

THE HORIZONTAL EVEREST: EXTREME JOURNEYS ON ELLESMERE ISLAND. By JERRY KOBALENKO. Toronto: Penguin-Viking, 2002. xvi + 277 p., maps, b&w illus., glossary, selected readings, index. Hardbound. Cdn\$35.00; US\$29.00.

Ellesmere Island is the world's tenth largest island and part of Canada's High Arctic archipelago in the territory of Nunavut. To put this into a simpler context, Jerry Kobalenko locates Ellesmere for his readers by saying, "Think of the little metal disk that sits on top of a globe: Ellesmere is under that" (p. xiii). Although the book does not explicitly state an objective, it is my view that one could simply be the theme of home: "Home is not where you live, it's where you belong. To me, the cold of Ellesmere Island was invigorating, its solitude lyrical" (p. xiii). Having travelled 3500 human-powered miles over Ellesmere Island during the span of 15 years, Kobalenko thinks of Ellesmere as home, the place where he feels the most comfort.

Focusing on Ellesmere Island as home, Kobalenko discusses topics ranging from history to biology, anthropology to adventure tourism, all loosely brought back to home and the notion of extremophiles. While on the Canadian Coastguard icebreaker *Pierre Radisson*, Kobalenko likens himself to the scientists aboard, in that at each moment they were consumed with a search for meanings in their own field. "I gazed through binoculars at the distant coast of Ellesmere and recalled the many times its extremes had gripped me with a similar magnificent obsession" (p. xvi), and "sometimes I wanted to embrace every inch of Ellesmere's 76,600 square miles" (p. 258).

Each chapter embraces and explores a different, but interconnected, aspect of Ellesmere as home. This combination of personal narrative, historical account, present research, plus a smattering of adventure is reminiscent of Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams* (1986) or more recently Kieran Mulvaney's *At the Ends of the Earth* (2001). *The Horizontal Everest* makes an encounter with Ellesmere accessible to all; Kobalenko's storytelling is rich in observation and entertaining to the reader throughout.

The first chapter captures the reader's interest with general information that forms a foundation for the rest of the book. Discussion of the 13 adventure motives of Wilfrid Noyce (1958) provides an excellent transition to the author's later examination of similarities between polar travel and mountaineering, but also gives food for thought: "we discover that the happiest state lies near the edge of our capabilities, and extreme journeys take us to that edge" (p. 21).

The possible root of Kobalenko's Ellesmere obsession could be murder. Specifically, Chapter 3 discusses the circumstances behind the 1970 death on iceberg T3 and the 1914 death of Inuit guide Peeawahto. The real strength of Kobalenko's research is bringing some of these little-known stories and pictures to light. Kobalenko shows his great respect for Inuit travellers throughout the book, but one anecdote is particularly illuminating. Regarding the

Macmillan and Green expedition, Kobalenko discusses the explorers' fancying themselves as "leading the happy-go-lucky, childlike Eskimo... little did they know that the Greenlanders who accompanied them were really the distinguished ones. It was as if Peary, Nansen, Sverdrup, Amundsen, and Shackleton were all part of the same expedition" (p. 40).

The debate over one of the Arctic's great sagas—the discovery of the North Pole, or Peary versus Cook—is interwoven with some of Kobalenko's own troubles with group dynamics during a Soviet-era expedition. Chapter 4 is filled with a number of good stories, which also bring Everest back into the picture. Ward Hunt Island is described as the "Everest Base Camp of North Pole expeditions" (p. 81). Chapter 5 continues to consider group dynamics and conflict, now relating to Nansen and Sverdrup, as well as some of Kobalenko's more recent travel companions. Under the guise of discussing Arctic wildlife, Chapter 6 drifts to yet another Ellesmere partnership gone amuck: that of Mech and Brandenburg. Kobalenko reveals the contributions of both to understanding Ellesmere's wolf populations, and as he does so, the underlying discussion drifts to many other wildlife species and the business of outdoor photography, the "four-footed Hollywood" (p. 111). Chapter 7, entitled "Inanimate things," is Kobalenko's examination of his connection to the scenery and landscape of Ellesmere, with a historical twist. Places and stories from Greely's 1884 expedition are examined and inanimate objects, such as the rock at Alexandra Fiord, provide links to botany tales. Chapter 10 fluctuates between Nares' 1875 expedition and modern-day research by botanist Josef Svoboda.

If murder drew Kobalenko to his Ellesmere obsession, the fates of missing explorers seem to have kept him under Ellesmere's spell. The expeditions of Björling and Krüger are discussed throughout Chapters 8 and 9, and the author ends: "I find myself turning my attention more and more to other unsolved High Arctic disappearances. Once inside the Arctic Triangle, it seems there is no way out" (p. 187). Here, as in the entire book, he makes wonderful connections between historic and recent travels.

