with a general interest in the Arctic. The first part, approximately 100 pages in length, is a background piece on arctic environments, including chapters on physiography, climates and microclimates, permafrost, soils, botany, vertebrates, and invertebrates other than Arthropods and Crustacea. To my mind this is the best, and certainly the most up-to-date, summary on arctic environments that is available. The section has its own bibliography and could easily stand along as a separate publication.

The second part of the book (264 pages) is focused more on arthropods, but in a manner that allows easy entry for a wide range of arctic specialists. The section is particularly rich in examples of biogeographic and ecologic interest. The low diversity of the arctic biota apparently conceals a considerable degree of complexity. As Danks points out, insects are an important part of arctic food chains. Because they are the most taxonomically diverse element of the arctic biota, knowledge of their repertoire of adaptations to arctic conditions provides a better insight to the real complexity of arctic ecosystems than can be gained by study of other organisms. But this is so only if the fauna is adequately known. A thread woven throughout Danks’s text concerns the problem of dealing with a partially known fauna. Only about half of the estimated arthropod fauna (4000 species) of the Arctic has been described, and some of the common groups that extend furthest north are among the most poorly known taxonomically. Any reader who questions the need for further baseline faunal and taxonomic work would be well advised to read chapter 13 on needs for future work and chapter 10.1 on difficulties of interpretation.

One chapter in Part II is an overview of arctic arthropods. It includes a synopsis of the life history and status of knowledge of each family found in tundra regions. For the non-entomologist this is an extremely valuable section. But it also points up one of the major deficiencies of the book — lack of a taxonomic index. I expect that few people will read the entire book from cover to cover. A reader will more likely be looking for information on a specific group. Danks’s text is peppered with examples that refer to named taxa, but without a taxonomic index, a reader will have difficulty locating the references to his/her target group. A subject index would also be of great help to the non-entomological reader.

Other important chapters in Part II deal with Adaptations of Northern Arthropods, Ecosystem Structure and Function, and Historical and Ecological Determinants of Distribution. It was particularly refreshing to note the balanced approach the author takes in the historical-ecological section. His statement, “The facts that underpin interpretation of historical events for arthropods are exceeded by speculations based on taxonomic and distributional evidence” is especially timely in view of the accumulating fossil record that reveals the faunal changes of the North American Coleoptera fauna over the last 15,000 years.

The final section of the book (153 pages) is a checklist and will probably be of interest only to entomologists. It is similar in format to the list developed for arctic beetles by the late W.J. Brown. Brown’s manuscript was widely circulated and cited by Coleoptera specialists, but unfortunately never published. At one time there were plans to publish Brown’s manuscript posthumously. Danks’s comprehensive checklist makes that unnecessary, but it is regrettable that Brown’s seminal thinking on the subject of arctic insects was not acknowledged.

There is a tendency for books of this type to be slanted in favour of the author’s particular special interest. It is a credit to Danks that this book is so evenly balanced. The organization of the text is excellent and there are few typographical errors. Many of the chapters contain brief point-by-point conclusions which provide the reader with ready clues as to where to search for specific data.

Arctic Arthropods is the latest book to be produced under the auspices of a National Museum of Natural Sciences project entitled “Biological Survey of Canada (Terrestrial Arthropods)”. A companion volume to the one reviewed here is a Bibliography of Arctic Arthropods of the Neartic Region, and an earlier Entomological Society of Canada Memoir dealt with the entire insect fauna of Canada. Together these three books constitute a comprehensive statement on the status and history of the northern North American fauna. Of the three, Arctic Arthropods is the one that will be of interest to the widest audience. Unfortunately the original press run was so small, it will probably be out of print by the time that the “wider audience” becomes fully aware of its existence.

