

Book Reviews

THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS OF ALASKA: LIVING ON THE EDGE. Kenneth Wilson (Editor). 2008. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. xvi + 143 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-1-60223-045-3. \$45.
doi:10.1017/S0032247410000033

This most attractive book presents a portrait of the Aleutian Islands and their peoples in the form of what amounts to a photo-essay with interlinking text. In landscape format, one's first impression is that this is yet another coffee table volume of the sort that merely merits a cursory examination and that if one misses a page or so, it does not matter. But this book is very much more than that. The editor, a photographer of vast experience has assembled a stunning collection of images but instead of simply presenting captions for them, as is common in the case of works that ostensibly seem similar to this one, he has taken the trouble to acquire a set of essays, by a wide variety of authors, that collectively present the practicalities of life on the islands, their histories, and stories of the Unangan inhabitants, who have lived there for centuries, together with those of more recent immigrants.

The book focuses on a particular area within the Aleutian chain. This is the island of Akutan, the island of Unalaska, with Dutch Harbor, the village of Nikolskoi on the island of Umnak, the uninhabited islands of Four Mountains, and the island of Atka. The text is divided into seven sections. The first is introductory and relates to the Unangan themselves and provides comment on, among other matters, the pivotal position that the Orthodox Church came to occupy among them and which continues to the present day. The present reviewer was somewhat surprised to note that the second 'chapter' is on the topic of 'The devastation of World War II.' This provides information on the Japanese attacks on Dutch Harbor in June 1942 and on the occupation by the Japanese of the islands of Attu and Kiska. It also mentions the forced evacuation of the population of all the islands west of Atutan Island and the account does not mince its words with regard to the suffering imposed on the peoples that

resulted from it. The third section is on life in the islands today specifically touching on problems of communication much of which is provided by the ubiquitous Grumman Goose amphibian aircraft. The fourth is entitled 'Traditions; an ancient culture endures' which is self explanatory. Particular reference is made to the efforts of the community in transmitting and practising ancient customs and crafts and many sub-sections illustrate this in action. Fine and colourful examples of this are the old tradition of hat making which is fully illustrated as is the skilful craft of the basket maker. One passes on to commerce with the title 'From otter pelts to seafood for the world' in which the centrality of seafood processing with regard to the economy of the islands is made explicit. It accounts 'for virtually all the development in the region' but this in itself is stimulating a search for diversification. We then pass on to a short chapter on the vulcanicity of the islands and to a conclusion on the Alaska maritime national wildlife refuge.

However the main purpose of the book is to present the editor's photographs. All are good and some are unusual and wonderful. In particular one should draw attention to the pictures of wildlife (can there really be that number of eagles in the Aleutian Islands?), volcanoes, and Orthodox churches. The pictures of people, of which there are a large number inserted in boxes in the text, are rather less successful and have much in common with the style characteristic of American popular magazines. The associated texts are also rather weak, adopting a wholly Panglossian view of life on the islands. Everyone is happy, content to do their part in promoting public welfare, there are no social pressures etc etc. This might of course be true but one is inclined, from experience in remote communities elsewhere, to doubt it.

But this is to cavill. As a presentation of the landscapes and wildlife of the islands this book could hardly be bettered. The pictures are wonderful and the text is, at least, thought provoking. Those who wish for an armchair excursion to the islands in question could not do better than to peruse this volume. (Ian R. Stone, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

ARCTIC DOOM, ARCTIC BOOM. THE GEOPOLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ARCTIC. Barry Scott Zellen. 2009. Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishers. Xi + 232 p, hard cover. ISBN 978-0-313-38012-9. \$49.95.
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In *Arctic doom, Arctic boom* Barry Scott Zellen, research director of the Arctic Security Project at the Center for Contemporary Conflict at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, argues that the Arctic 'often display[s] a seemingly paradoxical blend of competition and collaboration'. Such a statement could be

brushed aside as being rather obvious. But what is often lacking in the debate on the future Arctic is a multilevel approach to the region, putting emphasis on both the international structures and the domestic level. In this respect Zellen's work is both timely and intriguing. The Arctic is at the top of the agenda amongst both politicians and academics, and Zellen offers new thinking on the subject. His point of departure is that the long awaited 'Age of the Arctic' predicted by Oran Young in 1986 'is coming, and coming fast.'

