

B O O K S

The Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic & the Antarctic

EDITORS: Elizabeth Kolbert & Francis Spufford

PUBLISHER: Bloomsbury

DETAILS: 448 pages, \$29.95, hardcover, 2007

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The polar regions have captivated human imagination since early explorers first ventured into those inhospitable lands at the ends of the Earth. Extremes of cold, darkness, and remoteness approaching that of another planet have tested the limits of human endurance and challenged our technological prowess. Though seemingly resolute in their indifference to our inquisition, the poles are not immune to humans' presence on the Earth. The impacts of human activity are evident as ancient ice sheets melt and polar bears and penguins lose ground to rising seas and limited prey.

It is with these opposing images of polar insularity and fragility that the editors selected the pieces in this anthology, *The Ends of the Earth*. Published to mark the International Polar Year 2007-2008, the book is divided into two sections, one on the Arctic, and one on the Antarctic. At 200-plus pages each, both are arguably books in and of themselves.

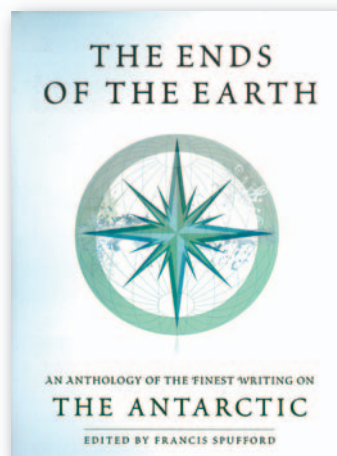
As one would expect, there are the requisite tales of adventure, survival, and death as experienced by famous pioneer explorers such as Roald Amundsen, Sir Robert Falcon Scott, and Ernest Shackleton. These tales have been told before, and the editors don't attempt to retell them so much as to select passages from previous works that illustrate particularly poignant

moments in the long history of exploration.

The Arctic selections jump right into the human element with a few accounts focused so narrowly on the expression of misery that it's almost difficult to find the context for the suffering.

The Antarctic section, however, opens with a beautifully descriptive account of a night spent in a fur sleeping bag on an ice floe under the stars and the aurora. The language conveys both the explorer's sense of horror at the ice accumulating around his face with each breath and his reverence for the silence, the breathtaking sky, and the Sun just slipping below the horizon. In its eloquence, the selection draws the reader in so that we understand the pull of such a magical place. As the selections on Antarctic exploration progress toward the tragic, we understand why these men have come to such an inhospitable place as we begin to see ourselves in these travelers. We can't help but ask ourselves whether we could endure the hardships these men experienced.

Beyond the initial selections on early exploration, both sections of the book expand into a collection of pieces that address other sides of these remote worlds. Excerpts from travel and nature writing, cultural histories, popular science writing, essays, and even fiction bring each polar region into deeper focus. Both sections include pieces on the natural beauty and ecological uniqueness of these worlds. The Arctic portion has excerpts that evoke a



rich cultural history and the sometimes awkward melding of indigenous ways with the southern cultures that have consumed them. The environmental calamity that threatens so much of the north polar ecosystem is brought to bear against a backdrop of climate change and rising sea levels.

The Antarctic portion of the book captivated me more than the Arctic section and seemed a more carefully selected anthology with illustrative language and diversity. For example, a geochemist invites us to peek into his world of particle science within a frozen lake with such passion that we feel the excitement of extracting water samples from a frozen lake. A waste collector describes the unique blend of monotony and camaraderie in the life of blue-collar workers at an Antarctic research station. And a fictional tour guide not unlike those that lead wealthy westerners up the face of Everest struggles to bring her clients across a frigid wasteland to safety.

It was difficult to think of this as one book, given the division of the subject matter. However, as two companion books, the Arctic and Antarctic sections offer an enjoyable read and a rich picture of two worlds that most of us will never visit. **W**

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by Julie Wan

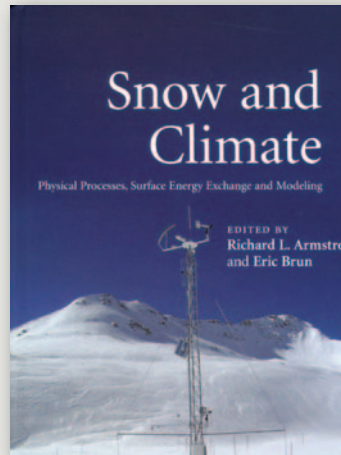
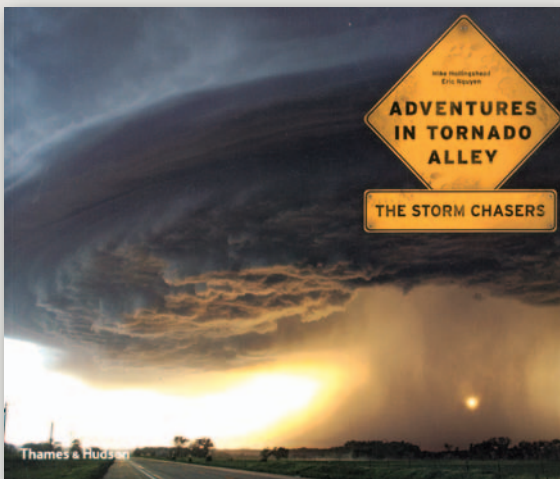
B O O K S

**Adventures in Tornado Alley:
The Storm Chasers**

Mike Hollingshead and Eric Nguyen
Thames & Hudson
New York City, New York, 2008;
192 pages, \$29.95, paper
ISBN: 978-0500287378

Storm photographers Mike Hollingshead and Eric Nguyen take readers along their trips through the American Midwest as they capture the excitement and grandeur of 17 storms in *Adventures in Tornado Alley: The Storm Chasers*. From magnificent supercells to tornado funnels, softball-sized hail, and glowing auroras, the authors recount thrilling moments few of us will ever witness.

The book is nicely laid out, with captions and commentary running alongside the images. A couple explanatory introductions as well as a brief glossary and section on the science of storms help give readers a basic background on what creates these stunning storms.



Snow and Climate: Physical Processes, Surface Energy Exchange and Modeling

Edited by Richard L. Armstrong and Eric Brun
Cambridge University Press
Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008;
256 pages, \$130, cloth
ISBN: 978-0521854542

This compilation of academic articles for advanced students and researchers examines recent trends and discoveries in snow-climate research. An introduction by the editors provides a helpful overview of the properties of snow, its importance in the climate and natural and human systems, and its implications for climate change.

Linked to energy and moisture, snow cover is an important component of the climate, and these studies look at how advances in snow-climate science, such as the use of satellites and snow modeling physics, can lead to a better understanding of climate change.

**Katie and the Magic Umbrella:
A Stormy Adventure**

Kristine Kahanek
Illustrations by Michael Albee and Valerie Jimenez
K. CO. KIDS, LLC
Colleyville, Texas, 2008;
44 pages, \$14.95, cloth
ISBN: 978-0980142303



Grace and Alex lie nervously in their beds at night as a thunderstorm approaches—that is, until their guardian angel Katie takes them on an adventure through the skies with her magical umbrella. The children learn about clouds, lightning, thunder, and tornadoes, gaining a better understanding of what creates the sights and sounds they experience during a storm.

Meteorologist Kristine Kahanek combines science with play in this educational book filled with colorful illustrations, imaginative explanations, and even discussion questions and a short glossary at the end. *Katie and the Magic Umbrella: A Stormy Adventure* is a great way to introduce little ones to the wonders of storms.