

THE MAGNETIC NORTH: NOTES FROM THE ARCTIC CIRCLE. By SARA WHEELER. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. ISBN 978-0-374-20013-8. Distributed in Canada by D&M Publishers, Vancouver, BC. xiii + 315 p., maps, b&w illus., notes, selected bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$29.95.

Sara Wheeler's new book, *The Magnetic North: Notes from the Arctic Circle*, takes readers on a journey around the Arctic Circle. Earlier in her career, Wheeler avoided the Arctic because of the presence of humans there, contrasting it with the terra incognita of the South Pole, the title of a previous work. Yet time spent with the Sámi in Norway sparked her curiosity about the North and ultimately the journey that inspired this book. Starting in eastern Russia, Wheeler makes her way around the Arctic Circle, ending in the White Sea region. Each chapter presents an ethnographic account of one of these locations, along with historical anecdotes and Wheeler's reflections on the uniqueness and significance of the Arctic.

Beginning in Chutkotka, Russia, Wheeler experiences a town engineered by Soviet planning for the extraction industries, the forced relocation of the indigenous people into urban life, and the impact of Governor Roman Abramovich's oil money on the local infrastructure. Her visit to Chutkotka coincides with that of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who is touting the potential and importance of the Russian Arctic to the country's future economic growth.

Wheeler's next stop is North America, where she visits Alaska and Nunavut. Her travels in Alaska follow the Dalton Highway, a service road for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which highlights the entrepreneurial and independent spirit of America in an Arctic context. Resource extraction and the waste it generates are juxtaposed with the natural beauty Wheeler finds in the Alaskan National Wildlife Reserve. Her account of her stop in Canada details the relations between the Inuit and policymakers in the South and notes the disconnect between state intervention and northern realities. While traveling along with an expedition on Southampton Island, Wheeler finds an Inuit guide hopeful about the new political power and voice Inuit have gained through the creation of Nunavut.

Wheeler's account of Greenland and Svalbard Island opens a perspective on science in the Arctic. Wheeler's time on Greenland was spent at the Summit Station with geologists and snow chemists examining the impact of humans on the earth trapped in the ice and snow. Svalbard is a similar case, except the focus was on the plants and the animals that have been affected by toxins and waste in the environment. Here Wheeler confronts her personal skepticism about the impact of humans on the environment.

Wheeler ends her journey in continental Europe, save for a brief excursion on a Russian icebreaker. Her chapter on Lapland details the relations between the Sámi and Scandinavian governments. The hardships of the Sámi are detailed, from their resistance to Soviet and Nazi forces during World War II to more recent struggles for

representation. Wheeler's voyage on a Soviet-era icebreaker offers another chance to confront her personal skepticism as she joins the tourists marveling at the spectacle of a polar bear feasting on a seal, made possible only by contributing to the very conditions that jeopardize the future existence of the observed and spectators alike. Finally, Wheeler ends her journey on the Solovetsky Islands in the middle of the White Sea. The history of the monastery on the island takes centre stage, from its early importance to Christianity in Russia, to its time as the prototypical gulag for the Soviets, and finally to the more recent story of its conversion once again to a monastery and museum.

Through the book Wheeler's stories are interspersed with topical issues and historical narratives. The narrative line can be confusing at times, as Wheeler is not always clear in indicating the source of her accounts. Additionally her approach to the topical issues remains superficial. Yet this is not necessarily a bad thing since Wheeler is neither an Arctic specialist nor an academic historian. The stories are brief, yet expressive; the contextual issues are left hanging as Wheeler allows the reader to reflect on her travels, the historical stories, and contemporary issues without needing a detailed and intricate explanation of these issues.

What Wheeler does bring is a new look at two intricate themes. The first is the interconnectedness of the polar regions. The issues and situations Wheeler encounters in one location are repeated again and again at nearly every site: the hardships of the people living in the Arctic caught between traditional ways of life and a "modern" structured lifestyle; the impacts of resource extraction on the plants, animals, people and land; and the rush of scientists, artists, and writers to these remote locations. These common issues reinforce the similarities, not only in the people but also in the conditions, across the Arctic region. These similarities are not forced or contrived through the narrative, but come unprovoked from Wheeler's observations and play a significant role in challenging her own skepticism.

The other significant theme of Wheeler's work is the acculturation of northern communities. The process is not pretty, and Wheeler makes no effort to hide this fact:

Every nation devastates native cultures, even if it doesn't actually kill everyone off. Russians did it with bureaucracy, Americans with money, Canadians (in the end) with kindness. Swedes and Finns did it with chainsaws that chopped down forests. And everyone did it with booze and syphilis. It is a grim story, but I... was looking, in the words of T.S. Eliot, 'to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.' (p. 14)

Wheeler's book is not for those looking for a feel-good story about the Arctic. This book presents the Arctic through the eyes of an experienced travel writer. The historical stories provide both context and continuity across the sites, as the same themes pop up without much prodding by the author. The value of this book lies in Wheeler's

ability to weave these multiple narratives together at each site, creating a book that is informative, enlightening, light-hearted at some places, and depressingly honest at others. While it might not be the most scholarly text available, the book does provide many interesting stories and reflections on the importance of the Arctic to the world today.

