

I thought across the range of these things, walking along the beach at Pingok. The day after a little trouble in the ice it is possible to imagine, if but imperfectly, the sort of reach some of these men made into the unknown, day after day. I think of Brendan asleep on a bed of heather in the bottom of his carraugh, and of the forlorn colonists at Eriks Fiord in the thirteenth century. The exemplary John Davis in his tiny pinnace, the *Ellen*. I think we can hardly reconstruct the terror of it, the single-minded belief in something beyond the self. Davis wrote of the wild coasts he surveyed that he believed God had made no land that was not amenable, that there were no wastelands.

Walking along the beach, remembering Brendan's deference and Parry's and Davis's voyages, I could only think what exquisite moments these must have been. Inescapable hardship transcended by a desire for spiritual elevation, or the desire to understand, to comprehend what lay in darkness. I thought of some of the men at Winter Harbor with Parry. What dreams there must have been that were never written down, that did not make that journey south with Parry in the coach, but remained in the heart. The kind of dreams that give a whole life its bearing, what a person intends it should be, having seen those coasts.

## Nine

# A NORTHERN PASSAGE

ALL DID NOT GO as smoothly on Parry's first expedition as his *Journal of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific* implies. In the pages of *The North Georgia Gazette* are hints that the officers of the *Griper* were ostracized. The coarser lot of the sailors is made clear in an expedition surgeon's report on the death of one William Scott, from alcoholism and acute psychosis. And the *Hecla's* assistant surgeon, Alexander Fisher, notes in his journal on February 28, "We had a portion of the Second, Nineteenth, and Twenty-second articles of War read on the quarter-deck

today, and after that a long order relating chiefly to some difference between two officers some days ago."

Such small variation with the pristine image history usually presents of Parry's voyage might count for nothing but quibbling if the gentle suppression of these images did not foreshadow a pattern. Increasingly, afterward, records of arctic exploration presented to the public were arranged to serve a purpose, to bolster a preconceived vision of the impersonal hostility of the region and mankind's role in it. The Arctic became an appropriate setting for a life of national service, and nations touted the success of their expeditions. Later, the Arctic became a dramatic setting for the personal quests and heroism of individuals like Robert Peary, Fridtjof Nansen, and Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Competition for geographic accomplishment in the late nineteenth century became as keen as the competition had once been for commercial advantage, and the use of the press to promote these expeditions became increasingly sophisticated.

The Admiralty's demand to control all the records from Parry's expedition stemmed from the desire—largely Sir John Barrow's, one suspects—to preserve a successful, coherent, tidy, and inspiring image of the enterprise. Barrow stressed that these voyages were for disinterested scientific and geographic discovery; any mere commercial advantage that might accrue was far less important. "[W]hatever new discoveries might be made," he wrote in 1818, with an air of noblesse oblige, were to benefit all other nations, "without [their] having incurred either the expense or the risk" of exploration.

Pressed to defend these lofty ideals, which Parry's expedition so admirably reflected, he remarked summarily, "Knowledge is power." An enhancement of her international prestige and the suggestion of an economic hegemony looming in the distance, too, played a role in an England fresh from the Napoleonic Wars. When Russia seemed poised to finish what England had begun in the Arctic, Barrow argued, successfully, to prevent it. He wrote that to have left the Northwest Passage "to be completed by a

foreign navy, after the doors of the two extremities of the passage had been thrown open by ships of our own [by James Cook (1778) and William Baffin (1616)] would have been little short of an act of national suicide."

The efforts of men such as Barrow to influence public emotions in this arena played a strong role, of course, in determining a public conception of the geography of the region. It is imprecise, however, to call this scheming—even when it involves, as it eventually did, individual men in acts of deception for personal gain; or when, today, it involves a discreet request by industry that scientific consultants structure environmental data in a helpful way. What is involved here, geographers such as John L. Allen have suggested, is a yearning to locate precisely what one has set out to find—and to shape what one finds to suit one's own ends, even if that meets with contradiction.

It is important, I think, not to lose sight of ingenuousness in these episodes. The desire to understand what is unknown is great. And the wish to create some human benefit out of new knowledge, however misconstrued, is one of the graces of Western civilization. Few historians can say precisely where the special interest of a Barrow or a Robert Peary ceased to serve society and served only the man; or where plans for industrialization cross a line and become of greater service to a nation's economy than the well-being of its people.

To travel in the Arctic is to wait. Systems of local transportation, especially in winter and along the fogbound coasts in summer, are tenuous. A traveler may be stranded for days in the vicinity of a small airport, tethered there by the promise of a plane's momentary arrival or by the simple tyranny of plans. In these circumstances I frequently read journals of exploration, especially those dealing with the regions I was in. I read in part to understand human presence in a landscape so emphatically devoid of human life. Slowly in this process a cairn I saw on a headland on Cornwallis Island, or the scattered remnants of a ship's cache at Fury Beach,

or the desolate shoreline of King William Island where so many died—all seen from planes—became infused for me with deeper meaning. On seeing them I felt exhilaration, empathy, and compassion—and wistful speculation, that historical sensibility we use, as much as the elements of natural history, to make sense of the regions we inhabit.

In all these journals, in biographies of the explorers, and in modern narrative histories, common themes of quest and defeat, of aspiration and accomplishment emerge. Seen from a certain distance, however, they nearly all share a disassociation with the actual landscape. The land, whatever its attributes, is made to fill a certain role, often that of an adversary, the *bête noire* of one's dreams. The land's very indifference to human life, ironically, becomes a point in its favor. In the most extreme forms of disassociation, the landscape functions as little more than a stage for the exposition of a personality or for scientific or economic theories, or for national or personal competitions. One rarely finds the lack of overbearing design on the land that distinguished John Davis's voyages, his mature wonder. Encounters with the land in the nineteenth century are more brutal than tender. And are shaped by Victorian sentiment: a desire to exert oneself against formidable odds; to cast one's character in the light of ennobling ideals; to sojourn among exotic things; to make collections and erect monuments. There are no monks intent on cordial visits, moving back and forth between insight and awe, travels without a thought of ownership or utility. And few travelers were not constrained by timetables of accomplishment.

With every expedition into that landscape, however, there went that hope born of a fresh start, that the land would reveal itself; that the maps would turn out splendidly in accuracy and detail; or that feelings of beauty or loneliness would penetrate deeply. For the rare few to whom the land was an unimpeachable source of wisdom, there was also a desire to perceive both its light and its dark sides.

So I read the histories that had been shaped by a sense of

mission or purpose, or that were arranged to fit the times in which they were written, and hoped for a stray remark that would reveal an edge of the land previously undivulged, or an unguarded human feeling that would show the land as something alive.

The expeditions that followed Parry's into the North American Arctic were virtually all British, until the middle of the century when disaster befell Sir John Franklin. Each of these overwintering expeditions disappeared behind a wall of fog—nothing but silence until they emerged somewhere a year later, or three or four years later. Or never. The shorelines and waterways were systematically mapped, but the journals make clear that this reconnaissance called upon a terrible strength in the men who pursued it. Many, boldly led, could not imagine the reason for such hardship; and officers grew weary of trying to impart their visions to reluctant and sullen men.

The cold brought frostbite and amputation, numbing headaches, and stupor to overwintering ships' crews. No kind of clothing or shelter could keep it entirely at bay. The cold made the touch of metal burn and all tasks more difficult, more complicated. Even to make water to drink was a struggle. And the stifling boredom of winter quarters in a dank, freezing ship only compounded apprehension about scurvy and starvation. Men could plan against debilitation, as Parry had; but common seamen still drank themselves into demoralizing unconsciousness with contraband whiskey, and some officers went clinically insane.

The capacity of the frozen sea suddenly to destroy a ship like a nut between two stones was knowledge that pursued people to a state of exhaustion, of abject capitulation. For days the ice seemed only to toy with a ship, to lift it slowly a few feet out of the water, or roll it over 15° to port and hold it. Men slept in their clothes for weeks on end, ready to abandon ship, knowing the bow stem could part suddenly with an explosion and green water pour over them through the fissure. Or any night might be only another when the ice barely murmured against the hull, or

screamed like a banshee and hove up shattered in the darkness, but in the distance.

In the spring the light came. It gave men "an extravagant sense of undefined relief," and in their innocence and abandon they became snowblind. Their eyes felt as if they rested on needles in sockets filled with sand. In harness they dragged sledges across the trench and rubble of sea ice and through vast sumps of soft snow. Consumed by the immenseness of the land, men tramped on mindlessly and fell over dead—of exhaustion, of fatal despair, of miscalculation. Died in a tidal crack that suddenly opened, or from a ridiculously simple accident. Starving men ate their dogs, and then their clothing, and then they turned to each other.

Some of this was unnecessary. The strength of British naval exploration was its regimented discipline, exerted by officers who believed completely and indefatigably in what they were doing. Its failure was its ethnocentrism, its attitude of moral and technical superiority to the Eskimo, its perception of the land as deserted and unamenable. The few technical advances the British brought to arctic exploration in the nineteenth century—India-rubber ground cloths, folding canvas boats, portable, alcohol-burning stoves—were all but inconsequential when compared with their failure to understand the advantages of fur clothing, snow houses, and fresh meat over naval uniforms, fabric tents, and tinned food. British ships, it is true, often carried more men than the lands they were exploring could supply with clothing and fresh meat; but, too, they thought in terms of unnecessarily large contingents of men instead of smaller groups better adapted to the land.\*

\* During the years of the Franklin search the British persisted in trusting to the superiority of their terrible winter clothing. They refused to use dog sledges because they felt it demeaned human enterprise to have dogs doing work men could do. Other explorers, particularly Hudson's Bay men like John Rae, and Samuel Hearne earlier, adopted the more serviceable clothing, more nutritious food, and more efficient travel methods of the Eskimos. Both Peary and Stefansson championed various aspects of the local intelligence as indispensable to their successes.

It is worth pointing up the failures of British exploration. The constitutions and desires of all the men involved in this experience were not the same; the complexities of economics and military duty, and the vision of men like John Barrow, placed other men in positions where they struggled for comprehension and meaning in a landscape that contradicted what they did. The geographical knowledge we enjoy now cost some men dearly. It is presumptuous to think they all died believing they'd given their lives for something greater.

In September 1837, George Back beached a badly leaking HMS *Terror* on the west coast of Ireland. He had spent a monumentally nerve-racking winter, beset in the ice in Foxe Channel and raked by gales. *Terror's* bulkheads had started, her deck had been sprung, her eyebolts shot, her bow stoved—she had been squeezed so tight that turpentine had dripped from her timbers. Any other vessel, said the shipwrights who repaired her at Chatham, would have broken apart under the pressure and sunk.

This foray—Back had been sent to map the north coast of America from Fury and Hecla Strait to Kent Peninsula—did not sit well at all in England. A stout ship and an affable, relaxed captain were all that saved crew and officers from near-certain death. The Northwest Passage held no real allure now—Parry had lit the way for whalers from Peterhead and Dundee into the North Water, but that was all the benefit (pure and applied science and a country's honor aside) most could see in these voyages. Besides, public benefactors like Felix Booth, a distiller, were now financing expeditions; and the Hudson's Bay Company was sending out explorers—let them foot the bill, thought Parliament, for whatever gain might be left in it.

