

WITH A CAMERA IN MY HANDS: WILLIAM O. FIELD, PIONEER GLACIOLOGIST. By WILLIAM O. FIELD, as told to C. SUZANNE BROWN. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2004. xxiv + 184 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., index. Softbound. US\$29.95.

I suppose that every field of science develops its own set of characters, introverted geniuses, extroverted braggadocios, curmudgeons of every ilk, and just a few folk who are as close to being perfect companions and colleagues as anyone has any right to expect. In our sparsely populated field of glaciology we have our share of individuals in each category, and one of the finest in the last group was Bill Field (1904–94). Over the 25 years or so that I knew him, he was the kindest, most gentle, helpful, and modest glaciologist I met. It is indeed a pleasure to read the excellent biography that Suzanne Brown has generated from the tape recordings she made of Bill discussing his life and work, which the University of Alaska Press has produced as a handsome book.

Bill's main scientific interest throughout his life was in the fluctuations of Alaskan glaciers. His instrument of choice was the camera, and over a period of 60 years he amassed a vast collection of photographs, all carefully annotated and now archived. A few are housed in the World Data Center A for Glaciology, in Boulder, Colorado, but most of them reside in the Rasmuson Library of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. That collection includes many photographs taken by others since 1883, so that it is now a most valuable research resource.

Obviously the main reason for fluctuations in the extent of glaciers is changes in parameters of the climate. Bill realized this from the time of his first major expedition to Alaska in 1926, when he determined what changes had occurred in the glaciers of Glacier Bay since G.F. Wright, H.F. Reid, H.P. Cushing, G.K. Gilbert and others had documented their extent some 40 years earlier.

Over the next half-century, Bill did a prodigious amount of documenting of glacier termini positions, sometimes in league with other noted glacier photographers, particularly Austin Post. He worked with many climatologists and other "hard" scientists, such as Mark Meier, Malcolm Mellor, Cal Heusser, and Bert Crary, in offering explanations for the changes, but the excellent recording and cataloguing were Bill's own work. Within that field perhaps his most significant contribution, other than the photograph collection itself, is the three-volume work entitled *Mountain Glaciers of the Northern Hemisphere*, published in 1975.

Bill's offerings to glaciology were not confined to field-work. He was keenly aware of the need to generate a new class of scientists with glaciological training. When he returned to the American Geographical Society after his service work in World War II (which was largely making Arctic survival films for the Air Force), he initiated the Juneau Ice Field Research Project, employing students as his research workers. The emphasis changed a little when the program continued under Maynard Miller, but several of their students later worked as glaciologists with American parties in Antarctica,

both during the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957–58 and afterwards.

As Bill gained experience and reputation, he was called on increasingly to participate in major committee and planning work. In 1931, he became a member of the Committee on Glaciers of the American Geophysical Union, and in 1948, its Chairman for the following six years. With the establishment of the International Geophysical Year in 1954, he joined the U.S. National Committee as its glaciologist, and he continued with the Antarctic work for another decade. He became the first Director of the World Data Center A for Glaciology, one of three centers established to catalogue all the reports produced during the IGY, and he was a member of the National Academy's Committee on Antarctic Place Names. Here I should mention that the British in 1957 named a glacier in the Antarctic Peninsula for Bill, though he was too modest ever to mention it. Following the Alaska earthquake on Good Friday in 1964, Bill was appointed to a Panel on Hydrology charged with assessing the impact of the earthquake on the glaciers of Alaska. Over the next 20 years, he visited Alaska nine more times.

Suzanne Brown has done an excellent job in generating this book. Bill appears as the warm, considerate, friendly fellow that he was, knowledgeable about so many aspects of Alaskan glaciers and glaciologists. It is not a book on glaciology, however, and its scientific content is rather small. Nevertheless, as a reference work it is valuable in pointing the way to material on glacier variations.

I am pleased that Suzanne has added considerably to the biographical value of the book by including a 10-page section of "Historical Photographs," a selection from Bill's collection, dating back to 1883. I've often heard and read of H.F. Reid and H.P. Cushing and their work, but I've never seen their photographs before. Suzanne has also included a 10-page section of comparative glacier photographs, showing the retreat (and occasionally, the advance) of various glaciers during the first half of the 20th century. Virtually all the work of this kind is now being done from satellite photography—I'm sure that it's much more efficient, but what a pity that it doesn't involve such pleasurable time in the field!

Altogether Suzanne and the University of Alaska Press are to be congratulated on this production. It is a warm biography of a very significant person in Alaska's scientific growth. The book is well edited; the photographs are well selected and reproduced. The most significant "error" that I could discover was that Bill, while flying around McMurdo Sound, Antarctica, in 1957, remarked that he could see the Wright Valley, which in fact was not named until 1959.

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