

HERSCHEL ISLAND QIKIQTARYUK: A NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF YUKON'S ARCTIC ISLAND. Edited by CHRISTOPHER R. BURN. Whitehorse, Yukon: Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), 2012. ISBN 978-0-9880009-0-2. Available from the University of Calgary Press. xiii + 242 p., maps, colour illus., 43 contributing authors, sources and further reading, index. Hardbound, Cdn\$44.95; Softbound, Cdn\$34.95.

I have many fond memories of Herschel Island, as it served as my introduction to Arctic archaeology in the early 1990s. It was therefore with great interest that I picked up Christopher Burn's edited volume, *Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk: A Natural and Cultural History of Yukon's Arctic Island*. The book is an ambitious attempt to summarize and integrate the natural, cultural, and historical diversity of this unique Canadian place. The national and international significance of Herschel Island is reflected in the many official designations it has received over the past 50 years. For example, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board designated the island as a National Historic Event in 1972. Herschel Island has been a Yukon Territorial Park since 1987 and was included in Canada's tentative list of sites to be considered for nomination as a World Heritage Site in 2004. It is therefore a worthy subject for any book. Burn's volume succeeds wonderfully in illustrating how Herschel Island's natural history and cultural heritage are intertwined. The author accomplished this by organizing the book into sections dealing with land and water, flora and fauna, people and culture, and conservation and governance, each authored by an acknowledged expert, with contributions by Inuvialuit scholars rounding out the impressive list of contributors. The book is beautifully illustrated and contains many striking historical and current photographs of the island and its inhabitants. Written for a non-specialist audience, it serves wonderfully as both a reference book and a "good read."

For the uninitiated, Herschel Island or *Qikiqtaryuk* lies 5 km off the coast of the Yukon in northern Canada. Captain John Franklin named the island in 1826, in honour of the talents and accomplishments of Victorian scientists William and John Herschel. From the sections of the book dealing with people and culture, we learn that the earliest traces of human settlement on the island date back to 800 years ago, when the ancestors of Inuvialuit and other contemporary Inuit peoples left Alaska in search of new lands to the east. The large numbers of bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) in the Mackenzie Delta region during the late 19th century prompted American commercial whalers to move their operations to Herschel Island. In 1890, the Pacific Steam Whaling Company ship *Mary D. Hume* reached Herschel Island, and the first of many buildings was constructed using materials off-loaded from the ship. The American whalers were quick to recognize the advantages of permafrost for food preservation. Consequently, semi-subterranean shelters were built for cold storage by blasting holes into the tundra and roofing them with

driftwood and sod. The Pacific Steam Whaling Company of San Francisco decided to use Pauline Cove on Herschel Island as an advance base from which whaling expeditions could be launched. Crews would overwinter at the site, where they would render blubber aboard the ships, collect firewood, hunt, and engage in a range of social activities to pass the long winter months. As the settlement grew, so did the cultural diversity of its population. In addition to whalers and their families, we are told, Inuvialuit were employed as laborers and engaged in trade. Stories of social problems caused by alcohol prompted the arrival of both the Northwest Mounted Police and Anglican missionaries.

By 1895, the whaling fleets had exploited the whole range of bowhead whales, and overhunting had caused a steady decline in whale numbers. With the collapse of the whalebone market in 1908, fur trading replaced whaling as a major economic activity on Herschel Island. In response to surging fur prices during the first decade of the 20th century, the Hudson's Bay Company established a post on Herschel Island in 1915. Through the 1920s, Inuvialuit fur traders became some of the wealthiest indigenous people in Canada. They purchased rifles, fishing nets, camping gear, and large motorized schooners, which allowed them to trap white fox over large areas of the Western Arctic. With the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, however, the fur trade all but collapsed. In the years that followed, Herschel Island has remained important to Inuvialuit as a wildlife harvesting location and is integral to their cultural identity.

Burn's book does an excellent job of tying this rich cultural history to the island's equally impressive natural history. After reading the sections dealing with flora and fauna, the reader understands why Herschel Island was such an attractive place for Inuvialuit families and Euro-North American whalers, traders, and others. The sections discussing land and water also link directly to those dealing with conservation and governance. For me, these were the most poignant parts of the book, as currently the impacts of climate change and human activity have put much of Herschel Island's rich cultural and natural heritage at risk. We learn that rising sea levels and increasingly violent storms caused by the disappearance of sea ice have accelerated shoreline erosion on Herschel Island. Records show that in the past 20 years alone, shoreline positions have receded by almost 20 m, requiring the relocation of several historic buildings. One historic structure was badly damaged in 1987 and again in 2001 when storm surges rammed ice into the structure. Historic building foundations are becoming waterlogged as a result of ground thaw, land subsidence, flooding in low-lying areas, and a possible rise in the water table. Several historic structures have also been damaged by grizzly bears. Vulnerability to flooding and erosion has been reduced through the relocation of several buildings at risk. For example, we learn that the Northern Whaling and Trading Company store has been moved twice: 5 m back from the shoreline in 2003 and another 5 m in 2004. A third building was moved in 2008. These and possible future relocations negatively impact the site by removing