Barrow argued, artfully and successfully, however, for yet another voyage, one so completely well outfitted and with objectives so clear it seemed impossible of failure. Thus, HMS *Terror* and *Erebus* sailed from London on May 19, 1845, with 134 men under the command of Sir John Franklin. Their goal was to

connect Parry's route through Lancaster Sound and Barrow Strait with the coast of North America, and then to sail west for Bering Strait. The whole of that coast from Icy Cape (Cook's farthest, 1778) to Boothia Peninsula was now known. The endeavor seemed, to most, perfunctory.

Franklin's party, less five men who transferred off before *Terror* and *Erebus* entered the ice, wintered in 1845-46 at Beechey Island, where three men died of unknown causes and were buried. In 1846 Franklin sailed up Wellington Channel to 77°N, then south down the west coast of Cornwallis Island, across Barrow Strait and into Peel Sound. He spent the winter of 1846-47 wedged in heavy multiyear floes in Victoria Strait. What Franklin did not know, and could not have known, was that he had chosen the wrong route. On a route plotted down the *east* side of King William Island and into Queen Maud Gulf via James Ross, Rae, and Simpson straits, he would have encountered only annual ice. Moreover, it was the only practicable route.\*

Franklin's tragic error—*Erebus* and *Terror* never got out of the ice, and twenty-one men including Franklin died during a second winter in Victoria Strait—grew out of an incorrect observation by James Ross, exploring the west coast of Boothia Peninsula in 1831. Ross thought King William Island and Boothia Peninsula were connected—he sketched in what would later be named Rae Strait as an isthmus.

By 1848 concern for the missing party had mounted sufficiently for rescue ships to be dispatched. The Admiralty continued the search for Franklin—some forty expeditions, governmental, private, and international, went out over a ten-year period—until March 1854, when Franklin and his men were officially declared

\* Heavy pack ice enters Victoria Strait annually from the Arctic Ocean via M'Clure Strait, Viscount Melville Sound, and M'Clintock Channel, a pattern of drift unknown in Franklin's time. The alternate route suggested above was the one followed by Amundsen in 1903-1906, on the first successful navigation of the Passage.

dead. Save for evidence of the winter encampment at Beechey Island, not a trace of the expedition had been found. In the spring of 1854, Dr. John Rae, a Hudson's Bay employee, met a group of Eskimos near Pelly Bay who told him they had seen men who had abandoned the ships walking on King William Island and later found their bodies. Rae purchased several relics from them, including a small silver plate with Franklin's name engraved on it. The British government awarded Rae £10,000 for determining the fate of the expedition, but Lady Franklin, Sir John's wife, was not satisfied with this conclusion. She wanted to know how and why such a sterling group (in her estimation) had failed. She continued to spend a large part of her own fortune and to raise public funds as well to outfit private expeditions and pursue the search for her husband's ships. The last of these expeditions, in a small, refitted yacht sent out under the command of Francis M'Clintock, located the only records from the disaster ever found, in the spring of 1859: two notes in separate cairns on the west coast of King William Island and a frozen packet of unreadable letters.

The search for Franklin caught England's imagination as Barrow's quest for a Northwest Passage never had. Scores of expeditions set out from England and America to search the entire unexplored Canadian Archipelago if necessary, especially its coastlines. This approach marked a fundamental change in arctic exploration. Where once the goal had only been to get *through* en route to somewhere else, now expeditions were prepared to overwinter and to make the region itself the focus of their attention. Small detachments of men spread out in the spring in every direction to cover hundreds of miles with man-drawn sledges, discovering new islands, channels, and bays almost everywhere they went. From this enterprise came, ironically, the first extensive and accurate maps of the high Arctic. After six years, however, the British were disenchanted. An oaf of an officer, Sir Edward Belcher, intuiting the Admiralty's growing impatience with an expensive and fruitless endeavor, summarily abandoned the search ships HMS *Resolute*, *Intrepid*, *Assistance*, and *Pioneer* in the ice and departed the Arctic

in September 1854.\* England's eyes were now on the western Crimea, and her heart with Englishmen dying there.†

The Franklin disaster ended British—indeed, virtually all—interest in finding a Northwest Passage. Franklin's men, said Sir John Richardson, had forged "the last link of the North-west Passage with their lives." They "perished in the path of duty," wrote M'Clintock, and the search for them had been a "glorious mission." These observations were widely endorsed. The Admiralty prize for the first successful navigation of the Passage went, with some grumbling, to Robert M'Clure and the officers and men of *Investigator*, who sailed through Bering Strait in 1850, spent the winters of 1851–52 and 1852–53 beset at Banks Island, and then walked over the ice to *Resolute* at Dealy Island, just west of Parry's old Winter Harbor. They spent the following winter beset off Bathurst Island and sailed home with Belcher in September 1854. (The sledge from *Resolute* that reached *Investigator* at Mercy Bay and escorted the men back in the spring of 1853 was, ironically, called the *John Barrow*.)

In order not to disparage Franklin's efforts, the Admiralty set the prize to M'Clure at £10,000, one-half the £20,000 originally set aside, for having discovered a Northwest Passage.

The Franklin search expeditions succeeded in mapping virtu-

\* The timely arrival of HMS *Phoenix* and *Talbot* at Beechey Island was all that saved the crews of these four ships and the men from HMS *Investigator* from all having to sail home in a single vessel, Belcher's *North Star*.

† The search for Franklin was a many-faceted affair, run on hunch and invention and conducted by people with a variety of motives. Some officers were looking for a quick route to promotion, others were enthralled with delineating a new land. Franklin's fate was, at some points, rather far from many people's minds. One of the oddest plans put into motion was Captain Horatio Austin's to live-trap arctic fox and fix them with metal information tags directing the Franklin party to the search ships and to caches that had been set out for them. Some of the foxes were quietly dispatched by sailors, who valued the fur and thought the plan cockeyed.

ally all the coastline of the arctic islands south and west of the Parry Islands. (Amundsen and Stefansson would complete the survey of the northeast coast of Victoria Island, the most difficult to reach, in 1905 and 1916, respectively.) Prince Patrick, the westernmost of these, was named for the Irishmen who participated in the search.\* Several islands were named for groups that donated funds for the search, including the Tasmania Islands at the foot of Franklin Strait, honoring moneys pledged to Lady Franklin's expeditions from that corner of the world (where her husband had been governor-general). Banks Land and King William Land were found to be islands. Bellot Strait was discovered. Virtually all this survey work was done by small sledging parties, a technique brought to perfection by M'Clintock, who set a record in 1853 by traveling over 1328 miles in 105 days.

As interest in Franklin's fate began to wane, attention slowly shifted to two other goals: discovering the waters of a reportedly ice-free polar sea and attaining the Geographic North Pole. These were to be largely American endeavors; indeed, the principal avenue of approach, the channel between Greenland and Ellesmere Island, came to be called the American Route, and the region itself came to be regarded by some, quite erroneously, as part of the United States, especially during the years when Peary was basing his expeditions there.

By 1850, then, the North had become a region important in its own right. The Hudson's Bay Company was continuing to export a fortune in furs from the Canadian subarctic; some arctic expeditions had reported deposits of coal; American whalers with their "go-aheadism" had met with new success in the Chukchi Sea—perhaps, thought investors, the region had enough potential to warrant

\* In a most roundabout way. The island was named for Arthur William Patrick Albert, Victoria and Albert's seventh child, born in 1850. The name Patrick was given him in remembrance of his mother's visit to Ireland in 1849.

further exploration. Too, it held out promise of renown and prestige to anyone who could help "extend the charts," who could map what lay north of the Parry Islands or reach the Pole. In 1853, with these sentiments in the wind, American shipping magnate Henry Grinnell, philanthropist George Peabody, and several scientific societies decided to sponsor a single-minded and popular American explorer named Elisha Kent Kane.

Officially, Kane was to become part of the Franklin search when he sailed north. But as nothing had been found to that date but the camp at Beechey Island, Kane felt justified in pursuing the search in an unlikely direction—up Smith Sound and into Kane Basin. He wintered at Rensselaer Harbor in northwest Greenland in 1853–54 and again in 1854–55 when his ship remained beset. His sledge parties pushed up the Greenland coast as far north as 80°N.\* In the spring of 1855 Kane and his men packed their journals and maps and rowed and walked out of the Arctic, all the way to Godhavn, where they met a relief expedition.

Arctic exploration had had a military and scientific cast under Barrow's orchestration. It was selflessly performed for God and country. The Americans entered the Arctic with no such illusions. From Kane to Peary, American expeditions were to be characterized by the individuals who led them as much as by the goals their benefactors and sponsors had in mind.

Kane was a diminutive, sickly man, obsessed with arctic exploration, "one of the last of the race of brilliant and versatile amateurs," says Canadian arctic historian L. H. Neatby. His dramatic presence, his brave and sentimental bearing, his romantic vision and virtue captured America's sense of itself. When he died at the age of thirty-seven, he enjoyed a funeral that, at the time, could only be compared with Lincoln's. His very frailty accented the qualities Americans so admired—drive, backbone, and grit.

\* At the time, William Parry held the record for a farthest north—82°45'N, a point north of Svalbard reached on a sledge journey in 1827.

With his ship locked up for a second year in the ice, Kane made soup from the ship's rats, burned parts of the ship itself for heat, and rigged mirrors to throw sunlight into the holds where his men lay bedridden with scurvy. In his encounters with the local hunters (characteristically intent on testing newly met people for any weakness, the Eskimos stole from him) he was stern, then vengeful, and finally tactful. He successfully negotiated a treaty with them which required that they provide his party with food.

Kane followed Edward Inglefield, an English explorer, into Smith Sound and generated considerable excitement in the outside world when he reiterated Inglefield's earlier report (1852) that there was open water north of the ice in Kane Basin. The theory of an open polar sea had been advanced numerous times in the previous 300 years, though nineteenth-century arguments for it were "sired by wishful commercial thinking and born to national ambition" in the view of geographer John Kirtland Wright. There was some legitimate reason to speculate about a vast stretch of open water in the Far North. As early as 1810 the Russian explorer Hedenström had described polynyas. The whale-fisher's bight west of Svalbard was known to reach as far north as 82°N in some years. And the extent of annual sea ice, especially in the Greenland Sea, did vary greatly from year to year. But the existence of such a sea was posited largely on scraps of information—about the set of currents, the presence of driftwood from distant coasts showing up in certain areas, a haphazard assortment of sea and land temperatures, and marine-mammal migration patterns. It was poor scientific reasoning, even by the standards of the day.

