

hand, it is a happy 'reversal of fortune' story, as Fipke restores a family fortune that should have been, but that was denied when his father was bamboozled out of selling a property that sat on top of vast oil reserves. On the other hand, the discovery of diamonds in Canada is sadly eclipsed because Fipke's behaviour finally estranges his wife and precipitates their separation.

Overall this is a very enjoyable and highly informative book, containing some beautifully written descriptive passages that demonstrate a genuine feel for language. However, what ultimately differentiates Frolick from Chatwin is that whereas Chatwin was always in control of his material, Frolick is often not. The tendency towards length and detail rather than brevity and simplicity works against the text, as does the complexity of its structure.

For example, in the first part of the book Frolick eschews simple, linear chronology, and structures the text in a way that is both cyclical and also historically discursive. In the first chapter, Frolick throws the reader straight into the narrative with Fipke, ending on a tense note with his protagonist in trouble. The succeeding chapters then backtrack, allowing the reader to understand how Fipke found himself in the dilemma described in the first chapter. The idea is an interesting one and it certainly communicates the energy and drive of Fipke before the character is properly introduced. The difficulty, however, is that Frolick takes so long getting the reader back to the point of crisis that the tension felt at the conclusion of chapter one has long since dissipated. The text also has minor errors of proofreading. On page 93 Frolick describes a '30 lease' (presumably a '30 [year] lease'), while the word 'girls' appears on page 116, inexplicably with a possessive apostrophe.

That said, one should not dwell on a book's lower merits for fear of masking its numerous higher ones. Frolick has written a very ambitious, meticulous, and informative text. Readers of this book will learn about the 'spirit ceremonies and single note drum rhythms,' the customs and rituals of some of New Guinea's 700 indigenous tribes, the history of Ukraine, West Irian, South America, South Africa, Cecil Rhodes, apartheid, and the politics of land ownership in the Canadian Arctic. If you read very carefully you might just find yourself with a sufficient knowledge of mineralogy and diamond-hunting to go prospecting yourself. (Ian N. Higginson, Centre for History and Cultural Studies of Science, Rutherford College, University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NX.)

TOWARD MAGNETIC NORTH: THE OBERHOLTZER-MAGEE 1912 CANOE JOURNEY TO HUDSON BAY. The Oberholtzer Foundation. 2000. Marshall, MN: The Oberholtzer Foundation. 127 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-9703138-0-2. Can\$50.00.

While some of the more remote parts of the Canadian north, for example, Prince Patrick Island or Prince Regent Inlet, had been explored and mapped by the mid-nineteenth century, other areas much farther south remained *terra*

incognita (except to the local inhabitants) until well into the twentieth century. Such an area is that of Nueltin Lake and the Thlewiaza River, just west of Hudson Bay; the lake straddles the sixtieth parallel, and the river, which flows through the lake, lies only a few tens of kilometres farther north.

In 1912 the lake and river were successfully explored (and mapped in some detail) by a rather improbable two-man canoeing expedition. Ernest Carl Oberholtzer was born in Davenport, Iowa, in 1884. As a young man he became an ardent canoeist, exploring the lakes and rivers of the Minnesota–Ontario border. Here he became friends with an Ojibway trapper, Billy Magee, or Titapeshwewitan ('Far-distant-echo'), then aged 50. Although neither man had been north of Rainy Lake, in 1912 they set off on a trip to the Barren Lands. Oberholtzer's original intention was to retrace Dr Joseph Tyrrell's route down the Kazan River, but to continue north from Yathkyed Lake (from where Tyrrell had headed east down the Ferguson) to Baker Lake and Chesterfield Inlet.

Having travelled by rail to The Pas, the two men set off up the Saskatchewan River in an 18-foot [6 m] chestnut canoe on 26 June 1912. Their route led via Cumberland House, the Sturgeon Weir River, Frog Portage, and the Churchill River to Brochet at the head of Reindeer Lake. Here Oberholtzer had hoped to hire a guide for the remainder of the trip, but was unsuccessful. Undaunted, he decided that he and Magee would proceed on their own. However, he did lower his sights somewhat, opting to head for Nueltin rather than Yathkyed Lake, and then to go east down the Thlewiaza to Hudson Bay.

They paddled, tracked, and portaged up the Cochrane River, portaged north into the headwaters of the Thlewiaza, then down the latter to Kasmere Lake and Nueltin Lake. On Kasmere Lake they stopped for a few hours on 8 August at a Chipewyan camp. Their progress north down Nueltin Lake, some 200 km in length, with a convoluted coastline of numerous headlands and dead-end bays and encumbered with numerous islands, was slow and tedious. But finally, on 27 August, they left the lake and headed east down the lower Thlewiaza. They reached Hudson Bay on 12 September and were pleasantly surprised to encounter an Inuk named Bite in his kayak; his family was camped nearby.

Fortunately, given the late date, Oberholtzer was able to persuade Bite to take them in his whaleboat, with their canoe lashed alongside, to Churchill, where they arrived on 17 September. From there they set off again on their own for York Factory, despite snow, hail, gale, and heavy seas. From there they followed the standard canoe route south up the Hayes River to Norway House, arriving on 19 October; the last steamer on Lake Winnipeg had already left and the two men were faced with the long haul south up the lake in snow and gales; they were windbound for six days. Their canoe trip ended at Gimli on 6 November 1912.

