

BULL, C. 2005. *Innocents in the Arctic: the 1951 Spitsbergen expedition*. Fairbanks, AK, University of Alaska Press. xviii + 254 pp. ISBN-10: 1-889963-73-9, ISBN-13: 978-1-889963-73-0, hardback, US\$34.95.

Perhaps I was chosen to review this very enjoyable book about the Birmingham University expedition to Spitsbergen in 1951 because I was a member of the neighbouring 1951 Oxford and Cambridge Spitsbergen expedition. I refreshed my recollections of that year by looking up the first accounts of both expeditions in the *Polar Record* for 1951–53, so can confirm that Colin Bull's dates and names are correct, unaltered by memory's tricks. His book's foreword (by Olav Orheim) and its first chapter are very good on the historical and political background of the pre- and post-World War II expeditions from British universities. Since 1951, of course, increasing prosperity has enabled so many to visit this new playground of northern Europe that, as explained in a *Polar Record* editorial in 1981, that journal's record of particular 'expeditions' has had to be replaced, in the main, by more general articles on polar travel and science.

For the Birmingham expedition, travel was the first challenge. By early June they still had no transport; the Norwegian passenger ship *Lyngen* made an annual trip from Tromsø, Norway, to Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen, but very late in the season. 'Then... someone spotted an advertisement for a vessel named *Miss Mabel* available for charter... *Miss Mabel* was berthed in Cork, Eire... [O]riginally she had been used to chase German boats at speeds exceeding forty knots... [She was] now used for leisure purposes... but... was a very poor sea boat'. With the ten expedition members, a volunteer crew of three, and one passenger, *Miss Mabel* made her adventurous way to Tromsø. But she had no ice reinforcement, no radio and no lifeboat, and the ship inspector there declared her 'unsafe to proceed in any direction... or something very like that'. Eventually, early in August, the expedition was obliged to take the *Lyngen* to Longyearbyen, from where the governor's vessel *Sysla* took them the last 100 km or so to their base in St Johns fjorden.

Once landed, further challenges involved equipment, clothing and food, all far short of today's standards. By now, much of the expedition's equipment had been mislaid, but they showed a remarkable talent for improvisation (e.g. making a sled out of a box on a pair of skis, and a plane table out of biscuit tins). As regards clothing, Bull includes a 1949 photograph of himself in shorts on a snowy North Wales crag, but, on the expedition, snow proved less of a problem than rain, which they had read somewhere was unusual in Spitsbergen, at least in the interior. Though 'waterproof' clothing has a long history, beginning with furs and skins, followed in the nineteenth century by rubberized, oiled and waxed fabrics, only after 1951 did modern, synthetic fabrics appear. Of course, even modern fabrics have their 'breathability' problems, and the older ones were unwieldy for fieldwork; one just got wet, until at last a fine day allowed one to dry out. I recollect that World War II 'gas capes' were the best we had to keep the rain out in 1951, and that a few years later the dry cold of East Antarctica seemed comfortable by comparison. Some of the Birmingham tents were too small and lacked flysheets, and the book contains

shivering accounts of squeezing the water out of sleeping bags. Against these conditions, an old-fashioned diet of some 5500 cal d⁻¹, featuring hot Bovril pemmican, suet and margarine, provided a vital defence. Scotch and tobacco eased the suffering. Late in the season, rain finally gave way to snow, the calories were nearly exhausted, and it was a relief when, on 19 September, *Sysla* reappeared. The return across the North Sea was made aboard *Miss Mabel*; most of the expedition disembarked in England, and it took the survivors several more weeks to return their temperamental boat to Cork.

The chief objectives of the Birmingham expedition were geological (and achieved), and glaciology was not part of the agenda. However, Dave Dineley kept his eyes open, and published two short 'glacial geology' papers in the *Journal of Glaciology* (Dineley, 1954; Dineley and Waters, 1960). Colin Bull was trained as a physicist and says he was merely a cook and load carrier for the expedition. However, he went on to work as a geophysicist (and glaciologist) in the British North Greenland Expedition of 1952–4. Then, at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, he pioneered a series of Antarctic expeditions somewhat similar in spirit to the Spitsbergen one. In 1961 he was lured to the developing Institute of Polar Studies at Ohio State University, Columbus, USA, became Director in 1965 and a Dean in 1972, organized and/or participated in numerous expeditions to Antarctica, Greenland and lesser snowy areas, helped the Institute to become the Byrd Polar Research Center, and supervised or employed over 30 by now well-known glaciologists and associated scientists (see the partial list in the review of Bull's book by Hughes (in press). From New Zealand, he had tried but failed to place the first woman scientist in Antarctica; from Columbus in 1969 he finally succeeded by arranging for a four-woman expedition there. In 'retirement', he buys, sells and writes polar literature.

Bull says that early in life he was advised to take his work very seriously but himself not seriously at all, and all the expedition members seem to have followed this rule, with general good humour. The eight still living have stayed in touch and have all contributed reminiscences and brief but intriguing biographies to an 'Aftermath' chapter. Their contributions are linked by Bull's wit and jokes. Original photographs have been restored. This is a happy account of the making of one of the International Glaciological Society's pioneers and senior statesmen.

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