

Stefansson, Dr Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913–1918. A Story of Exploration, Science and Sovereignty

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Book Reviews

STEFANSSON, DR ANDERSON AND THE CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION, 1913–1918. A STORY OF EXPLORATION, SCIENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY. By Stuart E. Jenness. Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, Mercury History Paper 56, 2011. 415 pp. \$39.95 (softcover). ISBN 978-0-660-19971-9.

In the 19th–20th centuries, polar expeditions suffered their fair share of internal disputes, including the subsequent reporting of the successes or failures to the outside world. The Canadian Arctic Expedition was no exception, and in this detailed accounting by Stuart Jenness, the son of one of the expedition's members (Diamond Jenness), the reader is exposed to the rivalry between the two expedition leaders—Vihjalmur Steffansson and Dr. Rudolph Anderson. Both men had attended what is now called University of Iowa, but this common bond did little to produce harmony. How they ended up as joint leaders of a Canadian arctic expedition is not the main point of this book, which is rather concerned with the initial planning of the expedition and the exploration (geographical and scientific) that this Canadian government-sponsored expedition achieved. The initial financial backing for the venture was obtained from American Museum of Natural History and the Geographical Society, but in 1913 the Canadian government was concerned with sovereignty over the arctic islands which had been ceded to it by the British government, and so agreed to cover the entire cost of the expedition "...on condition you (Stefansson) become a British subject before leaving and expedition (flies) British flag" (p. 9).

Jenness draws on an extensive set of archival materials to provide new insights into three major elements of this expedition. The first was the shipwreck of the expedition's vessel *Karluk* off Wrangel Island, the subsequent loss of life, and trek of Captain Bartlett to Alaska to implement rescue efforts (pp. 43–100). The second element was the year-to-year exploits of the Northern Party, led by Stefansson, which undertook substantial geographical exploration between 1914 and 1918 (pp. 101–218). The third was Anderson's Southern Party, which carried out geographical, geological, biological, and ethnological investigations between 1914 and 1916 (pp. 219–306). The final section of the book addresses head-on the "aftermath" of the expedition, including a historical tracing of the feud between the two expedition leaders. The book is profusely illustrated with many black-and-white maps and photographs, which are extremely useful in understanding the geography and activities of the expedition.

Stuart Jenness notes that the public perception and knowledge about the Canadian Arctic Expedition was and is probably influenced by Stefansson's book, *THE FRIENDLY ARCTIC*, which was published in 1921. In contrast, Anderson's contributions were largely confined to scientific publications through Canadian government publications. In no small measure the conflict between the two leaders can be traced to the fact that the expedition was not supported by a single Canadian government entity—rather Stefansson was funded by the Department of the Navy, whereas Anderson's group was supported by the Geological Survey of Canada. These two arms of the Canadian government did not consult with each other and this resulted in sometimes conflicting orders being sent from Ottawa.

Despite the underlying problems that beset the expedition, the book clearly documents the substantial geographic and scientific discoveries that were accomplished under the leadership of these two men. It also documents the travails of surviving under the harsh climatic conditions that existed at these latitudes, especially during the winter months. Survival depended greatly on successful hunting sorties for caribou, seal, and muskox. The book also serves as a vivid reminder of how modern polar science benefits from rapid person-to-person communications via radio and satellite phones, whereas during the Canadian Arctic Expedition, communication between the two units was by word of mouth or letter and thus was intermittent at best, resulting in "the best laid plans" sometimes not being carried out.

The author best summarizes the contribution of the Canadian Arctic Expedition as "... the most successful accomplishment by the Canadian government in the early years of the twentieth century. In addition to its discoveries of new land, it added much to Canada's knowledge of the Arctic territory it claimed as its own, and supplied an abundance of biological, mineralogical and ethnological material for the National Museum of Canada" (p. 336). Just looking at a map of the northwestern Canadian Arctic, and the sketch maps in this book, the legacy of the expedition still persists in the many place names that were given to these remote and sometimes "new" lands.

In conclusion, Stuart Jenness has written an authoritative account of this particular expedition. In doing so he has accessed considerable new data, including his father's diary and a considerable volume of letters and other diaries, all of which are well documented in an appendix. The book is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in polar expeditions and the current concerns of arctic sovereignty.

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