

SKUAS AND JAEGERERS

THE SKUAS. Furness, W. R. 1987. Calton, T. and A. D. Poyser. 363 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-85611-046-1. £18.00.

The skuas *Stercorariidae* are a family of brown or brown and white birds, lively and piratical cousins to the gulls. Prominent in both polar regions, they have for long intrigued and occasionally plagued field biologists. They fall readily into two genera, the large skuas *Catharacta* and the small skuas (or jaegers) *Stercorarius*. Both range widely across the world; the large skus have breeding representatives both north and south, while the jaegers breed only in the north. Many populations have now been studied in the field, and this book provides a much-needed review of the family as a whole. Furness covers them well; his own experience is mainly with stocks of great skuas (bonxies) in north Britain, but he knows his jaegers too, and deals very fairly with the southern literature on subantarctic, Chilean, Falkland, Tristan and south polar skuas. Topics in chapter headings include early history and classification, distributions and populations, migrations, sexual dimorphism and stock polymorphism, behaviour, food and feeding, kleptoparasitism, breeding, population dynamics, conflicts with farmers and conservation. Skuas are entertaining birds, and this author writes entertainingly about them, as well as fully. What he cannot reasonably include in text has been packed into over 60 tables at the back; illustrations are generous, including photographs, maps, and pleasing sketches by John Busby, and the bibliography and index are thorough. I recommend *The skuas* for its readability, presentation, sound content and modest price. (Bernard Stonehouse, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1ER UK.)

THE ESKIMOS

ECHOES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD: THE ESKIMOS. Text by Burch, Ernest S. jr., photographs by Forman, W. 1988. London, Macdonald/Orbis. 128 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-356-14209-4. £14.95.

The appearance of yet another book on the Inuit (Eskimos) is not everybody's chosen birthday treat, but it must be said that this one is different. 'Tiger' Burch knows people of the North at first hand, and the book is splendidly illustrated with photographs by Werner Forman, one of the foremost portrayers of the non-industrial world. We have lacked an authoritative but 'popular' treatment of the Inuit for some decades, since the earlier titles by distinguished anthropologists like Kaj Birket-Smith became hopelessly dated. We also have needed a book that junior educational institutions could be encouraged to acquire, and which might not turn away students from the pleasures of anthropology. Again this book does exactly this. It will not, of course, compete with the Arctic volume of the *Handbook of North American Indians* with its cohort of co-authors. However this fine book does introduce the reader to the main issues in Eskimology

without assuming extensive prior knowledge of anthropology. One is led through Inuit social organization, economy, cosmology and art, always with a focus on the traditional rather than the modern. This will no doubt irritate those whose concern is with ethnic mobilization. We are told virtually nothing about contemporary Inuit politics, but clearly the series of which it is a part focusses on the past. I for one have no quarrel with this, and I believe that Burch's text will not date, anymore than that of Birket-Smith did for several decades, whereas the ethnic lobbyists are often overtaken by events within five years of publication. (Ian Whitaker, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6.)

ALASKAN RAILROAD

THE WHITE PASS: GATEWAY TO THE KLONDIKE. Minter, R. 1987. Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press. 394 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-912006-26-9. US\$24.95 plus \$2.00 postage and packing.

Despite its meagre length, running only the 100 miles from tidewater at Skagway, Alaska to the Yukon River at what is now Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, the White Pass and Yukon Railroad stood as a major engineering feat of its day and one which was accomplished despite incredible legal, financial and geographic difficulties. With *The White Pass*, Roy Minter has written the definitive history of this extraordinary enterprise and at the same time filled a long neglected gap in the literature of the Yukon.

Set against the backdrop of the Klondike gold rush and surrounded by the familiar stream of frontier life, Minter's chronicle is a classic northern adventure. Beginning with the 'discovery' of the pass by Capt Moore, a supernumerary member of the 1887 Ogilvie Expedition, the story follows not just the construction of the railroad, but on a larger scale, the evolution of the idea for an all weather transportation system into the Yukon interior. All of the competing plans and routes are thoroughly examined, with the White Pass only ultimately emerging as the logical route and the railroad as the most efficient method. While the major emphasis focuses on the 25 months of the railroad's construction, it is on the characters involved as much as the event. To previous readers of Klondike history many of these will be familiar, but there are new characters as well, long neglected by historians and deserving of equal recognition: the financier Samuel Graaves; the co-builders of the railroad, Michael Heney, Erastus Hawkins and John Hislop; and others too numerous to mention.

Extremely well produced, this book is a delight to read, with the author's exhaustive research well supported by an excellent bibliography. For readers fortunate enough to have ridden with the WPYR before its untimely closure in 1982, this volume will rekindle fond memories and perhaps answer a few nagging questions. For those less fortunate, it provides an excellent opportunity to experience the thrill vicariously. (Geoffrey Bleakley,