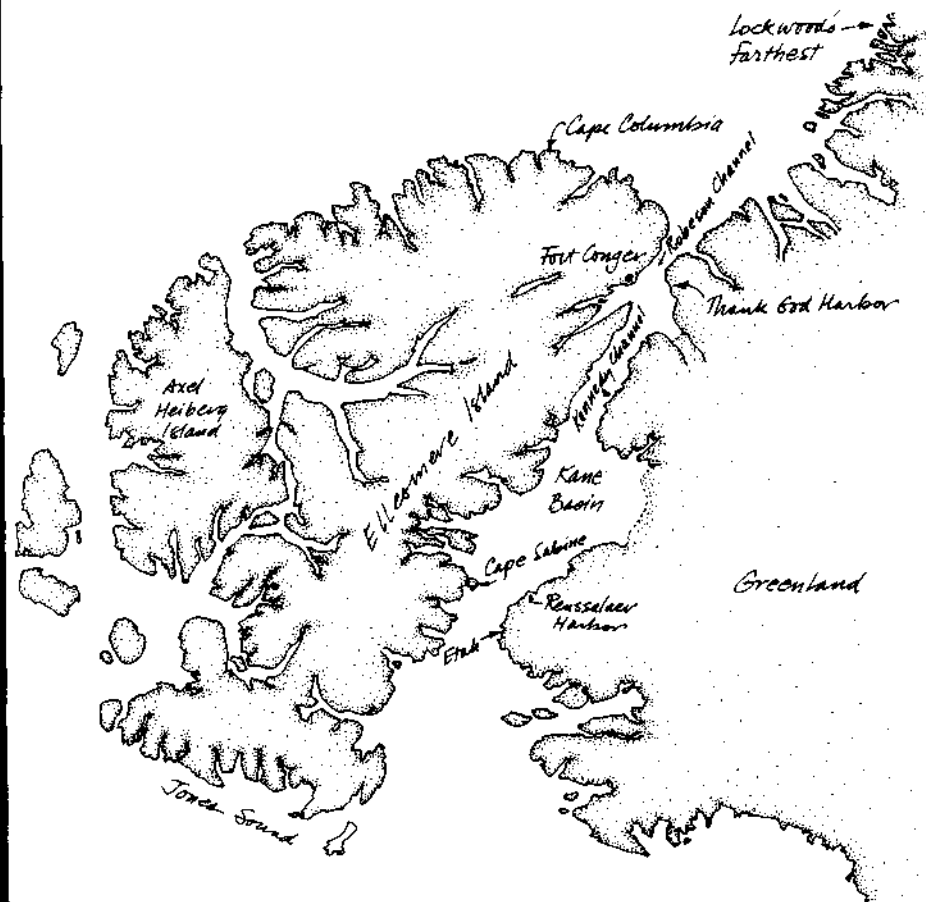
With the rise of a more rigorous science at the close of the nineteenth century, attempts to find an open polar sea were not taken seriously. They were not, however, loudly disparaged, for the public would not accept such criticism. Between the Civil War and the beginning of the First World War, American audiences were most eager to know and read about polar adventure. Men like Kane and Charles Francis Hall, and later Stefansson and Peary, who journeyed through exotic regions far removed from the factories of

industrial America, were fetchingly heroic figures.\* Peary especially, the very embodiment of determination, was revered, until his grasping and arrogant nature became too much and public sentiment turned against him.

In September 1875, Karl Weyprecht, an Austrian army officer who discovered Franz Josef Land with Julius von Payer in 1873, urged a group of scientists meeting in Graz, Austria, to make a synchronous and, consequently, more useful examination of the Arctic. Weyprecht regarded recent attempts to reach the North Pole as nothing but stunts; and he criticized the zealous international competition to discover new arctic islands. What was the nature of the arctic climate, he wanted to know, and how did it affect Europe's weather? Could chauvinism be set aside for international cooperation to answer this and other scientific questions in the North? It could, his colleagues believed. Weyprecht's proposals were refined and became the plan for the first International Polar Year. In 1882, eleven countries set up twelve arctic stations for a year of observations.

The station farthest to the north was to be an American one at Fort Conger, Ellesmere Island, commanded by army lieutenant Adolphus Greely. Greely was a humorless, mediocre commander, "an insecure . . . irritable martinet," according to one historian, without arctic experience. He opted, in the American tradition, for spectacular adventure rather than tedious scientific observation, sending a Lieutenant James Lockwood up the coast of Greenland to test, if possible, the current British farthest north of  $83^{\circ}20'N$ . Lockwood reached  $83^{\circ}24'N$  with Sergeant David Brainard and an Eskimo companion on May 15, 1883, four nautical miles farther

\* Hall, a small businessman and obsessed visionary, endured hardship in the Arctic with almost neurotic indifference. In 1862 he took down the story of Frobisher's visits to Baffin Island from resident Eskimos who had kept the details perfectly in order in oral tradition for 275 years. He died in 1871 in his winter quarters at Thank God Harbor, northern Greenland, a victim, apparently, of murder by arsenic poisoning.



north than the Nares Expedition had got on that same shore. "We shook each other's hands from very joy," wrote Brainard later, "and even hugged the astonished Eskimo who wondered what it was all about." Sergeant Brainard, one is chagrined to note, also carved an advertisement for a well-known ale into the rock before turning back.

Greely had been put on Ellesmere Island to build Fort Conger,



to make meteorological and magnetic observations, and to explore both Ellesmere and northern Greenland. The party was to be picked up in the summer of 1883. The relief ship did not show up that year, nor did it appear in the summer of 1884. Desperate, Greely led his men south along the coast to Cape Sabine in hopes of finding a cache, either one left by his would-be rescuers or one from the 1875-1876 Nares Expedition. (They found both. The former was pitifully inadequate and retrieving the latter proved too arduous.) Sixteen of the twenty-five men on Pim Island at Cape Sabine died of starvation that winter, including the young and very likable Edward Israel.

The failure to rescue all the men in the party—Greely, himself, survived—is one of the most shameful episodes in American history. The rescue efforts of both 1883 and 1884 were inept, half-hearted affairs. The saddest part, perhaps, was the disparagement heaped on Greely by the very politicians who would not underwrite a serious effort to rescue him. Heroic attempts apparently did not count for much against unqualified success in America. Not to have rounded the tip of Greenland or discovered new land, to have bested the British by only four miles—it wasn't enough. Greely was written off, a cruel and inhumane treatment of a man who did the best he could to keep his men alive. One of the loudest voices of condemnation was that of Robert Peary, who lived to greatly regret his self-indulgence.

By this time, 1900, arctic exploration had largely become the story of two men, Fridtjof Nansen and Peary. Robert Peary, the older of the two, was a shrewd salesman, desperate for acclaim. His accomplishments were genuine—explorations of northern Greenland and his arrival at the North Pole in 1909, arduous journeys requiring a determination that staggers the imagination. His bluster and his ability to command, however, concealed loneliness and insecurity, which he sought to assuage by his accomplishments and by maneuvering to gain the favor and companionship of powerful people. He embodied the bearing and to some extent the ideals of Theodore Roosevelt, one of his staunchest supporters.

Nansen, a Norwegian scientist and humanitarian, was a different sort of man—nearly as driven as Peary, but not a showman, not an imposing presence. He had a larger view of the world than Peary did, a better understanding of the scale of human events, and he made lasting contributions in several fields. He was the first explorer to cross the Greenland ice cap; he derived and then proved a theory of polar drift; and he wrote a scholarly two-volume work on early arctic exploration, *In Northern Mists*. In 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts on behalf of refugees after World War I.

While there is an aura of the unrequited lover about Peary, the proportions of Nansen's life seem ideal. Nansen, however, was not harried the way Peary was, dogged by a bewildering series of misfortunes that culminated in a self-destructive dispute with Dr. Frederick Cook over who had gotten to the North Pole first.

WHEN he read in 1884 that part of the wreckage of a ship called the *Jeannette* had turned up on the southwest coast of Greenland, Nansen began to speculate about polar drift in the Arctic Ocean.\*

With Scottish ship architect Colin Archer, Nansen built the *Fram*, a 128-foot, broad-beamed, three-masted schooner designed

\* The *Jeannette*, an American vessel, was crushed in the ice in the Laptev Sea in 1881. Most of the members of the expedition, including its commander, naval lieutenant George De Long, perished. They proved Wrangel Island was an island, however, and discovered the De Long and New Siberian islands, indicating the great seaward extent of the Siberian continental shelf. At about the same time, July 20, 1879, a Swedish geologist and explorer, Adolf Erik Nordenskjöld, rounded Cape Dezhnev in a steam sail ship, completing the Northeast Passage. (In 1913 Severnaya Zemlya, the last arctic archipelago, was discovered by a Russian officer, to complete a picture of the Siberian high Arctic.) Nordenskjöld's voyage opened a trade route for Siberian furs, lumber, and ore, which became the impetus for the development of the modern Soviet fleet of cargo ships and nuclear-powered icebreakers. The completion of the Northwest Passage by Amundsen in 1906, by comparison, aroused very little interest in Canada or the United States until the discovery of oil in the Arctic in 1968.

to survive in the polar pack.\* The *Fram* was outfitted for five years, and on June 24, 1893, with eleven companions, Nansen set his course from Norway to intersect the *Jeannette's*. By the end of September the *Fram* was beset as intended, north of the De Long Islands. For two years Nansen drifted in safety, making numerous observations. The ship rode beautifully in the ice; the drift, though slow, went as Nansen had expected, a clockwise movement westward from the De Long Islands. Bored and eager for a struggle, Nansen left the ship on March 14, 1895, with Frederik Johansen and twenty-six dogs in an effort to reach the North Pole. They passed beyond 86°N, but spring was upon them and they dared go no farther. As it was, they barely reached Franz Josef Land with two of the dogs. They overwintered there and sailed for Norway in August, with the English explorer Frederick Jackson, whom they were fortunate enough to meet there, quite by accident.

The *Fram's* captain, Otto Sverdrup, brought the ship safely out of the ice and into the Greenland Sea in August 1896. Two years later, on another expedition, Sverdrup was forced into winter quarters with the *Fram* by heavy ice on the eastern coast of Ellesmere Island. A suspicious Peary suddenly showed up in Sverdrup's camp—he wanted to know what Sverdrup's intentions were. To explore to the west and not try for the Pole, said the Norwegian. Peary, snubbing a courteous offer of coffee, bade the Norwegians an abrupt adieu. Another slight Peary would regret.

Between 1898 and 1902 Sverdrup and his companions explored southern and western Ellesmere and discovered Axel Heiberg

\* The *Fram's* smooth, round-bottomed shape offered no projections for sea ice to grip. Its rudder and the cast-iron propeller of its auxiliary engine were housed in protective wells and could be hoisted on deck quickly in an emergency. The oak hull itself, with an aggregate thickness of four feet, was reinforced with extra frames and an internal bracing of wood and iron. Layers of heavy felt, cork, and reindeer-hair insulation made the cramped quarters more comfortable. A windmill on board provided power for a system of electric lights.

Island and Amund and Ellef Ringnes islands to the west.\* Not since Parry's first expedition had so much new land been discovered and mapped. It was thorough, competent exploration, which went largely unheralded in America, like the Danish exploration of east Greenland.

