

DENA'INA ELENENA — TANAINA COUNTRY. By JAMES KARI and PRISCILLA RUSSELL KARI. Alaska Native Language Center. Fairbanks: University of Alaska, 1982. 109 p. + 5 fold-out maps. Softcover. US\$9.00.

Dena'ina Elnena — Tanaina Country is a non-technical survey of the geography, place-names, history, and land use of one of Alaska's major Athapaskan groups. The book is intended for general rather than specialist readers and is written in a clear, uncomplicated style. It will appeal especially to those interested in northern Native peoples, but it contains much that will be appreciated and enjoyed by a fairly broad spectrum of academic readers as well.

The Tanaina Athapaskans of Alaska have been the focus of numerous anthropological and archaeological studies in the twentieth century, and many readers of *Arctic* may be familiar, for example, with the summary article by Joan Townsend in the Subarctic Volume of the *Handbook of North American Indians* (1981), which contains a bibliography complete through about 1979. *Dena'ina Elnena* adds substantially to earlier studies by documenting in thorough detail the full range of the Tanaina land base and by focussing in an original way on the remarkable linguistic and geographic knowledge of the Tanaina people themselves.

The bilingual title of the book reflects its strong and consistent linguistic orientation. Nearly every section in it contains abundant references to Tanaina terms for land and water, mammals, fish, birds, and specific features of the land. This close attention to linguistic detail is unusual even in standard ethnographic writing, and it is clearly aimed in this case at giving the reader some explicit grounds for understanding and appreciating the richness of the Tanaina language.

The Tanaina have long occupied a large sector of south-central Alaska that now includes Anchorage, the largest city in the state and home of a majority of its population. According to the Karis, nearly 60 percent of the population of Alaska lives within the boundaries of traditional Tanaina lands, yet "there is little public awareness of the Dena'ina as a distinct people, or of their knowledge of the land" (p. 9). From a population estimated at 5000 or more at the time of European contact, the Tanaina have declined to an estimated 1000, and the number of fluent speakers of the language is thought to be fewer than 150. This shrinking base of speakers has lent urgency to the tasks of recording and documenting the language, and the Karis themselves have been working actively since 1973 in a variety of projects aimed at preserving native traditions in written form.

The Karis hope that this book "will help to give public recognition to the Dena'ina and their country as well as to preserve some of the knowledge they have about their land" (p. 9). They give full credit to the many Tanaina elders who have assisted them in their research on traditional land use and place-names. In some cases they have worked with literally the last Tanainas who are knowledgeable about the subsistence uses of certain areas and the native names associated with them. The results of these collaborations are impressive indeed. The lists of place-names, for example, represent a precious body of traditional knowledge that will now be accessible to future generations of Tanaina people.

The book is divided into two sections of approximately equal length. Following the Acknowledgements and Introduction, Part One ("The Dena'ina and Their Country") describes the areas occupied by the Tanaina during historical times. Part Two ("The Land and Its Uses") gives specific accounts of various land forms and their uses by the Tanaina people, paying particular attention to the native names for flora, fauna, and geographic features. A brief Bibliography of items on history, language, and place-names is included but is not intended to be complete. The book concludes with a Glossary listing in alphabetical order all the Tanaina terms introduced in the text, along with a well-intentioned but probably unusable pronunciation guide.

Part One contains short chapters on "Dena'ina Language" and "Dena'ina Place-Names", which give summary accounts of the various Tanaina dialect areas and a brief overview of the place-names research. The authors remind us that the names listed in *Dena'ina*

Elnena represent only a sample from the more than 1400 names recorded during nine years of work. These are summarized in lists for individual geographic and linguistic areas devoted to "Inland", "Iliamna", "Outer Cook Inlet", and "Upper Cook Inlet". Much useful information on individual Tanaina bands and their history is outlined in these short chapters. The authors suggest that the Tanaina originally came from the mountainous, interior region they now label "Inland" and subsequently spread eastward and south around the Kenai Peninsula. Part One concludes with accounts of the Tanaina "Directional System" and "Dena'ina Trails". The former will be of interest to readers who may wonder how the Tanaina language deals with directions (of water flow, spatial location, wind, etc.) without the key Western concept of cardinal points. The Karis demonstrate that the Tanaina directional system is based on flow of water and contains basic terms for "upstream", "downstream", "across", "down to (bank, water)", etc., which may be modified by the addition of prefixes and suffixes that convey additional meaning. These systematic elaborations make the system quite adaptable to the needs of the speech community, as the examples given by the Karis clearly indicate.

Part Two of *Dena'ina Elnena*, "Land and Its Uses", is based on the Tanaina "system of geographical classification" and examines the "geographic environments of Dena'ina territory and their resources" (p. 9). It consists of sections on a wide variety of landforms that are known, used, and named by the Tanaina people: "Mountain", "Mountain pass", "Glacier", "Cliff, Boulder, Canyon", "Lowland Forest, Clearing", "Hills, Rolling Hills, Low Ridge", "Muskeg and Low Tundra", "Stream", "Lake and Pond", "Bank", "Island", "Cook Inlet", "Ocean", "Tidal Flat", "Beach", and "Salt Marsh". These section headings alone will give the reader some sense of the remarkable range of geographic areas within Tanaina country, which uniquely for Alaskan Athapaskans also includes coastal areas. Within each section abundant detail is provided on land use, plants, animals, birds, and minerals. The discussion ties together explicitly the relationships between landforms and land use and the traditions and names known by the Tanaina people.

Five fold-out maps accompany the book. Four of these are keyed to the major Tanaina dialect areas of Part One ("Inland", "Iliamna", "Outer Inlet", and "Upper Inlet") and the fifth is a map of the entire region with an inset showing its location within the state of Alaska. The individual dialect area maps were easy to use, and I found it a straightforward matter to follow the place-names lists numerically keyed to them. But the general map was in some cases frustrating to use because it identifies only a small set of the English names used in the text for villages and sites. Clearly one of the strengths of this book is its careful discussion of Tanaina bands and villages (some of these now abandoned), but in order to locate them I found it necessary to consult other maps of the region (including especially the one in the "Tanaina" chapter of the *Handbook* mentioned earlier above, itself incorporating a lot of data gathered or clarified by the Karis). Readers will be well served if future editions of the book contain a revised general map showing all locations cited in the text.

Dena'ina Elnena is attractively produced. The quality of printing is high and few typographical or editorial errors were noted. The photos taken by the authors are printed in black and white (except for the unidentified cover colour photo of Qeghnilen village) and convey some of the dramatic diversity of Tanaina country, whetting our appetites to see even more. The photos of the Tanaina elders will also be especially appreciated and enjoyed in light of the essential contributions they have made to the preparation of the book.

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