

'Adventure is the sign of incompetence'. By that criterion, his great expedition of 1913–18 was not wholly unblemished. During those years Stefansson made the last major discoveries in the Canadian Arctic. He added three islands and 250 000 km² of hitherto unknown territory to the maps. He also proved—at least to his own satisfaction—that the northern lands, and the ice of the polar sea, were not the wildernesses of popular imagination, but places where it was possible to live off the wild life using Eskimo methods. It is all recounted in *The friendly Arctic*. However, one of the incidents not recorded with absolute candour in that otherwise persuasive work is the loss of the *Karluk*.

Karluk was the flagship of the tattered little squadron that was to carry Stefansson's expedition to the Canadian Arctic. The other ships were the *Alaska* and *Mary Sachs*; only they arrived safely. *Karluk* was caught in the pack ice near Flaxsman Island off the north coast of Alaska in the middle of August 1913, and swept westwards to the graveyard of many a whaler in the region of Siberia. She never got out. On 10 January 1914 she was crushed in the ice and sank. Her company made their way to Ostrov Vrangel'ya. Her captain, Bob Bartlett, managed to fetch help after a tremendous journey of 1 200 km across north-eastern Siberia to Alaska, and in September his men were rescued—what was left of them. 11 out of 18 had perished. Some drowned. Some died of an unidentified disease. One man shot himself. *Karluk* is the story of this nightmare.

The author is William Laird McKinlay, a Glasgow schoolmaster who was in *Karluk* as meteorologist and magnetician. He is the last known survivor of Stefansson's expeditions. For 60 years he has kept quiet about what happened, and only now has been persuaded to tell the story. 'I do not wish to detract in any way from the achievements of Vilhjalmur Stefansson', he says, 'but the record must be put straight. I owe that to the memory of my dead comrades, and to Captain Robert Bartlett, who saved my life.'

The tale that McKinlay has to tell is, not to mince words, one of bungling, bad leadership, amateurishness and desertion. That Stefansson was guilty of the last in particular emerges with very little doubt. When he saw that the ship was unlikely to get to her destination he went ashore in Alaska with a few chosen companions, and left the others to their fate. They never saw him again. *Karluk* ('fish' in Aleutian) was badly chosen and far too weak for the pack. With some notable exceptions her crew was a collection of misfits and failures. The cook was a drug addict. One man was picked up off a beach on his beam ends. Few were suited to the strains of polar life. Bartlett, a good captain and a splendid ice pilot, did not quite possess the stature to impose his will on this motley collection. He had been engaged at the last moment, and was presented with a ship and crew, neither of which, given the choice, he would willingly have taken. McKinlay himself had never seen the Arctic before. He was a complete tiro, one of the victims of the amateur ideal.

This book is the work of someone transparently honest, burning with a sense of justice, but in whom no grudges rankle. It is a moving human document; and a well written one. It tells a story and it has a message. It is one of the few books of exploration which one puts down without a nagging doubt whether the truth has been told. The only pity is that it was not published long ago. Historic truth should be no respecter of persons. If in the course of the story a hero or two is found to be tarnished, so be it. To that category McKinlay does not belong. He secures for himself a place in the quiet company of brave survivors.

TWO FOR THE COFFEE TABLE

[Reviews by Nigel Bonner* of *Frontiers of life: animals of mountains and poles*, by Joseph Lucas, Susan Hayes and Bernard Stonehouse (London, Aldus Books Ltd, 1976, 144 p, illus, £3.95) and John Croxall* of *Winter birds* by M. A. Ogilvie (London, Michael Joseph, 1976, 224 p, illus, £5.75).]

Frontiers of life is a rather surprising book in that it consists of two quite separate works, the first on polar life, by Joseph Lucas and Susan Hayes, the second on mountain life, by Bernard

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Stonehouse. The parts are separately paginated and indexed and it is not quite clear what (besides the binding) holds them together, other than the account of animals (and plants) in physiologically stressed conditions. The book is beautifully illustrated—though the graphics are not quite up to the high standard of the plates—and many people will buy it on the strength of the pictures. Those who do will not, I think, be disappointed in the text. Lucas and Hayes have written a good elementary account of the animal life of the poles, and have introduced a fair amount of physiological explanation to account for the adaptations and distribution which they describe, though inevitably in a work of this length there are omissions and abbreviations.

I found Bernard Stonehouse's contribution rather unsatisfying. It began with an excellent introduction on orogenesis but I would have preferred the final section, a region-by-region treatment of the world's mountain areas, to have dealt in greater depth with the dominant forms and discussed the various adaptations and parallels across the board. Perhaps my natural jingoistic nature was aroused by finding that North America received 42 per cent of the space available, and the rest of the world had to be fitted into the remaining 58 per cent. But overall I shall value this book and recommend it to my non-technical friends. It is a polished presentation and at a reasonable price.

The winter birds is a competently written and copiously illustrated general account of the 95 bird species which breed solely or largely within the confines of the Arctic region. A further 37 species, common chiefly at the periphery of this area, are also included, though the choice of some of these (for example, the Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, and the White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*) appears somewhat arbitrary. The species accounts are up-to-date and knowledgeable, if inevitably brief and rather generalized, and are particularly good when illuminated by the author's personal experience. They are preceded by short chapters on the nature and extent of the Arctic, and the adaptation of birds to the region, both of which could usefully have been expanded, including more details and photographs of the range of vegetation and habitats. There are numerous instructive distribution maps—though greater contrast between the shading for breeding and winter ranges would have been helpful. The book is attractively produced and will make informative background reading; in particular it will complement the knowledge of those who, seeing many of these birds only as winter visitors, may wish to know more about their breeding biology, poorly known as it still is for many species of the remoter regions, particularly in Siberia.

IN BRIEF

POLAR RECORDS

After the many first attainments of the poles and conquests of the North-west and North-east passages; the first crossings of Antarctica and of the Arctic Ocean; the first solo circumnavigation (almost) of the Antarctic continent—how many polar 'firsts' are left? Well, according to one young adventurer at least, there are plenty. What is more, to judge from his exploits so far and his plans for the future, he seems bent on accomplishing most of them himself.

Naomi Uemura, a Japanese, is a specialist in that relatively new genre of geographical achievement: the solo 'first' (also known, occasionally, as the solo 'longest'). His record to date is impressive. Between 1966 and 1970 he established himself as the first man to climb the highest mountain on five continents: Mont Blanc, Kilimanjaro, Aconcagua, Everest and Mount McKinley. On each occasion, with the sole exception of the Everest climb, he was alone. Most recently, he has made news with an Arctic record: between December 1974 and May 1976 he travelled some 12 000 km from Greenland and across northern Canada to Kotzebue, Alaska, to complete the longest recorded solo dog-sled journey ('solo' is the key word here—alert readers will recall that Knud Rasmussen made the same journey some 50 years ago, but he was not alone).

Having achieved all that, Mr Uemura already has ideas for the future. He would like to sledge across northern Siberia and Scandinavia to complete his overland circuit of the Arctic Ocean, to