John V. Matthews, Jr.
Geological Survey of Canada
Terrain Sciences Division
Ontario, Ontario, Canada
K1A 0E8


In 1786 Alexander Walker, a young ensign of the Bombay Army, participated in one of the earliest private trading voyages to the Northwest Coast of North America. Commanded by Capt. James Strange, this expedition hoped to collect scientific information and establish a permanent shore facility for trade for sea otter pelts with the Indian inland traders. Although their more grandiose plans did not come to fruition and Walker was not left on the Northwest Coast in charge of a small military garrison as originally intended, he did manage to make copious observations about the aboriginal inhabitants and their customs, particularly during a ca. one month’s stay in Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island in July 1786. Only the journals of the Cook expedition in 1778 provide an earlier, equally detailed, ethnographic account of this area. Like Cook, Strange sailed his ships north to Prince William Sound, Alaska, after their stay at Friendly Cove, where Walker collected further ethnographic data on the Chuquach. In his later life as a military officer and administrator in India and St. Helena, Walker maintained his interest in what today would be clearly labelled anthropology and continued to edit and prepare his Northwest Coast manuscript. Unfortunately he never finished this task and after his death in 1831 the journal lay unnoticed until its acquisition by the National Library of Scotland in 1952. Thus, its final publication in 1982 is the long overdue culmination of the effort, thought, and ambition of a man dead for over 130 years.

Walker’s descriptions of the native cultures of Nootka and Prince William Sound result from one of the earliest intensive contacts with those people and should therefore represent a source of baseline data about Pacific Coast aboriginal lifeways as valuable as any that exists. As the editors, Fisher and Bumstead, point out in their introduction, anthropologists are not always noted for their effective use of primary historical documents. For archaeologists at least, an account such as Walker’s ought to be as priceless a trove of new information about aboriginal culture as any assemblage of excavated tools. Anthropologists and archaeologists are prone to uncritical reiteration of normative generalizations about ethnographic cultures; and one turns to documents such as Walker’s with the hope of obtaining new insights or widened vistas on native cultures at time of contact, not previously integrated in standard contemporary ethnographic generalizations. In fact, it is clear that some of Walker’s specific observations are of unique interest, such as his long Nootka work-life, which is one of the earliest substantial vocabularies from the Northwest Coast. This may prove of value to scholars studying rates of post-contact change in native languages, and origins of the Northwest Coast (“Chinook”) trade jargon. Alaskan archaeologists may also be intrigued by Walker’s detailed description of a large abandoned native village in Prince William Sound, replete with “winter” semi-subterranean houses connected by an underground frame or “sumner frame”. Although, however, in sum one must be just a little disappointed by what seems to be little in Walker’s account — of Nootka culture, at least — that is significantly new or different from already published and deeply ingrained perceptions of those people as they were at time of contact. This is not to dispute the undoubted value of Walker’s work; but, in general, his overall observations simply complement and confirm those of many others from Cook to Drucker, rather than modifying or greatly amplifying them.

Walker’s overall agreement with extant ethnographic generalizations about Nootka culture could be taken simply as a verification of their validity — a new voice from the past confirming that we’ve been exactly right all along! However, satisfaction with this unlikely state of affairs must be tempered by consideration of an apparent problem with the Walker account. That is the fact that the original diaries were lost shortly after the expedition, and the final published manuscript was reconstructed from rough notes, diligently worked and reworked as late as 1828 — i.e. up to 42 years after the actual voyage. In addition Walker was obviously inclined to scholarly endeavour and he incorporated in the final manuscript published and unpublished opinions and observations of other explorers dating as late as the 1820s. Although the contributions of others are often carefully acknowledged by Walker and in some cases he even points out how his own opinions differ, one can not help feeling that his account, published, may be in many ways more a perception of the Northwest Coast as seen in the 1820s, near the climax of the maritime fur trade, than of that in the 1780s, during the earliest contact events. It is a great pity that his original journal could not have been published immediately after the voyage, in which case it unquestionably would have become famous as one
The bulk of Franklin scholarship seems to have been mainly concerned with the fate of the last expedition—a subject of diminishing returns, though sustained by the hope that journals may come to light in an overlooked cairn, or that the hull of one of the ships may be located, raised from the depths, and furnish at least a factual secret. By refreshing contrast, Nanton devotes only a small fraction of space to the last expedition, totally shunning the attendant conjecture, and focuses mainly on the two somewhat neglected land expeditions which Franklin led in the 1820s. However, to give a sense of perspective and continuity, Nanton sensibly includes a brief summary of Franklin's early adventures at sea under Nelson and Captain Flinders, his period as governor of Tasmania, and salient features of his private life. There is also an appendix containing recent evaluations of Franklin's achievements, one of them adverse, since, inevitably, no explorer can escape at least the occasional mud pie thrown by fashionably iconoclastic critics, though in this case Franklin is left with only a faint smear on his countenance.

