

THE ARCTIC DIARY OF RUSSELL WILLIAMS PORTER. EDITED BY HERMAN FRIIS. *Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976. 172 pages, illus., maps. No price indicated.*

When Russell Williams Porter was a young man, he attended one of Robert Peary's lectures and was immediately bitten by the "Arctic fever" bug, and applied to Peary for permission to accompany him on his next expedition. Because Porter's mother implored the explorer not to take her son with him, Peary refused his application. Not long afterwards, however, Porter was sailing north with Frederick Cook, in 1894, on his ill-fated *Miranda* expedition, having been signed on as artist and surveyor. After that Porter went north every summer until 1906. Thereafter the Arctic lost its hold on him, and he remained home to pursue other careers.

Porter was a member of several other well-known expeditions: Peary's two expeditions in the *Hope*, 1896 and 1897; the Peary Arctic Club Relief Expedition in the *Diana*, 1899; the Baldwin-Ziegler Expedition to Franz Joseph Land, 1901-02; the Fiala-Ziegler Arctic Expedition to Franz Joseph Land, 1903-05; and Cook's Mount McKinley Expedition, 1906. He also made a private trip to northern British Columbia in 1898, in a fruitless attempt to find gold; and to Labrador in 1899. A canoe trip to eastern Labrador in 1912 was his last venture into northern climes.

On all these trips Porter kept diaries and journals, as well as a sketch book; but it was not until the early nineteen-thirties that he wrote up his stories in their present form. The drawings, notes, photographs and papers, including the manuscript written in his own hand and its typewritten transcription are now lodged in the National Archives Centre for Polar Archives in Washington, D.C.

Porter's account of his part in the various expeditions is written like an adventure story, which indeed it is. His wonder and excitement (even so many years after the events) permeate the book, and the reader goes from page to page wondering "what next". The one unfortunate distraction is the presence of numerous footnotes on every page. The editor notes that these are intended "to document as fully as possible the subject matter in the text in order to acquaint the reader with sources of related material in the National Archives Centre for Polar Archives and in other depositories", and include "reference to related published materials that are useful in corroborating and amplifying specific subject matter". Their inclusion is very commendable, but they would have been better placed at the back of the book, where the serious researcher could find them,

and the avid reader would not be bothered with them. After all, "See Porter's Journal, 1896, p. 46" is not very useful advice unless one has access to the Archives themselves.

Porter was trained as an architect at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was then very lucky in his choice of employer; for he was welcomed back to his drawing board each winter, even though it was understood that his migrations northward each spring could no more be stopped than could that of the Canada goose or the black duck. Though never a senior officer on any of the expeditions, Porter had the distinction of having the designation "Porteri" appended to fossils he had collected from Silliman's Fossil Mount and presented to the American Museum of Natural History; and a lake in Baffin Island was named after him. In addition, he gave the name "Miriam Islet" to a previously uncharted islet at the entrance to Backs Channel (Franz Joseph Islands), but no explanation is given for his choice.

Having travelled with both Cook and Peary, Porter seems to have been, in retrospect, a Peary supporter in the Cook-Peary North Pole controversy. However, in chapter ten, concerning the ascent of Mount McKinley, he does speak of Cook's "sterling qualities".

So finally, sick with the "failures of ten years' effort", Porter turned his back on the Arctic as well as on city life, and moved to a remote spot on the coast of Maine. He soon found that his fascination with light, and his interest in lenses, prisms, mirrors and gratings, took on a new meaning. His amateur telescope-making led finally to his being invited to California to work on the design, construction and assembly of the great 200-inch telescope at Mount Palomar. Though Porter died in 1949, it was not until 1970 that his contribution to astrophysics and optics was recognized, when the International Astronomical Union gave the name "Russell Williams Porter" to the moon crater previously called Clavius B.

This book is handsomely bound in cloth. It is illustrated with five water colours, and 74 fine black-and-white pencil drawings prepared by Porter from his drawings and sketches for the book he had planned to publish. There are also four sketch maps and one diagram. The bibliography at the end of the book includes four obituaries, thirteen publications about Porter and six by him on Arctic subjects. There is no index.

The text and the drawings make an altogether fine evening's reading, as well as giving an interesting insight into the more personal side of the well-known expeditions Porter accompanied.

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