

**ANTARCTIC COMRADES — AN AMERICAN WITH THE RUSSIANS IN ANTARCTICA.** By GILBERT DEWART. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989. 194 p. plus 10 p. glossary of scientific terms and Russian words. Hardbound. US\$25.00.

Gilbert Dewart is a geophysicist who first worked in the Antarctic in 1957 during preparations for the International Geophysical Year (IGY-1958). There he participated in establishing the American Wilkes scientific station, at which he mainly operated long-period seismographs.

Shortly after returning from his year on Antarctica he was invited to participate in a U.S.A./U.S.S.R. Antarctic scientific exchange program, which had been initiated during the IGY but not renewed in 1959. In December 1959 Dewart, carrying a large collection of American books, records and other cultural items, geophysical equipment, including his prized Worden gravimeter, and with just a few months of Russian language training, joined a Soviet ship, the *Kooperatsiya*, in Cape Town, South Africa, for a two-week sail to the Soviet Mirnyy base on Antarctica.

Dewart's book is a well-written, interesting chronicle of his preparations for, voyage to and activities on Antarctica. It features cultural, political and scientific activities over the year. The book is written so that it can be understood and enjoyed both by laymen and scientists of various disciplines.

Included in this chronicle are his induction into the exchange, preparations, sea voyage from Cape Town to Mirnyy, life at the settlement, trips out to survey large ice shelves, a tragic fire at the base, and finally his four-month-long trip with a tractor train from Mirnyy to the Soviet Vostok station, located at the south magnetic pole, and which then had the coldest recorded temperatures on earth (-88.3°C). He includes a plethora of stories concerning daily activities, discussions on culture and politics, accounts of parties, and his progressive acceptance by the group and his evolution into speaking and even thinking in Russian.

The book contains numerous essential scientific terms and a smattering of transliterated Russian. Most of the terms are familiar to general science practitioners, and much of the Russian is obvious. However, Dewart includes a ten-page glossary of both types of terms, which I used frequently. This style tends to add real character to the book and to provide interesting material for the more scientifically oriented readers.

A favourite theme of Dewart's is his relationship and interaction with his Soviet colleagues. Like any group of people of any nationality, they had their oddballs, ideologues and the rare unfriendly type. His main conclusion, however, is that despite large differences between Western and Soviet systems, people are people and they are all basically warm, friendly and professional and are all striving to do their best.

Two of Dewart's chapters depart from the chronicle-style account and enter into the area of speculation. These are "Conversations with the Comrades" and "Explorations of the Mind." In these chapters he launches into a speculative assessment of the nature and problems with the Soviet system, and to some degree with the mind-set of the people under such a regime, taking into consideration their history of wars and tyranny. Having worked with Soviets on a scientific exchange since 1986 and having in the process been saturated with comments on Soviets and their system, I found a lot of this repetitive and some conclusions debatable. If you are like me, then skip these chapters; if not, read them. You may enjoy them, since they are, after all, based on an intense year of direct one-on-one experience.

The parts of Dewart's account that I particularly like are his descriptions of the sailing trip to Mirnyy, winter life at Mirnyy and his trip to Vostok, "the Pole of Cold."

On the ship voyage to Mirnyy, Dewart's account certainly opened my mind to the peculiarities and distinct character of this part of the world and wetted my appetite for Antarctica. During this voyage they crossed the Antarctic Convergence zone of the Southern Ocean.

Here warm ocean water meets cold polar water, producing an upwelling that brings an abundance of nutrients to the surface. When the *Kooperatsiya* crossed this zone there was a sudden increase in wildlife — pigeons, whales, petrels — and soon after this they began to encounter Antarctic icebergs, on which they saw Weddell seals and Adelie penguins. Dewart also introduces a science flavour to the trip: as they passed over the Atlantic-Indian Ridge, he comments on their collective awe at this phenomenon, given the rapidly evolving concepts in science on the significance of such features at that time.

The chapter on life at the base, mostly during the long winter, was quite enjoyable. Dewart was a compulsory guest at all parties, at which human nature is often at its best. He relates a few instances where the collected assembly quickly and effectively "disposed" of the ideologues bent on arguing with Dewart. The comradeship, the food and the whole adventure of it all made me envious of Dewart's experience. Dewart was also a willing participant in the ritual of the Soviet *banya* — a weekly cultural event that combines sanitation with recreation. *Banyas* are a real focus of socializing and relaxation in Soviet society that should be adopted by all cultures. I also enjoyed Dewart's description of the environment around the camp — storms, icebergs, the sea ice and its polar fog, the disappearance of the sun, the "blue-out" of sea and sky, atmospheric optical peculiarities of the arctic regions, and so on.

The final part of Dewart's stay on Antarctica involved a four-month trip with a tractor train to the south magnetic pole, where the Soviet Vostok station is located. They made the trip with three huge, 27-ton, over-snow tractor vehicles, *Kharkovchnaka*. They lived and worked on these monsters in mobile huts mounted on the tractors or on sleds, a *balok* in Russian (the American equivalent is a wanigan). Dewart makes you feel like a participant on the trip as you crawl at 5 km an hour across this immense hostile desert of ice and cold. The thickness of the polar ice cap was measured seismically whenever possible, and I was always amazed to read that once again they were at elevations of around 2-3 km, at which less than one-third of the material above the ocean was land mass and the rest was ice, all of which had accumulated in a real polar desert! During the trip the extreme cold made life difficult and they experienced numerous equipment failures (engines, wheel bearings, etc.). Eventually they attained their goal and were returned by air to prepare for their departure from Antarctica.

I enjoyed reading this book — I read it in record time, which is a reflection on how it captivated my interest. This book will be enjoyed by a broad cross-section of adventurous people, but particularly those who work in the polar regions and have been infected by its amazing climate and by the comradeship of people who share this experience.

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**SADIE BROWER NEAKOK, AN IÑUPIAQ WOMAN.** By MARGARET B. BLACKMAN. Seattle: University of Washington Press; Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990. 294 p., 32 black and white photos, appendix, end notes, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$19.95.

In recent years, Westerners have become increasingly conscious of Euro-centric views that have dominated our understanding of arctic Alaska. Indeed, even now much of our knowledge of Native life is filtered through the perspectives of non-Native North Americans. By contrast, the oral history *Sadie Brower Neakok, an Iñupiaq Woman* engages the reader in a compelling account of life on Alaska's North Slope as viewed by a well-known Native woman. Spanning the change-filled decades of the nineteen-teens to the mid-1980s, it provides a valuable counterbalance to the wealth of material that has been written by Westerners.