

END-OF-EARTH PEOPLE: THE ARCTIC SAHTU DENE. By BERN WILL BROWN. Toronto, Ontario: Dundurn Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-4597-2267-5. 179 p., maps, b&w and colour illus., notes, bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$35.00.

While Bern Will Brown's previous books focused largely on documenting his personal experiences of life and travel during the last half of the 20th century in the Northwest Territories (Brown, 1966, 1999, 2007), this time he turns his attention to the Dene residents of Colville Lake, with whom he lived for more than 60 years. Speaking a dialect of the Athapaskan language called Slavey-Hare, the people of Colville Lake are sometimes referred to as Delágot'ine, or "end-of-the-earth people." They are related to the K'ashogot'ine of nearby Fort Good Hope and are one of the communities composing the larger regional political entity, the Sahtu Dene.

The main body of the book consists of 14 brief chapters on various aspects of Dene life: history, social practices and beliefs, language, habitation, subsistence, crafts, and other subjects. These chapters focus primarily on Colville Lake, though occasionally using examples from other communities in the Sahtu region. The book contains a foreword by Norman Yakeleya, regional representative in the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly; an editorial on Brown's history and contributions in the North, by Ivan Gaetz; a brief afterword by Charles Arnold; two appendices, containing a profile of the Sahtu Dene/Metis land claim and an annotated bibliography of Brown's earlier publications; as well as acknowledgements, text notes, a bibliography, and an index.

Though loosely following the format of an ethnographic report, the book will disappoint those anticipating such a document, as Brown warns readers in the preface, where he carefully lays out his reasons for writing this book:

There are two ways of writing about any aboriginal people. The first is to research what has already been written about them, and then, if possible, to visit their area. Most books about the north seem to have been written this way. Such authors don't always get the facts straight...[and]...[w]hen I hear an old-time northerner criticizing a fly-by-night professional writer, I ask why didn't he write something himself. The second method of preparation for writing such a book is simple, but time consuming. You go and live with the people. You become a northerner yourself. But it can't be done in a year. I found that my ideas about the First Nations people only began to change after ten years of living among them. ...And so, after some sixty years, I have written an account of what I've seen and experienced over that time. I leave it to the anthropologists to research the books containing the facts and figures preserved in the Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. I am not a professional anthropologist. I write a simple tale of a people I know and whose history, way

of life, challenges, and opportunities gave birth to this unvarnished narrative (p. 21–22).

Though Brown sometimes presents interesting details about life in Colville Lake, there is much to criticize about his commentary, which frequently presents erroneous historical or cultural information, is often opinionated, and is consistently patronizing. In one example, from September 1950, Brown tells of a visit by boat to an island in Great Bear Lake, which, according to local Dene narrative, is home to a dangerous creature that lives in a cave and is always avoided by local people. Warned by one of his Sahtu Dene companions that visiting the cave was "too dangerous," Brown ignores the advice, noting "I was in charge of the boat so I pulled to shore and hiked up alone" (p. 25). To enumerate all of the book's errors and issues is well beyond the scope of this review.

Though Brown's commentary serves to decrease the book's importance as a contribution to northern studies, with more than 60 colour or black-and-white images, the book presents a rich photographic archive of life in Colville Lake and the Sahtu region since the late 1940s. Those familiar with Brown's photographs (Brown, 2008 and collection on file at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife) will welcome this collection, as many have never been published before. Depicting an intimate view of life throughout the second half of the 20th century, Brown's photographs make a significant contribution to documenting history and life in the Northwest Territories, and for this reason alone, the book is a worthy addition to any library focused on the Northwest Territories or northern lifeways. Students studying life in the North should be wary, however, and read the text with a careful and critical eye.

REFERENCES

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