

that the absence of a trend or reduced increase in temperature of warm permafrost is likely due to the absorption of latent heat required for phase change (Riseborough, 1990) and is therefore an expected characteristic of warming permafrost as ground temperatures approach 0°C. The explanation for this phenomenon is only provided much later (p. 139) in a chapter by Chris Burn on “Permafrost Distribution and Stability.”

A particular theme in the book which I enjoyed was the emphasis on spatial and temporal variation of physical processes and the role of past processes, specifically glaciation, on shaping the current landscape and its vulnerability to change. This context is set early in the text by French and Slaymaker, who remind readers that Canada’s cold regions are characterized by diversity and that many landscapes, be they geomorphic or ecologic, may be thought of as transitional, as most of Canada’s cold environments bear the legacy of glaciation. David Evans’ chapter on “The Late Quaternary Glaciation of Northern Canada” and Konrad Gajewski’s “The Evolution of Polar Desert and Tundra Ecosystems” both follow these themes nicely. The longer-term perspective of environmental change recurs in some chapters, notably in those on geomorphic change by French and Slaymaker. The concept that landscapes are in transition and that glacial and post-glacial histories influence their potential for change is an idea that should prove to be increasingly useful in anticipating which cold environments are most vulnerable to future modification.

The book also provides a chapter authored by Laidler that discusses the societal and governance systems that characterize the Canadian North. This is an important component of the text, as Aboriginal perspectives of environmental change and evolving northern governance set critical context that cannot be ignored when considering resource development, community adaptation, and the implications of climate change in Canada’s cold regions.

The strong technical content and the diversity of materials and perspectives presented make this text a valuable resource not only for senior undergraduate and graduate students, but also for professionals working in related environmental fields. The book will complement courses on the geography and ecology of cold regions and can help to set context for courses on northern resource management.

#### REFERENCE

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#### TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE: AN ALASKAN’S JOURNEY.

By VICTOR FISCHER with CHARLES WOHLFORTH. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2012. ISBN 978-1-60223-139-9. xv + 405 p., b&w and colour illus., chapter notes, index. Hardbound. US\$27.95.

Firsthand encounters with momentous challenges mark the author’s life, from the early 20th into the 21st century. Son of two authors, American Louis Fischer and Latvian-born Markoosha, Victor (“Vic” to his friends and colleagues) reached adolescence as “Vitya” in Moscow, USSR. Vic’s fascination with the North and Alaska began there, at the Fridtjof Nansen School, where élite students learned to admire pioneering feats, exemplified by the Norwegian polar pioneer for whom the school was named. Thus Vic, his older brother George, and two close chums, Lothar Wloch and Koni Wolf, celebrated Soviet polar achievements of the 1930s. Those included icebreaker developments, the airplane rescue of SS *Chelyuskin’s* crew from Chukchi Sea ice, and “firsts” by aeronauts and pagonauts of 1937–38 (Papanin, 1939). Stalin’s purges, begun in 1936, intensified for several years, draining school faculty and claiming relatives of schoolmates. Markoosha’s desperate perseverance, and ultimately intervention by Eleanor Roosevelt, won permission for Markoosha and her boys to leave the Soviet Union and rejoin Louis in 1939.

After reuniting, the Fischers were invited to the White House for dinner. To accommodate his awe of polar explorers, no doubt, 15-year old Vic was seated between Mrs. Roosevelt and Admiral Richard Byrd. He struggled to follow conversations in unfamiliar English while imitating the sequence of silverware that guests chose for successive dinner courses.

World War II lured the separated friends from the Nansen School into the military services of different nations, Lothar to serve as a Luftwaffe officer, Koni as a conscript in the Red Army, and George and Vic in the U.S. Army. America’s postwar boom and his graduate degree in planning from MIT allowed Vic to choose among job offers in 1950. He and his wife Gloria chose a federal post in the Territory of Alaska over settling into “the cluttered prettiness of New England” (p. 104).

The 1952 national elections roused Vic’s indignation over Alaska residents’ ineligibility to vote. Crisscrossing Alaska for his job while honing his sense of effective democracy led Vic ardently to support Alaska Statehood. Campaigning for statehood strengthened Vic’s skills at forging friendships and agreements across political lines. Vic was elected delegate to Alaska’s Constitutional Convention of 1955–56 in Fairbanks. Colourful depictions of delegates’ arguments and agreements on provisions of the Constitution occupy 50 pages (p. 133–182) and update Vic’s book on the Convention (Fischer, 1975). Policy development sensitized him to enthusiasm emanating from the Kennedy administration in Washington.

