

ANTARCTICA OBSERVED: WHO DISCOVERED THE ANTARCTIC CONTINENT? By A.G.E. JONES. Whitby: Caedmon of Whitby Press, 1982. vi + 118 p., illus., maps, index. Hardbound. £7.95. (Order from Caedmon of Whitby, 9 John Street, Whitby, Yorks, England.)

Students of Antarctic history will need no introduction to the works of A.G.E. Jones, who for many years past has carried out indefatigable research on polar exploration and navigation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shedding light on the personalities and achievements of little-known sealers, whalers, and explorers in polar waters. In this, his first book-length monograph, written in his customary economical style, Mr. Jones has grasped what in pre-Antarctic Treaty days would have been an exceptionally painful nettle indeed — the vexatious problem of who first set eyes upon the Antarctic continent. The question is bedevilled by two virtually insoluble problems; what precisely were these early navigators looking at when they reported Antarctic "land"; and how trustworthy was their navigation — that is, were their ships necessarily where they were reported to be?

Antarctica, a dome of ice some 5½ million square miles in area, exposing only a small fraction of the underlying rock, is a recent discovery unknown to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century navigators. Reports of "land" need to be treated with the greatest scepticism. A distant iceberg, a strange cloud formation, a mirage lifting distant objects into view, all can be understandably mistaken for a discovery of land. The historical evidence can be equally ambiguous as well as incomplete. Mr. Jones is all too aware of these difficulties. He devotes a preliminary chapter to the Inaccessibility of Antarctica, reminding us of its all-encompassing and at times impenetrable pack ice, and the unpredictability and severity of its weather. He takes pains to stress the special problems of navigating a sailing ship in these waters, particularly the fixing of longitude and the difficulty of maintaining dead reckoning with little knowledge of magnetic variations.

In a further chapter we are reminded of the achievements of early British explorers of southern waters such as Francis Drake and Edmond Halley, whose discoveries whittled down in size the vast Southern Continent of the geographers, paving the way for Cook and his successors. Mr. Jones takes Captain Cook as the first of five navigators for whom claims to Antarctic priority have been made. Other candidates are Edward Bransfield jointly with William Smith, the Russian Thaddeus von Bellingshausen, and the American Nathaniel Palmer. The history of early Antarctic voyages has already been chronicled by historians of the calibre of J.J. Bertrand, M.I. Belov, R.T. Gould, and J.C. Beaglehole. Mr. Jones's special contribution to the debate is his careful reappraisal of the known facts based on a critical examination of original logbooks and charts, and his use of the information contained therein to reconstruct the course of events on the critical days concerned.

The problems of plotting track charts from the available material are considerable, requiring specialized knowledge and expertise. As the author stresses, there appears to be no detailed study of the methods of navigation used by the explorers of this period. Navigation in the uncharted Southern Ocean, with its attendant climatic hazards, would have resulted in any course set by dead reckoning being subject to numerous inaccuracies. For Cook's *ne plus ultra* of 71°10'S, Mr. Jones has examined the Captain's original log book, along with that of his subordinate Lt. Clerke, and the observations of other officers, in the reconstruction of *Resolution's* track chart for 26 January - 3 February 1774. All are agreed on latitude, but for longitude "there could be almost as many positions as log books". To the chart Mr. Jones has added notes on relevant weather conditions extracted from the logs. Thus the weather on 30 January, reported as "tolerably clear", would not have enabled Cook to have seen the Walker Mountains of the Thurston Peninsula some 100 nautical miles distant. Nor were conditions calm enough to have raised these mountains by refraction. Cook and his officers never claimed to have seen land, and the author's careful observations confirm this.

Similar detailed attention is given to Bellingshausen's cruise in January-February 1820, though here the evidence is much more fragmentary. The original logbooks are lost and the narrative much edited. Only the manuscript charts and some other observations, plus the Hakluyt Society's translation of the narrative, are generally available. In reconstructing the tracks of *Vostok* and *Mirnyy*, Mr. Jones's confidence in the accuracy of the Russian's calculations of longitude is derived from the many lunar observations made. His comparison of the ships' positions with the probable position of the adjacent continental ice shelves at that time seem to support the claims made for Bellingshausen's sighting of the continental ice shelf on 27 and 29 January and 15 February 1820, even though there is no evidence that he saw continental mountains in these regions.

