

the United States in the protection of and trade with Greenland during the Second World War.

Porsild's published works continue to influence northern botany. *Vascular Plants of the Continental Northwest Territories* (1980) is still the standard flora used when one is working in the Northwest Territories or Nunavut. He wrote the first major compilations of Yukon plants. These works, including *Botany of Southeastern Yukon Adjacent to the Canol Road* (1951), *Contributions to the Flora of Southwestern Yukon Territory* (1966), and *Materials for the Central Yukon Territory* (1975), still bear important insights and plant treatments. For a complete list of Porsild's works see Soper and Cody (1978).

The Reindeer Botanist is a thoroughly enjoyable book for those who relish a good adventure story, steeped in history that explores more than the land, but also the historical fabric that has shaped our understanding of northern botany and the people and personalities involved.

References:

- Porsild, A.E. 1951. Botany of southeastern Yukon adjacent to the Canol Road. Natl. Mus. Can Bull. 121. 400 pp.
- Porsild, A.E. 1966. Contributions to the flora of the southwestern Yukon Territory. Natl. Mus. Can. Bull. 216. 86 pp.
- Porsild, A.E. 1975. Material for a flora of central Yukon Territory. Natl. Mus. Can. Sci. Publ. Bot. 4. 77 pp.
- Porsild, A.E., and W.J. Cody. 1980. Vascular Plants of the Continental Northwest Territories, Canada. Natl. Mus. Nat. Sci., Ottawa, Ont. 667 pp.
- Soper, J.H., and W.J. Cody. 1978. Alf Erling Porsild, M.B.E., F.R.S.C. (1901–1977). Canadian Field-Naturalist 92: 298–304.

Bruce Bennett, Whitehorse

***Shipwreck at Cape Flora: The Expeditions of Benjamin Leigh Smith, England's Forgotten Arctic Explorer.* By P. J. Capelotti. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013. Xxix + 269 p. 40 illustrations, 12 maps, notes, appendices, bibliography, index.**

Benjamin Leigh Smith, protagonist and hero of P.J. Capelotti's *Shipwreck at Cape Flora*, was a man of frustratingly few words. Between 1871 and 1882, he financed five private summer cruises from England to the polar regions north of Scandinavia—specifically around the islands of Svalbard and Franz Josef Land—participating in the second wave of Victorian polar exploration. During these cruises Leigh Smith discovered, mapped, and named dozens of bays, islands, and headlands; recorded evidence of a warm deep-water

current in the North; rescued a stranded Swedish expedition from certain starvation; and kept his own crew alive for months after his ship was crushed by ice in 1881—but he left no published account about his adventures or his discoveries. That is not to say that his stories were unrecorded, but no extensive personal narrative exists except that of his first expedition in 1871. Reports of his other four expeditions were formally prepared, and one was published, but only in the *Royal Geographical Society Proceedings* of 1881. The others, each written by a subordinate member of Leigh Smith's voyages, were either rejected for publication or never even sent forward; the last, written by engineer William Robertson, did not see "the light of day until the twenty-first century" and then only in review form (179). Because of Leigh Smith's historical obscurity, Capelotti rightly makes a case for his reintroduction into the nineteenth-century polar hagiography: as Admiral Sir Erasmus Ommanney hoped in 1881, Capelotti's book argues "that the name of Mr. Leigh Smith [should] be handed down to futurity as one of the great Polar explorers of the Victorian age" (175). Indeed, Leigh Smith's contributions to polar exploration were both geographical and practical: he discovered and mapped Eira Harbour, considered by many at the time to be the best staging ground for all future attempts on the North Pole, and he took a unique approach to his expeditions, not sailing toward a particular goal but meandering wherever the weather and ice took him, "adapting to local conditions" and thereby avoiding much damage and danger to ship and crew on each summer cruise (121). Leigh Smith received the Royal Geographical Society's gold medal for exploration, as well as a knighthood of the Order of the Polar Star from the King of Sweden and Norway (124).

Out of necessity, Capelotti has drawn extensively on the narratives of others to complete his account of Leigh Smith's voyages, and this narrative bricolage helps to place the reclusive explorer within the context of his times as well as within the late-nineteenth-century interest in reaching the North Pole. The book provides detailed overviews of other explorers' expeditions, including a number of private voyages by two of Leigh Smith's wealthy English contemporaries, in addition to those launched by other nations. Leigh Smith's polar activities in the 1870s make him a fascinating character, but what remains more interesting is that he went north at all. What is striking about Leigh Smith's story, to this reader's mind, is not the extent of his explorations, but his and others' adoption of the Arctic as a playground of the rich. As Capelotti documents, Leigh Smith was independently wealthy, the eldest son of a family that owned an extensive estate in East Sussex, and he used profits from his lands to bankroll his five expeditions to and around Svalbard. He hired expert crew from whaling and sealing communities who