Nanton's general approach is more that of a sympathetic chronicler and alert copy editor than of an interpretative historian. He derives his text almost exclusively from Franklin's own published account of his land expeditions, quoting from them at length verbatim, paraphrasing, or simply summarizing, all with little or no comment. On the whole, the narrative is quite well stitched together, though it is hard not to feel that Nanton could well have improved some of the cliches by direct quotation rather than summary, even if Franklin's prose is seldom fully adequate. The details of Franklin's expeditions are very clearly presented in the narrative, much as he does in his unpublished letters and journals. His style seems a combination of Robinson Crusoe's and Lemuel Gulliver's. Like Crusoe, he is devoted to a wealth of accurate detail combined with God-fearing wonderment and gratitude, and an overpowering belief in the superiority of the white man, in particular, an Englishman; like Gulliver, his strong sense of modesty and integrity alternates with a naive pomposity which sometimes makes him unwittingly almost a figure of satire to the modern reader. Also apparent are Franklin's unfailing care for his men, his willingness to share privation equally with them, and the fact that, while lacking the flair and imagination of a Nelson, he had the same ability to command undying loyalty and affection. With Indians, Eskimos, and voyous, Franklin can scarcely be regarded as enlightened, but by the standards of his day he was remarkably understanding, and reader to learn in this respect than most of his peers and subordinates.

One of the special pleasures of reading the narratives of the land expeditions is to see a then virtually unknown country through the fresh eyes of explorers: in particular, to feel with them the staggering impact of the first glimpse of the Rockies or of the Arctic Sea. The actual discoveries and charting of the Northwest Coast, though remarkable in themselves for the period, seem secondary in interest to the description of the native peoples, for example, the Copper Indians and the Dog-Rib Indians, with the engaging character sketches that emerge of Chief Akaite and his brother, of the Indian princess "Green-stockings" (who, we learn from other sources, caused a heated rivalry between Back and Hood), to say nothing of the two Eskimo guides, nicknamed Justus and Janus. Especially compelling are the narratives of protracted starvation, with only loathsome "tripe de roche" for main sustenance, and the resulting dark tale of murder and cannibalism perpetrated by a voyager, who had to be summarily executed by Richardson in self-defence. All in all, the two land expeditions, even if of limited success, were a remarkable achievement in context, and are crammed with invaluable byproducts, particularly for the anthropologist and social historian.

Though the narratives are fairly easy to follow, Nanton's work has several drawbacks. As a chronicle it suffers from occasional injudicious selection and abridgement, and we are often made to rush and saunter alternately, when a uniformly brisk pace would be preferable. The almost complete lack of comment leaves us with an imperfect understanding of some of the leading characters (for example, Richardson, Back, and Hood) or deprives us of guidance in assessing cause and effect and relative achievement. In addition, little attempt seems to have been made to include hitherto unpublished material, of which a great abundance is to be found, especially in the Scott Polar Research Institute.

It is perhaps for this reason that Franklin's first expedition to the Arctic, under Back in 1818, is completely but unjustifiably neglected. A minor blemish on the book is that the index is too selective to include even the lovely "Green-stockings". These reservations aside, Nanton's work does a great service in keeping Franklin before the general public and providing a good sense of an unusual and often gripping narrative of arctic exploration.