

Under Polaris: An Arctic Quest by Tahoe Talbot Washburn. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1999. 247 pp., illus., maps, glossary, appendix, bibliography, indices. ISBN 0-7735-1866-5- x (hc), \$34.95. Reviewed by Graham W. Rowley.

We have had to wait sixty years for Tahoe Washburn to publish *Under Polaris*, her account of travels with her husband in the Western Canadian Arctic between 1938 and 1941, but her book has been well worth waiting for.

As a young girl, Tahoe had been attracted by all she heard about the Eskimos and the North. Following her marriage to Link Washburn, a Yale geologist, they visited Alaska, the Yukon, and the Mackenzie District, a journey that would have strengthened her interest. Later Link continued his northern interests by becoming involved in research on the extent of glaciation in the Canadian Arctic during the Pleistocene period. Tahoe must have felt the universe was unfolding as it should when he asked her, "How would you like to spend a summer in the Arctic?" Asking only, "When do we leave?" she threw her arms around him."

Together they spent three of the years before the United States entered the war seeking scientific evidence of glaciation in a quest that took them by air, boat, and dog team to several of the islands in the Western Arctic, particularly Victoria and King William Islands, and along much of the coast of the mainland. Tahoe deserves great credit for the essential part she played, often under extremely difficult conditions in the explorations of her husband that would have been much less successful without her constant help, encouragement and enthusiasm.

Tahoe's enthusiasm is delightfully translated to the reader: "My heart sang as we rode on the load for a quarter mile up the bay, the dogs' harness bells jingling merrily, like sleigh bells of old. . . . I had to pinch myself there, in

the snow. A grin as big as the Cheshire Cat's spread over my face and I wanted to shout for joy." She describes the first igloo they lived in: "When we stood up inside, we were stunned by its beauty. Ten feet in diameter and eight feet high at the key block of the perfect dome, it glowed like candle-lit alabaster in the sunshine. . . . What a fabulous space to live in I thought." Later Tahoe and Link learnt from the Inuit to become self-sufficient as winter travellers. Link made the igloos while Tahoe chinked the spaces with snow like the Inuit women, and she learnt from them how to tan caribou skins and make all their winter clothing while Link made the dog harness and boots.

Throughout, Tahoe enriches her writing with paragraphs on the history, as well as delightful descriptions of arctic scenery:

I found the early Arctic spring more exhilarating than any I had experienced in temperate climates. The exquisitely sculptured, long, sleek, wind-carved sastrugi, the fantastically shaped ridges, and the turrets and minarets of rough ice were dazzling white, blue, lavender, and pale pink in the clear sunlight. Their cobalt shadows reached across glistening stretches of ice, while the sky, a deep and unbelievably intense blue, arched over all from horizon to horizon.

She tells charming anecdotes such as of sighting a mother polar bear and cub, which were disturbed by their boat:

The mother, roaring, tried to make her cub follow her. . . . Finally, she swung around and gave him a hard cuff on the head. Instantly he grabbed her stubby tail in his mouth and, hanging on, paddled furiously behind as she sped off with great powerful strokes.

Link, with Tahoe as assistant, collected rock samples wherever possible for his geological study of the area as well as examining the extent of glaciation. Tahoe also collected plants for Dr. Hugh Raup of the Harvard Forest and lichens for Lucy Raup. Both Tahoe and Link kept very detailed notes and Tahoe's were embellished with sketches of such things as tattoo marks on the

women. The Wasburns' indomitable spirits showed when their tent was flooded: "joked about being marooned in our seven-by-six foot tent as we sat huddled on top of our possessions close to the central pole while trying to write notes without bumping elbows!" Both adopted the Inuit habit of laughing at adversity.

In August 1940, they flew from Cambridge Bay, first taking photographs of huge white crosses they had painstakingly laid out on Mount Pelly to determine the tilt of the raised beaches, and then continuing west to the head of Wellington Bay. At that time the geology of Victoria Island had not been studied and very little was known of the interior. Link had heard of two large lakes and had tried unsuccessfully to reach them with an Inuk in the spring. On this flight they were able to land on marshy ground near the first lake, but walked into "impossible masses of mosquitoes. . . . As we had neither headnets nor mosquito dope it was impossible to remain for long. . . . we rushed back to the plane as soon as Link had collected his rock samples." They then flew over the second large lake. These two lakes, now happily named Tahoe and Washburn, record their work on Victoria Island.

Tahoe was determined to learn about life in the North. She and Link always helped with activities, such as building the new Hudson's Bay Company's post at Holman Island, learning to bale fox skins at the H. B. C., and clearing a runway on the ice before the aircraft could land as there were no airfields at that time in the area.

Tahoe kept very detailed records of the people she met and the circumstances of their meetings. She also spent many hours watching the Inuit women at their activities and learning from them, recording much of what she saw. In these ways, her account adds to our knowledge of the local history before the great changes brought in after the war. Those who lived then in the Arctic will relive the pleasure of those days as they read her book. Other

readers will learn the details of arctic life at that time, and many will regret that the North no longer provides the same excitements and experiences.

Tahoe and Link greatly enjoyed the company of the Inuit and were most appreciative of their help, as well as that of all the local inhabitants. This enthusiasm still draws the Washburns north year after year. As they were keen photographers, their travels are very well illustrated with photographs of their activities, the country, and those they met. The photographic record is so good that it deserves a better quality paper to bring more life to the reproduction. The maps showing their impressive travels are clear, though rather more of the places mentioned could have been included—an omission that is covered by their Index of Geographical Names and Locations. Those in the North assisted the Washburns in many ways and how to repay them must often have been in Tahoe's thoughts. The publication of *Under Polaris* puts the North in her debt.

Graham W. Rowley spent the three years before the war travelling, mapping and excavating in the Eastern Canadian Arctic. After the war in the Canadian Army, he led the advance party of Operation Musk-Ox and joined the Defence Research Board to head their Arctic Section. Later, he moved to Northern Affairs, retiring as Scientific Advisor. He then became a Research Professor at Carleton University, and established a graduate programme in Northern and Native Studies.

Staking Her Claim: The Life of Belinda Mulrooney, Klondike and Alaska Entrepreneur by Melanie J. Mayer and Robert N. DeArmond. Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 2000. 415 pp., maps, photographs, notes, index. ISBN0-8040-1022-6 (pb), \$19.95. Reviewed by Charlene Porsild.

Belinda Mulrooney Carbonneau (1872-1967) is a worthy subject for a biogra-