

The final section, again brief, is about threats to Antarctic conservation, and is a necessary addendum to any guide to this vulnerable region. It begins with the Antarctic Treaty, listing those countries that have so far acceded to it. The next section is about conservation, making the point that a third of the species described in the wildlife section are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The section on sealing notes the early slaughter of Antarctic fur seals, but not elephant seals. The following section on whaling is a little more detailed, noting the rapid success of the industry in the early part of the twentieth century, followed by the IWC moratorium in 1986. It concludes by noting Japan's continued harvest of southern whales, and raising the possibility of establishing a sanctuary in Antarctica for protecting these animals. I imagine most of the people reading this guide, having experienced the majesty of a baleen whale in its natural environment, would be inclined to think it a very good idea. The section continues with a description of fishing and the problems arising thereof, and the issue of invasion by alien species. The book finishes with ozone depletion and global warming.

The book finishes with a useful glossary, and the Guidelines for Visitors as set out by Recommendation XVIII-I of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting of 1994. The increasing numbers of visitors to the Antarctic are going to have an impact on its ecosystems at some point. Indeed, some people believe the impact is already being felt. However, the general public will not be much interested in protecting (and paying for the conservation of) a continent from which they are banned, and that only scientists are permitted to see. *Ergo*, tourism is here to stay, whether we approve of it or not. However, it can play an important role in the continent's future, by keeping it in the public eye. Many of us who work on cruise ships encourage passengers to talk about the area to schools and youth groups, in the hope that a younger generation will see this as an area to preserve. *Antarctica cruising guide* is an excellent souvenir for any passenger to the area, and its stunning photographs and friendly text will hopefully remind them of the fragile beauty of the place. It may also remind them that here is something worth protecting for the future. (T.R.D. Grade, History Department, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, USA.)

RIVER OF WHITE NIGHTS: A SIBERIAN RIVER ODYSSEY. Jeffrey Tayler. 2006. London: Robson Books. xxiii + 230 p, hard cover. ISBN 1-86105-949-3. £16.99.

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Jeffrey Tayler is a journalist and one of today's 'most intrepid writers,' according to the blurb, whose work regularly appears, so we are told inside the cover, in up-market travel magazines. He resides in Moscow and is fluent in Russian. In this book, he describes a journey that he undertook with one companion down the Lena River from near Lake Baikal to its mouth, some 3800 km

(2400 miles), in a boat that appears to have been a glorified Zodiac. He is recreating 'a journey first made by Cossack forces more than 300 years ago' and while seeking 'primeval beauty and a respite from the corruption, violence and self-destructive urges that typify modern Russian culture' only finds 'Cossack villages unchanged for centuries . . . Soviet outposts full of listless drunks . . . and stark ruins of the Gulag . . . grand forests hundreds of miles from the nearest hamlet.' So 'far' from 'help' is he that the personality of his companion obviously becomes important. However, 'Vadim' is a 'burly Soviet army veteran embittered by his experiences in Afghanistan' who 'detests all humanity' including, it seems, Tayler himself. But Tayler needs his 'superb skills if he is to survive a journey that quickly turns hellish,' and, despite all his adventures in wild parts of the world, 'he has never felt so threatened as he does now.' This atmosphere of mild hysteria is reinforced by a comment by Colin Thubron helpfully printed on the front cover that states that the journey was 'wrenched out of near disaster.'

All this is probably quite sufficient to deter most readers from bothering with the book at all and, in parenthesis, this reviewer wonders how often blurb writers perform precisely the opposite service to writers than the one they are supposed to be performing. But such rejection would be a pity since the book is not written in the feverish tone adopted in the blurb but is a fairly sober, matter of fact, and rather convincing, account of what was obviously a difficult journey, enlivened by some astute comment and mild wit.

There is an introductory chapter starting with Ivan the Terrible and moving on to the work of the Cossacks in securing Siberia for Russia. The author continues to consider more recent developments in that country and 'seized by a desire to find out what had gone wrong' he decided to head for the hinterland. 'The Lena came to mind. The villages, settlers, descendants of exiles, and indigenous peoples along its banks represent a distillate of Russia's outback masses.'

The book comprises a series of vignettes, conversations with the people met *en route*, impressions of the places visited, details of the journey along the river, and always with the lowering presence of Vadim, irritating but indispensable, in the background. Some of these vignettes are of real interest. At the village of Nyuya, just inside the Republic of Sakha, there are still a few Volga Germans, the remains of a community that was deported *en masse* by Stalin during the early stages of World War II to this remote region from the area on the Volga to which their ancestors had been invited by Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century. In between, this area had become, under Lenin, the so-called German Autonomous Republic. The author determined to meet some of these people and decided on a visit to the village mayor to seek his aid. The village disappointed, since it looked 'entirely desolate' and no different from many of the others along the river. Eventually finding the mayor,

he was informed that the Germans lived on the other side of the river. Here the situation was entirely different: 'Its houses . . . sported windows of polished glass hung with bright yellow and green curtains. No trash littered plank walkways or dirt lanes. No drunks were about and cows grazed only in their pens. German exiles had clearly put much effort into building their own prison village.' Then follows a sympathetic account of his meeting with two of the villagers, an elderly couple in their mid-seventies. He is surprised by the lack of rancour displayed by the couple concerning their appalling treatment by the Soviet authorities. There only appeared to be one grudge; that the German Autonomous Republic had not been reinstated after the war.

Proceeding northwards, the author passed through many towns and villages, most of which were in a depressing state of decrepitude. At some of them, however, enterprising individuals were contriving to live a reasonable life in the face of the most difficult circumstances, although it appeared that the majority of the population was in a state of lethargy animated only by the constant search for, and consumption of, alcohol of varying degrees of purity and strength. A prevailing impression derived by the writer was that moving out was the only real option for Russians, in the face of total disinterest from the government, with the corollary that before too long the area would become essentially unpopulated except for the native peoples. Passing northward 'our sense of solitude deepened' and

this was partly for historical reasons. In order to avoid the Cossacks and their demands for *yasak* (fur tribute) the Yakuts tended to build their villages where they could not be seen from the river.

As the pair crossed the Arctic Circle, the settlements became more sparse and the weather more difficult. But eventually the delta of the Lena was reached and the last village on the river, Tit-Ary. Following his normal practice, the author went ashore while Vadim was securing the boat, making camp, etc. Meeting a few of the inhabitants, he noted that most were Evens, 'an obscure nationality' in the words of one. Also at Tit-Ary was a graveyard for Finns and Lithuanians who had been exiled there in Stalin's time.

The voyage ended at Tiksi, on the Laptev Sea, 'Like a vision from a gulag survivor's nightmare,' where the author stayed in the town hotel for a few days before flying back to Moscow.

This book is of real interest to those concerned with the present situation in the more remote parts of Russia. The writer appears to have recorded his conversations accurately and they collectively comprise a body of opinion that represents a consolidated view of the current situation. Most of them are depressing and the same themes run throughout. This is an uncomfortable book to read, but one worth reading as presenting a picture of a very little known part of the world. (Ian R. Stone, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)