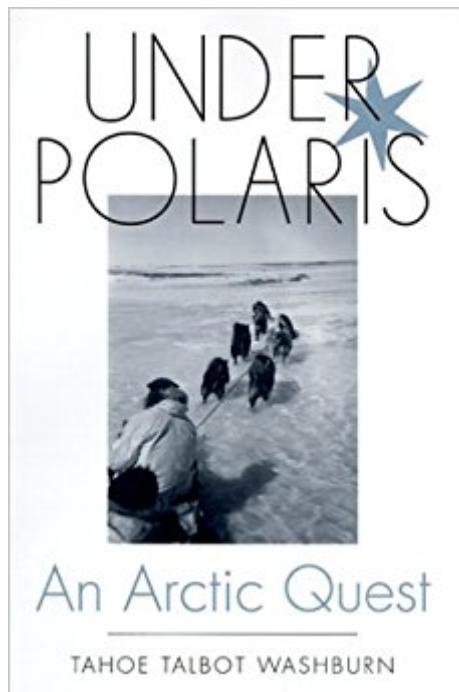


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Under Polaris: An Arctic Quest



Synopsis

Based on Washburn's journal of the first three years of her journeys in the Arctic beginning in 1938, including photographs by her and her husband. They traveled the coastal areas of Victoria and King William Islands by boat and dog sled. She made a concerted effort to learn the survival skills of t

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A modest memoir of scientific exploration in the Canadian Arctic. In 1938 first-time author Washburn accompanied her husband, Lincoln, to the far north when he went to pursue doctoral fieldwork on the geology and glaciology of the vast region; for the next several years the two traveled across much of the ice pack, studying both the landscape and its people and animals. Washburn's memoir is drawn from journals she kept at the time, and they're full of exclamation marks, mundane details, and the unexplained stuff of passing observation. We found the early Canadian bush pilots to be outstanding men individually and as a group, she writes, without elaborating, leaving the reader to imagine why the bush pilots should have merited such commendation. As the narrative progresses, Washburn's account takes on a more lively air, but it's still not much of a literary production. Even so, readers may enjoy her accounts of the hardships of life in the permafrost. For instance, getting into the Arctic heartland above the Mackenzie River delta, she writes, took much doing, including bargaining for passage with sometimes surly, often lonely trawler captains; becoming accustomed to the ways of her Inuit and Eskimo neighbors (and especially their penchant for practical joking) presented other difficulties as did negotiating a path among contending missionaries and government workers charged with improving the spiritual and material life of the native peoples. Of

greater value than Washburn's words, pleasant enough though they are, are the more than 100 photographs taken by the author and her husband, which accompany the text; they show innumerable details of life in the still-frontier Canadian far north, and they are unfailingly interesting. For those photographs alone, diehard fans of Arctic-exploration narratives will find this a valuable addition to their collections. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

"A wonderful, concise account of a woman learning to cope with the difficulties of Arctic life at the precise moment when the old Arctic of dog teams and isolation was about to change forever because of the outbreak of World War II." John Bockstoce, author of *Whales, Ice, and Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic*. "Washburn's descriptions are especially insightful because she was an eager participant in all of the activities of Inuit daily life, and determined to learn how to do the many tasks relegated to women." Dorothy Jean Ray, author of *The Legacy of Arctic Art*.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Arrived in stated condition. Delivered quickly. 5 Stars! Excellent. Thank you!

This marvelous book is a blend of adventure story, scientific diary, and ethnographic study. The author, Tahoe Talbot Washburn, accompanied her husband, Lincoln Washburn, to the Canadian Arctic in 1938-1941, helping him do his graduate field work in the glacial geology of the region. The author was a keen observer of native people and their way of life. She recorded what we now see in retrospect as the waning years of a nomadic way of life for the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Prior to World War II, many Inuit roamed freely across the high Arctic, camping in snow houses (igloos) constructed along the trail at the end of the day. The Canadian Arctic Inuit were still essentially nomads; they did not live in or visit permanent settlements, except for a few important events each year. Accordingly, governmental authorities and missionaries had to go on expeditions to meet with the Inuit. Soon after the war, this pattern changed dramatically, and seemingly irrevocably, towards a more settled way of life. This book is made all the more fascinating because it provides many glimpses into a way of life perched on the cusp of radical change. The Washburns were much more than casual visitors to the Canadian Arctic. They lived there for months at a time, including one extended stay from August, 1940 to February, 1941. They spent precious little time indoors, preferring to move about the Arctic islands, hiking, boating, camping, and dog-sledding in winter. The scientific aim of this multi-year project was to determine the extent of regional glaciation in the late Pleistocene, a much-debated topic of that day. By collecting marine fossils and mapping

traces of glacial scouring in bedrock, Lincoln Washburn was able to begin the process of reconstructing the extent of ice sheets during the last glaciation. This thesis project marked the beginning of his long and illustrious career in glacial geology. However, geologic research is only incidental to this book. It brought the Washburns to Arctic Canada, but once there, they fell in love with the land and its people. Both Lincoln and Tahoe relished the arduous Arctic lifestyle, where physical endurance and mental acuity often make the difference between survival and death. They marveled at the ingenuity, patience, and sense of humor that seemed to sustain the Inuit through manifold hardships. Tahoe Washburn spent many months emulating the role of Inuit women, including daily food preparation (for both people and sled dogs), sewing of leather garments, and hide preparation (including chewing caribou hides to soften them). Although limited by not understanding the Inuit language, she learned by observation. Her Native companions appreciated her efforts to follow their ways, and took the time to teach her many skills that few outsiders ever learned. The book is richly illustrated, with 107 photos and six maps. Although the material in the book was taken from diaries, it has been well-edited, never becoming dull or repetitive. I heartily recommend this book to readers interested in the natural history and ethnography of the Arctic. Review published in *Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research*, Vol. 31, No. 4. Copyright: Regents of the University of Colorado

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