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**DROWNING REINDEER, DROWNING HOMES: INDIGENOUS SÁMI AND HYDROELECTRICITY DEVELOPMENT IN SOMPIO, FINLAND.** By KAISU MUSTONEN and TERO MUSTONEN, in cooperation with ANTTI and PEKKA AIKIO. Vaasa, Finland: Snowchange Cooperative, 2010. ISBN 978-952-92-8343-9. 115 p., maps, b&w and colour illus., references. Available from [tero.mustonen@snowchange.org](mailto:tero.mustonen@snowchange.org). US\$20.00 + shipping.

The main goal of this book is to make the international public aware of the history of hydroelectric power construction in northern Finland and its dramatic consequences for local communities. The authors document the social, cultural, and environmental impacts on local people of construction of the Lokka and Porttipahta reservoirs, the two largest reservoirs in Europe. Since the 14th century, the community in the area has included first the Forest Sámi, then the arriving Finnish settlers, who mixed with the Forest Sámi, and in the 1880s, the arriving North Sámi. More Finns have moved into the villages of the community since the Second World War.

A focal theme of the book is the River Kemijoki, the biggest river in Finland, which has been harnessed for hydroelectric power since 1948. During the Second World War, Finland lost much of its hydropower capacity to the Soviet Union. Very quickly national interests were directed towards the natural resources of northern Finland. The standard of living was rising after the war, and the forest industry played an important role in this development. The state had taken over the task of securing the energy supply. By the late 1960s, the construction of dams and the electric industry had reached the headwaters of the river. The cover photo of this book very distinctively describes the last “timberjack” logger in the area just before it was flooded.

This book has four main parts. Part 1, “One River, Many Damages,” was written by Tero and Kaisu Mustonen. Both are human geographers who have worked with northern communities in the North American Arctic, Iceland, Sámi areas, and Siberia. To describe the main events during the construction of the Lokka and Porttipahta reservoirs in northern Finland and the situation in the region, the authors

use Western scientific assessments, indigenous and local oral histories, and literature that is relevant to the themes at hand. The chapter first explores the histories, culture, and major biogeographical features of the region. Juridical and power-related issues are named as key factors in the process of constructing the reservoirs in the 1960–70s. Finally, it discusses recent concerns in the area related to other global changes, such as weather and climate change, and the arrival of new species.

Part 2, “When Electricity was Sown,” was written by Pekka Aikio (MSc, Doctor honoris causa), a reindeer herder and longtime leader of the Sámi of Finland who comes from the reindeer herding community affected by the reservoirs. The chapter begins with an earlier, previously unpublished story by Pekka’s father, the late Sámi leader and reindeer herder Oula Aikio, who kept a diary in the 1960s. His entries include observations of weather and ecosystem changes and reindeer herding events during the time when the community was under pressure from hydroelectric development. These diary entries are no doubt one of the most haunting parts of this book. Oula Aikio (p. 75) shares with readers the views from inside the community as the hydroelectric plans developed and as the situation worsened in the community:

12th February 1967. I listen to the Greek Catholic Church service from the radio and it sounds beautiful. It seems to me that the Government of Finland tends to empty the entire Northern Finland of its old regular inhabitants. Our reindeer are starving and dying. Our best winter pastures on the shores of the big rivers have been spoiled with clear cuttings and soil preparations. They also destroyed the areas by spraying herbicides on deciduous forests and all this was carried out prior to the man-made lake construction. We have no possibility to herd reindeer in an old traditional way. The reindeer have been left on their own. Maybe the Finnish society and authorities again one day [will] realize what mistakes and injustice they have done to us and the damage it has caused to us. The society will however never again be able to save the reindeer herding in Lapin paliskunta [reindeer herding co-operative].

Pekka Aikio concludes his chapter by showing how the Finnish state completely ignored the existence of nomadic Sámi and their reindeer herding. In this hydroelectric development project led by institutions, only technical and economic issues were considered, and local people were neither heard nor taken into account in the planning and implementation.

Similar problems related to questions of indigenous rights and hydroelectric developments have arisen in other circumpolar societies as well. Many of these examples demonstrate how hydroelectric power constructions are planned at the periphery of the Arctic regions, where most of the impacts remain, while the profits are taken by the more populated regions in the south. The authors use