

HUNTING THE 1918 FLU: ONE SCIENTIST'S SEARCH FOR A KILLER VIRUS. By KIRSTY DUNCAN. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003. ISBN 0-8020-8478-5. xvi + 297 p., 1 map, b&w illus., bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$35.00.

This book deals mainly with Svalbard and the exhumation from permafrost of the graves of seven miners who died of Spanish influenza in 1918.

Kirsty Duncan, a geographer at the Universities of Windsor and Toronto, spent six months reading about influenza virus, soliciting help from appropriate experts around the world, and two more years researching Svalbard (Spitsbergen), where bodies of seven miners lay in permafrost. Duncan hypothesized that exhumation might yield samples of the 1918 influenza virus for modern scientific analysis: for ten years she devoted her indomitable energy to this quest.

Duncan rightly claims credit for her “patience, promises, diplomacy” (p. 277), which led to government approvals. Her high-profile quest gained generous financial support, some of it belated, from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States and from Roche, an international manufacturer of antiviral agents.

Within Ontario she chose a pathologist, Dr. Charles Smith; a pediatrician, Dr. Peter Lewin; and a geologist, Alan Heginbottom. More audaciously (and in some respects, naively) she next enlisted Nancy Cox and two other specialists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, and made a trip to Svalbard to gain permission for exhumation of six of the seven bodies. Dr. Rob Webster, a leading virologist from St. Jude Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, offered to join her team, as did Lars Haaheim of the University of Bergen, Norway. Lars later withdrew.

A workshop to launch the project was held at the University of Windsor in August 1996. A second meeting took place in Atlanta, Georgia, in April 1997. Here, a Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) was appointed, with two Americans (Cox of the CDC and Webster); two Canadians (Duncan and Heginbottom), and two Europeans, Haaheim and John Oxford, an influenza virologist.

In spite of her preliminary research and careful preparations in Svalbard and Norway, Duncan was unable to maintain control of the SAG. After all, she had no experience or expertise in virology. Most readers, by page 46, will be predicting disaster. This book is thereby overweighted with Duncan's careful documentation of squabbles between researchers, rather than dealing primarily with science.

We read repeatedly of Duncan's never-ending conflicts with the media, with public relations firms, with John Oxford and his journalist daughter Esther, with Peter Taubenberger of the American Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, and to some extent with Sir John Skehel of the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill, London, United Kingdom.

The heroes of this book are Duncan's three Canadian supporters, Smith, Lewin and Heginbottom, who stuck with her to the end; Ann-Kristin Olsen, Governor of Svalbard; Pastor Jan Hoifodt of Longyearbyen; Dr. Tom Bergan and Bjorn Berdal of the University of Oslo in Norway; Barry Blenkinsop, office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, and a reluctant Rod Daniels of Mill Hill, who took care not to offend his chief, Sir John Skehel.

Although Duncan repeatedly criticizes others of her team who stole the limelight whenever they could, this criticism rings hollow when her own book carries the subtitle “One Scientist's Search.”

Few young researchers would have chosen, as Duncan has, to write a book from such a personal perspective, to divide the protagonists into “bad guys” and “good guys,” and to air the “dirty linen” of a complex project in public. The chronicle of difficulties encountered makes this more a “how-not-to” than a “how-to” book. Sadly, only short fragments of the 1918 flu virus were recovered, from lung, liver, kidney and brain; full sequencing of the virus has not yet been achieved.

Caveats aside, this book is an interesting, well-written, and appropriately illustrated account of a Canadian-led project that achieved more than any other junior geography professor would have dared to attempt. It will be of interest to all who wonder what other diseases, including smallpox, may lurk interred in permafrost, and whether they might remain infectious.

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MANY FACES OF GENDER: ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH TIME IN INDIGENOUS NORTHERN COMMUNITIES. Edited by LISA FRINK, RITA S. SHEPARD and GREGORY A. REINHARDT. Boulder and Calgary: University Press of Colorado and University of Calgary Press, 2002. 257 p., 4 maps, b&w illus., bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$29.95.

This finely edited volume stems from a 1998 symposium convened at the Alaska Anthropological Association meetings. Unlike most material products of such aggregations, it is a tightly focused compilation of thoughtful and materially grounded case studies of northern latitude prehistoric, historic, and contemporary hunter-gatherer gender systems. Although there is significant thematic and methodological overlap from front to back cover, the volume is divided into three sections: (1) Contemporary Research (Stewart, Ackerman, Jolles), (2) Historical and Ethnoarchaeological Approaches (Shepard, Tobey, Frink),