People are the focus of the final three chapters. Modern-day people involved with Alert and listening to Soviet radio signals, those involved with the wreck of Boxtop 22, the RCMP patrols of Stallworthy, and Kobalenko's own re-tracing of RCMP patrols. Chapter 12 gives "they, the people," as the chapter is titled, the respect they deserve in the region. The fates of Dorset and Thule peoples are discussed, as is the only Inuit migration of historic times. When examining recent RCMP patrols, attention is given to Nukapinguaq, "the most celebrated of all Greenland guides, a Tenzing Norgay of the High Arctic" (p. 231).

Overall, Kobalenko has done his homework for this book. He has visited many villages, spent time in all the major research libraries and probably talked to just about everyone with a story to tell about the island. Quality black-and-white photographs, both the author's and his-

torical reproductions, provide excellent additions to the writing by allowing the reader to “see” the island and its explorers. The maps, both at the beginning and throughout the chapters, are another matter, as they frequently have a rough appearance and lack the detail necessary to follow the content being described.

Kobalenko has collated a wealth of historical facts, from the well-known to the unheralded, and added personal stories and anecdotes of his adventures to enthuse the reader. *The Horizontal Everest* is quite readable and would probably appeal to the generalist rather than the specialist; however, it is also a useful reference book, with an excellent annotated bibliography that makes it worth its price.

The Horizontal Everest is part travelogue of Kobalenko’s “home” and part well-researched history text; he has seamlessly woven the two together as very few authors have the ability to do. This is an account of one man’s love affair with a very special place, and Kobalenko outdoes scores of past Arctic history books in bringing the personalities and events to life. Ellesmere truly is a remarkable place, and the author manages to convey his sense of awe in a way that readers sitting in their “homes” (probably in far more hospitable circumstances) will appreciate.

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MAPS, MYTHS, and MEN: THE STORY OF THE VINLAND MAP. By KIRSTEN A. SEAVER. Stanford University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8047-4962-0. xx + 480 p., maps, b&w illus., notes, bib., index. Softbound. US\$24.95.

In the fall of 1965, I was working on a term paper for a geography class at the University of Alaska. As a topic I had chosen the Norse settlement period in Greenland. Naturally the publication of *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* by Yale University Press, in October of that year, and the Yale Library’s announcement that it had acquired a world map dated to about 1440 and showing the location of the Norsemen’s *Vinland*, were of immediate interest. From the fall of 1965 to the present, debates about the authenticity of the Yale publication and particularly the *Vinland* map have raged unabated.

The author of *Maps, Myths, and Men*, Kirsten Seaver, is a well-known and respected scholar, historian, and writer. An exhaustive researcher, Seaver has spent years gathering and assessing data for this book. The essence of her work is to show that the *Vinland* map is a modern fake and to expose the identity of the mapmaker. Seaver’s research covers a lot of ground and explores the most contentious cartographic issues: the source of the parchment, the wormholes, the scientific ink studies, and the relationship of the map to the *Tartar Relation* and a second document known as the *Speculum Historiale*.

One of the great challenges of presenting a fairly detailed account of a multitude of issues, especially those surrounding a topic well known to only the most ardent students, is organization. A second consideration has to be the targeted audience. Are they the relatively few people who already possess a thorough grounding in the topic, or a much wider readership that must be guided through a considerable amount of history in order to appreciate the validity of the arguments, the relative importance of the players, and the complexity of the mystery before them? Understandably, the author and the publisher have chosen the wider audience.

In the opening chapter, the author explores the concept of *Vinland* as first presented in the 13th-century *Vinland* sagas, as the southernmost of the three areas—*Helluland*, *Markland*, and *Vinland*—that the pioneering Norsemen discovered on the North American coastline. Seaver then introduces the reader to *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (1965), the circumstances surrounding its publication, and its authors, two British scholars from the British Museum (R. A. Skelton and George D. Painter) and an American curator at Yale (Thomas E. Marston). For seven years before publication, these three scholars had worked under a cloak of secrecy—an unfortunate arrangement, as it turned out. In subsequent chapters, a good many of the scientific arguments for or against authenticity of *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* have as their focus the conclusions drawn by these three men. A brief mention of another Yale acquisition, an incomplete portion of the *Speculum Historiale*, is important for the reader to keep in mind, as this text document will eventually be tied to the *Tartar Relation*.

A thorough review of the history of the medieval Norse in the North Atlantic follows this introduction. Aside from exposing the uninitiated reader to this period of Norse history, the material constitutes the means of evaluating the authors of *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation*. Seaver points out that although the authors were experts in their fields and of excellent reputation, they had no particular skills when it came to Norse history, nor did they have the language background required to access primary Nordic sources. Equally damaging was the authors’ inability, due to the secrecy clause, to consult with scholars possessing far greater and more current expertise than they had themselves. Not surprisingly, the publication was sharply criticized by experts such as Haroldur Sigurdsson,