ONE winter in Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories, when the temperature did not get above  $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$  for seven weeks, I found plenty of time to read. Ringing in my mind was a conversation about the perception of landscape that I had had with a man named Richard Davis, at his office at the Arctic Institute of North America in Calgary. I had explained my fascination with a set of journals, written about travels over the tundra north and east of Yellowknife, those of Samuel Hearne, John Franklin, Warburton Pike, and Ernest Thompson Seton.† Hearne had lived off the land like his Slavey and Chipewyan companions on a journey to the Northern Ocean (1770–1772). The land does not take on the proportions of an enemy in his journal, nor does it seem bereft of life. A different understanding emerges from Franklin's journal, in which the land reflects the name it was to bear ever after—the Barrens. (Franklin's 1819–1822 expedition was troubled by execution, starvation, murder, and cannibalism.) In Pike's journal (1890) the tundra is construed as a wild place that sagacious and incessantly tough men are meant to subdue, to survive in. For Seton (1907) the same tundra is so benign, its economic promise so bright, he even attempts to change its name from the Barrens to the Arctic Prairies.

The same land—plants, animals, small trees, weather, the low hills, rivers, and lakes—is, as one might easily guess, seen differently in different eras by men of dissimilar background. I speculated about

\* Count Axel Heiberg and two wealthy brewers, Amund and Ellef Ringnes, contributed heavily to Nansen's and Sverdrup's expeditions.

† See note 5 for titles and dates of publication.

the overlap and contrast in the journals with Davis, who had himself written a paper comparing the journals of twentieth-century travelers in the subarctic. Something that comes up in a comparison of such journals, he said, is how much a description of the land in an early report affects the description of the same landscape in a later report. Confirming the existence, in other words, of a landscape like Pike's in the North—"the most complete desolation that exists on the face of the earth"—is partly the result of choosing that writer over another to read before departing.

As I sat reading in Yellowknife I was mindful of this, of the caution with which one should approach any journal, of the tendency to make a single appealing narrative stand for the entire experience or, worse, to stand in place of the experience. I also felt a sense of privilege, having been able to walk over some of the same country these explorers traversed. Even if I did not always care for the shape of the mind, I could see they had been there. Hearne's journal rings with authentic detail, some of it quite subtle. I reflected that week in Yellowknife how infrequently any of us is able to do this, to verify what is given to us to read about a far place. And how in reading three or four journals about the same region one sees even better the gaps, the strange lacunae that emerge in our understanding of anything. And something else: one wants to get a sense of the land itself, to know what it is; but one is also drawn irresistibly to the people who walk around on it, figuring out both the landscape and themselves.

The literature of nineteenth-century arctic exploration is full of coincidence and drama—last-minute rescues, a desperate rifle shot to secure food for starving men, secret letters written to painfully missed loved ones. There are moments of surreal stillness, as in Parry's journal when he writes of the sound of the human voice in the land. And of tender ministrations and quiet forbearance in the face of inevitable death. As if caught up in the plot of a great Victorian novel, ships and people often turn up again in ironic circumstances—Sir John Ross was rescued in 1831, after being trapped in the ice of Prince Regent Inlet for four years, by the

*Isabella*, the ship he had sailed into Smith Sound in 1818, since converted to a whaler. The *Terror*, which George Back barely got clear of Foxe Channel in 1837, the near-disaster that almost ended British arctic exploration, was Franklin's flagship in 1845.

Francis M'Clintock, who would be the first to find records from the Franklin Expedition, on King William Island in 1859, also had a hand in M'Clure's completion of the Northwest Passage. In the spring of 1851 he left a message under a rock at Winter Harbor, Melville Island, giving the location of his ship's winter quarters. It was found the following spring by M'Clure, who, realizing the note was now dated, added information to it about the location of *Investigator* at Mercy Bay and the dire circumstances there. M'Clintock's note was checked by a colleague in the fall of 1852 and, the ship's fate then known for the first time, preparations were made for a rescue expedition in the spring of 1853. (A single member of *Investigator*'s crew, Samuel Cresswell, was fortuitously present when a supply ship, HMS *Phoenix*, departed Beechey Island for London on August 24, 1853. He thus became the first person to travel through the Northwest Passage—the rest of the crew spent another winter in the Arctic.) Another note left by M'Clintock, on the north shore of Prince Patrick Island, was discovered in 1915 by Stefansson and delivered, still legible, to his widow in 1921.

Of the many dramatic events, several became fixed in my mind.

In 1900, Peary placed a cairn on the northeast shore of Greenland at 82°37'N. In the previous twenty-five years the Danes had been making a systematic reconnaissance of Greenland's remote east coast. The only hole in their map was that between Peary's cairn and Cape Bismarck (76°45'N), a distance of about 400 miles. In August 1906, the Danmark Expedition arrived at Cape Bismarck to complete the coastal survey. On May 1, 1907, having spent the previous autumn laying down caches, Mylius Erichsen, Høeg Hagen, and an Eskimo companion named Jørgen Brönlund parted company with J. P. Koch and his party, after traveling north from Cape Bismarck with them. Koch headed for Peary's cairn. Erichsen

turned west into Independence Fiord, the east entrance to a channel that Peary had reported led to the west coast of Greenland. On May 27, by accident, the parties met again. Koch had found Peary's cairn while Erichsen had traveled 125 miles into Danmark Fiord and found his way blocked. He told Koch he was going to run up Independence Fiord to the vicinity of Academy Glacier, from where he thought he might be able to look westward into Peary Channel. He thought it would take only a few days.

Erichsen's party never returned. Koch and the others searched unsuccessfully for them in the fall, laying down emergency supplies along the coast as they went. The following spring they began a careful check of the depots. In a small cave, which served as a cache on the coast of Lambert Land, they found Brönlund's body. At his feet were a bottle containing all of Hagen's maps and his diary, all but the last page written in Eskimo syllabics. On the final page, in Danish, Brönlund had written:

Perished 79 Fiord after attempt to return over inland ice in November. I arrive here in waning moonlight, and could not go farther for frozen feet and darkness. Bodies of the others are in middle of Fiord off glacier (about 2 1/2 leagues). Hagen died 15th of November, Mylius about ten days later.

The three of them, it turned out, had run into warm weather on the way back, which made travel over the sea ice impossible. They ran out of food and their dogs perished. They had found a geography Peary's descriptions did not prepare them for. Hagen's maps, which the Eskimo had carried with him to the end, corrected the errors.

There was no Peary Channel. Where Peary had reported the frozen northern reaches of the Greenland Sea, they had found two enormous peninsulas, Crown Prince Christian Land and land now named for Erichsen. (In fairness to Peary, other explorers made such errors, though few were ever pointed up in such a regrettable way.)

Peary's own journeys were full of desperate moments, including one of the most harrowing in arctic literature. In 1906, retreating south across the ice after an unsuccessful attempt to reach the Pole, Peary found his way blocked by a lead a half-mile wide. The party, camped on the north side, sent men to reconnoiter east and west, and waited, day after day, for the lead either to close or to freeze over. Peary's provisions ran perilously low. The men finally killed their dogs for food and broke up their sleds for fuel. The lead was by then two miles wide, but some distance from camp a thin film of ice had formed over it. The ice would not support a man without snowshoes—to stumble, even to pause, would mean breaking through. They tied on their snowshoes with great care, spread out in a wide line abreast, and set out in silence. Each man moved with a rhythmic shuffle. The young ice rose in bow waves like water at the tips of their snowshoes. When the toe of his rear shoe broke through the ice on two successive steps, Peary thought his life was finished. He heard someone cry out behind him but did not dare stop or turn around. "God help him," he thought. When they reached solid ice on the other side no one spoke. Peary heard the quivering sighs of the two men nearest to him. The shout had been from a man whose snowshoes, like Peary's, had broken through. But everyone had made it.

That moment, indeed the intensity with which Peary lived, contrasts sharply with the highly accomplished but unsung arctic voyage of one Richard Collinson. Collinson left England in January 1850 in HMS *Enterprise*, with his consort M'Clure in *Investigator*. Somewhere en route to the Bering Sea, around Cape Horn and via Hawaii, M'Clure decided he would just as soon be the first ship through the Northwest Passage as to find Sir John Franklin. M'Clure was already forty-three, and his chances for promotion were not good. Accordingly, he slipped ahead of his commanding officer.

Collinson, a few weeks behind M'Clure (who had made a bold charge through an uncharted part of the Aleutian chain), arrived

too late to get past the ice at Point Barrow. He turned south and spent the winter in Hong Kong. In the summer of 1851 he rounded Point Barrow and, unknowingly, followed M'Clure's 1850 route up Prince of Wales Strait. On one of the Princess Royal Islands, Collinson found a note indicating M'Clure had tried to cross Viscount Melville Sound to reach Parry's Winter Harbor but was prevented by heavy ice. Collinson also tried and was repulsed. He returned south, doubled Nelson Head, and sailed up the west coast of Banks Island (unaware, again, that he was just two weeks behind M'Clure). The ice proved too great an obstacle, however, and he turned south again. He headed for the southwest shore of Victoria Island, where he set up winter quarters.

In 1852 Collinson deftly navigated the 300-ton *Enterprise* through Dolphin and Union Strait, a stunning bit of seamanship, to winter at Cambridge Bay on the southeast coast of Victoria Island. Had he had an interpreter along (the interpreter was with M'Clure), he very likely would have learned the location of Franklin's tragedy. As it was, he only collected some relics of the expedition from local Eskimos. In the spring of 1853 he explored the east coast of Victoria Island as far as Gateshead Island, finding that he had been anticipated there by Rae in 1851. (The relics Rae collected among the Pelly Bay Eskimos in 1854 would also arrive in England a year before Collinson was able to get back with his.) Collinson set sail for England in the summer of 1853. After again navigating unscathed through the treacherous shoal water south of Victoria Island, he was forced into winter quarters at Camden Bay, Alaska. He finally reached England via the Cape of Good Hope in May 1855.

In those five years only three of the sixty-four men with Collinson died. According to one historian, Collinson exceeded all his contemporaries in looking after the health and morale of his men. One of his innovations was a billiard table made of snow blocks, erected on the sea ice at Cambridge Bay to dispel winter ennui. The bumpers were made of walrus skin, packed with oakum;

the table surface was a sheet of freshwater ice, finely shaved; and the balls were hand-carved of lignum vitae. "I do not suppose that any of the men had played at billiards before," wrote Collinson, "so they could not complain of the table; but the thing took admirably."

Collinson's journey, for distance traveled, length of voyage, difficulty of navigation, adherence to orders, and overall health of officers and crew upon their return, was singular. His very lack of difficulty, however, obscured his unparalleled achievement and helped to promote M'Clure's somewhat contrived claim. Belcher, it might be noted, knowing full well what had happened to the *Investigator*, abandoned Collinson to the same fate in 1854.

WHEN Collinson headed up the east coast of Victoria Island in 1853, he had two sledges with him. He intended to send one of them across Victoria Strait to King William Island, where he would have found the evidence M'Clintock found six years later—the skeletons, cairns, and abandoned stores that revealed the fate of Franklin's men. As it was, the 55 miles of sea ice looked too formidable, and he decided against it.

On April 25, 1848, Franklin's second-in-command, Captain Crozier of HMS *Erebus*, put a message in a cairn on the northwest coast of King William Island. It stated that he had arrived at this point with 104 men after a journey of some 30 miles across treacherous sea ice. *Erebus* and *Terror* had been frozen in in Victoria Strait for two years. Franklin was dead, as were twenty-three others. He intended to lead these survivors 250 miles south and east to the mouth of Back's Fish River. From there, apparently, he hoped to reach a settlement.