Theirs was quite a remarkable trip; travelling without a guide, in part through unmapped country, they had covered

some 2000 miles (3200 km) by canoe in 134 days. Tyrrell, to whom Oberholtzer wrote soon after his return, congratulated him on his trip 'which will add materially to our knowledge of that portion of Northern Canada.' But these expectations (until now) were not realised. While Oberholtzer kept a detailed journal, it has never been published. Further, while he was a competent photographer and took numerous excellent photos, he did not publicise them.

This book, to a degree, rectifies this situation. The main body of the book consists of superb reproductions of a selection of Oberholtzer's photographs: of York boats on the Sturgeon Weir; of the Chipewyan at Brochet and at the encampment on Kasmere Lake; of caribou; of rapids on the Thlewiazia; and of the hospitable and accommodating Inuk, Bite and his family. The definition and composition of the photos are superlative; a photographer with the most up-to-date equipment today would be hard-pressed to match them.

The photos are accompanied by appropriate extracts from Oberholtzer's diary. These simply whet one's appetite for reading the entire journal, which Richard Cockburn is preparing for publication. He has also written a brief essay in this volume on 'Oberholtzer as an explorer,' while Ray Anderson has written on 'Oberholtzer as a photographer' and Bob Hilke has written on his expedition in 1963 when he accompanied Oberholtzer on a trip to Nueltin Lake by plane, canoe, and boat.

This volume is a beautifully produced addition to the exploration literature, which puts Oberholtzer in his rightful place among Canada's northern wilderness travellers. One looks forward with anticipation to Cockburn's edited version of Oberholtzer's complete journal. (William Barr, Arctic Institute of North America, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada.)

WHO KILLED THE GREAT AUK? Jeremy Gaskell. 2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press. xi + 227 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-19-856478-3. £18.99.

All readers of *Polar Record* who contemplate undertaking this book are invited to write down all that immediately occurs to them about the great auk. For example, 'a large, northern hemisphere, flightless sea bird, which became extinct in the nineteenth century and....' One suggests that for some readers their knowledge will not much exceed that set out in the previous sentence but, whether it does or not, this is a book that should not be missed. On the face of it, it is a case study of the extinction of the bird in question, but the author has wrapped the known facts relating to the matter, which seem surprisingly few, with layers of fascinating historical writing that are sometimes peripheral to the ostensible topic but that together comprise a coherent and satisfying account of a remarkably sad subject.

The author's approach is to present a series of chapters, each of which is relevant to the overall story of the extinction, but each of which concentrates on a different place, or persons, of relevance. By this means, the reader

receives a remarkable amount of abstruse information. So if he or she is not specifically an ornithological historian, but is, for example, interested in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society of Newfoundland, there will be much of interest. The net result is that this book offers something to all readers, even if they are not specifically interested in the fate of the unfortunate auk.

An early statement in the introduction is that 'The Great Auk has the unhappy distinction of being the only bird that was once a regular visitor to the coasts of the British Isles but is no longer to be seen.' It passes on to include an outline of some fundamental points. These include the incompleteness and general inadequacy of early accounts of the species, and that the extinction of the auk was contemporary with the distortion of 'the survival of the fittest' concept into little more than 'might is right.' The author also points out that there was a widespread misconception concerning the range of the bird, which was much more new world than old, and hardly Arctic at all. He comments that it was the extinction of the great auk that led to the passing of laws for the protection of sea birds. He answers the question set out in the title by observing that it was 'the unremitting exploitation which followed the species wherever it came ashore to breed' that caused the 'last of its kind' to vanish from the Earth.

After the introduction is a series of chapters that takes the reader on a historical and geographical tour of the territories within the range of the great auk. The first, entitled 'This rare and noble bird,' seeks to explain what British writers knew about the bird at the start of the nineteenth century, liberally illustrated by quotations from relevant texts. The scene then shifts to Iceland with the story of a serious 'raid on the skerries' on which the auks were breeding, in August 1813, which seems to have had a decisive impact on the already severely depleted species. Then, in a long sketch, the reader is introduced to the interesting personage of Friedrich Faber, an officer in the Danish Army based in Iceland, who diligently searched for, but failed to find, the auk in the 1820s. His work is illustrated by an extract from an article by him in the German journal *Isis* in 1827. This is nearly three pages long and provides clear insights into the difficulties facing the many ornithologists who searched for the auk at that time. In parenthesis, it might be noted that one of the most attractive qualities of the book as a whole is that the author is not afraid to include long, sometimes very long, quotations when he feels that it is better to let the original authors speak for themselves. This inclusion of what constitutes primary evidence in the present context renders the book very valuable and enables the reader to acquire much clearer insights into what the original writers thought and deduced, than he or she would obtain by merely being informed concerning these matters by the author.

The same technique prevails throughout the book. The reader travels with Audubon to Labrador, with Humphrey Gilbert to Newfoundland, and with Peter Struvitz, a Norwegian naturalist, to Funk Island, just off Newfoundland,