The book runs to 232 pages and consists of six chapters. In chapter 1 the broad picture is painted with emphasis on climate change; '... the climate is rapidly warming, threatening to bring an end to the Arctic as we know it, creating much

uncertainty about its future – and ours.’ (page 2). Moreover, Zellen gives the reader a short introduction to some of the theoretical concepts and ideas applied in the coming chapters. In chapter 2 the author turns to a more theoretical analysis of Arctic sovereignty and security. While drawing on insight from the field of geopolitics and international relations theory it is also stated that the external dimension is just one part of the picture. The region is multinational and multiethnic and both ‘internal’ and ‘external’ forces of change must be taken into consideration. In this chapter the focus is on geopolitical characteristics of the region. Chapter 3 addresses the ‘inexorable drive to develop the Arctic (. . .)’ (page 45) or what is referred to as the ‘Arctic imperative’, discussing among other matters, property rights of local inhabitants. Zellen claims that the real threat comes from outsiders ‘who see the Arctic as a resting point, an adventure, a place of employment – in short, a colony’ (page 58). In chapter 4, the author returns to a more global perspective on the region, putting emphasis on the strategic repercussions of the melting ice. Drawing on the concept of geopolitics Zellen considers the profound impact a declining ice cap will have in this respect. In chapter 5 the author asks if conflict is inevitable in the ‘race to stake’ undersea claims. In this chapter the author also discusses the question of winners and losers of climate change, claiming that ‘the people of the Arctic could be the winners of climate change – after they adapt to the new seasonal patterns and rebuild on drier ground.’ In the last chapter entitled ‘The End of the Arctic’ the local perspective is again in the forefront in his concluding reflections. The author addresses the challenges Arctic people and environment will meet due to rapid climate change. However, in the concluding section the opportunities are in the forefront.

Zellen is an important voice in the debate on the future Arctic. One could disagree with statements made in his work, but they give the reader both new insights and a fresh introduction to emerging challenges and opportunities in the ‘new’ Arctic. Zellen engages in one of the central debates in the post cold

war era. How will the future Arctic look like? He is quite optimistic regarding the future of Arctic. In the book Zellen looks at the uncertainty in the region as the shrinking polar ice cap might open up for commercial developments of hydrocarbon at the Arctic seafloor and new sea lanes. This could create environmental disasters for Arctic biota and indigenous people. But, as the author argues the future of the Arctic might also be bright. He suggests that new economic opportunities in part could offset the bad effects of global warming.

Arctic doom, Arctic boom explores the geopolitics of the Arctic from both a contemporary and a historical perspective, claiming that the warming of the earth is transforming our conception of the Arctic. In addition to addressing economic and environmental issues, the book also considers the vital strategic role the future Arctic can have. Such a broad analysis demands a clear structure and point of departure. The author has many points to make. At times this leads to fresh thinking but at times the reader is almost overwhelmed by Zellen’s enthusiasm. This comes to show in statements such as: ‘. . . the people of the Arctic are well prepared for the coming transformation of their world – guided by their strength of spirit and identity, . . .’ (page 164). Moreover, his mixture of information, from military history to climate change to eagerly drawing optimistic scenarios on behalf of the future Arctic, leads the book at times to be a little repetitive. However, overall the arguments put forward in the book are easy to follow.

Zellen aims high and touches upon a wide range of highly interesting approaches on how to grasp and analyse the challenges and opportunities in the region. One could argue that this leads to a lack of analytical depth, but at the same time this wide scope offers its audience easy access, insight and plenty of food for thought into a wide range of pressing topics within the area of post cold war international relations. The book is a central contribution to the debate on the future of the Arctic. (Svein Vigeland Rottem, The Fridtjof Nansen Institute, PO Box 326, 1326 Lysaker, Norway).

LEGACIES AND CHANGE IN POLAR SCIENCES: HISTORICAL, LEGAL AND POLITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL POLAR YEAR. Jessica M. Shadian and Monica Tennberg (editors). 2009. Farnham: Ashgate (Global Interdisciplinary Studies Series). 232 p. hard cover. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7399-6, £60.00, online: £54.00.

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This new volume of the Ashgate Global Interdisciplinary Studies Series is edited by Jessica Shadian, senior research fellow at the High North Centre for Business and Governance, Bodø Graduate School for Business, Norway, and by Monica Tennberg, research professor at the Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Finland. Their interest in political science and international relations as well as their involvement in the International Polar Year (IPY) project on ‘Large scale historical exploitation of polar areas (LASHIPA)’ and the Finnish IPY project on community adaptation and vulnerability to climate change in Arctic regions (CAVIAR) led to the idea to discuss the relationship between science and policy from a broad interdisciplinary perspective. They collected nine papers on legacies and change in polar sciences referring to historical, legal and political reflections

around the International Polar Year 2007–2008, and these provide a new and valuable source for further discussions. Some essays are more theoretical, others more descriptive, while legal matters alternate with scientific matters and field stations in the Arctic correspond to the analysis of newspaper clippings on Antarctica. This variety by purpose allows even non-experts to acquaint themselves with this topic. A detailed index of 14 pages helps to switch from one chapter to another corresponding chapter. No such publication is available until today.

In his preface on legacies of polar science Michael Bravo, senior lecturer at the University of Cambridge, states that ‘the challenges of environmental regulation and conservation in the polar regions in the decades ahead will require fresh thinking about the organization of research methodologies. It is unlikely that the same approaches that have enjoyed success in Antarctica will work in the Arctic’ (page xv). Strengthening the different existing science policy instruments in both polar regions would be far more useful.

The editors emphasise in their introduction that ‘the practices and meanings of science changes with political and social change, . . . , as well as the ongoing shifting meanings of polar field stations and research institutes for defining and producing legal norms and policies’ (page 6).