

them” (p. 158). She argues that an eastward migration is unlikely: “If word had reached Danish, Norwegian, or Icelandic officials that the Norse Greenland colony had ceased to exist, it would have been noted by somebody” (p. 166). She also rejects the possibility of a northward or southward migration: “For the Norse Greenlanders to settle farther north in their Arctic homeland would have made no sense, and there is no indication of a wholesale movement south, such as to the British Isles” (p. 166). This, then, leaves only the option of going west. Following an overview of the cartography of the North Atlantic area, Seaver discusses the explorations of João Fernandes and his companions around the turn of the 16th century and the Azorean and English plans to exploit the resources of the Labrador-Newfoundland coast, which would require a permanent settlement with skilled workers. She proposes that “João Fernandes with his Azorean and British associates may have been the catalyst for the Eastern Settlement to lose the strongest and most fertile segment of their population around 1500” (p. 182) and points out that “[i]f the Norse Greenlanders had adjusted both their domestic and export economy to English demands for stockfish and other fish products that had now dwindled to the point where the Greenlanders were facing complete isolation, they would primarily have required assurance about transportation and help to get started with a new life” (p. 182–183). She speculates that “[i]f the Norse Greenlanders migrated west to a stretch of Labrador chosen by others...they may have ended up on the bottom of the Davis Strait before ever reaching the other shore, or they may have perished during their first winter in the new land from new diseases, from starvation or simply from the bitter cold” (p. 183).

In the final chapter 11, “Who Went Looking for Them?” Seaver examines accounts of post-medieval efforts to reconnect with the Norse Greenlanders and also notes that recent DNA testing of a number of Inuit people has not revealed any discernible genetic mingling of Norse and Inuit during the Middle Ages. In a postscript, “The Fictional Norse in North America,” Seaver discusses what she calls “alternative histories festooned with ‘Norse’ objects found in America” (p. 203), such as the Newport Tower, the Kensington Stone, and the Vinland Map.

The Last Vikings: The Epic Story of the Great Norse Voyagers is a book that makes the fascinating reality considerably more interesting than the fictional stories that have arisen about Norse activities in Greenland and America. Admittedly, many of Seaver’s suggestions and conclusions are speculative, but they are sound and based on careful scrutiny of archaeological evidence, historical data, and literary analysis. Some chapters seem encumbered by digressions or by too much detail or information irrelevant to the story of the Norse in Greenland, such as accounts of personal travels and impressions. Moreover, Seaver’s attempt to combine a style that is novelistic and yet scholarly seems strained at times and becomes somewhat wearisome as the book progresses. Nevertheless, in her attempt to solve the mystery of the fate of the Norse Greenlanders, Seaver

manages to hold the reader’s attention until the very last page.

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THIS VANISHING LAND: A WOMAN’S JOURNEY TO THE CANADIAN ARCTIC. By DIANNE WHELAN. Half-moon Bay, British Columbia: Caitlin Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-894759-38-0. 176 p., maps, colour illus. Softbound. Cdn\$28.95.

This Vanishing Land, a companion to the author’s National Film Board production *This Land* (2009), based on the same event, describes Dianne Whelan’s participation in Operation Nunavut 07. She drove a snowmobile in one of three Canadian military units that took part in the Arctic sovereignty patrol from 24 March to 10 April 2007. The entire patrol of 24, approximately half active Canadian soldiers and the other half Inuit Rangers, joined forces at Resolute, where they constructed their komatiks (sledges) and packed each with 907 kg, the necessary supplies for the entire trip. From Resolute, they traveled together on 24 snowmobiles to a spot outside Grise Fiord, where they split into three eight-member units, each of which took a different route before reuniting at Alert at the end of the trip.

A 42-year old journalist and a white woman to boot, Whelan wheedled her way onto the expedition by getting what the military’s public affairs officer thought impossible: three letters from broadcasters interested in her footage and reportage. She then discovered she had one more crucial test: passing the snowmobile operator’s exam. She easily accomplished this feat and was assigned to the group led by Major Bergeron, the operation’s commander.

