

## **Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Preconfederation Canada and Rupert's Land.**

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as a territorial park, designated as such to protect its “cultural, historic, geographical, and ecological significance.” Wildlife management, and ecological monitoring and research are ongoing. Herschel the island, once used as a base for whaling and trade, is now the center of environmental monitoring of climate change effects along the Yukon Coastal Plain and Beaufort Sea.

The book succeeds at bringing together a “variety of perspectives on a single place,” while continuing to preserve the oral history and the Inuvialuktun language. All names of places, flora, and fauna are given in the Siglitun dialect of Inuvialuktun as well as in English. One observation on place names is that the titles given to landforms by the Inuvialuit are descriptive, whereas British explorers named features after other Europeans. The island’s two names provide an example of this. *Qikiqtaryuk* means “big island” in Inuvialuktun; *Herschel* was the name given by the first known British explorer of the island, Capt. John Franklin of the British Royal Navy, in honor of what he regarded to be the “most distinguished scientific family” of his time. This naming convention highlights the importance of the island to both indigenous and non-native communities, and also illustrates the earth-centric simplicity of the aboriginal people compared to the anthropocentrism of the Euro-American explorers.

The expertise and passion of the book’s collective authors for Herschel Island are evident in the level of detail presented in each subsection and in the way the editor frames the book. The chapter subsections are written as stand-alone segments, although there is occasional redundancy across sections. For example, there is repeated reference to the relationship between the island’s physical and oceanographic conditions and human livelihood. Likewise, the arrival of the whaling ships as a trigger for social and cultural change is mentioned throughout the book. While this approach could be distracting to the reader unfamiliar with interdisciplinary writing, it is a technique that is often unavoidable and necessary to fully describe the intertwined natural and human history of a place. As such, the reader concerned only with the discrete components of Herschel Island’s history will find the stand-alone chapters accessible and informative. When read in its entirety, however, the book as a whole leaves the reader with an impressive, well-rounded understanding of how human and natural systems have influenced each other on Herschel Island.

The book is written at a level appropriate for both scientists and the educated layperson, as the authors seem to have made an effort to use concise and simple language throughout. The book is a great primer for readers unfamiliar with Herschel Island or Arctic Yukon environments in general, and would be a useful text for an interdisciplinary course on coupled human–natural history in Arctic environments. To that end, the final chapter includes short bios of each of the book’s authors and their research interests, and a useful reference section of suggested continued reading. Likewise, the accessibility of the writing and the excellent photos create a compelling narrative for eco-travelers with an interest in conservation and preservation of places threatened by environmental change.

The largest modern threats to Herschel Island are sea-level rise, marine industrial activity, and offshore hydrocarbon drilling in the Arctic Ocean. Coastal erosion has already washed away archaeologically important sites, and rapid offshore development

is increasing the risk of potentially catastrophic oil spills in the waters surrounding Herschel Island. These represent the most pressing challenges facing the preservation and management of Qikiqtaryuk as a historical site, as well as other low-lying coastal communities with rich human and natural histories. While *HERSCHEL ISLAND—QIKIQTARYUK: A NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF YUKON’S ARCTIC ISLAND* carefully presents the history of a single small place, the book serves as a well-organized template for interdisciplinary research efforts focused on other historically significant and environmentally sensitive coastal regions.

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*CIVILIZING THE WILDERNESS: CULTURE AND NATURE IN PRE-CONFEDERATION CANADA AND RUPERT’S LAND.* By A. A. den Otter. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2012. 438 pp., Index. \$49.95 (softcover). ISBN 9780888645463.

The theme of *CIVILIZING THE WILDERNESS* is perhaps best expressed in the quote from Horace with which den Otter introduces his first essay: “They change their clime, not their frame of mind, who rush across the sea.”

The nine essays in this work address concepts of wilderness and civilization held by people living in or concerned with British North America and Rupert’s Land, the vast territory controlled by the Hudson’s Bay Company, especially the settlement of Red River and the Red River valley. The timeline cuts back and forth across the 19th century, a time of political, scientific, and philosophical upheaval at the height of the British Empire.

