

photographic account of the 1910–13 expedition under various conditions. Readers interested in a comparison to polar photography using the finest of modern equipment may refer to the recent book by Klipper (2008) as a notable example.

The “Afterword” by Hugh Brody (p. 275–280) is a well-done section on some philosophical aspects of capturing the moment of a situation that illustrates an obvious message and a tribute to those who made this collection a work of art. One of the more famous of many photographs from Scott’s expedition of 1910–13 is that of the five men at the South Pole (p. 14), taken several times with the men in different positions in the scene. As Brody mentions (p. 276), their facial expressions show their disappointment to find that Amundsen was there before them, as well as their experience of great hardship in getting to the Pole, and their knowledge that they are “going to suffer yet more.” No preparation or posing for such a picture was necessary, for the subjects dominate the message. A “Further Reading” list is a boost toward searching for books relevant to the subject of polar photography; illustrations of cameras in the SPRI collections are helpful for comparisons with what is available today; and an index on p. 285 helps to locate individuals of your choice. The quality of the sturdy paper and the reproduction of photos are excellent. The book was published in association with Polarworld, and can be found at <http://www.polarworld.co.uk>. The book accompanies a touring exhibition that opened in Cambridge, England, in 2008 and will be displayed in select galleries in the United Kingdom and United States. Overall, I recommend the book to polar historians and others who value the art of specialized photography and as a handsome addition to a personal library and coffee table.

REFERENCE

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THE BIG THAW: TRAVELS IN THE MELTING NORTH.

By ED STRUZIK. Mississauga, Ontario: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2009. ISBN 978-0-470-15728-2. x + 278 p., map, colour illus., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$29.95; US\$26.95.

Consider this book a collection of thoughtful dispatches from today’s front lines in what many regard as tomorrow’s war on global warming. Since 2006, the author has been “embedded” with scientific investigative teams deployed

across the Canadian Arctic. From these adventures, Ed Struzik combines vivid travelogues with his take on scientists’ current interpretations of their own findings. *The Big Thaw’s* first nine chapters are the resulting distillate. Its concluding tenth chapter and Epilogue step back from researchers’ trenches to some mid-latitude foci of geopolitical analysis. Thus distanced, the author puts scientists’ arcto-centric efforts into the context of international and global public policies—or the lack thereof.

Inevitably, readers calibrate the quality of writing by how it treats people and subjects common to their own and writers’ experiences. My calibrations include depictions of Andy Williams, mountain pilot extraordinaire (p. 65–68), Steve Blasco, geologist (p. 155), and the complex topics of vetting scientific activities by local game councils (p. 16) and traditional knowledge among indigenous residents of the Arctic (Chapter 7, p. 159–182). In each case, this author earns highest marks for combining accuracy, conciseness, fairness, and empathy with his human subjects.

In the dimension of breadth, *The Big Thaw’s* content also deserves praise. Struzik’s menu of natural history topics is analogous to the repertoire of a musical virtuoso. His topics range from the “iconic” polar bear and its variously beset populations (Chapter 1) to insidious microbes plaguing eider ducks and other species of wildlife (Chapter 5), and to matriarchal societies amongst red squirrels, the “chatterboxes” of the North (Chapter 9). In our age of specialization, we should revere the handful of generalists who open communications between scientists and non-scientists for substantive dialogue. Struzik’s book portrays the ruins of post-warming Arctic environments as what he might have called “A Dominion of Mosquitoes and Willows” (e.g., p. 208–218), in much the way that Jonathan Schell (1982) evoked an image of life surviving a nuclear war in his essay entitled, “A Republic of Insects and Grass.”

Struzik targets thoughtful citizens—especially of western European and North American nations—with a goal of swaying them from ignorance and apathy to action. This ambitious goal puts his work in distinguished company; we remind ourselves how many observers for so long have touted the imminent reality of contrasting human-induced global changes. On the rising tide of environmental concern in the second half of the last century, some scientists depicted in chilling detail the consequences of “nuclear winter” (e.g., Ehrlich and Sagan, 1984). A few years later, Asimov and Pohl (1991) explored threats of planetary warming by CO₂ and an array of other, more potent greenhouse gases. Some of their global examples are scarcely distinguishable from elements of Struzik’s catechism of more detailed Arctic examples: increased storminess (p. 61), sea level rise (p. 44–46), and increases in insect-borne and other southern diseases (p. 6).