Once the mission began, she faced more challenges, some relating to her gender and others to being an outsider to the military world. On less demanding assignments, Whelan might not have faced as many gender issues as she did with the 22 macho military men. There was one other woman, a Native elder who did not speak English, but she was on another of the three units and not on hand when Whelan needed her most. The most difficult challenges, however, came from the land and climatic conditions that do battle against everyone on such patrols.

With little practice, Whelan was immediately faced with understanding a snowmobiler’s techniques for hauling a loaded komatik with no brakes and navigating through rough terrain. She managed all right, but was ever-conscious of the men watching her. Although they insisted they must work as a team and, in fact, their survival demanded teamwork, Whelan was often the butt of their jokes, when she needed a bathroom and the landscape was flat for miles, or

when her brakes started to smoke because she began driving without noticing the emergency was on. No doubt, the ribbing would have taken a different direction had Bergeron not cautioned her against revealing her lesbian relationship. She was constantly aware of navigating a fine route not only through the Arctic landscape, but also through the team's complex personalities.

Without doubt, it was the land itself that caused Whelan the most anxiety. The unit faced every imaginable Arctic hazard: choppy sea ice, raging blizzards, extreme cold temperatures, and polar bears. Few before have traveled even by skidoo on the 2000 km route from Resolute, traversing Ellesmere and following the western and northern shorelines, as her unit did. They stopped a mere 684 km from the North Pole at Ward Hunt Island, where they erected a specially designed titanium Canadian flag, thus claiming the island as Canada's in much the same way, she notes, as the Danes had done for Denmark by occupying Hans Island in 2006. Then, they continued on to Alert.

In writing this book, Whelan joined a growing group of women Arctic adventurer-writers that includes Helen Thayer (1993), who skied to the magnetic North Pole in 1988; Victoria Jason (1995), who kayaked through the Northwest Passage between 1991 and 1994; and the many women who have attempted in recent years to reach the North Pole. These women are bent on demonstrating how they win against adversity and reach their goals. Some, especially Jason, focus as much on the beauty and spirituality of the land as they do on a show of strength or an outwitting of nature. Like theirs, Whelan's is an adventure story, first and foremost, but hers differs because she is immersed in the masculine military world. She is foisted into a position alongside the military crew in opposition to the landscape; her story is one of conquest. She is constantly pushed to do her share and keep up with the men.

Yet, she describes moments when the landscape is overwhelming in its magnitude and beauty. On Day 4, for example, under sunny skies and traveling across a high plateau, free of the demanding crush ice along the shoreline, she remarks: "it is one of those Zen moments when the energy of the landscape clears the mind...We are all experiencing the same thing—bliss" (p. 93–94).

Most often, moments of bliss were cut short by obstacles. Within an hour's travel of reaching Grise Fiord, she notes, "I am looking at the beautiful icebergs locked into place on the frozen waters of Jones Sound when suddenly I hit a large chunk of ice hidden under some soft snow, and my body is airborne" (p. 78). She was, of course, expected to pick herself up and carry on, in true military fashion. Like everything in the Arctic, experiences are extreme: extreme beauty, extreme temperatures, and extreme shifts from comfort to pain.

The book's rich descriptions of daily happenings on the patrol are amply supplemented by 107 images of the participants, equipment, and landscape. Images project the realities of meal preparation, sleeping, and waiting out storms in cramped tents, as well as the scenery along the route, in

both sunshine and storm. Pictures of storms are particularly memorable. Images definitely flesh out the physical challenges but also the camaraderie in the patrol, emphasizing the crucial role played by the Inuit in its success. In particular, Whalen praises her own patrol's Inuit scout, who often traveled without goggles in order to find the best route in spite of risking—and often experiencing—frostbite.

Like many books meant for a general audience and popular consumption, *This Vanishing Land* lacks both bibliography and index. A few brief notes appear at the conclusion, but these are only teasers. The text itself refers to many historical, cultural, and geographical facts. The story is not solely about the adventure; it also celebrates the Inuit and early explorers, mention of which could be better accessed through an index.

However, what I like best about *This Vanishing Land* is its ability, through both words and images, to transport readers and immerse them in the heart and essence of this short but remarkably intense patrol in the Canadian Arctic. Readers will feel as though they've experienced a brief period in today's changing world of the Inuit.

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