In the vicinity of Cape John Herschel on the south coast of King William Island, Crozier and some forty starving and debilitated men encountered four Eskimo families. Crozier approached them, beseeching them with gestures to open their packs. They held seal meat out to him. He took the meat and began eating and indicated the Eskimos should give meat to the other men, which

they did. They spent the night with Crozier's party. In the morning Crozier pleaded with them to stay, saying over and over the word he thought meant "seal." But the families walked away. The thin resources of that part of the Arctic would not support the four families and a party of forty men, and the Eskimos knew it.

Crozier's entreaty—the details were learned from the Eskimos years later—is one of the most riveting moments in arctic history. Crozier had left England in 1845 with every expectation of success. An officer's plum. When technology and British naval tradition proved inadequate to the task, his complacency was shattered. He was reduced to begging from people he regarded as socially and morally inferior, people who counted for nothing against what he felt his own people stood for, by any comparison of accomplishment.

After the encounter on the beach, Crozier and his men became more destitute in every way. The men, for the most part tragically ignorant of where they were, of what they faced, continued to fall in their tracks. A boat abandoned on the beach and later found by M'Clintock contained a kid glove, with measures of powder tied off in each finger; a copy of *The Vicar of Wakefield*; a grass-weave cigar case; a pair of blue sunglasses, folded in a tin case; a pair of calf-lined bedroom slippers, bound with red ribbon; blue and white delftware teacups; and a sixpence, dated 1831.

There is some indication at the place where the last thirty of them died together that they were trying to kill and eat the first snow geese arriving from the south.

In 1923 Knud Rasmussen paused at this place, Starvation Cove near Barrow Inlet on Adelaide Peninsula, to perform a graveside service. It was here, too, that the expedition's journals were found, a waterlogged, wind-scattered, indecipherable mess.

After Rasmussen (and before), others searched for clues to explain this monumental failure. On the basis of Eskimo testimony it is conjectured that one of the ships sank in Victoria Strait and the other went down off Grant Point, Adelaide Peninsula. In 1967 the Canadian military searched the area thoroughly for records,



relics, and undiscovered grave sites. They found nothing. The desire to write a final epitaph to this story, however, is still very much alive in the North.

ABOUT 1856, two years after the Franklin search officially ended, a shaman named Qillarsuaq, convinced that there were unknown Eskimos living somewhere far to the north, left Baffin Island with a group of about forty people. They traveled to Somerset Island, across to Cornwallis Island, then east along the coast of Devon Island. More than half of the people turned back along the way. Hunting was hard, and they did not entirely share Qillarsuaq's vision. Finally, in 1863, after traveling for several years with none

but the map in Qillarsuaq's head, they crossed the sea ice from Cape Sabine, Ellesmere Island, to the coast of Greenland, where they indeed found people. They met two men near Etah. One of them, Aqattaq, had a wooden leg, a gift to him from British whalers. The Baffin Island people had never seen anything like it and marveled.

For the next five or six years the Baffin Islanders lived among the Polar Eskimo, mostly around Siorapaluk. The two groups had been separated during a climatic episode called the Neo-Boreal, or Little Ice Age (1450-1850). With the return of warm weather, the kinds and numbers of animals changed and the Polar Eskimo did not have great success hunting them—in the intervening years they had lost the necessary skills. The Baffin Islanders taught them again: the construction and handling of the kayak, a craft a man could carry with just a forearm thrust in the cockpit, light as a basket; the use of the bow and arrow, to reach out for caribou; and the way to fish for migrating char.

The notion of Eskimos exploring their own lands and adapting anew at the same time Europeans were exploring the Arctic was something the Europeans were never aware of. They thought of the Arctic as fixed in time—a primitive landscape, a painting, inhabited by an attenuated people. They mistook the stillness and the cold for biological stasis. They thought nothing at all changed here. They thought it was a desert, a wasteland.

Stefansson, and others, condescended to Crozier for his inability to survive in a region "teeming with game animals," basing their arguments on the subsequent success of an American cavalry lieutenant in the area.\* The criticism is unfair, and revealing. Crozier, if he knew anything about hunting at all, knew it only for a "sport," not as a serious endeavor. It is unlikely that he or any of his men could have survived except in a place that actually did

\* In 1879 Frederick Schwatka and two companions made a fifty-week, 3200-mile sledge journey from Hudson Bay to King William Island and back, during which time they lived almost entirely off the land.

teem with caribou or muskoxen, apparently never the case in the King William Island-Adelaide Peninsula region. The only food animals that might have sustained them would have been seals, but they did not have the skill to hunt seals—and it is extremely unlikely that there were seals enough to keep so many men alive. That is the reason there were so few Eskimos in the region to begin with. Stefansson's promotion of the Arctic as a land overrun in every sector with animals—he also publicly criticized Greely for failing to feed his men with local animals—showed as poor an understanding of the land as the British misperception of it as a biological desert.

The itineraries of arctic animals are not obvious. Archaeological research has found, however, that the core areas of cultural development in the Arctic, such as Bering Sea and Foxe Basin, have a long history of stable animal populations. Even here, however, their presence is seasonal. Caribou have their ancestral calving areas, the birds their ancestral rookeries. And the narwhal comes predictably to Admiralty Inlet. But if you pick the wrong time to look, it would appear that nothing ever happened at these spots.

The land in some places is truly empty; in other places it is only apparently empty. To those who had no interest in the movement of animals, the entire region seemed empty. They could not grasp a crucial fact—seminomadic people living here in such small numbers were an indication that the animals themselves moved around. Either the animals did not stay long in one place, or there were not very many of them to begin with, or they were very hard to kill. Or there would be more people, living in more permanent dwellings. The land was not empty, but it teemed with animals that would sustain men only in a certain, very limited way. To know this you either had to live there or depend on the advice of the people who did.

Crozier and his men died because they had, truly, no idea of where they were. The cocoon they traveled in split open, exposing them to the elements. Their authority was useless to them. There were too many of them, and they had no idea what to do.

Eskimos willingly escorted a different sort of people in the Arctic, men like Peary and Rasmussen, whose inspirational leadership and skill with dogs they admired. They liked to travel with men who hunted, who became involved in the land. The only strange time that came for them on these journeys was when they had to eat the food that came packed in tin boxes while they were out on that part of the land that was emptiest, on journeys to the Pole and across the Greenland ice cap. They had no great interest in these places; they were, in fact, fearful of them. They went only because they admired the men they were with.

The relief these Eskimos experienced in returning to the coasts, to that living edge of their environment, was extreme. Many of these scenes are touched with a moving and wonderful sentiment. When the Second Thule Expedition arrived back at Uummannaq, Ajako, one of Rasmussen's companions on this starvation journey, went first to the water. "Ajako bends down," writes Rasmussen, "filling his hollow hands with fiord water, which he raises to his face to feel and inhale its salt freshness. In these drops he smells the meat of the walrus, narwhals and seals—flesh of all the blubbery animals which shall now make our days good. Beautiful ocean! I recognize you, now I am home!"

ON the 7th of April 1909, Robert Peary departed the vicinity of the Geographic North Pole, bound for Cape Columbia, Ellesmere Island, and his ship, the *Roosevelt*, which lay beyond at Cape Sheridan. He had arrived the day before, with five men, five sledges, and thirty-eight dogs. In the cross-examination he was subjected to later, Peary was criticized for having no man with him who could vouch for his solar observations, confirming the latitude. Peary's answer was that he wasn't about to share the glory with someone who had not earned the right to be there as he had—and there was no one, in his view.

The men who were with him on that day he regarded as no threat to his prestige. In a photograph, five of them stand on a hummock before a piece of sea ice, on which Peary has planted the

American flag. Ooqueah holds the flag of the Navy League. Ootah has the colors of Peary's college fraternity in his hands. Egingwah holds a flag of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and Seegloo a Red Cross flag. Matthew Henson, Peary's black manservant, holds the flag that probably meant the most to Peary—a homemade polar flag, pieces of which he had left at four other of his "farthest norths" in the previous nine years.

The blue-eyed, auburn-haired man with the walrus mustache was fifty-three and in robust health at the Pole. Close up, the squinting eyes and weather-polished face showed the wear of twenty-three years in the North. He had wished all of his life to secure some accomplishment that would make him stand out from other men, one awesome, untoppable deed. Now he had it. But this man who so enjoyed the trappings of importance, who wished to be envied, also wished to be liked. He wrote to a woman he loved, after he graduated from Bowdoin, "I should like to gain that attractive personality that when I was with a person, they would always have to like me, whether they wanted to or not." But this was not to be.

As Peary grew older, as the misfortune with bad weather that always seemed to befall his journeys continued, he grew more rigid and less congenial. He exhibited that edge of irritation that emanates from self-important people who think, privately, they may have failed. Toward the end of his life, wounded no one will ever know how deeply by Frederick Cook's claim to have been at the Pole twelve months before him, Peary became recklessly arrogant and despotic.

The few excerpts from Peary's private journals that have been published reveal a man beyond the one who grasped for fame, someone beyond the *hauteur*, a man with tender regard for his wife and, early on, a certain sensitivity and compassion. He knew that by constantly abandoning his family and pursuing his quest for the Pole, in abandoning certain human duties and obligations, he might be thought "criminally foolish," as he put it. He was troubled by self-doubt and on at least one occasion seems to have toyed with



suicide, so bleak did his prospects of making a name for himself seem.

Like all great men, Peary was importuned by oddballs and hounded by dissatisfied people. He grew to hate the parody of himself that grew out of endless public speeches and interviews. For all his disregard and unapproachability, his conniving and maneuvering, a pervading loneliness clung to him. And one is moved to see his life in a less critical way. Something went on inside him that no one else but perhaps his wife understood. After 1902, missing joints from each of his ten toes from frostbite, he walked down Senate corridors and across the streets of Washington, D.C., with a peculiar gliding shuffle. His determination to succeed, the depth and power of this man's obsession, absolutely stills the imagination of anyone who has looked upon the landscape he traversed.

In some ways Peary and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the most visible twentieth-century arctic explorer, were alike. Both were individualists who built life-long reputations around their arctic exploits. Both were avid, sometimes unscrupulous promoters of their own enterprises and accomplishments. Both were heedless of the slaughter of animals it took to maintain their arctic endeavors. Both were dogged by petty detractors. As they settled into their reputations, they became men who preferred talking to listening, who forgot or denied the others whose lives and toil made their reputations. And, like many explorers, what was in fact nothing more than good luck they came to promote as the result of their own sagacity and careful planning.

Stefansson had a flawed understanding of arctic biology and climate, but he was insistent and dogmatic in his misconceptions. They are most clearly set forth in his book *The Friendly Arctic*, in which he maintains that men, particularly white men, can travel anywhere in the Arctic and the land will provide. Stefansson became so infatuated with this idea, after the book vaulted him to popular acclaim, that he could never see the land as a refutation of it. To prove to people who doubted him that he was right, he

killed animals everywhere he went, and left behind what was inconvenient to transport.

