

YUKON: A WILDER PLACE. Photographs by FRITZ MUELLER and text by TERESA EARLE. Vancouver, British Columbia: Greystone Books, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-55365-945-7. 160 p., 1 map, large-format book with full-colour photographs. Hardbound. Cdn\$50.00.

This book opens with the statement “The Yukon is one of the richest places on Earth” (p. 19). The authors then show and tell us why, through Fritz Mueller’s photos and Teresa Earle’s essays. Their answers have nothing to do with Klondike gold, but rather the riches of the Yukon Territory’s vast, varied, and largely undeveloped landscapes and intact ecosystems, which are increasingly rare commodities in our crowded world.

The book is organized in five sections. Each opens with an essay meant to both provide information and convey the essence of the northern landscape and life within it. The narrative is very personal and in places poetic, and it succeeds beautifully in conveying the essentials of experiencing the Yukon. Most of the book’s pages are devoted to a mix of stunning photos of panoramic landscape views, from the glaciated coastal mountains in the south, through the mountainous central boreal forest, to the northern coastal plains, and of the region’s plants, animals, water, and geology. The first photos in each section are most closely related to the essay, and those in between sections give a broader view of the landscape and wildlife.

Light, the book’s first section, describes and shows through photos the “magic” quality of light in the Yukon. The extremes in quantity and quality of light perhaps define the North more than any other feature. Summers are characterized by 24-hour daylight, while the mid-winter darkness can seem interminable. The low angle of the sun to the horizon leads to long, slowly unfolding sunrises and sunsets. Northern lights provide a haunting, ever-changing splash of colour across winter skies. The photos and text in this section capture this beautifully. Changes in light are tied to seasonal transitions and what they mean for the plants, animals, and people living in the Yukon.

Patterns focuses on the glacial and biogeographical history of the Yukon that has led to the landscapes, fauna, and flora that we see today. Special attention is given to Herschel Island, along with its human history, and to the Yukon’s Arctic coast. The photos show patterns from the broad landscape level down to sutures in the skull of a caribou.

The book’s third section, *Flows*, brings the reader to the southwestern Yukon, where the coastal St. Elias Range boasts the world’s largest Subarctic ice fields, Canada’s highest peak, and Kluane National Park. Photos of the mountains, glaciers, and glacial silt-laden rivers all emphasize the forces that rule the natural world in this unique corner of the Yukon.

The ecology of the boreal forest and the seasonal movement of animals—salmon, birds, and caribou—in and out of it are the subject of the fourth section, *Systems*. The boreal forest is characterized by instability, including

annual seasonal extremes, cyclical changes in fauna that occur each decade, and wildfires that re-set succession each century or two. Wildlife species adapt to these changes in a variety of ways, which include migration away to more favourable habitats for part of the year or, in the case of salmon, part of the life cycle. The text in this section focuses on change as a theme and also touches on the influence of humans—climate change, over-harvest, and resource development—on natural systems. The photos show a wide variety of boreal wildlife and landscapes.

The book finishes with *A Wilder Place*, which briefly describes the human history of the Yukon, starting with European colonization, and the opportunities and challenges facing Yukon residents today. A changing climate, increased demands for the Yukon’s resources, and a rapidly changing society all present challenges to the natural environment and First Nation culture. The authors finish with “Change is nibbling at its edges, but for now the Yukon’s wild core is whole. At a time when wilderness is disappearing at an alarming rate, the Yukon is still a wilder place” (p. 151).

This book is beautifully produced, and it provides the reader with an excellent sense of the Yukon Territory’s landscape and what it is like to live here. It is not a technical book, and readers looking for a scientific description of the Yukon’s ecosystems should look elsewhere (e.g., Krebs et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2004). I would highly recommend this book for anyone who wishes to understand and vicariously experience the Yukon, as well as for long-term residents and visitors who want to celebrate its beauty.

REFERENCES

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- Smith, C.A.S., Meikle, J.C., and Roots, C.F., eds. 2004. Ecoregions of the Yukon Territory: Biophysical properties of Yukon landscapes. Pacific Agriculture Research Centre Technical Bulletin 04-01. Summerland, British Columbia: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

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