Den Otter wades into the nature-culture divide, showing the Western conceptions of wilderness and civilization as human constructs. These constructs, implicitly or explicitly stated, shape his subjects’ philosophical stances and drive their actions.

Above all, den Otter is concerned with what he terms the “civilizing-the-wilderness theme.” He is at pains to explore “the drive to civilize not only the Natives but also the wilderness in which they lived” (p. xxi). He delves into extensive primary sources to work out how actors perceived wilderness and civilization, and how these perceptions transformed and shaped their actions as missionaries, company functionaries, settlers, traders, writers, and administrators, and as white, Native American, and Métis.

Den Otter contends, “At mid-nineteenth century, most writers perceived the concepts of civilization and wilderness as opposing poles. And, in conflict, they defined each other” (p. xii). The concepts defined not only the landscape, but the people inhabiting it. Wilderness could be perceived as untouched, barren, unredeemed, wasteful, or dark, and its people as heathen and ignorant. Civilization was ordered, settled, productive, and its people Christian, literate, and educated. How each actor defined or resisted these con-

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cepts, and to what extent they acted on trying to transform one state to the other, is the meat of den Otter's essays.

The greatest strength of *CIVILIZING THE WILDERNESS* is its rich and diverse selection of primary sources. Den Otter conducts a chorus of voices, mostly lesser-known figures, that articulate varied perspectives on the "civilizing-the-wilderness mandate." Chapters often pair subjects: two sisters, two missionaries, two Native American preachers—with contrasting views of civilization and wilderness. Their accounts weave back and forth across decades, intersecting in locations and events.

Subjects include the sisters Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, both writers, who emigrated to Canada with their husbands to wrest a living from backwoods farms; William Mason and Robert Rundle, Methodist missionaries with wildly divergent views of the necessity of civilizing the wilderness and its peoples; preachers Henry Budd, a Cree, and Henry Bird Steinhauer, an Ojibwa, who came to identify with the Christian urge to transform the wilderness through agriculture; David Anderson, the first Anglican bishop of Rupert's Land; Red River Métis who conducted large-scale buffalo hunts as commercial operations; the witnesses who testified before an 1857 British Parliamentary Select Committee to review the record of the Hudson's Bay Company, including the Company's governor in British North America, George Simpson; and Peter Jones, an Ojibwa-Welsh man who worked (usually unsuccessfully) to secure legal title to reserve lands. Lastly, in an intriguing venture into historiography, den Otter reviews the historians of the Red River Métis, showing how they too unconsciously adopted the civilizing-the-wilderness motif.

Den Otter sometimes struggles to press his subjects into the civilizing-the-wilderness mold. He recognizes that a minority opinion that saw nature as a place of beauty could sometimes offset the civilizing impulse, though it could also support it. But he never

really explores civilization and wilderness in the romantic tradition, despite some of his subjects' professed romantic ideals. In European sources, at least, romantics evinced a revolt against the concept of civilizing, maintaining that the best part of humanity is natural, and valuing nature—especially sublime wilderness—for invoking the strong emotions of apprehension, awe, even terror that were the most authentic and important part of being human. Den Otter acknowledges Suzanna Moodie, for example, as a romantic and admits she mourned returning to "civilized life" after time on a backwoods farm. He identifies her "gothic fear" of the landscape as a hatred of nature, but from her quotes given, is it possible that it was instead a romantic embrace, the thorn in the hand that proves one is alive? Perhaps not, but the question is left begging.

Den Otter leaves plenty of room for further analysis, particularly in teasing out the views of Hudson's Bay Company officials toward wilderness and civilization more explicitly. Den Otter points out that encroaching settlement spelled the end for the Company's monopoly; further work on their possibly contradictory views would be welcome.

Extensive back matter, including end notes, bibliographies, and an index, is thorough and helpfully constructed.

*CIVILIZING THE WILDERNESS* is a solid work of original scholarship that deserves to be on the shelf with any collection dealing with Canadian history or the history of North American settlement and the frontier. It is also profitable for those with an interest in environmental, economic, and social history.

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