

REVIEWS

SVALBARD: A NORWEGIAN OUTPOST.

Bergen: J. W. Eides Forlag, 1950. (New York: Bonniers). 8 x 11 inches; 175 pages; illustrations and map. Norwegian Kr. 22.50; U.S. \$4.50.

Most probably the first impression of the reader will be that this book belongs to the usual run of "propaganda" picture books which form so large a part of almost every country's export trade. Closer inspection, however, will show that even if there is a certain "propaganda" intent behind the publication of these carefully selected pictures, the descriptive text is unusually well written, factual, and most informative.

The last important general account in English of Svalbard (Spitsbergen) was written in 1920 by R. N. Rudmose Brown. There have certainly been several useful short accounts since then, but these are far from exhaustive and in any case are out of date. It is not suggested that the new book will fill the gap and become a very important source of reference for English students of Svalbard, but, until a new and carefully documented general account appears, it will certainly be the best available introduction to the subject.

In 1947 O. F. Backer, a very talented photographer working in cooperation with the publishing firm of J. W. Eide, visited Svalbard in order to collect material. Unfortunately, he died in that year, before his book had been prepared for press. The publishers decided to continue the work and collected additional photographs. In this they were aided by the Norsk Polarinstitut. Finally, Professor Anatol Heintz of Oslo University, who has taken part in a number of expeditions to the archipelago, was asked to write the introduction and the detailed captions for each picture. The book was published simultaneously in a Norwegian and an English edition. The English translation, apart from a few minor mistakes, is well above the average.

Almost every aspect of scenery and life in Svalbard is illustrated: coal mining; trapping and sealing; geological features; and flora and fauna. There are many fine photographs of mountains, fjords, and glaciers: all the fascination of Svalbard on a fine summer's day. Strangely enough there is no photograph of so prominent and common a feature as a raised beach, though there is a view across Gipsdalen where the old shore lines stand out fairly well. A number of the oblique air photographs taken just before the war by Norges Svalbard-og Ishavs-Undersøkelser (now the Norsk Polarinstitut) have been included and help to give a striking impression of the topography of the archipelago. The quality of the photographs and their reproduction is very good, and all the important photographs are up to date. It is regrettable that there is little or no order in the arrangement and that the illustrations could not have been collected under headings such as "coal mining", "bird life", and "geological features". Moreover, too much attention is paid to purely Norwegian achievements—great as these undoubtedly are. A few brief references are made to "foreign" scientific work, but nothing is said, for instance, about the long and important series of Swedish expeditions to the archipelago, nor is there any mention of the many British expeditions, particularly from Oxford or Cambridge. More details should certainly have been given about American pioneering work in the development of coal mining.

Despite this criticism, it cannot be doubted that the book will serve its main purpose well—to attract the more adventurous traveller and to help revive the once flourishing summer tourist trade. Svalbard should appeal to the scientific visitor as well, for there are few places in the Arctic so easy of access and with such magnificent scenery.

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