

Baffin Island: Field Research and High Arctic Adventure, 1961–1967

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BAFFIN ISLAND: FIELD RESEARCH AND HIGH ARCTIC ADVENTURE, 1961–1967. By Jack D. Ives. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 2016. 234 pp. C\$34.95 (softcover). ISBN: 978-1-55238-829-7.

Fifty years ago, the physical geography of the Canadian Arctic was pretty much *terra incognita*. There was only a crude understanding of the glacial and isostatic history of the region, because very little fieldwork had been carried out due to daunting logistical challenges (and attendant costs). But big changes were underway; the establishment of the DEW (Distant Early Warning) line of military bases provided facilities for aircraft and operational support, and mineral exploration crews were beginning to undertake geophysical and geological surveys. This was the situation when Jack Ives, fresh from his position as Director of the McGill Sub-Arctic Research Laboratory in Labrador-Ungava, arrived in Ottawa to take up an appointment as Assistant Director of the Geographical Branch in the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys (later the Department of Energy Mines and Resources). Ives had an ambitious agenda—to greatly expand the activities of the Geographical Branch into areas further north, principally Baffin Island (arguably not in the *High Arctic*...but I'll let that go). And his ideas received strong support from senior administrators, opening up a remarkable series of field activities that laid the foundation for subsequent decades of research in the region. This book tells the story of those expeditions to central Baffin in the years from 1961 to 1967—and what a great story it is. The events of each year are laid out in an entertaining and informative manner. We learn about the difficult negotiations over financial support back in Ottawa, the exciting (and hair-raising) trips into the field by float plane and helicopter, and the remote field camps, with all their charms and challenges. For anybody who has spent much time in the Arctic, huddled in a tent, or who has traveled by light aircraft or helicopter in remote regions, this book will strike a chord. I found myself recalling many similar escapades, and the emotional highs and lows that are part and parcel of fieldwork in the Arctic.

Ives describes how various scientists came to be involved in the field programs. Many were English, who had recently arrived in Canada to work or study;

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many others were Scandinavian scientists, whose experiences in the mountains of the Nordic region were considered to be important assets. A number of those involved built outstanding careers on the research that they undertook during these early expeditions to Baffin Island. Most notably, John Andrews became internationally recognized for his research on the glacial and isostatic history of the Arctic, winning many awards, as did Mike Church, who became the leading fluvial geomorphologist in North America. John England was a student assistant on several of the expeditions, and that experience laid the foundation for his many decades of fieldwork in the Canadian High Arctic and his outstanding contributions to the Quaternary history of the Arctic. Roger Barry also took part in one of the expeditions, starting off his long career of excellence in arctic climate science—and there were many others that readers will be familiar with, too. The Baffin expeditions were also notable in providing opportunities for a number of female scientists—perhaps nothing unusual today, but unprecedented in the early 1960s, and a development that was strongly opposed by many of the senior administrators to whom Ives reported. Nevertheless, he was undeterred, and thereby took an important step towards scientific gender equality in arctic field research. A nice feature of the book is the section that profiles many of these individuals, highlighting their remarkable achievements. A section also summarizes some of the main scientific accomplishments that were made in just a few brief seasons (1961–1967), which provides an interesting backdrop to much of the research that has followed.

I enjoyed reading this book, and I expect that others will, too. It describes a unique period of government-supported arctic fieldwork by members of the Canadian Geographical Branch, in one of the most beautiful and fascinating parts of North America. Ives has a great knack for recounting his experiences and motivations in an entertaining and engaging manner, and the text is generously illustrated with many fabulous photographs that he took. These serve to bring the wonder and adventure of it all to life. And it really was a great arctic adventure.

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