buildings from their historic contexts. In a historic cemetery on the south-facing hills behind the settlement, thawing permafrost has caused caskets to push through the ground surface and tumble down the slopes. Finally, up to three cruise ships now visit the island annually, resulting in footpaths and general wear and tear on buildings. In this way, the book relates history and heritage to climatology, oceanography and earth science so beautifully that non-specialist readers will be left with a greater understanding of just how fragile Canada's Arctic heritage has become in recent decades. I would therefore recommend this book to anyone interested in the natural and cultural history of the Canadian Arctic, and I consider it a worthy addition to any coffee table or library.

Peter C. Dawson
Department of Anthropology and Archaeology
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada
pcdawson@ucalgary.ca

FROZEN ASSETS: BRITISH MINING, EXPLORATION, AND GEOPOLITICS ON SPITSBERGEN, 1904–53. By FRIGGA KRUSE. Groningen, The Netherlands: Arctic Centre, University of Groningen, 2013. ISBN 9789491431333. Circumpolar Studies 9. xiii + 466 p., maps, b&w Illus., references, appendices. Softbound. €36.57 (incl. VAT).

Frigga Kruse's doctoral thesis on the history of British mining, exploration, and geopolitics on Spitsbergen in the first half of the 20th century is published as Volume Nine of the University of Groningen's Circumpolar Studies Series. Readers will immediately recognize this work as an unrevised dissertation with all the strengths and weaknesses this genre entails. The structure is somewhat formulaic, the introduction is highly theoretical, and the text is quite long. But this is a fascinating and highly original work that will be of great interest to historians of Spitsbergen/Svalbard, as well as to historians of the Arctic in general. In particular, it offers an excellent example of the innovative work of the Large-scale Historical Exploitation of Polar Areas (LASHIPA) project, which came out of the International Polar Year of 2007–08 and combines historical archeology with extensive archival research.

The book's central research question is, "What were the driving forces behind the development of the British mining industry on Spitsbergen between 1904 and 1953?" (p. 4). Using a theoretical framework that combines a center-periphery model with Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor Network Theory (ANT), Kruse suggests that a combination of economic and political motivations sustained British mining interests in Spitsbergen during that period. The study aims to move the history of economic exploitation in the Arctic away from a national or nationalistic perspective

towards a broader and more international approach by integrating previously disparate research methods. ANT offers an ideal framework for achieving this goal since it gives a role to non-human "actants" and connects local histories to global networks. This theoretical framework potentially has a lot to contribute to Arctic history, and a fuller discussion of how ANT fits into this broader field might therefore have been useful. For example, does ANT function as an alternative to the more established approaches of environmental history, history of science, and historical geography, or is it better thought of as a tool to be applied across a variety of historical disciplines?

Spitsbergen is probably not a place most readers would immediately associate with Britain and the British Empire, but an early chapter on "Britishness" helps to make this connection. Building on Francis Spufford's *I may be some time: Ice and the English Imagination* (1996), Kruse shows how Britain's longstanding interest in the polar regions played an important role in stimulating British economic interests in Spitsbergen. The British had a romantic interest in the history of the polar regions that sometimes provided the motivation for men like the polar explorer William Speirs Bruce to take an interest in mining on Spitsbergen. But economic and political factors were central. The coal industry that had both stimulated and been stimulated by Britain's industrial revolution was constantly looking for new opportunities to exploit. At the same time, Britain's empire was seeking to project power across the globe, and Spitsbergen functioned as another node in this geopolitical system.

The majority of text presents detailed case studies of the four British companies that operated in Spitsbergen in the first half of the 20th century: the Spitsbergen Coal & Trading Company Ltd., the Spitzbergen Mining & Exploration Syndicate Ltd., the Northern Exploration Co. Ltd., and the Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate, Ltd. Beginning with the Spitsbergen Coal & Trading Company's arrival on the island in 1904 and ending with the departure of the Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate in 1953, the combined operations of these four British companies represent 87 years of activity. These detailed on-the-ground studies fit neatly into the ANT approach outlined above, since they reveal how local environmental conditions played a key role in shaping the histories of global networks, and vice versa. While some of the more detailed descriptions of the archeological study of British mining camps will be of interest primarily to historical archeologists, the very impressive integration of archeological and archival sources provides a useful model for all historians conducting this sort of study in the Arctic or elsewhere.

Ultimately, Kruse's aim of taking the history of economic exploitation in the Arctic beyond a national framework is only partially realized by this book. ANT certainly opens new possibilities and perspectives for examining the economic exploitation of the Arctic, and the conclusion that geopolitical factors were often of central importance to decision making appears valid. But the decision to focus almost exclusively on British companies inevitably