

NEW ZEALAND AND THE ANTARCTIC. BY L. B. QUARTERMAIN. *Wellington, New Zealand: A. R. Shearer, Government Printer, 1971. 6¼ x 9¼ inches, 269 pages, illustrations and maps. \$5.85 n.z.*

This comprehensive volume gives chapter and verse of all the antarctic expeditions sponsored by New Zealand or in which New Zealanders have taken part along with other nations.

It is a historical text — a “must” for all serious students of this aspect of New Zealand’s external affairs and a good read for the armchair adventurer who can find the theme in the welter of personal details and dates.

Primarily a reference book, it gives a full chronology of the men who served, the outstanding incidents and sometimes hair-raising adventures in which they were involved and ceremonies in which they participated. It is well illustrated with maps and monochrome photographs of places, people and hut interiors. There is an appendix list of party members over the years and a full bibliography and index.

Quartermain starts by bringing out the goodwill of New Zealanders to the early antarctic expeditions when support from Britain was less than it might have been. “Kiwis” contributed not only the sympathies of common men and financial support from the government, but over 500 applicants wishing to join Shackleton’s expedition in 1907.

It is likely that their pioneering spirit found more kinship with the idea of these outlandish exploits in the early part of the century than did the more sedentary inclinations of the Britons who had stayed at home. Life in the Far South was very different then from now. This period the author very aptly refers to as “the heroic age” and expresses no surprise that some of the early antarctic explorers from Britain chose to become New Zealanders on their return.

In his anxiety to leave no-one out, he creates short passages which are little more than a list of names and dates, but this detracts only marginally from the narrative which, although unembellished, makes good reading because of the greatness of what was being attempted and achieved in the field.

It is often a factual account from logs and notebooks and the meticulous details of

quotations from the press and statements by expedition officials read rather like the acknowledgements in a preface and get a little tedious — but in an earnest historic account of this sort the back-scratching sessions are probably inevitable. To most readers the names mean little and the account of expeditions would read more smoothly if there were fewer, but one appreciates that credit should be given where credit is due.

Rather too many paragraphs begin with “At 3.0 a.m. on the 27th” or “At noon next day” and the frequent quotes of latitude and longitude bring this into the category of textbook rather than a tale for general enjoyment by the not-so-involved. But enjoyment is there for the taking if the more ponderous details can be skipped.

The author leaves us in no doubt of the fact that New Zealand is recognized as a country which has made a significant contribution to antarctic exploration and research. The reader learns that IGY and TAE are not two Maori participants, though Maoris there were in the great southern treks.

During IGY, the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58, important advances were made in our knowledge of Antarctica and its resources. New Zealand had taken no part in the first Polar Year of 1882-83 and little in the second one of 1932-33, but she made up for past deficiencies in the third. Popular interest preceded government action, although New Zealand had been responsible for the Ross Dependency since 1923. It was there, on the New Zealand-administered Ross Island, that TAE finished up — the goal of the major Trans-Antarctic Expedition when the world at home held its breath for news bulletins of the men who were conquering Earth’s last frontier.

Since the cracking of this, the biggest of all the Earthly ‘nuts’, the questing spirit of human pioneering has reached out further to other planets.

For those who wish to read of this spirit in the days when adventurers depended on their own cunning, physique and will power rather than the technical genius of others, this is a book to be fully recommended. Wherever we go from here, these men are a part of our heritage to which we look back with pride, and we would do well to know more of them.

Mary E. Gillham