Stefansson was also a social Darwinist; he believed in racial superiority and economic destiny. En route to the Arctic in 1908, he was captivated by the sight of natural gas flare-offs burning along the Athabasca River. "It is the torch of Science," wrote Stefansson, "lighting the way of civilization and economic development to the realm of the unknown North." The tundra was for him an extension of the American prairies, and he lamented the fact that "billions of tons of edible vegetation" that could be feeding cattle were going to waste yearly on the northern prairies. He felt that certain wild animals, like the caribou, "cumbered the land" and had to go, because they forestalled the development of ranching and agriculture. Like Theodore Roosevelt, who fought only to save prey species and who reviled predators, Stefansson wanted to make nature over to suit his beliefs about human destiny. His knowledge of the land, despite his great popularity, was selective and self-serving.

Stefansson was an explorer of prodigious determination but not an inspiring leader. He was a poor judge of character, he freely admitted; he could not get some of the people he employed to believe in his work; and he ignored important details in his plans. He was, however, a true visionary. He succeeded between 1913 and 1918 in accomplishing the expeditionary tasks he set for himself despite serious illness, appalling loneliness (he received but a single personal letter in the mailbag one year) and physical hardship, and the rudeness and contempt of some of his companions. (In those years he discovered Brock and Borden islands in the western high Arctic, Meighen Island in the north, defined the previously confused geography of King Christian Island and the Findlay Group, and made extensive pioneering soundings in the Beaufort Sea.)

Stefansson returned from the Arctic in 1919 more convinced than ever that Canada's economic future lay in the North and that the Arctic Ocean was destined to become a "Polar Mediterranean,"

with large coastal ports, submarine traffic beneath the ice, and a network of transpolar air routes. To convince skeptics, he embarked upon a scheme to raise reindeer on southern Baffin Island, a poorly thought-out project that ended disastrously and showed more than anything how illusionary Stefansson's understanding of the Arctic was.

He nearly wore himself out during this period of his life with lecture tours and commitments to write books and articles, and he made a serious miscalculation in insisting that Canada claim Wrangel Island, a Russian possession, for a future base of operations for arctic transport. Canada's handling of the affair eventually held it up to international embarrassment, and the debacle ended in a tragedy that reminded too many people of the *Karluk*: Stefansson sent his own expedition to Wrangel Island to establish occupation—four young college men and an Eskimo woman (to prepare and mend their skin clothing). The four men, following Stefansson's directions for living off the land, died. The woman survived.

In Ottawa, before he found himself no longer welcome in Canada, Stefansson was called "Windjammer" behind his back, for the loquacious and headlong way in which he promoted his ideas. Stefansson's impetuous insistence on arctic development was based on a distorted view of the land, ironic in the light of his extensive travels. He became an anachronism and then, finally, something of a hero to men promoting oil development, mineral extraction, muskox ranching, and other projects for northern economic development.

Despite his overbearing nature, Stefansson was an approachable and thoughtful man. He willingly shared his moments of geographic discovery. He praised others' skills. And he readily acknowledged his own failures of tact and planning. His compassion toward sled dogs is singular among arctic explorers. (He despised Nansen's and Peary's habit of feeding sled dogs to each other to save weight on long journeys. And in a moving and poignant passage in *The Friendly Arctic*, so revealing of his loneliness, Stefansson assesses the character of a dog named Lindy

with great generosity and empathy, concluding, "When he came to die I lost my best friend in the world, whom I shall never forget.")

In his later years, Stefansson became an idol to young men because he irritated self-important and pompous people and because he stood resolutely by his theories. He was pleased to share what he knew and to recommend books from his enormous library; as a friend put it, he had "an unabashed philosophy of eternal youth, complete with revolt and optimism." Stefansson liked young men for the same reason Peary did—they believed in his goals and they threw themselves unquestioningly and energetically into the work at hand. And they were loyal.

Stefansson lived a long life. His energy and independence were an inspiration to many. Peary's life ended in bitterness in 1920. His claim to the Pole was disputed by powerful enemies whom he had publicly ridiculed—Greely in the United States and the Norwegians Sverdrup and Nansen. The confused public image of him is due, in part, to his dedication to achieving a goal that many could not quite catch the importance of. In a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1910, the Honorable J. Hampton Moore of Pennsylvania spoke in support of Peary's claim to have been first at the Pole, and caused to be introduced into the record a number of congratulatory telegrams sent to Peary. They range from President Taft's somewhat quizzical pat on the back to Theodore Roosevelt's cable, sent from his safari camp in Africa and bursting with American pride and hyperbole.

Peary and Stefansson both wrung fame from the Arctic. The distance between the real land and Stefansson's notions about it, or between the unpossessable land and Peary's appropriation of it (both gaps effectively bridged by astute public relations campaigns), is a generic source of trouble in our own time. The landscape can be labeled and then manipulated. It is possible, with insistent and impersonal technology, to deny any innate order or dignity in it.

Peary and Stefansson, too, were public figures, admired for

their energy and vision. The personal insecurity and loneliness that besieged them, and that they sought a way around in the Arctic, however, provokes consideration of several dilemmas. What is the point at which the "tragic" loneliness of an individual, which drives him toward accomplishment, no longer effectively leads but confounds the well-being of the larger society? And what will be the disposition of the landscape? Will it be used, always, in whatever way we will, or will it one day be accorded some dignity of its own? And, finally, what does the nature of the heroic become, once the landscape is threatened?

IN 1918 the American artist and illustrator Rockwell Kent arrived at Fox Island off Alaska's Kenai Peninsula with his nine-year-old son, young Rockwell. "We came to this new land, a man and a boy, entirely on a dreamer's search," he wrote. "Having had a vision of Northern Paradise, we came to find it." He meant to heal himself somehow and to get to know his son. He believed the land would help him to do that, and that it would care for them both.

Kent was a remarkable twentieth-century American. A socialist, he professed himself to the *Strenuous Life* of Theodore Roosevelt. He delighted in thumbing his nose at social conventions. He identified himself with the drama and characters of the Icelandic sagas, and was fascinated by cold, harsh, testing environments. He was abrasive, self-righteous, and occasionally cruel to people he felt superior to, but he was also a romantic and a man of idealistic visions. And, in spite of the apparent contradiction between his socialist beliefs and his success as an artist and businessman, he was a person of integrity. He argued in his art and in heroic prose for the essential dignity of human beings and for the existence of man's Godlike qualities. His enthusiasm for life was genuine and unbounded, and he was completely dedicated to the work that reflected his beliefs.

On Fox Island, Kent exulted in clearing the land and creating a parklike setting. He was glad to be away from the "confusing

intricacy of modern society." His illusions about wilderness were always somewhat at odds with the requirements of daily life on the island, which caused him to reflect that "the romance of [this] adventure hangs on slender threads." Kent realized that what invigorated him in this northern landscape was not so much the land but what he made of the land—what his imagination made of the color, the contours, the shading. His attachment to the landscape was passionate; he responded ecstatically to beauty in the land, in Alaska and on trips to Greenland as well. But his attachment was almost entirely metaphorical; and it was sustained by all the attachments to civilization Kent would not forgo—his mail, trips into the village of Seward for the staples of his vegetarian diet, the neighborly assistance of the island's owner, who lived in a house a few yards from Kent's cabin.

When he and his son left after six months, his neighbor said, "You might as well have spent a couple of months back in the mountains of New York for all you've seen of Alaska." But Kent felt no need to travel further. The invigoration he felt, the renewed sense of wilderness that now compelled his art, made it possible to return to the marital and professional difficulties that he faced in New York.

Kent's metaphorical experience with the land, the way his imagination worked against it, differs markedly from Stefansson's and Peary's manifestly arduous encounters. But it was no less real. And the experience that Kent had—to find oneself in the land, to feel some intrinsic, overwhelmingly sane order in it, to participate in that order—is the aim of many twentieth-century people who travel to such remote regions. Relationships with the land that are intensely metaphorical, like Kent's, are a lofty achievement of the human mind. They are a sophisticated response, like the creation of maps, or the development of a language that grows out of a certain landscape. The mind can imagine beauty and conjure intimacy. It can find solace where literal analysis finds only trees and rocks and grass.

In July 1929, eleven years after the sojourn on Fox Island,

Kent and two companions shipwrecked at Karajak Fiord on the mountainous west coast of Greenland. Walking inland, they came to a lake "round as the moon." The gale that had wrecked them was still blowing. Kent wrote that the lake's

pebbly shore shows smooth and clean and bright against the deep green water. [We] descend to it and, standing there, look over at the mountain wall that bounds it. The dark cliffs rise sheer from lake to sky. From its high edge pours a torrent. And the gale, lifting that torrent in mid-air, disperses it in smoke.

[We] stand there looking at it all: at the mountains, at the smoking waterfall, at the dark green lake with wind puffs silvering its plain, at the flowers that fringe the pebbly shore and star the banks.

One of them says, "Maybe we have lived only to be here now."

A salient element emerges in Peary's recounting of his arctic journeys, which reminds me of this scene of tranquil beauty after a violent shipwreck. As far as I know, it is consistent with the experience and feelings of most other arctic explorers. The initial trip into that far northern landscape is perceived by the explorer as something from which one might derive prestige, money, social advantage, or notable awards and adulation. Although these intentions are not lost sight of on subsequent trips, they are never so purely held or so highly regarded as they are before the first journey begins. They are tempered by a mounting sense of consternation and awe. It is as though the land slowly works its way into the man and by virtue of its character eclipses these motives. The land becomes large, alive like an animal; it humbles him in a way he cannot pronounce. It is not that the land is simply beautiful but that it is powerful. Its power derives from the tension between its obvious beauty and its capacity to take life. Its power flows into the mind from a realization of how darkness and light

are bound together within it, and the feeling that this is the floor of creation.

THREE of us were driving north on the trans-Alaska pipeline haul road, pulling a boat behind a pickup. For miles at a time we were the only vehicle, then a tractor-trailer truck—pugnacious and hell-bent—would shoulder past, flailing us with gravel. From Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay the road parallels the elevated, gleaming pipeline. Both pathways in the corridor have a manicured, unnatural stillness about them, like white-board fences running over the hills of a summer pasture. One evening we passed a lone seed-and-fertilizing operation, spraying grass seed and nutrients on the slopes and berms of the road, to prevent erosion. There would be no unruly tundra here. These were the seeds of neat Kentucky grasses.

One day we had a flat tire. Two of us changed it while the third stood by with a loaded .308 and a close eye on a female grizzly and her yearling cub, rooting in a willow swale 30 yards away. We saw a single wolf—a few biologists in Fairbanks had asked us to watch for them. The truckers, they said, had shot most of the wolves along the road; perhaps a few were drifting back in, with the traffic so light now. Short-eared owls flew up as we drove along. Single caribou bulls trotted off in their light-footed way, like shy waterfowl. Moose standing along the Sagavanirktok River were nodding in the willow browse. And red foxes, with their long black legs, pranced down the road ahead of us, heads thrown back over their shoulders. That night I thought about the animals, and how the road had come up amidst them.

