

Book Reviews

Exploring a sub-Antarctic wilderness: a personal narrative of the first biological and geological expedition to Marion and Prince Edward islands 1965/1966. Brian J. Huntley. 2016. Stellenbosch: Antarctic Legacy of South Africa. 268 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 978-0-620-70521-9 (e-Book ISBN 978-0-620-70522-6). ZAR250. doi:[10.1017/S0032247417000511](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247417000511)

Marion Island and Prince Edward Island (collectively the ‘Prince Edward Islands’) are two small sub-Antarctic islands situated in the Indian sector of the vast Southern Ocean. These protected islands belong to South Africa and are managed as ‘special nature reserves’. Like a number of prominent South African scientists, Brian Huntley spent a substantial amount of time on these islands as a young researcher – one distinction being that he was one of the very first to visit these islands with the explicit mission of undertaking field research. *Exploring a sub-Antarctic wilderness* is a collection of his diary entries on the islands while he spent 15 months there as a recent graduate and as part of the First Biological and Geological Expedition to the islands in 1965/1966. This expedition was the brainchild of Professor E.M. van Zinderen Bakker Snr, a scientist working for the University of the Orange Free State (currently University of the Free State) in South Africa. He also later compiled a monograph (van Zinderen Bakker, Winterbottom, & Dyer, 1971), which included most of Huntley’s work undertaken during his stay on the islands – *Exploring a sub-Antarctic wilderness* is appropriately dedicated to him.

The book is an enjoyable blend of diary entries, original photographs of the islands, expeditioners and animals, and even a few handy illustrations of data recorded during the expedition. It is structured in a way that clumps diary entries that fit into specific themes and sub-themes together (chronologically within these). This can be quite bewildering at times, since the reader effectively skips back and forth in time throughout the book, precluding a real appreciation of the temporal sequence of events and (perhaps subtle) changes in the perspective and mind-set of the author. It also leads to some, although limited, duplication of diary entries relevant to multiple themes. However, the grouping of themes does perhaps allow for a better understanding of the topics themselves and further gives the reader freedom to read only small sections at a time.

The first broad theme is an introductory one, focussing on the preparation period and early times on the island. Team recruitment and training was a remarkably simple process involving very little real preparation of the team members for the conditions they were to face. Perhaps inevitably, Huntley and the rest of the team had to learn for themselves *in situ* about the dangers and discomforts of undertaking research in the harsh sub-Antarctic. A case in point are the few diary entries detailing the events around the overnight disappearance of one of their team mates (Neville Fuller) after being separated from the rest of their hiking party in very strong wind conditions:

We were all extremely worried about Neville’s fate in such conditions (he had no tent or similar cover, nor to

my knowledge any cooking equipment), but trying to find him in the lava field and wild storm was hopeless. (p. 31)

This is followed by a theme entitled *Fieldwork before the age of field huts*, which provides one with a glimpse of what it meant to do fieldwork in the perennially wet, windy and cold conditions of the islands without much of the modern-day amenities now available. The mention of field huts in the title here refers to the now very well-stocked field huts present on Marion Island at various strategic locations, making it possible for field researchers to traverse the island without having to carry tents and food. It is truly impressive to read here, and in later sections, how much time the author and colleagues spent in the field given that they had to be completely self-sufficient, carrying very heavy (approx. 40 kg) backpacks along as they went.

The third theme is entitled *Teamwork on a remote island*, which includes diary entries that epitomise the sometimes fun and sometimes less-fun aspects of living with a very small group of people as exclusive company in a remote place for a long time. It is striking how the author’s descriptions of other team members remain remarkably positive and diplomatic throughout – perhaps the most critical entry being in regard to a team member upset with the author’s experiments affecting the power supply to the station. Huntley simply concludes with:

...Anyway, the world has not come to an end even if some people think it has. (p. 95)

These entries speak volumes of the evidently very affable, and mature, nature of the author.

Getting down to the research programme is the fourth major theme and features entries relevant to a wide array of investigations that the author either led or contributed to. This section makes up the single largest theme of the book and is filled with diary entries detailing the work undertaken on aspects as diverse as the geological origin of the islands to extensive work undertaken on the plant communities and even observations of the seabirds and seal populations. The breadth and detail of the entries here display the author’s inspiring enthusiasm and yet remarkable maturity of understanding. As the botanist on the team, Huntley’s diary entries include details on a variety of botanical surveys and experiments he undertook, ranging from the discovery of new plant inhabitants (four previously unrecorded indigenous species and nine introduced species), the description of vegetation complexes, through to studies of plant phenology and altitudinal zonation. Much of this work has proved invaluable to more recent work assessing how vegetation communities on Marion Island have responded to climate change (for example, le Roux & McGeoch, 2008). It is obviously a great pity that the author notes that the ultimate fate of many of his collections (including more than 1,500 herbarium samples) are unknown following their return to mainland South Africa.

