

Inuit navigational skills of which I am aware. Yet, as MacDonald admits, Inuit knowledge has diminished substantially in recent generations, and his project has salvaged memories of some of the last elders remembering traditional practices. Had this research been conducted two or three decades earlier, one can only wonder how much richer the present volume might have been. Nonetheless, MacDonald demonstrates the elegance of Inuit intellectual culture and the many features of aboriginal knowledge that are analogous to western science.

Inuit observations were once typically dismissed by non-Native scientists as hearsay opinion or folklore, but in recent years the validity of aboriginal knowledge and its value for enhancing western science have become more widely appreciated. An example is given of Inuit reports about sounds emitted by the aurora borealis and displays occurring close to ground level being rejected by most atmospheric scientists, although confirmed in historical accounts written by European and American explorers. Yet we may be perpetuating a bias against information from aboriginal people by continuing to describe material as 'traditional knowledge,' while 'science' is credited only as a product of western society.

Modern Inuit have become less reliant on star-gazing and traditional navigational skills with the introduction of high-speed snowmobiles, man-made landmarks, compact GPS (Global Positioning System) gadgets, street lights in winter, clocks for telling time, and calendars organized by work days, weekends, observance of Sunday religious rites, and holiday periods. With the establishment of Inuit jurisdiction to Nunavut (formerly the eastern Arctic) in April 1999, interest in reviving the Inuit culture has grown and should generate new opportunities for collaborative research between community residents and western scientists. Material from *The Arctic sky* is already being used in school classrooms to teach elements of Inuit astronomy to children, and the book is a valuable model for future studies combining indigenous and western sciences.

The Arctic sky is beautifully produced by the Royal Ontario Museum and the Nunavut Research Institute, and contains numerous colour photographs, sketches, woodcuts, images of artifacts, and diagrams. For Igloolik elders and John MacDonald, the stars in the Arctic sky will surely whistle their thanks for being remembered through the publication of this intriguing volume. (Carol Brice-Bennett, Bareneed, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, Canada.)

SNOW. Ruth Kirk. 1998. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. 320 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-295-97734-5. \$US17.95.

Do not be misled by the title of this book, which was first published in 1977. Whilst it attempts to cover the distribution of snow in all its vicissitudes, it also deals with many other aspects of frozen water, from snow animal ecology to snow clearance in New York. It is not written for the specialist glaciologist or meteorologist, but more for the well-read generalist with some knowledge of ice ages, climate change, polar biology and anthropology, snow

transport systems, and water conservation and management. The author draws on her direct experience of snow whilst living with her husband, a ranger in the Mount Rainier National Park, reputedly the snowiest place in North America; on wide reading in the eclectic literature of the subject; and on discussions with notable mountaineers, and particularly her friendship with Sir Charles Wright (now deceased), a long-time survivor of Robert Falcon Scott's last expedition. In no way is the book a scientific monograph, nor a textbook in the physical sciences, but a highly readable, discursive account similar in approach to the classic *Times of feast, times of famine*, by the French social historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. Essentially, it is a 'geography of snow.'

The book is divided into 10 chapters as diverse as: 'The role of snow,' a general commentary on the influence of snow on the human environment, including an account of the making of snowballs by macaque monkeys; 'Theories of ice ages'; a brief outline of the major events in the search for the North and South poles; the contrasts in polar ecology of the Arctic and Antarctic; perceptive analyses of human adaptation to snow and ice in shelters built, and clothing used, in polar regions; the domestication of sled dogs and reindeer; and a history of skiing. The purist will object to the unavoidable over-generalisation in a work of this kind, such as the statement, 'glaciers caused the formation of Niagara Falls,' but the book is commended as an entertaining and widely researched account of the natural history of snow.

The work is not referenced in the text, but in a selected bibliography for each chapter, given at the end, and in an index. As befits a general work produced in North America, metric measure is eschewed: temperatures are given in Fahrenheit, snowfall in feet and inches, and topographic elevation in hundreds of feet. (Peter Speak, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

THE CIRCUMPOLAR INUIT: HEALTH OF A POPULATION IN TRANSITION. Peter Bjerregaard and T. Kue Young. 1998. Copenhagen: Munksgaard. 289 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 87-16-11905-3. DKK 300.

Arctic human history can be read as a narrative of changing health patterns. Ancient health indicators remain inscribed in genetic markers linking Inuit populations with northeast Asia. Recent analytical techniques involving mitochondrial DNA suggest a common ancestor for several northwestern North American and northeastern Asiatic populations, providing clues about distinctive patterns of health and disease (pages 18–19). In the history of European colonization, Inuit were both the first and the last North Americans to contact Europeans: Inuit on the Labrador coast met Norse visitors as early as 1000 AD, yet when Stefansson reached Coronation Gulf 900 years later, in 1910, he was the first European the Copper Eskimos had encountered directly (page 25). Evidence from the last five centuries attests to the general deterioration of health throughout the Arctic, initially because of massive de-