The evidence for Smith and Bransfield's voyage is even skimpier than for Bellingshausen's. Only Bransfield's chart and a contemporary account, attributed to a midshipman, survives. Mr. Jones's review of their voyage does

no more than confirm Rupert Gould's classic 1941 paper on the subject; there can be little doubt that the two men saw the rocks and peaks of Trinity Land on 30-31 January 1820 and that Bransfield was the first to chart the Antarctic mainland. As Mr. Jones remarks: "If rock is to be the criterion then priority should go to these two men." A final chapter dealing with claims made for the American sealer Nathaniel Palmer again says nothing new. Palmer may well have discovered Deception Island in November 1820, but his mainland landfalls off the Antarctic Peninsula shortly after occurred ten months after the achievement of Smith and Bransfield.

We are left still undecided between Bellingshausen and Bransfield, a dilemma of no great consequence. This is a valuable summary of some very scattered material and a reminder to historians of the need to return again and again to original sources if the truth is to be established. Less praiseworthy is the quality of the book itself whose press work is unworthy of the publishers.

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NORTHERN TRADERS: CARIBOU HAIR IN THE STEW. By ARCHIE HUNTER. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983. 151 p. + illus. Can\$13.95.

Like Charles Camsell's *Son of the North* and Erik Munsterhjelm's *The Wind and the Caribou*, *Northern Traders* is Archie Hunter's memoir of the years he spent in the Canadian north. Sent by the Hudson's Bay Company to Repulse Bay when he was 18 years old, the author worked in the fur industry until his retirement. He was moved about to Wager Bay, Pine River, Lac du Brochet, Telegraph Creek, and numerous other postings during his nearly 40-year employment with the Company, and consequently, Hunter's account has a solid air of authority to it. Few, if any, are better qualified to speak about life in northern trading posts. Although his trading duties made his life somewhat more domesticated and perhaps less glamorous than Camsell's prospecting and Munsterhjelm's trapping livelihoods, the geographic breadth of his postings and the length of his tenure in the north clearly qualify him as a significant spokesman for such an experience.

Hunter's book is not concerned with evoking the landscape, nor with illuminating the relationship between the residents of the tiny posts and their wilderness environment. The focus falls instead on the social dimension of domestic routine in these isolated northern outposts. The wilderness is not a primary actor in *Northern Traders*, as one might expect, but rather serves as a behind-the-scenes force that isolates these small cultural centers from the mainstream of Canadian society. In many ways, the response to life is similar to that found in small prairie towns or Atlantic outposts, although the highly distinct regional environment — the "midnight sun", the winter dark and cold, the dependence on game — shapes that response in a unique manner. Interestingly, whether the author is writing of his postings at Baker Lake, Lac du Brochet, or Churchill, a homogeneous and characteristic "northern" quality is brought out. In spite of the thousands of miles separating Repulse Bay from Telegraph Creek, Hunter responds to these settings as though — collectively — they constitute a distinct region that is clearly distinguishable from any region on the "Outside".

The book gives the reader glimpses of some celebrated personalities — Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh, who landed at Baker Lake to refuel, and Sergeant W.O. Douglas of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for instance — but more significant appearances are those of the many inhabitants of the posts, men and women who would otherwise remain nameless and unknown — the trappers, the Natives, the missionaries, the other traders. These people are the backbone of society in northern Canada, and they become the true centre of Hunter's book. Who they are, what they do with their days, and how they interact with one another is perhaps the most important revelation of *Northern Traders*.

The book has a rather basic structure, one that is sometimes annoyingly simplistic and repetitious. Hundreds of anecdotes, usually less than one page in length and often no longer than five or six sentences, are arranged according to where they originated, that is, at which post. Other than this arrangement, one could almost shuffle the anecdotes without any serious loss to the book as a whole. There is no build-up of suspense or curiosity, nor is there any development in the attitude of the author. Perhaps "collection of reminiscences" is a more accurate descriptive term for Hunter's book than is "memoir", for little of the author's thoughts, feelings, or personal growth appear in this work; he becomes an observer of life at northern trading posts.