This book stands out as a very readable account of mountaineering before it became the slightest bit trendy or glamorous — when climbing a mountain was done solely for the private adventure and not for equipment endorsements and lecture tours. The equipment used and food eaten is ridiculous in light of our modern-day outfits, yet these four men never complained, had no close calls or epics, and appear to have enjoyed their climb. This is a book that would be very enlightening to our modern generation of pink and lavender clad alpinists who embark upon the annual pilgrimage up Denali with little idea of the roots of their "sport."

The book ends with a summary of all prior exploration of and attempts to climb Denali. By doing so, Stuck has tied all the strings together into one bundle. Now in this single volume one can make one's way from the first sighting of Denali by Captain Vancouver in 1794 to the first ascent of the highest summit on 7 June 1913.

This book is not only a very entertaining piece of mountain literature but is, as well, a significant piece of mountain history. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of every mountain lover. As well it would make delightful reading for the non-climber. The antique type and photos preserved in this publication add to the sense of history that the book conveys and make it a delightful acquisition.

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THE NORTHERN FOREST BORDER IN CANADA AND ALASKA. By JAMES A. LARSEN. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1989. 272 p. US$79.50.

The boundary between the northern boreal forest and the arctic tundra has been shown by the meteorologist Reid Bryson and his associates to be related to the median position of the arctic front in summer. This climatic-vegetation tension zone is the topic of Larsen's latest book. (Larsen has also written *The Boreal Ecosystem* (1980) and *Ecology of the Northern Lowland Bogs and Conifer Forests* (1982), both published by Academic Press.)

It is important from the beginning for the reader to understand that Larsen adopts a Baconian view of science. That is, it is his stated intention (p. v) to survey the composition of plant communities as they are affected by environmental factors and not to provide a theoretical framework for community organization. This is somewhat misleading since Larsen's own phytosociological viewpoint is not without its principles. One of the tenets of phytosociology that Larsen upholds is that plants are climatically controlled and that their composition better expresses their ecological relationships to one another and the environment than any other characteristic.

Central to Larsen's organization of this book is the belief that "there is still a place for the expression of data in relatively straightforward presentation, in which the performance of the species . . . is given no analytical treatment, leaving analysis and interpretation to the reader if so desired, using any method selected" (p. 201). This alerts the reader that he should expect the book to be essentially an uncritical collection of observations by different researchers. In this sense the book is very good, providing a complete and up-to-date review of vegetation research in this part of the boreal forest. This research describes the northern forest border as a vast unsettled area (roughly comparable in size to the eastern United States, but essentially without any roads) in which natural processes operate on a vegetation that is still unaffected by Europeans. Areas such as this are becoming increasingly rare and, as such, increasingly more valuable for ecological research.

Is it possible, as Larsen asserts, that from a purely observational approach readers can analyze and draw conclusions about species performance using any method available to them? This is an old controversy about whether it is possible to observe nature with a "value-free language." Readers will respond differently to this question and will rate the book's value in this context. We believe the book would have been more valuable if Larsen had hypothesized how he thinks the environment is actually coupled to plant population and community dynamics. An example of this preferable approach is found in the gradient studies of J.T. Curtis. Curtis and his associates identified the significant environmental factors and the species tolerance curves of the vegetation in Wisconsin. Further studies then showed the physiological mechanisms that explained the plant's adaptations to these environmental gradients (for example, Wuenscher and Kozlowski, 1971, Ecology 52:1017-1023). These studies, unlike Larsen's book, explicitly gave the coupling between the vegetation and the environment.

Larsen, in taking a Baconian approach, can make only general statements, often rather obvious to contemporary ecologists. The conclusions Larsen comes to are that the northern limit of trees and the air mass boundary in summer are well correlated. Changes in atmospheric circulation patterns have caused a displacement of the mean frontal zone during the Holocene with subsequent changes in vegetation boundaries. A complex of factors is involved in the advance or retreat of trees near their limits of growth. Temperature appears to be especially significant, as it limits translocation, water absorption and photosynthesis and is correlated to plant growth. Also the declining availability of nutrients (N,P,K) in soil is one of the other factors reducing tree growth.

