonio is not to blame for the sometimes confusing usage adopted by the Place Name Committee for Greenland, that names given after persons are always in two words (e.g., Gunnbjørn Fjeld, Watkins Bjerge; p. 88). Nor could Apollonio know that the Committee modernized the original name “Loch Fine” (p. 16, 82) to “Loch Fyne” and approved Scoresby’s original “Liverpool Kyst” (p. 74) as “Liverpool Land.” Furthermore, although Milne Land is an island, it has never been known as “Milne Ø” (p. 74), and the name of the island Shannon was perhaps

strangely approved in its present one-word form, rather than the more logical “Shannon Ø” (p. 16). The Greenlandic names have nearly all been correctly translated into English as far as I can judge, although the name ‘Ittoqqortoormiit’ (for the town Scoresbysund) that Apollonio indicates as meaning “the people living in big houses” (p. 296) is not a new name; it is a modernized spelling of the original colony name, Igtorqortôrmît, which in 1955 was translated as “those that live at the place with one large house,” a reference to the earliest days of the colony, when the priest and the governor both lived in the only large house.

The photographic illustrations in Apollonio’s book are nearly all from historical sources, and many seem to have poor contrast, notably the very first photograph (opposite p. xv) of the boat *Alabama*. This volume would have been greatly improved by the inclusion of a few modern colour photographs; none of those reproduced here give a true impression of the glory and splendour of East Greenland, of the “lands that hold one spellbound” of the title. Despite my critical comments, I commend Spencer Apollonio for the excellent job he has done putting this volume together from the sources he used. This book will probably appeal mostly to North American readers since Europeans and Danes interested in Greenland will have easier access to some of the other sources cited.

#### REFERENCES

- Berthelsen, B., Mortensen, I.H., and Mortensen E., eds. 1989. Kalaallit Nunaat/Grønland atlas. Pilersuiffik: Grønlands Hjemmestyre.
- Boyd, L.A. 1935. The fiord region of East Greenland. Special Publication of the American Geographical Society 18. 357 p.
- . 1948. The coast of Northeast Greenland. Special Publication of the American Geographical Society 30. 339 p.
- Fantin, M. 1969. Montagne di Groenlandia. Bologna: Tamari editori.
- Fristrup, B. 1966. The Greenland ice cap. Copenhagen: Rhodos.
- Haller, J. 1971. Geology of the East Greenland Caledonides: London: Interscience.
- Jakobsen, B.H., Böcher, J., Nielsen, N., Guttesen, R., Humlum, O., and Jensen E., eds. 2000. Topografisk atlas Grønland. Atlas over Danmark Serie II, Bind 6. Copenhagen: Kort & Matrikelstyrelsen.
- Laursen, D. 1972. The place names of North Greenland. Meddelelser om Grønland 180(2).
- Mikkelsen, P.S. 2008. North-East Greenland 1908–60: The trapper era. Cambridge: Scott Polar Research Institute.
- Tornøe, J. 1935. Hvitserk og Blåserk. Norges Geografisk Tidsskrift 5:429–443.
- FREE SPIRITS: PORTRAITS FROM THE NORTH. By BERN WILL BROWN. Toronto, Ontario: Novalis Press, 2007. ISBN 978-2-89507-900-2. 146 p., b&w illus., colour plates. Softbound. Cdn\$18.95.

For those who read and enjoyed Brown’s previous book, *Arctic Journal: A Fifty Year Adventure in Canada’s North* (1999), also published by Novalis, his new book, though smaller and slimmer, will come as a welcome addition to northern libraries. Whereas *Arctic Journal* chronicled Bern Will Brown’s five decades of travel and living in northwestern Canada, *Free Spirits* presents 22 short stories focused largely on northern characters that Brown (rather an impressive northern character himself) either met or heard of during his travels through the North. These carefully chosen tales cover topics ranging from misadventure to outstanding deeds: they tell of trappers and traders, herders and explorers, clergy and prophets, sailors and artists, always with a warm, respectful, and sometimes affectionate presentation.

Born in Rochester, New York, in 1920, Brown was ordained as an Oblate missionary in 1948 and sent to Fort Norman, Northwest Territories. Over the next 14 years, Father Brown travelled widely throughout the Northwest Territories and northern parts of the western provinces, taking mission assignments at Fort Franklin (now Deline), Camsell Portage, Uranium City, Nahanni Butte, and Aklavik. In 1962, he was assigned to start a mission in the small, remote Hare-Slavey community of Colville Lake, where he built a beautiful log church. In 1971, he received permission from Rome to leave the Oblate order to marry, and he and his wife, Margaret Steen, still live in Colville Lake today, residing in a successful fishing lodge, also built of logs, which attracts wealthy fishermen from across North America. Indeed, Brown’s building skills are impressive, and he has left a legacy of churches in many of the communities to which he was posted. As a pilot and owner of his own amphibious aircraft, Bern travelled widely throughout the North to investigate historical places and events and visit friends and strangers. It was only recently that Brown, well into his eighties, gave up flying on his own. Today, he is probably best known as an artist, depicting northern landscapes, people, places and events in his paintings. He is a photographer and filmmaker, and his 35 mm slides and 16 mm film have recently been acquired by the NWT Archives (PWNHC, 2008). He recently self-published a beautiful collection of 100 of his colour photographs (Brown, 2008).

*Free Spirits* starts with a lengthy foreword written by Frederick Miller, a former editor of *Oblate Missions* magazine, to which Brown was a frequent contributor. Miller provides a detailed, interesting, and warm biography of Brown and his accomplishments, which measures very well against the stories of other “characters” in the book. In an Author’s Note, Brown explains that most of the stories were told to him in person, and it was his practice to make notes of the encounter once he got home, though in a few instances, he recorded interviews on tape. The stories range

A.K. (Tony) Higgins  
Senior Research Geologist  
Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland (GEUS)  
Øster Voldgade 10, DK-1350  
Copenhagen K, Denmark  
akh@geus.dk