THE QUIET LAND: THE ANTARCTIC DIARIES OF FRANK DEBENHAM. Edited by JUNE DEBENHAM BACK, with Foreword by SIR VIVIAN FUCHS. Huntingdon, UK: Bluntisham Books, 1992. 207 p., drawings and photos. Hardbound. £24.95; US$50.00.

History has rarely accorded as much attention to a single expedition as that given to the British Antarctic (Terra Nova) Expedition of 1910-13 led by Captain R.F. Scott. Frank Debenham, an Australian, was taken on by Scott as junior geologist. His diaries have been lovingly edited by his daughter June Back, who has supplemented them with extracts from letters and explanatory details. The diary entries were intermittent and not written for publication, but they retain all the freshness and enthusiasm of a young man embarking on the greatest adventure of his life. While the fate of Scott and the Southern Party has held centre stage for 80 years, very substantial scientific results were obtained by field parties exploring the coasts of Victoria Land.

Debenham, or Deb, as he was known, was a member of the four-man Western Party during the first summer and the second Western Party during the second summer. He was a master of plane-table surveying as well as an astute geologist. The diary contains many drawings and sketch maps. The sketch maps are clear but of uncertain scale and orientation, so I found it easiest to follow the party's sledging routes by using the full array of modern large-scale topographic and satellite image maps. Both parties made the exciting discovery of mummified seals far inland in the so-called dry valleys. Deb was always perceptive in his understanding of natural phenomena. He found a headless fish on top of the McMurdo Ice Shelf and later used the finding to formulate a theory on how the ice shelf was formed. Half a century on, a New Zealand glaciologist claimed to have "proved" the theory wrong, but later had to eat his words. Deb had it right.

He was a romantic as well as a scientist, and this is reflected in his writings: "This morning the clouds hung like candle snuffers over Mount Discovery." Instead of camps I, II, and III, they had Camp Labyrinth, Honeycomb Camp, Mushroom Camp, Alcove Camp and many other imaginative names. For the reviewer — an Antarctic traveller from another age — the narrative carries an astonishing yet unspoken acceptance of high levels of risk as an occupational hazard. Clothing was grossly inadequate, bad falls were common, and they frequently dropped (unroped) into crevasses. Snow blindness and frostbite — virtually unknown today — were commonplace. Nowadays we speak of the "myth" of hardship in the Antarctic; but hardship was no myth in 1912.

Followers of the story will know that Scott believed, as did his 19th-century forebears searching for a Northwest Passage, that naval discipline was the best way to hold the expedition together. Although they were crammed into one hut during the winter, the officers and scientists were in the "wardroom," whereas "the men" occupied the "mess deck." Deb abided by the convention: with few exceptions, "the men" are described by their surnames.

Inevitably, readers will be interested in Deb's assessment of his companions. Scott is "Captain Scott" or "the Owner," whereas Dr. Wilson and the scientists are addressed by their first names. After the autumn journey in 1911, a telling diary entry reads: "If the Owner will consult the senior men I think [the southern journey] can be done but if he keeps them in the dark as they were on this depôt trip things are likely to go wrong." And again, "Birdie [Bowers] thinks [Amundsen] has *no* chance of getting to the Pole. I must say I think he has, if anything, got a better chance than we have." Scott says in a lecture: "I don't know whether it is possible for men to last out [75 days on the plateau], I almost doubt it."

In a letter from Deb to his mother:

> I must tell you what I think of [Scott]. I am afraid I am very disappointed in him, tho' my faith dies very hard. There's no doubt he can be very nice and the interest he takes in our scientific work is immense, he is also a fine sledger himself and as organiser is splendid. But there I'm afraid one must stop. His temper is very uncertain and leads him to absurd lengths even in simple arguments. In crises he acts very peculiarly. In one, where Atkinson was lost for 6 hours in a blizzard, I thought he acted splendidly but in all others I have been quite disgusted with him. What he does is often enough the right thing I expect, but he loses all control of his tongue and makes us all feel wild. . . . But the marvellous part of it is that the Owner is the single exception to a general sense of comradeship and jollity amongst all of us. We all get on simply splendidly. We are a really jolly party, such as I never dreamt 25 men could be, living as we do. . . .
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> Dr Wilson — good old Bill — is easily the best man we have in every way and I think I have never met a man I admired more. Thoroughly sane, quiet, self-controlled, he is the very antithesis to the Owner. . . .
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> Birdie (Lieut. Bowers) comes next in seniority and he is the marvel of the party. Imagine a fat little man with a perfectly immense nose and red bristly hair, unquenchable spirits and energy, and marvellous endurance. The Owner thinks he is the hardiest man ever down here. . . . He is great fun, interested in everything and a great tease and teasee. He and I have fearful arguments and rag each other mercilessly.

The expedition's second winter was dominated by speculation about the fate of the southern party: "It has been tacitly accepted that [the loss of Scott's party] must *not* intrude itself upon us, and consequently we are able to throw it off at times and behave as if it were not intruding." Deb became the expedition's official photographer; a selection of his photographs adorn the book.

A final chapter by the editor relates something of Deb's life after the expedition. He was sent to Cambridge to write up his scientific results, joined up in 1914, was wounded at Salonika and sent home to recover. Returning to Cambridge in 1919, he continued preparing his Antarctic work for publication. Then together with other polar contemporaries, he drew up a memorandum for the trustees of the Scott Memorial Fund suggesting a Scott Polar Research Institute. The institute was launched in 1920 with Deb as *de facto* (later appointed) director. Deb always hoped that as funds became available the institute would expand and take on a wider role in polar research. Little did he imagine that this expansion would go far beyond his most fervent hopes.

This book is for all devotees of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. It is beautifully printed, painstakingly edited, and concludes with a bibliography of Debenham's publications.

Charles Swithinbank
Scott Polar Research Institute
University of Cambridge
Cambridge, England
CB2 1ER

MESSAGES FROM EARTH: NATURE AND THE HUMAN PROSPECT IN ALASKA. By ROBERT B. WEEDEN. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992. 189 p., maps, illus., refs., index. Softbound. US$16.95.

Robert Weeden's *Messages from Earth* is itself a message that should be conveyed not only to inhabitants of northern climes, for whom it is primarily intended, but also to humankind in general, regardless of latitude or attitude. The author avails of 30 years of experience, insight, and scholarship, gained mostly while a professor of natural resources at the University of Alaska, to produce a thoroughly captivating book. The result is a primer on living "gently, comfortably, and sustainably" in the North. More importantly, however, Weeden stresses that such an existence is untenable unless founded and guided by an ethic towards nature. *Messages from Earth* outlines this ethic — an ethic based on ideals but couched in the realities of nature and the demands and processes of a modern society.

The tone of *Messages* is set in the introduction. There the author brings to sharp focus the inherent conflicts that have arisen worldwide between cultural evolution, with its speed and flexibility, and genetic evolution, with its vastly slower adaptive response time. Weeden points out that the most universal failing of recent cultural evolution is its inability to adjust its numerous forms to the rhythms, character, and physical limitations of regional environments, but he believes that humanity is beginning to realize that exploitative societies have "had their day" and that human survival now depends on a dramatic reorientation of thought and behavior.