

TRUE NORTH. By ELLIOT MERRICK. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. (Reprinted from the 1933 edition published by Charles Scribner's Sons.) 353 p., map, photos. Hardbound, US\$29.95; Softbound, US\$9.95.

Travel journals written by explorers, traders, scientists, wilderness enthusiasts and others are common in the literature on the North. They have a typical form or genre as narratives of discovery centering on a quest for a place or experience and richly describing the pace, hardship and lessons of a dramatic adventure. Usually composed in an informal, spontaneous style, journals are compelling to read not only because they are original and convey the sense of immediate challenges but also because they are closely personal, like a private diary. A portrait of the author emerges from his reactions to stress and insights on natural environmental conditions. These features draw readers to share in the experience of discovery and make travel journals, whether old or recent, constantly popular to the general public.

True North is Elliot Merrick's journal of a trek into the Labrador interior accompanying a local trapper to his customary trapping grounds for the fall season. The four-month expedition dominates the narrative, with short descriptions added of winter settlement and a spring trapping venture at the head of Lake Melville in central Labrador. A novice to wilderness survival, Merrick had a profound learning experience in northern travel and social relationships; undergoing a challenge was the essence of his quest.

Merrick sought meaning and purpose in his life after becoming disenchanted with his routine job in advertising and the urban pressures of New York. In 1928 he went to Labrador to work as a school teacher in North West River, a small village composed of families with mixed native and European ancestry known as Settlers and containing medical and educational facilities operated by the International Grenfell Association. There Merrick met and married Kay Austin, an Australian nurse employed in the Grenfell hospital. They were intrigued by the departure of trappers from the community over the fall season and managed to convince one trapper, John Michelin, to take them along into the country in September 1930. Over the next four months, they travelled about 700 miles to and from Michelin's trapping area in the watershed draining into the Grand (now Churchill) River.

In canoes loaded with equipment and food, North West River trappers headed inland by travelling upstream along the Grand River until a massive waterfall midway on their route forced them to carry all their goods up a very steep 600-foot trail known as Big Hill portage. On the plateau above Grand Falls, they followed a network of rivers and lakes to Michelin's cabin, keeping an "almost bewildering" pace of paddling, poling their canoes in shallow water, and portaging at impassable rapids or between lakes. Speed was necessary because the trappers could travel more easily so long as early winter ice did not block the rivers and lakes on their route. The journey demanded incredible strength and endurance; it was a gruelling introduction to the Labrador environment for the Merricks.

A trapper's territory was defined by a modest log cabin and a "fur path" consisting of a line of traps and several temporary shelters, called tilts, that were within about five hours' walk of each other. Trappers normally lived alone and occupied their time by tending traps, hunting fresh game to supplement their meager imported food supplies and cutting wood for fuel. Bush life was simple, sparse and physically strenuous. The Merricks quickly learned the basic skills and techniques for daily chores and contributed as much as they could to maintaining themselves at Michelin's cabin.

Stripped to the barest essentials, Elliot Merrick met his quest by discovering the interchange between primitivism and civilization. His romantic notions of peace and beauty were shattered by

the realities of physical exhaustion, pain and hunger. Matching hardship, however, Merrick found new pleasure from endurance, independence and companionship. The trappers' existence in the hinterland depended on products of civilization: axes, guns, flour, tea and other fundamental amenities. Even with these few items, the Labrador wilderness presented more threats than it offered gifts. Trappers raced back to their homes and families at North West River in late December, driven by a shortage of food and the danger of being stranded by winter snowstorms. The five-week-long walk over river ice, towing toboggans loaded with furs and supplies, was even more grueling than the canoe journey inland.

By travelling with local trappers, Merrick had a unique opportunity to witness the details and rhythm of a seasonal activity particular to the Settler or Metis families of Labrador. Montagnais Indians living in the area did not claim trapping areas or spend periods alone in the interior, as did the North West River trappers. They crossed the landscape in family groups, stopping to trap and hunt in various places and making an occasional visit at the Settlers' cabins. Merrick's vivid account of the trappers' lifestyle, including their folklore and legends, is a valuable reference for understanding the Labrador Settler culture and for comparisons of Metis and aboriginal adaptations across the North.

Elliot Merrick was certainly true to his Labrador experience. While he admired local residents, he realized that he could never equal them and saw the limits to his capabilities. He also valued his strengths and gained immeasurably from a new self-confidence and conviction that he could command a future in any environment. The North taught him well.

Merrick describes a pattern of activity and lifestyle that is now only a memory to native Labrador residents. Much of the drainage area where people once trapped and hunted was flooded to create a reservoir for the Churchill Falls hydro-electric generating station, opened in 1972. A rough gravel road runs parallel to the Churchill (Grand) River from Goose Bay, near North West River, across to western Labrador. For readers familiar with the region, these changes make Merrick's account of the trappers' hard-won route into the interior especially poignant; their footsteps are shadows in a vanishing wilderness.

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NORTHERN ATHAPASKAN ART: A BEADWORK TRADITION. By KATE C. DUNCAN. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989. 224 p., 44 colour plates, 186 black-and-white illus., appendix, notes, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$45.00.

Kate Duncan's objective is to provide a greater understanding of the Northern Athapaskan people and the history of their costume ornamentation. *Northern Athapaskan Art* begins with a collection of brilliantly coloured photographs depicting ornately decorated costumes and accessories. The first chapter provides an overview of the origin, location, lifestyle and history of the Northern Athapaskan people in general. Early-contact subarctic Athapaskan art includes incised bone objects, bark containers, quillwork, beadwork and appliqué (chapter two). The focus on