In conclusion, the book is of value in providing an overview of the plant ecological research that has been done in the northern forest border of western Canada. However, readers who are hoping to find an explanation or even an hypothesis of how the vegetation in this ecotone is organized will be disappointed.

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NUNIVAK ISLAND ESKIMO (*YUIT*) TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL CULTURE. By JAMES W. VanSTONE. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1989. Fieldiana, Anthropology, New Series, No. 12. 108 p., 107 figs., bib. Softbound. US$23.

Isolated by shallow seas in summer and constantly moving ice in winter, the Yupik-speaking people of Nunivak Island were slow to give up their traditional technology and social organization. Indeed, as James VanStone points out (p. 42), "until World War II, Nunivak was about 50 years behind the Seward Peninsula-Norton Sound area in acculturation." For this reason the publication under review is particularly valuable.

When anthropologist Margaret Lantis spent a year on Nunivak Island in 1939-40 in her study of social organization, she found the people still occupying semi-subterranean houses, the men living apart from their families for much of the year in the *qasgiq* — the familiar Alaskan Eskimo ceremonial structure serving as a men's house. She also found traditional items of local manufacture in staple use for many subsistence and housekeeping purposes. Although unsure of herself when dealing with material culture, she recorded what she saw in word pictures, photographs, and drawings.

Half a century later, when the fifty-year lag of the people of Nunivak is erased and they have caught up fully in acculturation with their cousins of the western Alaskan mainland, those records are presented by James VanStone in an organized synthesis that brings the careful description of everyday Alaskan Eskimo material culture into the twentieth century. It is most fitting that this job so well begun by Lantis should be equally well completed by VanStone, who is signally qualified by his own extensive experience with both historic and recent material culture of western Alaska. Appropriately enough, his own first independent Alaskan fieldwork was a survey of recent archaeological sites on Nunivak Island in 1952.

The base of the work is the information collected by Lantis. But added to this are facts gleaned from, among other sources, the first detailed description of Nunivak and its people by Ivan Petroff, who visited the island for the eleventh U.S. census, in 1891; by George Byron Gordon, of what is now the University Museum, Philadelphia, who sojourned in 1905; by Edward Curtis, who wrote the first brief ethnographic account from his visit in 1927; by Henry B. Collins, Jr., of the Smithsonian Institution, who with his colleague T. Dale Stewart measured heads and skulls there for much of the summer of the same year (and who recommended the island to Lantis); and by Hans Himmelheber, the German ethnographer, who visited the island three years before Lantis. The more than 100 figures are principally drawings and field photographs by Lantis (some, but not all, of which have been published before), photographs of her collection now at the Museum of Anthropology, University of Kentucky; and several photographs of places and people by Himmelheber. Photographs are clear and printed on paper that reproduces very clearly.

The descriptive text on the actual material is divided among ten sections, fairly traditional in their boundaries, which include details of use and behavior as a well as artifact form and technology. These treatments extend, for instance, to variation in kayak bow and stern sections between individual makers, as well as in various construction details; to food collection and methods of preparation; specific means for taking fish; to the making of birdskin parkas and identification by bird type of categories of people who might wear them.

These are not simple restatements of standard anthropological knowledge that might apply anywhere in the Yuit or Inuit world, or even anywhere in Alaska. On the one hand, Nunivak Island represents a regional subdivision of western Eskimo culture in its own right; the people are, for instance, far enough outside the regular communication network of even the adjacent mainland and Nelson Island that their speech has been classed by some linguists as a separate dialect of Yupik. Behavior follows the same pattern, in particular with regard to women, whose traditional modes are shown to have departed more from the practices of their mainland relatives than did those of the men: they split salmon diffierently, they made boots by a different pattern, their needle cases were distinctive, they used grass for more purposes.

