

Book Review

Antarctic Science, 34 (2022)
doi:10.1017/S0954102022000311

The Dawning of Antarctica: Through Exploration to Occupation

Patrick G. Quilty

Published by Dr Eva Meidl, Hobart (2021)

ISBN 978-0-646-84234-9. xviii + 474 pp. 75.00 AUD.

This extremely comprehensive record of the human history of the exploration of Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic Southern Ocean covers pre-discovery speculation, early circumnavigations in the Southern Hemisphere, commercial sealing and whaling in the Southern Ocean, the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration, the 'Inter-war Year' expeditions and the pre-modern era leading to the 1957–1958 International Geophysical Year (IGY). This history ends after the IGY, when the Antarctic had been basically 'explored' and was 'occupied' by permanent stations.

Patrick G. Quilty was an enthusiastic palaeontologist and geologist who had been involved in Antarctic research since 1965. He was the Chief Scientist of the Australian Antarctic Division from 1980 to 1999. He also had long been involved in international Antarctic scientific collaboration, including as a vice president of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) from 1994 to 1998. His enthusiasm for Antarctica shines throughout the book. Quilty made many field trips to Antarctica, and his personal experiences give meaningful insight into his interpretation of the conditions of earlier expeditions. His careful scholarship is clearly reflected in the detail and thoroughness of the narrative.

This history draws substantially from original sources, such as the diaries and logs of expedition leaders and other participants in early explorations. One of the strengths of this book is that it records the lesser-known contributions of these ordinary expedition members that were critical to the overall outcomes of the expeditions. The book also documents the often-productive peripheral field explorations that were undertaken alongside the main objectives of the expeditions. Quilty finishes his accounts of most expeditions with concise summaries (variously sub-headed as 'Commentary', 'Legacy', 'Footnote', etc.) of the expeditions' achievements, with a strong focus on their scientific outcomes. He often includes within these summaries his assessment of the personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the leaders. I found these

assessments, while subject to some personal bias, interesting and insightful.

Another valuable feature of the volume is that it includes maps of the routes taken by each of the expeditions. These maps are at a variety of scales that are indicated by scale bars or by latitude/longitude fiducials. However, I found that the place names on the maps did not always match the most important locations discussed in the text. A few maps have a small error (e.g. showing St Paul Rock in the Atlantic Ocean near the equator when discussing Drygalski's visit to St Paul Island in the south Indian Ocean in April 1903). The depiction of ice shelves on the maps is also inconsistent. Sometimes they are shown as an ice feature and sometimes they are shown as ocean. In at least one case (the map of the 1957–1958 International Trans-Antarctic Expedition route) the Filchner is shown as an ice shelf, but the Ross Sea is shown as open ocean. Ice shelves were solid barriers and surface features for early expeditions, so it would be more appropriate to always show them as ice features, even though the modern fronts may be in different locations. The layouts of the stations and interiors of the huts of most expeditions are also detailed.

Quilty worked on this volume as a labour of love for over a decade after he retired. When he died in 2018, the book was still only at the first draft stage. Editing and completing the book in his memory was taken on by Eva Meidl and friends and associates, whom must be gratefully thanked. But without Quilty's intimate knowledge of things Antarctic, a number of small factual errors, including in the conversion of units of measurement, have crept in. These do not, however, at all detract from the overall value of this encyclopaedic, thorough and entertaining history.

The volume is supplemented by an extensive bibliography of original and secondary sources, although these are not directly cited in the text. There are also three separate indexes on people, ship names and geographical place names.

In summary, this book is a very welcome addition to the chronicle of Antarctic exploration. It is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and thorough history of human activity in the Antarctic yet published, far exceeding earlier historical works, and it will be a source of scholarly information well into the future. It provides a thorough record of many little-known expeditions and a comparative assessment of those that are better known, particularly those of the 'Heroic Age'. This record nicely

documents the parallel development of geographical knowledge and science with technological developments. The book is written in a narrative style and is an enjoyable read, although weighing 2 kg, it is not a 'bedtime read'. It is a fitting legacy of Quilty's involvement in the Antarctic, his contributions to Antarctic science and his irrepressible enthusiasm for geoscience.

The book has been published as a limited edition and it may be difficult to source from outside Australia, but

doing so would be well worth the effort. It is available from the publisher, Dr Eva Meidl (contact details from ian.allison@utas.edu.au), and from the Hobart Bookshop (hobartbookshop.com.au).

IAN ALLISON

Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of
Tasmania, Hobart, Australia