were responsible for the running of the ship itself, and directed his cruises to follow his own curiosity, rather than that of his government, though he seems to have been at least partly patriotically motivated. Eventually dissatisfied with renting ships for his explorations, in 1880 Leigh Smith built his own polar ship, the *Eira*, at a cost of what Capelotti estimates to be “in the area of £.10,000, or more than £.780,000 in 2010 currency” (153). And Leigh Smith was by no means alone in his northern preoccupation: Capelotti documents the expeditions of two other polar dandies of the period, Lord Dufferin and James Lamont, both incredibly wealthy Englishmen who like Leigh Smith paid, rather than worked, for the prestige of becoming polar explorers.

One scene in particular is illustrative of the wantonness of Leigh Smith’s whole enterprise: Capelotti very elegantly describes an “Arctic paradise” at Gray Bay, where Leigh Smith and his crews shelter briefly in 1881. There is a prehistoric raised beach, majestic columns of basalt, flowers, nesting birds, lounging walruses. Using powerful prose, Capelotti then destroys the scene by describing Leigh Smith’s reaction: “the crew of the *Eira* wasted no time in transforming it into a butcher shop” (181). True, Leigh Smith did try to defray some of the costs of his expeditions by hunting, but, given his immense wealth and his intention to cruise only in the summer months, episodes such as this seem more about the thrill of the chase than commerce or scientific discovery. This reader is thus less convinced than Capelotti that Leigh Smith’s voyages offer something better than the “overweening government-sponsored expeditions of the era,” though she does agree that they offer something different (226). He was rich and, like Dufferin and Lamont, he went north because he could, not because he had to. Capelotti defends Leigh Smith by arguing that he “would not have sailed without a detailed scientific research program,” and this is perhaps the case (226). Capelotti notes convincingly that Leigh Smith’s “systematic efforts at scientific data collection” set him at least partially apart from the other “British Arctic tourists like Dufferin and Lamont” (58). In the end, however, we know so little about Leigh Smith that it is impossible to know for certain what exactly his motivations were. The book’s extensive inclusion of minute details of other expeditions in the period is interesting, but it also becomes its weakest element. To give depth to his subject’s context (if not character), Capelotti must include them, and though he does his best with others’ narratives, there is so little actually of Leigh Smith himself that the focus of the book is occasionally unclear. The adventures of Leigh Smith’s contemporaries take up so much of the narrative that it, like the other accounts Leigh Smith left for others to write, is necessarily somewhat “uneven” (225). Like Captain John C. Wells’s unpublished account of Leigh Smith’s 1872 expedition,

so too does this book contain some confusing “shifts in time and place, randomly [tacking] on accounts of other expeditions” in order to round out the frustratingly sparse records that Leigh Smith himself left behind (225). And what little we do learn about Leigh Smith as a man tends to confuse further: “his family’s dissent and his own illegitimacy,” coupled with his strange enduring obsession with his young nieces, don’t help to clarify his place in the larger context of late-nineteenth-century polar exploration as anything other than a “super-rich” tourist on the hunt for adventure (49, 226). Capelotti has painted an interesting portrait of an early extreme Arctic tourist, but ultimately Leigh Smith remains as remote and inaccessible as the islands he loved to explore.

Erika Behrisch Elce, Royal Military College of Canada

Finding the Arctic: History and Culture Along a 2,500-Mile Snowmobile Journey from Alaska to Hudson’s Bay. By Matthew Sturm. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2012. xiii + 258 pp., preface, introduction, acknowledgments, bibliography, index, color plates, maps.

The roster of books about the Arctic and Antarctic has grown in recent years by a nearly exponential degree. Concerns over climate change, melting glaciers, and the fate of charismatic creatures such as the polar bear, for example, have resulted in dozens of titles on the polar regions for both public and scientific audiences. That said, Matthew Sturm’s new book from University of Alaska Press, *Finding the Arctic*, stands apart as a welcome and wholly unique addition to the field.

In Spring 2007, Sturm, a snow scientist from Fairbanks, Alaska, led a group of fellow physicists, geologists, and adventurers on a snowmobile trek across Arctic Alaska and Canada. The officially named SnowSTAR expedition featured field work, research projects, data collection, and stops at several rural schools for scientific lectures. As the author makes clear, however, the trip’s real purpose was a quest for adventure and knowledge in one of the most mysterious places on the planet. The seven expedition members accordingly plotted their route to visit sites of cultural and historical significance.

As with most travel books, this one has a straightforward narrative structure, and each of its twelve chapters covers a different section of the trail. Among the many locations visited by the snowmobilers are the routes taken by explorers Alexander Mackenzie (1789) and John Franklin (1821); the spot where the Mad Trapper of Rat River was killed in a shootout