

little of the primary material in Mrs. Vetter's collection has ever been examined by a professional historian. If the Memorial Library materializes, the key to the puzzle may yet be found.

JOHN E. EULLER

Obituaries

Frank Debenham (1884-1965)

The Polar community has suffered a great loss in the death in November 1965 of Frank Debenham. Debenham was a powerful inspiration to many polar workers, being at the same time a disciplinarian professor of geography and a warm hearted individual who, around his hospitable fireside, could inspire young men to take up a career, or a voluntary immolation into polar exploration.

He was definitely the founder of what must be considered the senior Polar Research body of the world, the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge. Many of us have thought out fanciful or practical schemes when confined to tent or igloo in a blizzard. But the idea of a repository of polar information and a centre from which future expeditions could draw their nourishment came to Frank Debenham on the slopes of Mt. Erebus in 1912.

At that time he was a member of Capt. Scott's last Antarctic expedition, which ended triumphantly but tragically for the leader and his four companions. Britain and the world were profoundly moved by the death of these brave men and the public subscription to take care of their widows and children exceeded the funds required by a wide margin. It was from this surplus that Debenham's scheme for a Polar Institute was achieved, supported as he was by (Sir) James Wordie and (Sir) Raymond Priestly, two other great Antarctic men.

From its inception in 1920-26 until 1946, Debenham was the Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, and from 1930 Professor of Geography at Cambridge University. Debenham, Griffith Taylor, and Priestly were all three geologists on Scott's last expedition. The first two, Australians by birth, were distinguished founders or chairmen of University Geography Departments; the latter went on to be Vice-Chancellor of two universities and President of the Royal Geographical Society. Scott and Shackleton both knew how to pick men, and Debenham likewise attracted and then stimulated the very best. In these material modern days when a graduate student assistant expects a fat salary, it is of interest to record that until 1930 neither the Director nor his secretary nor any of the other workers at the Scott Polar Research Institute received a cent of pay, and thereafter only the secretary, who, at times, assisted Debenham in scrubbing the floor.

Ill health plagued Professor Debenham for a time, at and after his retirement. But somehow a new lease on life arrived with his postwar researches in Africa and his scholarly writings, if anything, increased now that he no longer had to devote his leisure to housecleaning in the Polar Institute. In skull cap and smoking jacket he became the friend and mentor of a new generation of British polar enthusiasts.

Although never an associate of the Arctic Institute of North America, we on this continent have felt his inspiration and join the rest of the world and his large family in mourning the loss of a great and lovable polar enthusiast.

P. D. BAIRD

Yakov Yakovlevich Gakkel' (1901-1965)

Yakov Yakovlevich Gakkel' died in Leningrad on 30 December 1965 after a short illness. He was a geographer of the broadest kind, who gave almost the whole of his working life to arctic studies. He enjoyed a considerable reputation in the Soviet Union, and became known overseas mainly in the last phase of his life, when he was working on problems of the Arctic Ocean.

He was born in 1901 in St. Petersburg, and was educated there. In 1921 he joined the Geographical Institute, which became in 1925 the geography faculty of Leningrad University. During this period he undertook his first expeditions: to study limnology in Karelia in 1924, and geomorphology in Yakutia in 1925. Meanwhile he was already active in sea-ice studies during the winters in the Gulf of Finland.

In 1932 he joined the Arctic Institute, also in Leningrad, where he was to remain until his death. He was associated with many different sides of the Institute's work — oceanography, sea-ice studies, navigational problems, geomagnetism, geomorphology, and the history of exploration. He was in turn Head of various departments, latterly of that of geography and history of exploration, and in 1941-42 he was Deputy Director for Research.

While with the Arctic Institute, he took part, often as leader, in 21 expeditions. Among the best-known of these were the first one-season navigation of the Northern Sea Route in the *Sibiryakov* in 1932, the ill-fated *Chelyuskin* expedition of 1933-34, high-latitude expeditions in *Sadko* in 1936 and *Ob'* in 1956, and the first double transit of the Route in the *Mossovet* in 1937. In 1948 he became interested in the idea, then mooted, of making wide use of the technique of studying the central polar basin by means of drifting stations on the ice. He was active in the work which led to the identification of the Lomonosov submarine ridge, and devoted much time to construction of bathymetric charts of the Arctic Ocean, based largely on drifting station data. This in turn led to an interest in the relation between bottom relief and the structure of the earth, a study he pursued with success, and on which he was still engaged when he died.

He published widely in many fields. Of particular note are his contributions to sea-ice studies, especially on drift of floes; to problems of practical seamanship, such as magnetic compass behaviour; to the geomorphology of the Arctic Ocean (one of his last papers was a contribution on this subject to the still unpublished American *Encyclopaedia of Earth Sciences*); and to the history of Arctic studies, notably his history of the Arctic Institute (*Za chetvert' veka*, 1945) and his more general survey of Soviet achievements in this sphere (*Nauka i osvoyeniye Arktiki*, 1957).

He received the degree of Candidate of Geographical Sciences in 1938, Doctor in 1950 and the rank of Professor in 1953.

He did not travel abroad much, and therefore was little known personally to his foreign colleagues. He was a likeable person, large, good-humoured, and