

A WAY OF LIFE. Edited by ED HALL. Yellowknife: Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the Northwest Territories, 1986. 122 p., illus., photos, bib. Softbound. Cdn\$7.50.

In the midst of the current controversy about the trapping and hunting of fur-bearing animals, this book offers a welcome perspective. The "way of life" referred to in the title is that of northern people, native people especially but not exclusively, whose lives focus on living off the land and who have known hunting, fishing, trapping and self-sufficiency as a lifestyle for generations. It is a life won by hard struggle and age-old, tried and true technique. This book is a tribute to the people who know and live this life. It is a glimpse of the history, the personalities, the painstaking skills and the ingenuity of these people, who even today are a part of the fur-trade industry of Canada.

The first part of the book is a short historical perspective of the fur trade in the N.W.T. The profundity of the impact of this development is reflected in the words of Guy Hologak, in his address to Justice Berger during the Berger Inquiry in 1975-76:

The first white man I ever saw was Mr. Steffanson and his partner, Billy Banksland. That's the first time we saw a match being used. . . . Then in later years more white people started coming in and that's the time I saw my first rifle — musket rifles [p. 19].

This first section of the book also provides insight into the different histories of the fur trade in the Eastern and Western Arctic, the influence of the whaling era on the coastal communities and the effect of church establishments in the N.W.T. This brief history of the boom-and-bust economy that has been experienced in the North for so many years provides a useful perspective from which to view the rest of the book.

Turning to modern times, the book develops its major emphasis, portraying many facets of the involvement of northern people in the trapping industry.

Trapping in the north, however, should not be seen as an occupation in the same way that driving a truck or balancing a ledger is. It is but one part of an entire way of life. Other aspects include not only hunting and fishing, but also all the myriad skills and traditions associated with them. When a family moves out on the land for a period of time it is to re-affirm their ties with it as well as to reap its benefits [p. 27].

It is the "myriad skills" and close relationship to the land demonstrated by northern people that this book seeks to portray.

Through nine personal profiles of men who have lived and trapped in the N.W.T. almost all their lives, we get a sense of who these trappers are and of their vast experience in many fields. These men were not schooled in classrooms; rather they have had as their teachers their parents, grandparents, family, friends and, most importantly, Mother Nature — sometimes the toughest teacher of all. The stories of these men's lives bring warmth and reality to the book. The reminiscences of many other individuals interspersed throughout the text are a testimony to the all-too-seldom-heralded presence and involvement of northern people in every step of northern development.

Five detailed sections provide well-illustrated step-by-step instructions for preparing items that have been useful in bush or tundra living. They include: making snowshoes, making waterproof kamiks, making a spruce bark canoe, preparing and eating country food and setting traps. Another section is a collection of tips for repairing snowmobiles (especially when proper parts are not available), some traditional medical remedies (like chewing fresh young willow bark for its acetylsalicylic acid content when you have a headache), and various other bits of advice about travelling and trapping in the North.

What is special about the presentation of this material is that each individual is credited for his or her contribution(s) no matter how small. The book provides a forum where many northern talents come to light. Many people have passed on their best advice to the reader, so the book reflects the way in which much of this knowledge has previously been learned and passed on — by first-hand experience, by demonstration and by friendly advice. The need for spirit, physical strength and ingenuity is everywhere evident.

The last section of the book is of interest to anyone who has thought

about the fur-harvesting controversy. Many sides of the argument are presented, with lists of pro-animal organizations appearing alongside informative sections on leghold and killing traps, trappers' ethics and education and the role of the fur industry in Canada's economy. It provides a bird's-eye view of the status of and current issues concerning trapping in the N.W.T. and Canada.

The book is entertaining, informative and realistic. It offers the warmth of personal anecdote along with hard fact. The numerous illustrations and photographs, the variety in format and the juxtaposition of brief overview and in-depth consideration of issues makes it useful for light reading or as a reference book. Anyone interested in making any of the items described in detail will find adequate instruction. A teacher interested in provoking a discussion about fur-harvest issues would find ample suggestion here. Anyone interested in northern culture, lifestyle, concerns and issues will find the book useful.

A person inexperienced with northern cultures might find it difficult to separate the skills in the book according to which culture they represent: Dene, Metis or Inuit. For most of the material, it does not matter; the knowledge or skill is widespread across the N.W.T. Some of the skills are obviously from within the tree line, therefore probably Dene or Metis, while skills involving sea animals are most likely Inuit. If anyone finds this a particularly perplexing problem, there are maps available of the N.W.T. from the same publisher that will help locate the community of the contributor and thus usually reveal the cultural group. A map of all N.W.T. communities would perhaps have been useful in the book, but these are readily available from G.N.W.T.

Ed Hall, the editor, lives and works in Yellowknife and has contributed a great deal to conservation education in the N.W.T. The other book that he coordinated, and that I had the pleasure of assisting with, is *Arctic Animals*, another well-illustrated, well-researched publication about animals above the tree line in the N.W.T. (G.N.W.T., 1985).

One last word. The book is dedicated to Al Bourque, whom I once met while he was a Wildlife Officer in Fort Simpson in 1975. He would have had his own book to write, I am sure, in which he would have shared with all of us the kind of tip he once gave several of us about hunting moose. He told us to get an empty can (a large juice can, for example), punch a hole through the bottom and insert a wet string through the hole with a knot inside the can to hold the string in place. As you run your fingers quickly down the string, the can will bellow like a rutting moose and attract moose to you.

Al, like all the other contributors to *A Way of Life*, had so much unwritten knowledge. It is good to see some of it recorded now. Perhaps others will be encouraged to do the same.

Betty Harnum
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L'OURS POLAIRE ET LES INUIT. By VLADIMIR RANDA. Paris: Société d'Études Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France, Ethnoscience 2, 1986. 323 p., 6 maps, 5 tables, 12 figs., 11 schemas, 15 sketches, 2 photos, bib. Softbound. 160F00.

Randa has assembled a large volume of information on the relations between the polar bear and the Inuit, revealing how their two apparently different worlds overlap. Through his fascination for polar bears, Randa wishes to tell the reader what they represent for the Inuit.

The author, an ethnologist, relied on a thorough search of published documents to yield information for his dissertation research. The core of the information was therefore collected from explorers' and missionary reports, ethnographies and scientific reports in biology. To this he later added a few interviews with Inuit from the Eastern Arctic.

The introductory chapter begins with bear cults through time — from the Palaeolithic to the last century. It is followed by two sections: the