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At the outset Riches outlines his theoretical orientation, contrasting what he calls the “humanistic” approach which he proposes to follow, with the “scientific” which is presented as that used by most northern scholars. A disclaimer is made of any attempt at ethnographic completeness, together with the attempt to solve too many problems in too short a space.

I find the greatest difficulty of this work to be its expansiveness. Too many problems are tackled, and the burden of both arctic and subarctic hunters is too great a weight to shoulder. The book is in fact an attempt at a tour de force of northern hunters as well as of a number of generalized hunter-gatherer problems. Had Riches limited the range of these problems and narrowed the scope of societies considered, and in doing so more adequately represented scholars whose works are relevant to the discussions, and taken into account more fully the nuances of their arguments as they differed or agreed with his own, he might have made a stronger case for the deductive approach and achieved a significant contribution to northern studies.

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This important monograph summarizes the study of the technology, typology and distribution of 342 native copper artifacts from Canadian Eskimo and Athapaskan ethnographic and archaeological collections, with supplementary observations on several Alaskan Athapaskan archaeological collections. A uniform copper technology crosscut ethnic and temporal boundaries and produced finished artifacts which were all quite small. It was based on the folding of small sheets of native copper and the consolidation of these sheets by hammering into larger artifacts in a process clearly involving annealing and/or hot working.