

## BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Greetings from Spitsbergen: tourists at the eternal ice, 1827–1914*, by John T. Reilly (2009). Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press. 227 pp. ISBN 978-8-2519-2460-3.

This finely produced but maddeningly inconsistent work seeks to explore a segment of Svalbard's history through a largely pictorial examination of the vessels that carried tourists to the archipelago. The book has the pleasant feel of an essential family scrapbook (indeed, some scrapbook pages from early tours of Svalbard are reproduced here in their entirety), and it is because of this feel that it is easier to overlook the flaws in a work destined to take its place in the library of every Svalbardian.

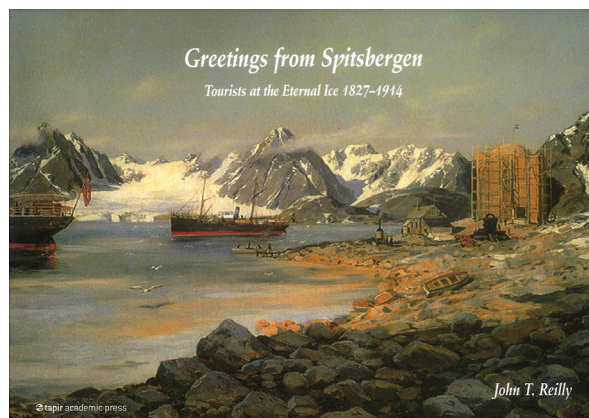
Like other Svalbard books that seek to combine historical scholarship with visual representations of the magically elusive landscape, one element tends to predominate, and here it is the imagery. As with many pictorial works, the text is oddly structured and thematically confused. It cannot decide if the emphasis should be placed on Svalbard's rich postal history, on the artists and photographers who left behind a large repository of imagery at the turn of the last century, on the tourists themselves (about whom we learn very little) or on minihistories of the steamship lines and their owners who sought to create the *terra nullius* of Spitsbergen as a European vacation destination. The result is not book chapters in the formal sense so much as illustrated vignettes. Indeed, a heading in the publisher's promotional literature—"smakebiter fra boka" ("tidbits from the book")—would, in slightly modified form, have made for an even more appropriate title: *Tidbits from Svalbard*.

The time span cited is misleading because, before 1896, the vast majority of visits to Svalbard, including those cited here, were by scientific expeditions or private hunting excursions, not tours. Some of these early expedition leaders, such as Benjamin Leigh Smith, were emphatic in their rejection of the mantle of "tourist" or even "gentleman yachtsman" or "big game hunter". Although a possible case can be made for such wealthy sportsmen as Lord Dufferin or James Lamont as tourists, Leigh Smith was no more a tourist than was A.E. Nordenskiöld.

Indeed, throughout the early part of the book the author struggles with the definition of "tourist". Can a tourist exist where there is no tourist infrastructure, no

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hotel, post office, steamship, wharf, dockside public house and, perhaps most critically, no souvenir stand? If one eliminates both the serious expeditions and the gentlemen adventurers, then tourism in the modern sense of the word did not begin until the 1880s, as the author himself makes plain in Appendix B: "Spitsbergen's Tourist Ships, 1881–1914".

By this reckoning, the first true tourists did not arrive until the cruise of the *Pallas* in 1881, and the vast majority of tourist cruises to Svalbard took place between 1896 and 1909. These coincided—although it was very likely no coincidence—with the international publicity surrounding the aerial polar expeditions of Salomon Andrée and Walter Wellman. In addition, during this period there was the opening of a tourist hotel in Adventdalen, and the arrival of serious coal mining and shore-based whaling in the archipelago. There is even herein a wonderful image of a bold entrepreneur named Klaus Thue who had set up shop on a Svalbard shoreline to sell souvenirs to visiting tourist vessels. In other words, by the time Wellman began constructing his airship hangar at Virgohamn in the summer of 1906, the requisite infrastructure was in place to support a Svalbard tourist industry that was by then in full swing

On the tourist ships themselves, the author offers several more *smakebiter*. In 1896, the cruise of the Orient Line's *Garonne* included the eminent astronomer and founding editor of the journal *Nature*, Joseph Lockyer, in the role of the now *de rigueur* guest lecturer. By 1899, an average of 50 postcards per person was being sent from Svalbard, in a kind of archaic tweeting from the High Arctic. Some of these bits are less than tasty, as when the German Arctic tourism pioneer Wilhelm Bade is

described as a firm believer in Vilhjalmur Stefansson's concept of "the friendly Arctic", although Stefansson's book by that title was not published until more than 20 years later.

