

granddaughter Kathleen notes that Ellen was not put out by disarray or unusual situations, finding her teaching more important than household chores and even than writing letters. Fortunately, she did write, well and often, never allowing interruptions—sometimes weeks passed between her beginning and ending a letter—to stop the flowing accounts of her decade in Alaska a century ago.

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FLOWERS IN THE SNOW: THE LIFE OF ISOBEL WYLIE HUTCHISON. By GWYNETH HOYLE. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8032-2403-6. xv + 269 p., maps, b&w illus., appendices, notes, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$29.95.

*Flowers in the Snow* is a biography. Authors of most biographies provide a context in which readers are to understand, or at least become aware of, their subject's motivations. Hoyle's choice of context for her biography of Arctic botanist Isobel Hutchison is not so much the Arctic or botany, but the changing concept of "travels" and the revolution in social expectations for women in the first half of the twentieth century. This choice is evident in Hoyle's informative appendix, entitled "The literature of travel and adventure." It is also obvious from the map of northern North America in the introduction (facing p. 1): all non-American shores are represented with such fantasy that surely the geography of the Canadian Arctic is not a major theme of the book. Perhaps the map was drawn as an illustration of Isobel Hutchison's own atlas, which caused her travel itinerary north of 60° to have "some significant gaps, and more than a few questions marks" (p. 97).

Isobel Hutchison, in her own eyes, was a Lady traveler who happened to have learned botany at a young age, then botanized from home in Scotland, to Iceland, Greenland, Alaska, northern Canada, and later the European Alps. This she did in a period when men normally mounted expensive (and hence, fully funded), adventure-filled expeditions in these regions. As noted by Hoyle, Isobel's travels were not an adventurous litany of near disasters, but totally unorganized strings of friendships and opportunities. The reader is given here a recipe for cultural travel that can still be applied today: make friends and adapt. Isobel's northern achievements were sometimes overlooked because she succeeded in keeping hardships to a minimum.

*Flowers in the Snow* is also an essay. Hoyle's book is part of a series called *Women in the West*, published by the University of Nebraska Press. Most of the Arctic explorer books I have read are, to quote Hoyle (p. 222), of the "bluff, hearty, masculine adventure..." types. On opening

Hoyle's book, I may not have been prepared for something quite different. The reading of Hoyle's book can be somewhat introspective. Throughout she offers many clues on Isobel's upbringing, personality, and sexual ambiguity. By chapter four, I was enjoying both the intimacy and the social analysis of the biography. How did so many people help Isobel while she walked, sailed, dogsledded, and was flown over northern landscapes, whereas her contemporaries considered these same landscapes barren and uninhabited? Why did women of the early twentieth century travel for pleasure, whereas men explored for duty or money in the same remote regions of the world? Hoyle did not provide most answers, but she explored them. I found this informative and refreshing. Also enjoyable was Isobel's adaptability; her evolution from a shy and self-isolated girl to a friendly, open, and entertaining woman provides a leitmotiv to her biography.

So is there anything on the Arctic and botany in Hoyle's book? There is. Anyone acquainted with Arctic literature and northern history will appreciate Isobel Hutchison's life. She was witness to many changes. Possibly, Hutchinson's work and itinerary of 70 years ago would be hard to replicate today: river boats, dog-sledding routes, trade and patrol ships, HBC houses, and transcontinental rail service have now all but disappeared. Isobel witnessed the beginning of a new transportation age in northern regions: the age of air travel. She was also present at the height of social and cultural upheavals for the Inuit, Inuvialuit, and Aleutians. Hoyle's book offers a glimpse into a changing North. In addition, Isobel Hutchison's friends will surprise any fan of Arctic exploration literature. Among others, she met Rasmussen and corresponded regularly with Stefansson. Botanists will be pleased to meet, through Isobel, Dr. Porsild (the elder) in Greenland and Dr. Porsild (the younger) at Reindeer Station near the Mackenzie Delta.

*Flowers in the Snow* is informative and at times entertaining. It can be recommended reading for general study on the history of travel. I would recommend it to any enthusiast of northern biographies, with the advice that the reader should be open to introspective moments.

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