One item especially welcome to this reader is an unambiguous description, with photographs, of the construction of semisubterranean dwellings with a cribbed roof structure, rather than one supported by simple post and beams. Excavations elsewhere in southwestern Alaska had made it seem necessary that the former be the pattern, for repeatedly the four central support posts were found set so closely toward the corners that a simple beam construction could be trusted to carry the weight of a sod roof only by inhabitants totally oblivious of constant danger. And yet ethnographers — including James VanStone — had continued to refer to "four-post central" construction and to insist that in family dwellings the sod roofs were always laid only on simple crossbeams. The photographs and description of Lantis finally confirm the excavations, showing roofs built up by cribbing from four heavy posts set well out toward the corners.

Added to the descriptive presentation are valuable conclusions in which VanStone places Nunivak Island within the context of southwestern Alaskan Eskimo culture. A lengthy list of culture elements derived from the notes of Lantis, supplemented by information from E.W. Nelson, Curtis, and others, serves to point out that a major inventory is shared with mainland southwestern Alaska, in particular with the heavily occupied region around the Kuskokwim and Yukon river mouths. A much shorter list sets Nunivak apart.

Nineteenth-century visitors to Alaska presented descriptions of the living technology that have formed our major base of such data. But a difficulty with material of this vintage — in addition to scale and murkiness of photographs — is that the collectors were too much pioneers to appreciate and record nuances that later came to seem significant.

In the present case, however, an experienced ethnographer (and sometime archaeologist) approaches a unique body of information on traditional material culture with a fully twentieth-century eye. And so this is a publication that will find its place beside the classic works on the Bering Sea for those of us who would interpret the traditional historic or prehistoric material culture of coastal southwestern Alaska. As with all of the Field Museum series, the lack of an index causes problems in the rapid location of specific facts, although the organization of the book is straightforward enough that this problem is a small one.

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SPIRIT OF THE BARRENS: DIARY OF AN ARCTIC JOURNEY. A video by PETER HARMATHY. Scarborough: See Hear Now! 1988. 27 min. Cdn$79.

Popular accounts of travel in or about the Arctic have been part of northern literature for several generations. In more recent years, film has been added to the repertoire, as reflected in the work of John and Janet Foster and in the recent voyage "through" the Northwest Passage in a catamaran. This video, *Spirit of the Barrens*, fits into the growing interest in the North. In a real sense, however, the film tells as much about the participants as it does about the Arctic.

Spirit of the Barrens tells the story of five "ordinary people, city people with no special skills or training" who undertook to walk from Yellowknife to Coppermine, a distance of 700 km. Aided by five supply caches flown in earlier and by radio communication, the three men and two women started their odyssey on 22 April 1988. For the first 200 km, to the first cache at the source of the Yellowknife River "at the northern limit of the forest," they manhauled their supplies and equipment on toboggans. Indeed the soft snow delayed their arrival for a couple of days, until a cold front created a crust allowing them to proceed the final 6 km. From then on, they left the "security of the spruce forest" and headed for the vast barrenlands where there was little shelter. It was colder, too. As if the Arctic held them "captive in an ocean of soft and deep snow," they were delayed two weeks while two members, including the narrator-cameraman, were evacuated to Yellowknife to recover from dehydration.

When the expedition recommenced on 2 June, the temperature had risen sufficiently so that only patches of snow remained. It was as though spring had given them a "gesture of good luck." However, rivers were melting, including the Snare River, which could not be crossed. Gradual warming of the continent meant in some cases the shore ice of the lakes had melted, necessitating riding floes to the more solid ice, such as at Winter Lake. The Arctic cooperated in their northward trek, for the colder weather delayed spring; ahead were the brown barrenlands, behind a green landscape, as they "walked on the edge of spring." The narrator indicated he was never so much aware of the seasons as in this journey. By the beginning