

Frederica de Laguna. *Travels among the Dena: Exploring Alaska's Yukon Valley*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000. xxi + 368pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-97902-1.

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Meandering Down the Yukon River and Through Time

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Imagine sitting with an accomplished scholar, now well into her nineties but evidently as sharp as ever, as she regales you with her memories of a voyage down the Yukon River that she took more than sixty-five years ago with three colleagues. As she describes the trip, in which the party on a shoe-string budget constructed its own skiffs, she answers your questions on a wide range of questions from the mundane (Just how bad were the mosquitoes? What was Noel Wien like?) to the scholarly. In fact, as she recounts the group's experiences, she interrupts her narrative continually to summarize the historical evidence relevant to the various locations the party visited, to pull out albums full of photographs she took during the trip and copies of other photographs, drawings, engravings that she has gathered over the years, and to contemplate how scholarship has changed since the days of Franz Boas, and to reflect how life in Alaska has changed over the same period. If you can imagine that, you can get a sense of this fascinating book.

So how does one categorize *Travels among the Dena*? It is not a typical scholarly book in that it has no central thesis. Instead, the book is structured around a narrative of an archaeological reconnaissance survey of Alaska's Yukon and lower Tanana Rivers from Nenana to Holy Cross in 1935. But the book is not a travelogue. If anything, it is a reminiscence. Her understanding of that

trip has clearly changed after a distinguished career as an anthropologist. De Laguna vividly but unromantically shares her memories, aided by field notes, journals, and letters home. She conveys a sense of the rhythm of the Yukon Valley in the 1930s. She captures its sense of community and its loneliness, its joys and its heart-rending tragedies, its beauty and peace, and its desolation and violence. But this book is much more than a reminiscence. This book is made more important by the fact that the author has written it in the context of a lifetime of reflection and research. So, while de Laguna's trip of 1935 provides the narrative thread for the book, de Laguna effortlessly moves from the world of a young student of Franz Boas to the mature commentary on the evolution of anthropological thought in the twentieth century. Thus, *Travels* not only gives us a tour of the Yukon Valley in 1935, and de Laguna's present-day reflections upon that trip, it also provides a fascinating reflection on the scholarship by a woman who has traveled that voyage too. Even this, however, does not exhaust the book. Integrated with the book are historical vignettes of the various places along the route. De Laguna has compiled the available documentary evidence relevant to the various places the group visited, from the years before contact with the Russians, to 1930 and beyond. To top it off, she has included no fewer than 120 photographs and drawings (her own photographs from 1935, and many other illustrations drawn from a wide range of other sources). Useful maps also enrich the reader's experience. The Press contributed with a large format and high production standards. The result is splendid.

Readers, including non-scholars, who decide to curl up in an easy chair and relax with this book will be rewarded, but most readers who pick up this book will probably be researchers aiming to mine the book for its nuggets. For them, the useful index and citations will allow them to locate information and sources easily. Anyone interested in a wide range of topics in Alaska history, from the material culture of the Dena to the Nulato Massacre, from river, land, and air transportation in the Yukon in the 1930s to the history of the whites and mixed blood of the Yukon Valley during the Great Depression, will find portions of this book useful. The author and the press deserve to be congratulated for producing this unconventional book.

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