The two visits that the author made to Prince Edward Island (the smaller of the two islands on the archipelago) are afforded a separate theme, entitled *The jewel in the crown – Prince Edward Island*. Having no permanent structure on the island and having never been surveyed or explored as part of a scientific expedition,

these two sorties stand out as really special experiences for the author. The relatively pristine Prince Edward Island is still today only visited irregularly (roughly once every five years) as part of scientific expeditions, maintaining its extraordinary status as one of the least known and unspoiled pieces of land anywhere on the globe.

The book concludes with a *Postscript* and *Annexes*, which provide a short overview of how the research programmes (run through the South African National Antarctic Programme) and management plan of the islands have evolved during the past six decades or so.

Each theme and sub-theme is introduced by a short section providing some background to the topic covered in the subsequent section. These are generally very useful, providing relevant context to the diary entries that follow, particularly by introducing the people mentioned later on. They also often offer some interesting bits of historical information on topics such as the early understanding of the geology of the islands, origin of its fauna and flora, as well as human impacts on the islands. I found some of these bits of trivia to be superfluous (for example, we are reminded more than once about the advent of the internet), although this is probably personal preference. While there are very few errors, spelling or otherwise, in the book, I could not help but notice the niggling erroneous description of the location of the islands as being ‘some 1400 km southwest of the southern tip of Africa’. The islands are actually situated approximately 2000 km *southeast* of the southernmost point of Africa. This

error would not have been so conspicuous had it not been printed on the cover flap!

All in all *Exploring a sub-Antarctic wilderness* is a testimony to the inquisitive nature of the author and the seemingly endless enthusiasm and drive he must have had to continue working so hard, taking breaks very rarely (such as for Christmas celebrations). And this as a 20-year-old without any direct supervision! The book provides a good viewpoint on what it meant to do field science in the 1960s before the dawn of the current metric-driven, super competitive scientific era. It will obviously be of interest to more recent visitors to Marion Island and unsurprisingly contains a few ‘South Africanisms’ (which are perhaps tricky for others to follow). However, I can happily recommend it to anyone with an interest in the early days of ‘modern’ scientific work in remote places, particularly the sub-Antarctic. (Trevor McIntyre, Mammal Research Institute, Department of Zoology and Entomology, University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20, Hatfield 0028, South Africa (tmcintyre@zoology.up.ac.za)).

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Northern sustainabilities: understanding and addressing change in the circumpolar world. Gail Fondahl and Gary N. Wilson (editors). 2017. Cham: Springer Nature. xv + 342 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978–3319461489. €114.99.
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The present edited volume tackles the blurry, but prominent, concepts of ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ in the Arctic. These concepts, which gained presence on the world stage particularly after the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and subsequently the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, have become some of the most integral elements of Arctic research and governance. But what do we actually mean when we talk of ‘sustainability in the north’? This is what the authors of the 28 chapters have set out to critically examine. Based on papers presented at the 2014 International Conference of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS) in Prince George, Canada, the editors and authors make abundantly clear that there is not just one ‘north’ and not just one understanding of ‘sustainability’. Instead, depending on time and space, cultural background and social setting, the terms are charged differently. Given the blurry understanding of what ‘sustainability’ means, this, as is argued, is indeed the reason for it to be ‘such an interesting and politically potent concept’ (p. 14). In order to better understand that this blurry concept means in the Arctic, the content of the short chapters are geographically located in a many different locations all over the circumpolar north—the reason for which, the editors explain, simply lies in shedding light on a diverse region such as the Arctic.

Thematically, the book is subdivided into three parts: Conceptualizing and measuring Arctic sustainability, Challenges in sustainability, and Advancing sustainability. Given the vast number of contributions to this book, it is not possible to tackle each and every single chapter individually. Generally speaking, however, as with the geographical scope the book, there is also a large number of different topics that in one way or the other shed light on how differently ‘sustainability’ or ‘sustainable development’ are generated in the north. The red thread throughout the book is the focus on the people(s) of the Arctic—indigenous, non-indigenous, as well as outsiders coming to the Arctic. The terms ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ are thus clearly linked with the social and human dimensions while the book does not tackle any natural or earth sciences. One may, of course, criticise the editors for not having included chapters on at least the interplay between the natural and social sciences, but I personally, as a social scientist, felt deeply rewarded by having read the book. The reason is simple: many of the topics covered are topics that have, at least to my knowledge, found rather little reflection in the Arctic social sciences. A chapter that I found particularly intriguing, for example, is that of Rémy Rouillard on the adaptation of the bodies of ‘oil nomads’ in the Russian north. Rouillard tackles a whole new dimension on sustainability—namely that of the outsider’s body in the harsh Arctic natural and economic environment.

In fact, many of the chapters deal with the socio-economic conditions in the Russian north. This is a particularly laudable element of this volume, especially since it also allows for comparative reading of the different chapters. What I mean is, for example, the topical parallel between Wilson’s and Ringholm’s chapters. While the former deals with the interaction between local communities and oil companies in Russia’s Komi