

with any book that studies policy issues in depth, it contains numerous, sometimes confusing, acronyms, and fortunately the authors have provided an alphabetical listing of them and their meanings. The book has excellent maps, illustrations, and photographs that assist the reader in understanding the text and context of the authors' arguments. It is a timely work, given the impending decisions to be made on the sovereignty claims of the Arctic nations, and the increasing rate of sea ice decline in the Arctic Ocean.

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***The Reindeer Botanist: Alf Erling Porsild, 1907–1977.* By Wendy Dathan. Calgary: University of Calgary Press co-published with the Arctic Institute of North America, 2012. Xxii + 726 pages. 80 b&w photos, 7 maps, notes, bibliography, index.**

Botanists are often thought of as mild mannered, quietly studying amongst mounds of floras, surrounded by large metal cabinets. Few envision such folks facing the demands and dangers of the field work that has attracted so many of us to the pursuit. Still fewer have experienced the challenges presented to Alf Erling Porsild (Erling) and his old brother Robert Thorbjørn (Bob) in their endeavours to transport and establish a herd of reindeer from Alaska to the Mackenzie Delta, Northwest Territories.

Erling Porsild was an eminent Arctic botanist who shaped our understanding of the flora of the Northwest Territories, Alaska, and Yukon, but who also had a keen interest in geological processes and the natural history that shaped and shared the land with the plants and the animals that shared the country. It was Porsild who brought the Greenland Inuit term “pingo” into the common English usage (at least, common for northerners). *The Reindeer Botanist's* 726 pages chronicle his career from a young student through his term as the chief botanist with the National Museum of Canada from 1936–1967. It is a detailed, intimate look into the life, adventures, and motivations of his complex personality, explored using the meticulous notes and letters kept by him and others.

The Reindeer Botanist follows Erling Porsild from his early beginnings learning botany from his father, Morton Porsild, Director of the Danish Arctic Biological Station at Godhavn on the island of Disko, Greenland. Early in his life he honed his skills at observation encouraged by his dad through a competition with Robert to collect and compete for the best collections. They received the equivalent of 5¢ Canadian for each flowering plant they discovered, with a bonus of 50¢ for rare specimens, and \$1.50 for species new

to the island. Erling would later receive the appointment of assistant botanist at the Danish Biological Station, but dreamed of travel and work in faraway, sunny lands.

The faraway part of Erling's dream was realized when he and his brother, with letters of introduction from his father to a colleague, Oscar Malte of the National Herbarium of Canada, secured an opportunity to pursue the Canadian Reindeer Project; a project that would occupy the next ten years of his life (1926–1935). "The object of your investigation will be to ascertain the suitability of the northern part of the Mackenzie District (Mackenzie Delta Region) for the maintenance of reindeer. We desire, therefore, to learn as much as possible of this country, with the object if your report is favourable, of purchasing herds in Alaska and driving them across country to whatever areas in the Mackenzie District may be selected by you." *The Reindeer Botanist* explores this project, and how the experiences gained through this work would shape the future of someone who would become one of Canada's greatest botanists.

Following the Reindeer Years, the book explores the challenges in overcoming the government bureaucracy to secure the position as Chief Botanist within the National Herbarium, complete with enough staff and resources to shape the "treasure-trove of dried plants" into the scientific institution we see today. In comparison, driving 3000 reindeer through the darkness of an Arctic winter would prove to be a more manageable task.

This is a biography about relationships. The work captures the conflict and the camaraderie of many notable figures in the development of Canadian botany and how those relationships have shaped the development of northern studies. *The Reindeer Botanist* chronicles how Porsild's close friendship with American botanist and ecologist from Harvard University, Hugh Raup, helped to shape his career. It describes the competition with Swedish botanist Eric Hultén, author of *Flora of Alaska and Neighboring Territories*. Family relationships are as important in shaping Erling's life, including tragic family losses and the strained relationship with his brother. These and the narration of the public exchange between Porsild and Canadian author and environmentalist Farley Mowat are just a few examples of relationships explored. Dathan highlights the challenges working in a bureaucratic government system and the early competition between the two national herbaria, the Canadian Museum of Nature and Agriculture Canada. Throughout, one is introduced to many of the famous botanists of the time, both North American and European. As well, through Porsild's consular duties, the book explores the roles and motivations of Canada and

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:

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***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