We arrived at the oil fields at Prudhoe Bay on an afternoon when light blazed on the tundra and swans were gliding serenely in rectangles of water between the road dikes. But this landscape was more austere than any I had ever seen in the Arctic. Small buildings, one or two together at a time, stood on the horizon. It reminded me of West Texas, land throttled for water and oil.

Muscular equipment sitting idle like slouched fists in oil-stained yards. It was no business of mine. I was only here to stay overnight. In the morning we would put the boat in the water and head west to the Jones Islands.

The bungalow camp we stayed in was wretched with the hopes of cheap wealth, with the pallid, worn-out flesh and swollen bellies of supervisors in ball caps, and full of the desire of young men for women with impossible shapes; for a winning poker hand; a night with a bottle gone undetected. The older men, mumbling of their debts, picking through the sweepings of their despair alone in the cafeteria, might well not have lived through the misery, to hear the young men talk of wealth only a fool would miss out on.

We left in the morning, bound for another world entirely, the world of science, a gathering of data for calculations and consultations that would send these men to yet some other site, the deceit intact.

Months later, on a cold March morning, I came to Prudhoe Bay for an official visit. I was met at the airport by a young and courteous public relations officer, who shook hands earnestly and gave me the first of several badges to wear as we drove around the complex. The police at road checkpoints and at building entrances examined these credentials and then smiled without meaning to be cordial. Here was the familiar chill of one's dignity resting for a moment in the hand of an authority of artificial size, knowing it might be set aside like a small stone for further scrutiny if you revealed impatience or bemusement. Industrial spying, it was apologetically explained—disgruntled former employees; the possibility of drug traffic; or environmental saboteurs.

We drove out along the edge of the sea ice and examined a near-shore drill rig from a distance—too chilly to walk over, said my host, as though our distant view met the letter of his and my responsibilities.

We ate lunch in the cafeteria of the oil company's headquarters building, a sky-lit atrium of patrician silences, of slacks and perfume

and well-mannered people, of plants in deferential attendance. The food was perfectly prepared. (I recalled the low-ceilinged cafeterias with their thread-bare, food-stained carpets, the cigarette-burned tables, the sluggish food and clatter of Melmac where the others ate.)

On the way to Gathering Station #1 we pull over, to be passed by the largest truckload of anything I have ever seen: a building on a trailer headed for the Kuparuk River. In the ditch by the road lies a freshly fallen crane, the wheels of the cab still turning in the sunshine. The man with me smiles. It is  $-28^{\circ}\text{F}$ .

At Gathering Station #1 the oil from four well areas is cooled. Water is removed. Gas is separated off. Above ground for the first time, the primal fluid moves quickly through pipes at military angles and sits under pressure in tanks with gleaming, spartan dials. The painted concrete floors are spotless. There is no stray tool or wipe rag. Anything that threatens harm or only to fray clothing is padded, covered. The brightly lit pastel rooms carry heat from deep in the earth and lead to each other like a series of airlocks, or boiler rooms in the bowels of an enormous ship. I see no one. The human presence is in the logic of the machinery, the control of the unrefined oil, the wild liquid in the grid of pipes. There is nothing here for the oil but to follow instructions.

Tempered, it flows to Pump Station #1.

The pavilion outside the fence at the pump station is drifted in with snow. No one comes here, not in this season. I climb over the drifts and wipe wind-crusting snow from Plexiglas-covered panels that enumerate the local plants and animals. The sentences are pleasant, meant to offend no one. Everything—animals, oil, destiny—is made to seem to fit somewhat naturally together. People are not mentioned. I look up at Pump Station #1, past the cyclone fencing and barbed wire. The slogging pumps sequestered within insulated buildings on the tundra, the fields of pipe, the roughshod trucks, all the muscular engineering, the Viking bellows that draws and gathers and directs—that it all runs to the head

of this seemingly innocent pipe, lined out like a stainless-steel thread toward the indifferent Brooks Range, that it is all reduced to the southward journey of this 48-inch pipe, seems impossible.

No toil, no wildness shows. It could not seem to the chap-eroned visitor more composed, inoffensive, or civilized.

None of the proportions are familiar. I stand in the wind-blown pavilion looking at the near and distant buildings. I remember a similar view of the launch complexes at Cape Canaveral. It is not just the outsize equipment lumbering down the roads here but the exaggerated presence of threat, hidden enemies. My face is beginning to freeze. The man in the blue Chevrolet van with the heaters blasting is smiling. No guide could be more pleasant. It is time to eat again—I think that is what he is saying. I look back at the pipeline, this final polished extrusion of all the engineering. There are so few people here, I keep thinking. Deep in the holds of those impersonal buildings, the only biology is the dark Devonian fluid in the pipes.

On the way back to the cafeteria the man asks me what I think of the oil industry. He has tried not to seem prying, but this is the third time he has asked. I speak slowly. "I do not know anything about the oil industry. I am interested mostly in the landscape, why we come here and what we see. I am not a business analyst, an economist, a social planner. The engineering is astounding. The true cost, I think, must be unknown."

During dinner he tells me a story. A few years ago there were three birch trees in an atrium in the building's lobby. In September their leaves turned yellow and curled over. Then they just hung there, because the air in the enclosure was too still. No wind. Fall came when a man from building maintenance went in and shook the trees.

Before we drove the few miles over to Deadhorse, the Prudhoe Bay airport, my host said he wanted me to see the rest of the Base Operations Building. A movie theater with tiered rows of plush red velour seats. Electronic game rooms. Wide-screen television alcoves. Pool tables. Weight-lifting room. Swimming pool.

Squash courts. Running track. More television alcoves. Whirlpool treatment and massage. The temperatures in the different rooms are different perfectly. Everything is cushioned, carpeted, padded. There are no unpleasant sounds. No blemishes. You do not have to pay for anything. He shows me his rooms.

Later we are standing at a railing, looking out through insulated glass at the blue evening on the tundra. I thank him for the tour. We have enjoyed each other. I marvel at the expense, at all the amenities that are offered. He is looking at the snow. "Golden handcuffs." That is all he says with his wry smile.

It is hard to travel in the Arctic and not encounter industrial development. Too many lines of logistic support, transportation, and communication pass through these sites. I passed through Prudhoe Bay four or five times in the course of several years, and visited both lead-zinc mines in the Canadian Archipelago, the Nanisivik Mine on Strathcona Sound on Baffin Island, and the Polaris Mine on Little Cornwallis Island. And one winter I toured Panarctic's facilities at Rae Point on Melville Island, and their drill rigs on the sea ice off Mackenzie King and Lougheed islands.

I was drawn to all these places for reasons I cannot fully articulate. For the most part, my feelings were what they had been at Prudhoe Bay—a mixture of fascination at the sophistication of the technology; sadness born out of the dismalness of life for many of the men employed here, which no amount of red velour, free arcade games, and open snack bars can erase; and misgiving at the sullen, dismissive attitude taken toward the land, the violent way in which it is addressed. At pretensions to a knowledge of the Arctic, drawn from the perusal of a public relations pamphlet and from the pages of pulp novels. A supervisor at an isolated drill rig smiled sardonically when I asked him if men ever walked away from the buildings on their off-hours. "You can count the people who care about what's out there on the fingers of one hand." The remark represents fairly the situation at most military and industrial sites in the Arctic.

Away from the carefully tended environment of a corporate showcase base of operations, the industrial scene is much bleaker. In the most distant camps, to my sensibilities at least, were some of the saddest human lives I have ever known. The society is all male. The tedium of schedules is unrelieved. Drugs and alcohol are smuggled in. Pornographic magazines abound, which seems neither here nor there until one realizes that they are nearly inescapable, and that they are part of a resentful attitude toward the responsibilities of family life. There is a distrust, a cursing of women, that is unsettling. Woman and machinery and the land are all spoken of in the same way—seduction, domestication, domination, control. This observation represents no new insight, of course, into the psychology of development in Western culture; but it is not academic. It is as real as the scars on the faces of flight attendants I interviewed in Alaska who were physically and sexually abused by frustrated workmen flying to and from Prudhoe Bay.

The atmosphere in some of the camps is little different from the environment of a small state prison, down to the existence of racial cliques. This is part of factory life in America, an ugly way the country has arranged itself, a predicament from which economic and political visionaries would extricate us. There is a lurking suspicion among the workers I spoke to that in spite of their good wages they were somehow being cheated, that any chance for advancement from their menial situation was, for most of them, an illusion. And they were convinced that someone, somewhere, was to blame. Their frustration was predictably directed at their employers, at overeducated engineers or petroleum geologists, and at vague political and ethnic groups whom they saw as confused and impractical critics of growth, of progress. Some of these men felt that the Arctic was really a great wasteland "with a few stupid birds," too vast to be hurt. Whatever strong men could accomplish against the elements in such a place, they insisted, was inherently right. The last words of many of these discussions, whether they were delivered quizzically or cynically or in disbelief, were summary—what else is it good for?

Many arctic oil and mine workers are hard-pressed to explain—and mostly not interested in—what it is good for, beyond what is in the ground; or in what its future will be; or in the fate of its people and animals. "Technology is inevitable," a drilling supervisor told me with finality one day. "People just got to get that through their heads." The sensibility of many of the foremen and crew chiefs, to characterize the extreme, is colonial. The tone of voice is impatient and the vocabulary is economic. The mentality is largely innocent of history and arctic ecology, cavalier about human psychological requirements, and manipulative. And the attitude of the extremist, at least in this regard, filters down. These thoughts are parroted by other workers who feel defensive, or embattled by critics. Men who make such extreme statements often give the impression of not having thought through what they are saying. They only mean to keep their jobs, or talk themselves out of doubt.

In the mines and oil fields, of course, were other, different men, who criticized in private conversation what was being done "for the money." As a group, they felt a responsibility for what they were doing. They did not see their jobs solely as a source of income. Many told me they wanted to return to the Arctic after making enough money to go back to school. They wanted to travel in the Arctic and read more about it. They meant no harm, and were uneasy themselves about the damage they were capable of doing. In Canada they feared the collusive force that government and industry were capable of bringing to bear—that the restraints against it were too weak. These were mostly younger men; and the sentiments were not rare among them.

More memorable somehow, and ultimately more gratifying, were the thoughts of several older men who spoke to me on different occasions about the conditions under which they worked. (It was one of them who had suggested the parallel with prison life.) These were seasoned men of dignified bearing in their forties and fifties, the sort of people you have regard for instantly, regardless of the circumstances. They were neither insistent nor opinion-

ated in offering their observations, which made it easier to speculate in their presence; and they gave an impression of deliberation and self-knowledge.

They shook their heads over industrial mismanagement, that humorless, deskbound ignorance that brings people and land together in such a way that both the land and the people suffer. They said, without any condescension, that the companies that employed them sometimes clearly erred, and that they acted in high-handed and sometimes illegal ways. But these were more acknowledgments of a state of affairs than criticism. They spoke as much of their families, of their wives and children. They spoke of them with indulgence and unconscious admiration. You could build anything on the decency of such men.

In the wake of these latter conversations the world seemed on balance to me, or at least well intentioned. Part of what was attractive about these men was that their concern for the health of the land and their concern for the fate of people were not separate issues. They were not for me, either. And one evening, lying in my bunk, it became clear that the fate of each was hinged on the same thing, on the source of their dignity, on whether it was innate or not.

