what he did, offering only a broad absolution to many of
Kelsall’s fellow officials in the Conclusion: “And while
we have questioned many of those purposes, we have no
wish to deny the honourable intentions … of many of the
state’s agents” (p. 274).

These are minor quibbles and should not detract from
Kulchyski and Tester’s achievement. They have taken on
a vast swath of northern history, immersed themselves in
the available material, and emerged with a compelling
account of how relations between a modern state and a
hunting society were bungled with lasting consequences.
Even the creation of Nunavut has been influenced, and not
entirely to the good, by the legacy of the events that
occurred between 1900 and 1970. Kiumajut should be read
by political scientists, wildlife managers, government offi-
cials, historians, and perhaps most importantly, by Inuit
interested in understanding the origins of their political
situation today.

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EMPEROR OF THE NORTH: SIR GEORGE SIMPSON
AND THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE HUD-
SON’S BAY COMPANY. By JAMES RAFFAN. Toronto:
x + 484 p., maps, b&w illus., appendices, notes, bib.,
index. Hardbound. Cdn$34.95.

Sixty-five years ago, the great American historian Samuel
Eliot Morison, in his fine biography of Christopher
Columbus, made a perceptive comment about historians
who write biographies of explorers. He wrote (1942:xx):
“This book arose out of a desire to know exactly where
Columbus sailed on his Four Voyages, and what sort of a
seaman he was. No previous work on the Discoverer of
America answers these questions in a manner to satisfy even
an amateur seafarer. Most biographies of the Admiral might
well be entitled ‘Columbus to the Water’s Edge.’”” Morison,
who was a sailor as well as a historian, was not satisfied with
a landlubber’s history, and steered his boat around the
Caribbean, following Columbus’ path to find out where and
how the discoverer had made his first landfall.

Much the same might be said about histories of the fur
trade and of northern exploration in Canada. Few writers,
places Simpson in a particular place, one has the feeling that Raffan has been there too, and knows it well, just as S.E. Morison had been to Watling Island, Columbus’ landing place, and knew it just as well as Columbus had. This gives an invaluable immediacy to the book.

The book has two flaws, however. First, it’s too long. Raffan has mined the Hudson’s Bay archives extensively, but the ore extracted has been insufficiently refined. The result is that the latter part of the book quotes and paraphrases more material from Simpson’s papers and journals than most people will want to read. Secondly, some of his prose is pretty turgid. It’s not unfair to expect an author to write sentences that can be understood at first reading, but unfortunately this book contains many that fail that test. As examples, here are two taken at random, in which parenthetical phrases impede immediate understanding: “Maria, who turned eighteen (and who was only three years younger than Frances, her would-be stepmother) in 1833, had been thriving in and around the Beauly Firth and was to be married to a young Inverness solicitor called Donald Mactavish. Although he was most certainly invited, for reasons of propriety or health Simpson appears not to have attended the wedding on October 25, but he did quietly pay Mactavish a dowry of £500 (Simpson’s salary that year, not including expense allowances, was £1,800) to allow the newlyweds to emigrate to Canada and purchase property in Haldimand Township in Upper Canada” (p. 289 – 290). Pierre Berton never wrote sentences like these.

There’s quite a lot of this sort of thing, and one wishes that the book had had a stricter editor, for it detracts from the book’s popular appeal. As a record of an important figure and his times, however, it makes a valuable contribution.

REFERENCE


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This second edition of Alaska Trees and Shrubs is an update of the original 1972 U.S. Forest Service Agriculture Handbook No. 410. This popular handbook was out of print and unavailable for several years until 1986, when the University of Alaska Press republished it in its original 1972 format.

In this second edition, Dr. David F. Murray, professor of botany and curator emeritus, University of Alaska Fairbanks, reviewed and updated plant names and made other significant contributions. Dr. George Argus, curator emeritus, Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa, provided important information on the Alaska willows.

There are notable changes in this second edition, but the general format and content of the first edition are retained. The front cover of the first edition was a drawing of an interior spruce-birch forest by late Fairbanks artist William D. Berry. The front cover of this second edition consists of nine colour photographs and three line drawings. I had fun trying to identify the three species depicted in the line drawings, which weren’t identified in the “Cover images” on the copyright page.

This new edition includes 16 pages of excellent colour photographs of selected Alaska trees and shrubs and important landscapes and major vegetation types. The keys have been changed to couplet format, which makes them easier to use, and English measurements have been changed to metric units. A glossary and appendices that include non-native and transplanted trees and shrubs have been added. The bibliography and index of common and scientific names are comprehensive and useful.

Advances in techniques and procedures, better communications and collaboration, and new publications in plant taxonomy have resulted in the reclassification of several species of Alaska shrubs since the first edition. Major plant inventories were conducted in the new parks and refuges established in Alaska after the passage of the Alaska National Interests Land Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980. These inventories resulted in significant changes in the known distributions of some Alaska trees and shrubs, which are reflected in changes in boundaries in the range maps. The map on pages 36–37 shows the major national parks, monuments, preserves, forests, wildlife refuges, and major cities, towns, roads, and rivers in the state. A comparison of this map with individual species range maps shows the distributions of trees and shrubs and their overlap with these features. Unfortunately, the binding of the book obscures some labels in the middle of the map, e.g., near Bettles, Denali, and Kenai. I had to pry open my copy to find the label number (24) for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. This map would have been better as a foldout, like the map of vegetation types on the following pages.

Distribution maps in the species accounts are presented as “generalized shaded areas around the specimen locations using a buffer radius of approximately fifty kilometers” (p. 3). These maps are also viewable online via web links to the very well designed and easy-to-use website of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (http://137.229.80.38/website/aktrees/viewer.htm) and the U.S. Forest Service’s Bonanza Creek Long-Term Ecological Research Program (http://www.lter.uaf.edu).

There is an interesting section entitled “Vegetation of Alaska,” which reminds us of the extremes in climate and physical geography that influence vegetation in Alaska.