

ISACHSEN LAND

78° 47' N, Lat. 103° 50' W. Long.

In more than five years in the Arctic, travelling over the Polar Pack, discovering new islands, Stefansson and his companions brought back a great deal of new knowledge of the entire areas over which they travelled and forever blew away that fog of misconception that the Arctic was a grim place where man survived in spite of it. He found it to be a friendly place, and that it was possible to live comfortably off the country, to travel leisurely, and to acquire that spiritual aloneness and peace found only in the polar regions.

In order to achieve this, he travelled and clothed himself as the Eskimo has for some centuries. He lived in the traditional Eskimo snowhouse, where one may rest comfortably at sixty degrees above zero. He noted the northward spring flight of the geese and other birds, watched the great fog banks roll over Prince Patrick Island and Cape Isachsen from the Beaufort and Prince Gustav Adolph seas. He saw the faint track of the lemming and tail mark of the arctic fox in the snow; watched the arctic wolf tear down the caribou calves, and ate with gusto the juicy haunch of the muskox. He felt the soft ground smothered with moss and multi-coloured flowers under his feet in the short summer, the touch of frost on the cheek and heard the whistle of the rising wind and the drone of the blizzard. He relished it and he recorded it as a happy existence and one in which much was accomplished. This was more than thirty years ago.

It had been my pleasure to talk with Stefansson prior to heading northward in February nineteen forty-eight. My flight north touched briefly at Goose Bay, Labrador, and thence continued northward over Greenland to Thule, where I spent a happy evening with Dalkild a Danish meteorological scientist, and talked with Ootah who had been with Peary, and others who had travelled with Rasmussen.

The next day we flew into Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island. Here we remained for three weeks getting our sup-

plies ready for an airlift to Isachsen Land where we were to establish a joint Canadian-United States weather station. We flew several reconnaissance flights over Isachsen Land before finding a spot that looked likely for landing an aircraft. Finally early in April a safe landing was effected and eventually a mound of some 160 tons of equipment was made on the sea ice.

Here we were then, in this new land with a great mass of supplies; food of all kinds, an airborne tractor, sleds, clothing, three dogs—one ancient male, a pregnant bitch and a six weeks old pup; James huts, a prefabricated timber house, linoleum, chemical toilets, radios of assorted kinds, electric generator, medical stores, silex coffee makers, trail equipment of one kind or another, kerosene, motor fuel, aviation gas, diesel fuel, lubricating oils, unleaded gas and coal, a complete set of weather-recording instruments, hydrogen-making apparatus, lumber, beaver board, winch, antenna masts, stoves, paint, nails, tools, ice cutting saws, dynamite, Very pistols, an ice-cream mixer and a library of twelve books. This was to take care of us, to make life easier and more comfortable, so that we could do our weather observing. Everything had to be moved into place and buildings put up and the whole put into working order. A long hard job for seven men. There was little excitement over being in a new country never before explored and about which little is known. Why? Man and his machines? Man and his gadget thinking? Man in his desire to explore, at the mercy of his machines? With all the great mound of supplies and the seven men, one thing had been forgotten. This land had not changed; it remained the same as when Sverdrup and Stefansson charted its coast. The great and beautiful clouds still swept over it, the blizzards still hit the mountains and roared into the valleys, the pinched vegetation was still soft and glorious in the summertime. The landfast ice still clung to the shores as though to defy the ice breakers. The great stillness was still

here. It would never change. Only man had changed. He had harnessed himself to the machine, and somehow the machine seemed a little tawdry, a little out of place, a little futile and dirty. Nothing was simple any more. There was comfort of a sort, but not the hominess of a snowhouse. There were typewriters, but gone was the effort of writing what one saw and felt with the bare hand. Nobody sang, nobody whistled, it was a grim job. Only the land, misty in

the drifting snow or brilliant under the high sun, remained the same. This would never change. There would always be that spiritual aloneness to be found here, but it was too simple, too basic; it was no longer what man desired. He had arrived here forty years after discovery, a stranger and an intruder in a strange land he would never understand.

May 7, 1948. ALAN INNES-TAYLOR*

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BOOK REVIEWS

MARINER OF THE NORTH.

By GEORGE PALMER PUTNAM. Duell, Sloan, and Pearce. New York. 246 pp. \$3.50.

"He was not only a master mariner, but an uncanny ice pilot, for he was blooded in the hard school of the Arctic. He knew the coves and bays of Labrador, and his native Newfoundland, the glaciers from which the icebergs calved, the tides and currents of the straits that lead north and the vast ice-fields of the polar basin. In this forbidding region Bob Bartlett spent the greater part of his life; he loved every headland and barren cliff"—from an editorial in the *New York Times*. And such was the life of Captain "Bob" Bartlett, one of the greatest ice navigators of all time.

Captain Robert Abram Bartlett, born in 1875 at Brigus, a small fishing and seafaring village on the rugged east coast of Newfoundland, was brought up in the old tradition of the sea, the background of wooden ships and iron men. He was the hard-bitten master of the old school who commanded awe and respect in his crew as he paced the quarterdeck; yet beneath this was a gentle heart of gold, keen, sensitive, and understanding, with a singular love for the three great cornerstones of his life, the North, the *Morrissey*, and his mother.

His motto was "Eternal vigilance is the price of success", and his daily fare was hard work. This was the secret of his

uncanny ability to navigate "by instinct". Hours, days, years of observing and soaking in the lore of the northern seas provided his rich background of experience. His bringing the damaged *Roosevelt* from Cape Sheridan on the north shore of Ellesmere Island to New York is in itself an epic of seamanship. His career and life were profoundly influenced by the major polar exploration of the early twentieth century, and represented the era of transition from the old geographical to the modern scientific exploration.

"Bob" Bartlett is sometimes referred to as a relic of the old school, but by misunderstanding only. Although without any formal scientific training he could see and appreciate the value of science. He was intensely interested in scientific polar work. Little known and little heralded are his fine series of biological collections made on the later *Morrissey* voyages, which have been

Captain R. A. Bartlett's schooner *Effie M. Morrissey* in the arctic ice.