To enjoy this book fully, overlook some lapses in copy-editing. Garry Clarke with a terminal ‘e’ is correct, despite contradictory text entries (p. 52, 75). The *Louis St. Laurent* transited the Northwest Passage from west to east (not east to west) in 1998, but, the account on p. 85 notwithstanding,

this transit direction was accomplished a decade earlier (cf. Bockstoce, 2003). Southern extremities of two continents are conflated as the “Cape of Good Horn” (p. 96). The pattern throughout of using antiquated units of measurement followed by their modern equivalents in parentheses is more distracting than helpful; however, distraction becomes irritation when incorrect conversions have eluded copy-editing, as, for example “. . . 4° Fahrenheit (5°C). . .” (p. 252).

A caution to other readers is that Struzik leaves limited room in his account for expressions of doubt and alternative explanations of the changes observed. “Now that man-made greenhouse gases are rapidly warming the Arctic. . .” (p. 5 in the Introduction) amounts to the author’s public profession of faith (admittedly shared by most scientists) in a complex web of cause-and-effect relationships. In a less competitive framework than funding-starved research into global change, continual doubt and re-examination of these relationships would strengthen ones that deserve belief as explanations, while downplaying those that are less predictively robust. Sentiments in the declaration above undoubtedly assured Struzik tribal acceptance for his embeddings with scientists along their figurative battlefield, where a camel’s nose under the tent flap would be a genuine nuisance. Without denying the realities of rapid Arctic environmental change, however, a small number of agnostics question part or all of the trinity of beliefs implied above: that CO₂ is the major determinant of change; that this greenhouse gas is traceable entirely to human-mediated releases into the atmosphere; and that warming is the single significant symptom of change. If any one of these assumed relationships is found wanting, mathematical modelers face re-tooling. Perhaps only curmudgeons like me will yearn for a bibliography or footnotes that would substantiate claims such as that prolonged cold can no longer be counted upon to kill spruce beetles (p. 73) and nestling peregrine falcons are succumbing to rain-induced hypothermia (p. 209).

Apart from these cautions, *The Big Thaw* is a valuable portrait and chronicle of opposing postures in global change intrigue during this first decade of the 21st century. It is particularly fortunate that this reportage is predominantly Canada-based, for Struzik reflects fairly other national and cultural perspectives, their history, and their development. It is difficult to imagine a U.S. chronicler (using myself as a blatant example of inadequacy in this regard) being as reciprocally fair to Canadian and other Western perspectives and historical development as he is. Doubters from within the scientific community may not feature prominently in *The Big Thaw*, but Struzik grants enough latitude to First Nations’ perspectives and to the resilient diversity they represent (p. 134–135; Chapter 7:159–182) that echoes of doubt and defiance persist in the form of “We’ll adapt as we have had to for centuries” (e.g., p. 16).

Of all the topics covered by *The Big Thaw*, the most promising for catalyzing meaningful discourse may be the five scenarios outlined in the final chapter (p. 237–242). Each underscores gaps in understanding and various forms and

extents of technological unpreparedness for dealing with new realities likely to result from Arctic environmental change.

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BODY AT THE MELBOURNE CLUB: BERTRAM ARMYTAGE, ANTARCTICA’S FORGOTTEN MAN.
By DAVID BURKE. Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-86254-833-6. xv + 170 p., map, b&w illus., appendix, bib., index. Softbound. AU\$27.95.

The story of Ernest Shackleton’s British Antarctic Expedition (BAE)—on which sledging parties made valiant attempts to reach the geographic South Pole and the South Magnetic Pole—has been told several times in recent years, with the emphasis varying between the entire expedition (Riffenburgh, 2004; Wilson, 2009) and the major participants, such as Professor T.W. Edgeworth David (Branagan, 2005) and Douglas Mawson (Riffenburgh, 2008). This book is a biography of Bertram Armitage, the expedition’s third Australian (along with David and Mawson), but one who played a far less significant role than his countrymen, and, unlike them, failed to become a national hero. In fact, his story ended in tragedy the year after the expedition’s return, when he committed suicide in his room at the elite Melbourne Club, an event that inspired the book’s title.

My initial impression, even before opening the book, was that the choice of Armitage for a biography was a bit odd. Although the cover matter, the introduction, and at points the main text attempt to justify this selection, by the time I had finished the book, my opinion remained the same: that there was not enough interesting or significant about Armitage to warrant a full biography.

Born in 1869, the fourth son in one branch of a large Victoria family that had grown wealthy through the wool industry, Armitage led an early life not dissimilar to those of countless others of the British Empire’s pampered social and economic elite. He loved riding, hunting, and shooting, and when he left Australia to attend the University of