

BOOK REVIEW

By WALLY OLSON

ALASKA WHALES AND WHALING. Alaska Geographic, Vol. 5, No. 4, November 1978, \$9.95

A WHALER AND TRADER IN THE ARCTIC: 1895-1944 My Life With The Bowhead, by Arthur James Allen, Alaska Northwest Publishing 1978.

Here are a couple of fine books for anyone interested in the history of whaling in Alaska and the life styles of the world's largest mammals. The first text, from the Alaska Geographic Society's series, is a beautiful combination of photographs, explanatory texts and historical reporting. The articles themselves are written by some of the most knowledgeable people in Alaska and the nation. From Southeastern, Chuck Jurasz and his wife Ginny tell about their research in Glacier Bay. From up north, Lael Morgan describes present day whaling by the Eskimos of Wainwright. And then John Bockstoe and others fill us in on the history of Alaskan whaling. Like earlier books in this series, the photography is fantastic! If one picture is worth a thousand words, then the art work here is worth five volumes of text. The writers try to bring a balance to the question of hunting the bowhead along the Bering Strait and the problems are set forth quite clearly. While the Eskimos are limited to twelve bowhead whales landed, international commercial whalers still kill thousands of whales mainly for luxury items. Is all of this fair? Yet, what will happen to the bowhead population if they continue to be hunted? There are no easy answers.

For the whale watchers, there is an excellent section on each of the species of whales found in Alaskan waters. Besides the beautiful photographs and illustrations, there are small descriptions of the identifying actions of each species. I'm sure that anyone who spends much time on the waters of Alaska's coast will want to keep a copy handy just for the identifying information.

The second book, the life of Arthur James Allen, is a classic autobiography of one who lived and shared the final period of commercial whaling in northern Alaska. The text was originally written in 1937. After his death in 1944, his daughter Alice Killbear, finally got the work published. Big Jim's autobiography fills in the day-by-day life of the whaler and trader. In addition to Allen himself, the reader learns quite a bit about other famous people of the North Slope — names like Brower, Gordon, Hopson and Bodfish along with many Native names — crop up regularly.

As a balance to the first book reviewed, this text adds personal and historical perspectives.

With all the interest in whales and whaling nowadays, these are two books that just have to be read. If this reviewer had to pick two of the top books of 1978, these two would have to be in the final running!