

Reviews

HOW REMOTE SENSING WORKS

PHYSICAL PRINCIPLES OF REMOTE SENSING. Rees, W. G. 1990. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 247 p, soft cover. ISBN 0 521 35994 5. £13.95.

This text is the first in a series of volumes on topics in remote sensing edited by G. Hunt and M. Rycroft. Written by a physicist, it focusses upon the physical principles of remote sensing. The topics covered include an introductory chapter on the need for remote sensing, the basic theory of electromagnetic radiation in homogeneous media, the interaction of radiation with the surface and the atmosphere, sensing systems (photographic, electro-optical, passive microwave and ranging), scattering techniques, and platforms for remote sensing. Very little background in physics is assumed. As a result, it is written in a way that should place the book within the reach of environmental scientists of all kinds with only a limited background in physics, but who are motivated by a desire to understand the methods involved.

The volume differs fundamentally in emphasis from the large number of books on remote sensing which focus upon environmental applications of remote sensing techniques. For example, it is only in the brief concluding chapter that data processing techniques are introduced; this is near the point at which most applications-based books on remote sensing begin, and it highlights the preoccupation of Rees's text with the theory as opposed to applications of remote sensing. Therein lies the importance of Dr Rees's book. Many applications-based books contain either little or inaccurate discussion of the physics underlying remote sensing methodology, whereas a proper understanding of the physical principles involved is essential both for the accurate design of remote sensing studies and for the subsequent interpretation of results. For environmental scientists, the book should therefore be seen as an important text to be read alongside applications-oriented books.

Further valuable features of the volume are the exercises included at the end of each chapter to permit readers to test their understanding of the material presented. Answers to the numerical problems are provided. Perhaps in a future edition, 'main point' answers might also be included for the essay questions. Readers with polar interests will find useful the writer's treatment of polar problems, arising especially from the limited variation in reflection of snow and ice surfaces. The book should become a basic text which will find its way on to both library and personal bookshelves. (A. D. Cliff, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.)

GREENLANDIC LITERATURE

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE GREENLANDERS. KALAALLIT ATUAKKIAANNIT. Fortescue, M. (editor). 1990. Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press. 245 p, soft cover, illustrated. ISBN 0-912006-43-9. US\$22.95.

Greenlandic literature had its origins in the 1850s with the establishment of a printing house in Nuuk, from where the newspaper *Atuagagdliutit* first appeared in 1861. While Danish and European classics were among the first works of literature to appear in Greenlandic, the early part of this century saw the development of a Greenlandic literary tradition in its own right. However, this rich and varied literature remains untranslated into any other language and, therefore, is elusive for those who have no reading knowledge of Greenlandic.

Michael Fortescue, a specialist in Eskimo languages, has compiled and translated into English extracts from selected Greenlandic writings. Fortescue points out that his compilation is intended not as an introduction to the literature of Greenland, but as a 'broad and representative coverage ... ranging in time from the earliest oral tradition to the 'frontier' where the language is still in process of developing new styles and registers today' (p.viii). While making some fine writing accessible for English readers (and this will include Canadian and Alaskan Inuit for whom Greenlandic is also difficult to read), the book is also intended as a reader for students of the Greenlandic language. Each sentence-by-sentence translated extract is accompanied by the original Greenlandic text on the opposite page. Beginning with a fairly easy piece of Greenlandic, the selections increase in difficulty so that, with the use of a dictionary and grammars, the interested student of Eskimo languages can work through the book, acquiring a good reading knowledge of West Greenlandic on the way. For those with no inclination to immerse themselves in a struggle with the complexities of an agglutinative language, this volume does offer an interesting glimpse of a literary tradition that remains, in terms of a global perspective, largely unknown.

As an anthropologist and student of Greenlandic, I find the texts in this compilation illustrate the wealth of social, cultural and poetic observation of Greenland to be found in the writings of Greenlanders. Fortescue's selection also demonstrates the vitality of Greenlandic as a living language. Anyone who wishes to discover Greenlandic literature and the poetic expression of the Greenlandic language would do well to read this compilation. (Mark Nuttall, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LL)