

RUSSIAN EXPLORATION IN SOUTHWEST ALASKA: THE TRAVEL JOURNALS OF PETR KORSAKOVSKIY (1818) AND IVAN YA. VASILEV (1829). Edited and introduced by JAMES W. VANSTONE; translated by DAVID H. KRAUS. The Rasmuson Library Historical Translation Series Vol. IV. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1988. vii + 120 p., 13 maps, bib., index. Softbound. US\$15.00 plus \$4.50 postage and handling.

This volume has two basic components: the travel journals including also "Chistyakov's Instructions to Vasilev," and the extensive input of the editor consisting of a preface, introduction, notes, references, glossary, index and maps.

The accounts report the first of two expeditions by Korsakovskiy (there being no known journal for his second trip undertaken in 1819) and the first of two subsequent expeditions by Vasilev (the journal for his second, 1830, expedition being lost). In his introduction VanStone discusses each set of expeditions, utilizing details gleaned from Russian sources. Their sequent relationship focused on a single region and the likelihood that persons utilizing one account would consult the other one justify joint presentation in this volume, achieving a certain economy of publication, focus and concentration of subject matter.

In VanStone's words, the "purpose of this account is not only to reproduce . . . [the journals] in English, but to place their achievements in historical perspective . . . and to emphasize the importance and significance of two generally neglected events in the history of Russian America." The actual narratives are not for a general readership but are working documents for historians, anthropologists and others with specialized interests. For this pursuit even the specialist might have difficulties if it were not for the editor's numerous notes, totalling 214 items, some of which are detailed and treat many subtopics. The notes hardly are of lesser magnitude than the texts. One might wonder if it would not have made a fascinating writing project, in the place of extensive notation, to retrace Korsakovskiy's and Vasilev's travels in parallel documents.

But the editor's objectives are not simply to present source material. To read life and significance into these accounts of a century and three-quarters ago we return to the ten-page introduction. Following the consolidation of Russian operations in Alaska into a single company, and with decreased fur yields from coastal stations in the Aleutian Islands and around the Gulf of Alaska, the attention of the fur traders turned northward to the hinterlands beyond the Alaska Peninsula. Information on the native peoples and resources of this region was sparse, though there had been one largely undocumented Russian exploration in the 1790s. To explore that area, Korsakovskiy was dispatched from Kodiak and was joined by Kolmakov at Katmai. His is the first overland expedition to the Nushagak-Kuskokwim region for which a first-person account exists, and accordingly, as VanStone points out, "everything he says about the country represents new information." But his account is vague and difficult to follow, he made no map, and his contribution to geographic knowledge is rated as poor. Nevertheless, during his next expedition, aided by a ship-born party, Korsakovskiy established the trading post, Aleksandrovskiy, at the mouth of the Nushagak River. This initial opening up of the country and subsequent coastal exploration notwithstanding, southwest Alaska remained to be fully explored. The next documented exploration of the interior is Vasilev's. It receives high marks for the accurate map that Vasilev prepared. VanStone states that Chistyakov, general manager of the Russian American Company, who ordered the exploration, was pleased with the results, but it is not clear to this reviewer whether the journal supplied Chistyakov was the brief (11 p.), sometimes second-person, narrative published in the present volume or a more detailed journal. The editor suggests that the missing journal of Vasilev's second expedition was more

detailed and a source of information later published by Wrangell. VanStone concludes that Vasilev's explorations assisted the company in assessing the fur-bearing potential of the region and that they were instrumental in the decision to establish the St. Michael post on the coast north of the Yukon River. Like pieces of a puzzle, these accounts contribute to piecing together the big picture of contact and development of the interior and western regions of Alaska.

I found Chistyakov's detailed instructions to Vasilev more interesting than the latter's account. I was disappointed, though, to find only scattered references to these instructions in the Introduction. Are explorers normally requested to "take note of . . . bees, flies, midges . . . etc.?" I am fascinated that Vasilev was instructed to "measure the thickness of the skin and determine the color and length of the hair" of any mammoth remains he might see. A reference to blue pigment scraped off such remains by natives undoubtedly refers to the iron phosphate mineral "vivianite" (first noted in 1823, according to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*) found on Pleistocene remains uncovered later by placer mining. Evidently for such reasons, Fedorova (cited by VanStone) considers Vasilev's to be a scientific expedition. But judging from the brevity of his journal, perhaps not the primary account of this exploration, coping with the aftermath of the severest winter then ever known and hunting and fishing to provide for the party's subsistence prevented Vasilev from fully recording the array of ethnographic and other scientific observations requested.

At the back of this small book is a brief glossary of Russian and Siberian terms used in the fur trade and exploration of Alaska. Many such glossaries have accompanied translations during recent decades. Since the same researchers use these publications, has the time not arrived for a definitive separate, collaborative publication of terms that explicates their significance and explains usage changing through time? VanStone's explanation of the two- and three-hatch *baydarka* (kayak) is exemplary, for instance, but his definition of *artel* clings too closely to the classic definition as a work crew and misses the functional aspect of a settlement from which the crew operated.

This publication is one of a growing series of translations of primary documents that regional historians will want to add to their base of reference resources.

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FLUCTUATIONS OF GLACIERS 1980-1985. Vol. V. Compiled by WILFRIED HAEBERLI and PETER MÜLLER for the World Glacier Monitoring Service. Wallingford: IAHS Press; Nairobi: UNEP; Paris: UNESCO, 1988. 288 p., 9 maps. US\$38.00.

It has been said that a mere handful of mathematical physicists have contributed far more to glacier science than have a hundred measurers of glacier stakes, or recorders of advances and retreats of glacier termini. On the one hand, this statement may have had some truth to it, but on the other hand, with time, the slow but steady labour of the field crews is resulting in the accumulation of some very valuable time series, which start, in this series of publications, in 1967. The World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS) assumes the very crucial role of the "middle man" in the process of providing raw data to the research consumer, who