Bade is also described as perhaps the earliest proponent of tourist cruises to Franz Josef Land. Ice and fog prevented his 1900 cruise on *Hertha* from landing in those nearby islands, but his passengers nevertheless had the chance to meet the returning *Stella Polaris* in Hammerfest, on mainland Norway, where they learned from the Duke of the Abruzzi himself that his team member Captain Umberto Cagni had bested Fridtjof Nansen's farthest north.

The exploration and tourism histories of Svalbard and Franz Josef Land, intertwined on so many levels since the latter's discovery in 1873, have recently been joined again, as two tourist cruises to Franz Josef Land began from Longyearbyen in the summer of 2008. Whether the lugubrious apparatus of Russian border control allows future such voyages—with their vastly reduced sea transit times, first-class international jet connections and not-to-be-missed meals of Pepper Nois and claret at Kroa, one of Longyearbyen's posh eateries—seems doubtful. In the event, it seems more than likely, had Bade been able to land in Franz Josef Land in 1900, his tourists would have followed much the same archaeo-tourism routes as those used today by the 100-passenger Russian diesel and nuclear icebreakers, from the ruins of Leigh Smith's and Frederick Jackson's huts in the southwest to Nansen's stone hut on Jackson Island to, if they could have attained that latitude, the Duke of Abruzzi's base camp on Rudolf Island.

Of more permanent import herein are the artists and photographers who were carried to Svalbard to document these cruises. These included the Greek-German Themistocles von Eckenbrecher, who visited the islands in 1905 on the *Oihonna*. He made beautiful sketches of Hornsund and Magdalenafjorden, both reproduced here, as well as an excellent and important painting—unfortunately not reproduced here—of the ruins of Andrée's base camp, just before the 1906 arrival of Wellman and his entourage that permanently changed the archaeological nature of the Virgohamn shoreline. Another brilliant painting of that shoreline, made by Hans B. Wieland in 1896, and showing Andrée's inflated balloon ready to lift off, is reproduced here, and also serves as the book's cover. Wieland's sketches and paintings from the 1896 cruise of Bade's *Erling Jarl* include a virtual catalogue of cultural and natural landmarks of the archipelago as they existed during that famous summer.

The British maritime artist William L. Wyllie sailed to Svalbard on board the *Vectis* with his wife Marion in 1906, and produced a magnificent rendering of whaling operations in Recherchefjorden. This painting, along with another of the graves of whalers in Recherchefjorden, is reproduced here. Perhaps the most important passenger described in these pages is Anders Beer Wilse, the photographer and correspondent for *Aftenposten*, Norway's leading newspaper. His work from Svalbard from 1905 to 1913 comprises part of an archive of 135 000 images that he produced of the Norwegian landscape.

The author touches on the personalities that these early working tourists had the chance to interact with, such luminaries of Svalbard history as Sir Martin Conway and the Swedish scientist Gerard de Geer, as well as the men responsible for the creation of much of what is now the archaeo-tourism infrastructure of Svalbard: John Munroe Longyear, Ernest Mansfield and, of course, Andrée and Wellman. (Wellman's own daughters visited Virgohamn in 1907 on board a tourist steamer, and Wellman himself was not above promoting such voyages.)

The links between scientists, explorers and tourists are introduced here—as in the participation of the incomparable balloonist Arthur Berson on the 1902 cruise of the *Oihonna*—but this is a complex subject requiring a full and profound sociocultural explanation. One of the great unexplored themes in this interplay is the extent to which this early Svalbard tourism relied on visits to, for example, the aerial base camps of Virgohamn, which have served as magnets for tourists in shallow draft vessels from 1896 to the present day. And the author correctly points out the damage tourists have committed at historic sites such as Virgohamn almost from the moment of their abandonment.

Would the tourist industry exist in Svalbard if Andrée and Wellman had flown from Greenland or the Canadian Arctic? Of course, but was the landscape alone enough to draw paying customers north? Or do tourists require that extra attraction provided by historic ruins in the Arctic? How far can modern tourist cruises to Svalbard imitate their forebears in advancing scientific research in an age of hyper-professionalized fieldwork? And, finally, how much will the rapidly approaching disappearance of "the eternal ice" affect the next century and a half of Svalbard tourism? Such weighty questions await another day. For now, this delightful scrapbook of Svalbard imagery will keep interested readers occupied during those still-long winters between the summer cruises to the North.

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