After 11 heady years in Alaska, Vic and Gloria followed Alaska Senator Bob Bartlett’s advice and returned to

Boston for graduate study at what is now Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Subsequent federal appointments elevated Vic to near-cabinet rank. The family's absence from Alaska stretched beyond three years. He comments, "optimism of those days may be difficult to imagine in these more cynical times" (p. 192). Four months after JFK's assassination, the Good Friday Earthquake of 1964 struck Alaska. Within hours, Air Force One was carrying a federal team, including Vic, to Alaska to make firsthand inspections and brief the White House on damage the following Monday.

While still overseeing federal post-earthquake reconstruction in August 1964, Vic returned to the Soviet Union after a 25-year absence for a conference on community planning. He also stopped in West Berlin to renew his friendship with former schoolmate Lothar Wloch. The next stretch in Vic's several careers took shape after Paul Ylvisaker at the Ford Foundation warned that support for U.S. civilian programs would shrivel as the Vietnam war exhausted discretionary federal resources. Returning to Alaska, Vic founded the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska, which he directed from 1965 to 1980. Early in his tenure, Vic wondered why the young state's funding for the Institute's research had stopped. He mentioned his concern to Republican Governor Wally Hickel, who summoned his chief of staff to join him and Vic. In their presence, Hickel articulated his policy of contracting evenhandedly for research. It turned out that his chief of staff had imagined a Democratic Party conspiracy to use Vic to wrest Alaska back from Republican Party control. ISER research helped Alaska to navigate various benchmarks: the discovery of petroleum at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (1971), oil pipeline construction in 1975–77, and oil flow through that pipeline starting in 1977.

Vic grew restless in academia, and by the mid-1970s he was seeking more tangible objectives. He and his brother George reconnected Vic's Moscow boyhood "Troika" by hosting both Koni Wolf from East Germany and Lothar Wloch from West Germany in New York and Alaska. Some of Vic's most thoughtful passages explore deep friendships and human empathy, trumping the political brutalities of the 20th century. A new wife, Jane (1981), election to the Alaska Senate representing Anchorage (1981–86), a new baby daughter (1983), and symbolically significant trips to China (1984) and Alaska's Little Diomedede Island (1985) highlighted the decade.

Louis Fischer predicted in 1926 that oil imperialism would dominate world politics for a generation or two. Six decades later, political headhunting by petroleum industry operatives and lobbyists derailed his son's reelection bid to the Alaska Senate. Economic doldrums afflicted Alaska until the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill (1989) brought a surge of spending for cleanup efforts.

After 1988, events at both ends of the Soviet Union combined to tap Vic's cosmopolitan skills. At an age when he

might have welcomed easing into anonymity and the aura of eccentricity that surrounds Alaskans who reside there for love of the Arctic (it's hard to reside in a less populous region, or any farther west, east, and north of urban Euro-American centers-of-gravity for global consciousness), Vic continued to travel and raise his profile. Thawing Cold War barriers breached the Russia-Alaska "Ice Curtain" for a few years. As a facilitator for scientific and academic cooperation between the University of Alaska and Russian counterpart institutions, Vic traveled so extensively through Russia that he gladly accepted Russian passports for himself and family. Developments at the European and Beringian ends of Russia remained worlds apart. Anchorage's nickname, "air crossroads of the world" vanished, for example. Refueling there to skirt Russia's periphery stopped when Russia's air space opened to international air carriers. Alaska's nearest neighbours in Chukotka, 12 time zones from London, suffered more, rather than less, privation once the Ice Curtain melted. A corrupt, despotic governor (A. Nazarov) plundered resources in the autonomous region. Chukotka's crisis became so severe that one of Russia's wealthiest post-Soviet entrepreneurs, Roman Abramovich, stepped in to help Chukotkans financially. A delegation of influential Russians and Americans wanted Vic to seek Chukotka's governorship in the next election. Abramovich himself ran and won, however, and ended up making improvements in Chukotka's infrastructure.

Vic's characterizations of key friends and colleagues could strike some readers as "name-dropping." The author's expressed admiration for nearly every associate, however, reflects the sincere civility that permeates his life; not the pale shadow of civility found in public life today. Moreover, depictions of so many people allow readers to calibrate their own experiences with people the author describes. A few syntax and proofing problems escaped the book's editors. Overall, though, this wide-ranging account succeeds as a unique, thoughtful perspective on circumpolar affairs.

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