The source of their dignity—not among themselves, but in a larger social context—was the approval of their superiors, an assessment made by people who were not their peers. (Largely unfamiliar with modern Eskimo life, these men nevertheless had an intuitive and sympathetic response to the predicament of Eskimos constantly being scrutinized and judged by outsiders.) Their dignity as workmen, and therefore their self-respect, was not whole. To an outside viewer they, like the land, were subject to manipulation. Their dignity was received. It grew out of how well they responded to directions.

In my experience, most people in the Arctic who direct the activities of employees or who seek to streamline the process of resource extraction without regard to what harm might be done to the land, do so with the idea that their goals are desirable and

admirable, and that they are shared by everyone. Their own source of dignity, in fact, derives from a belief that they are working in this way "for the common good." In their view the working man must provide cheerful labor, be punctual, and demonstrate allegiance to a concept of a greater good orchestrated from above. The Eskimo, for his part, must conduct himself either as a sober and aspiring middle-class wage earner or, alternately, as an "authentic, traditional Eskimo," that is, according to an idealized and unrealistic caricature created by the outsider. The land, the very ground itself, the plants and the animals, must also produce something—petroleum, medicines, food, the setting for a movie—if it is to achieve any measure of dignity. If it does not, it is waste. Tundra wasteland. A waste of time.

Without dignity, of course, people are powerless. Strip a person or the land of dignity and you can direct any scheme you wish against them or it, with impunity and with the best of motives. To some this kind of efficiency is a modern technique, lamentable but not evil. For others it is a debilitating degradation, a loss of integrity and spirit that no kind of economic well-being can ever justify.

The solution to this very old and disconcerting situation among the men I spoke to, when I asked, was utopian. They believed in the will of good people. They thought some way could be found to take life-affecting decisions away from ignorant, venal, and unimaginative persons. Yes, they said, an innate not a tendered dignity put individuals in the best position to act, to think through the difficult problems of what to do about technologies that mangled people and mangled the land. But they did not know where you started, where the first, hard changes had to be made.

I was traveling with a friend once, in northern Baffin Island. We were in a hunting camp at the edge of the sea ice with about thirty Eskimos. It was damp and windy—raw weather. Out of the sky one morning—we had been in this atmosphere long enough to make the event seem slightly confusing at first—came a helicopter, which landed at the camp. A man got out and walked



over to the tent where we were staying. He was the president of a shipping company. He was concerned that an icebreaking ore ship that had recently been in Admiralty Inlet might have adversely affected hunting for the Eskimos or made travel over the sea ice more difficult for them. (The ship's track had relieved pressure in the ice, which would cause it to break up in an unusual pattern as spring progressed. The track might possibly lure narwhals into a fatal savssat. Or the noise of the ship's engines might frighten narwhals away from the floe edge, where the Eskimos were hunting.)

There were several unusual aspects to this man's visit. First, Eskimos virtually never get to talk directly with "the head man," the person whose decisions vitally affect the direction of their lives. They are usually held at bay by dozens of intermediaries. Second, important men more often have pressing schedules and retinues with them, which preclude protracted or serious conversation. Third, it is unusual for anyone at all to show a concern this pointed, this knowledgeable. The man offered to fly several hunters out along the 40 miles of ship track in the helicopter so they could inspect it. He would land wherever they wanted. The hunters went with him, and were glad for the opportunity to see the situation from the air.

That accomplished, the man could have left, feeling a wave of genuine gratitude from the Eskimos for his thoughtfulness. But he stayed. He sat in a tent in the hunting camp and ate the "country food" that was offered, along with bannock and tea. He did not try to summarize or explain anything. He did not ask a lot of questions to demonstrate his interest. He just sat quietly and ate. He handed a gawking child a piece of bannock and said a few things about the weather. By his simple appreciation of the company, by his acceptance of these unfamiliar circumstances, he made everyone in the tent feel comfortable. The dignity of the occasion arose from an atmosphere of courtesy that he alone could have established.

He sat for more than an hour. And then he said good-bye and left. One incident in the vastness. But it was a fine moment, a gesture you could carry away with you.

ONE brilliant July morning I flew out of Resolute on Cornwallis Island for the Canadian weather station at Eureka, on northern Ellesmere Island. I traveled with a flight map in my lap. From this height, and with the map, I found a corroboration of what I knew of the land—from history books, from walking around in it, from talking to people long resident here, from eating food the land produced, from traveling over it with people who felt defined by it. There were walrus in the upper part of Wellington Channel. We passed over Grinnell Peninsula, long thought an island, named for the generous Henry Grinnell. Far to the west I could see the dark waters of a perennial polynya in the ice in Penny Strait, and to the east country I wanted one day, if ever there was a chance, to see from the ground, at the head of Jones Sound and the southern end of Simmons Peninsula. In winter.

We drew up on the southeast corner of Axel Heiberg Island, which Otto Sverdrup had explored. Good Friday Bay. Surprise Fiord. Wolf Fiord. At the head of these fiords were glaciers that did not reach tidewater—huge hesitations on the brown earth of the valleys. In the east light I was reminded of the mountain ranges of Arizona, of the colors of canyons on the Colorado Plateau—ocherous browns, washed tans, flat yellows. I was mesmerized by the view of Axel Heiberg: distant mountains in a sky of clear air; steep slopes of gray scree tumbled out onto the backs of white glaciers, the lime-green tongues of vegetation etched so sharply against the darker mountains it seemed in the morning light that the scene occurred behind polished glass. I realized this island was as remote as anything I could imagine, and for the first time in all the months I had spent North, I felt myself crossing a line into the Far North. It was as though I had passed through one of those walls of pressure one feels descending from mountains.

I had a clarity of mind that made the map in my lap seem both wondrous and strange in its approximations. I looked west into Mokka Fiord, to a chain of lakes between two whitish gypsum domes. Beyond was the patterned ground of the mesic tundra. The browns and blacks and whites were so rich I could feel them. The beauty here is a beauty you feel in your flesh. You feel it physically, and that is why it is sometimes terrifying to approach. Other beauty takes only the heart, or the mind.

I lost for long moments my sense of time and purpose as a human being. In the walls of Axel Heiberg I found what I had known of mountains as a child; that from them came a knowledge that was received, for which there were no words, only, vaguely, prayers. What I loved as a man, the love for parents and wife and children and friends, I felt suffused with in that moment, flushed in the face. The fierce testament of life in abeyance on the winter tundra, the sharp taste of *irok* on evening walks on Baffin Island, the haunting sound of oldsquaw in the ice, *abaalik*, *abaalik*. At the sudden whiteness of a snowbank on the brown earth at Mokka Fiord, I remembered vividly arctic hares, three feet tall and running on their hind legs, hundreds of them, across Seward Peninsula. In the stillness of Axel Heiberg I felt for the first time the edges of an unentered landscape.

That intense reverie came because of the light, the clearness of the air, and certainly the desire to comprehend, which, however I might try to suspend it, was always there. I found in adumbrations of the land, in suggestions of the landscape and all that it contained, the ways human life sorts through itself and survives. To look at the land was never to forget the people it contained.

For a relationship with landscape to be lasting, it must be reciprocal. At the level at which the land supplies our food, this is not difficult to comprehend, and the mutuality is often recalled in a grace at meals. At the level at which landscape seems beautiful or frightening to us and leaves us affected, or at the level at which it furnishes us with the metaphors and symbols with which we pry into mystery, the nature of reciprocity is harder to define. In

approaching the land with an attitude of obligation, willing to observe courtesies difficult to articulate—perhaps only a gesture of the hands—one establishes a regard from which dignity can emerge. From that dignified relationship with the land, it is possible to imagine an extension of dignified relationships throughout one's life. Each relationship is formed of the same integrity, which initially makes the mind say: the things in the land fit together perfectly, even though they are always changing. I wish the order of my life to be arranged in the same way I find the light, the slight movement of the wind, the voice of a bird, the heading of a seed pod I see before me. This impeccable and indisputable integrity I want in myself.

One of the oldest dreams of mankind is to find a dignity that might include all living things. And one of the greatest of human longings must be to bring such dignity to one's own dreams, for each to find his or her own life exemplary in some way. The struggle to do this is a struggle because an adult sensibility must find some way to include all the dark threads of life. A way to do this is to pay attention to what occurs in a land not touched by human schemes, where an original order prevails.

The dignity we seek is one beyond that articulated by Enlightenment philosophers. A more radical Enlightenment is necessary, in which dignity is understood as an innate quality, not as something tendered by someone outside. And that common dignity must include the land and its plants and creatures. Otherwise it is only an invention, and not, as it should be, a perception about the nature of living matter.

The plane, that so well designed, dependable, and ubiquitous workhorse of the Canadian Arctic, the Twin Otter, swung out over Fosheim Peninsula, a rolling upland, far northern oasis, on its approach to the Eureka airstrip. I could see muskoxen feeding to the north.

There is a peninsula at the southern end of Baffin Island called Meta Incognita, named by Queen Elizabeth. The words are often translated as the "Unknown Edge" or the "Mysterious Land."

(Frobisher thought this the shore of North America.) It is possible, however, that Elizabeth had another meaning in mind. The word *meta*, strictly speaking, means "cone." In classical Rome the towers at either end of the race course in the Colosseum, around which the chariots turned, were called *metae*. It may have been that Elizabeth meant to suggest a similar course, with London the *meta cognita*, the known entity, and the land Frobisher found the unknown entity, the *meta incognita*. North America, then, was the turn at the far end of the course, something England felt herself reaching toward, and around which she would eventually make a turn of unknown meaning before coming home.

The European culture from which the ancestors of many of us came has yet to make this turn, I think. It has yet to understand the wisdom, preserved in North America, that lies in the richness and sanctity of a wild landscape, what it can mean in the unfolding of human life, the staying of a troubled human spirit.

The other phrase that comes to mind is more obscure. It is the Latin motto from the title banner of *The North Georgia Gazette*: *per freta hactenus negata*, meaning to have negotiated a strait the very existence of which has been denied. But it also suggests a continuing movement through unknown waters. It is, simultaneously, an expression of fear and of accomplishment, the cusp on which human life finds its richest expression.

The plane landed. Light was lambent on the waters of Slide Fiord. From the weather station six dogs came toward us, lumbering like wolves, a movement that suggested they could drop buffalo. I reached out and patted one of them tentatively on the head.

## EPILOGUE: Saint Lawrence Island, Bering Sea

**T**HE MOUNTAIN in the distance is called Sevuokuk. It marks the northwest cape of Saint Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. From where we are on the ice, this eminence defines the water and the sky to the east as far as we can look. Its western face, a steep wall of snow-streaked basalt, rises above a beach of dark cobbles, riven, ice-polished, ocean-rolled chips of Sevuokuk itself. The village of Gambell is there, the place I have come from with the Yup'ik men, to hunt walrus in the spring ice.

We are, I believe, in Russian waters; and also, by a definition to them even more arbitrary, in "tomorrow," on the other side of the international date line. Whatever political impropriety might be