

Book follows life of Pt. Hope hunters

*The Traditional Eskimo Hunter
ery of Point Hope, Alaska
(Squ) 1875*

by Ernest S. Burch, Jr.

Published by the North Slope
Borough, 1981. Price \$10.

The North Slope Borough
commissioned Dr. Burch to
provide a baseline study of
land use by the Point Hope
people. He already had done
a great deal of research on the
people and their history and
was able to combine his ear-
lier material with more recent
fieldwork.

The book is broken down
into several related topics such
as "The Land," "The People,"
"Land Use." The last part is
further divided into sections
on the materials, the social or-
ganizations, the seasons of use.
These first 60 pages present a
fine historical description of
the people and their use of
the territory.

Anthropologists and others
have often generalized by say-
ing that the Point Hope
people were whale hunters. But
what emerges is the fact that
they were also hunting many
other sea mammals, land ani-
mals, birds and gathered plants
and berries. They used a wide
variety of resources from their
local areas.

Another thing he points out
is that social scientists have
tended to divide the people
of this area into "Coastal-
Inland" Eskimos (Iqarimut/
Nunamut) when, in fact, they
moved inland and out to the
coast at different seasons for
different types of hunting and
gathering.

What he shows is that
these generalizations don't real-
ly give a clear picture of
what was happening. A person
has to look at the particular
details of times, seasons, re-
sources, settlements and re-
lated subjects in much finer
terms. By doing this, one is
able to get a much better idea
of what was going on when the
first Europeans arrived on
the scene.

Dr. Burch does his home-
work well. He went back to
the many historical reports and
descriptions of the people, and
pulled together the differing
descriptions and offers what
seems to be the best explana-
tion of historic changes.

There are 25 maps of the
region showing the traditional
names of places and the loca-
tions of villages and campsites
during the different seasons of
the year. It's very clear that
they knew their locality in

fine detail and used it to its
fullest in terms of the tools and
technology they had. Some
writers have said that Eskimos
didn't really have a sense of
territory; they roamed freely
over the entire northern slope.
This isn't true either. They
knew very well what was
home territory and what be-
longed to others.

All in all, it is a very fine
report in terms of what the
Borough asked him to do.

There is one problem. It is
a little hard to read.

It was written more as a
special technical report and it
has to be read carefully. If

the average person wants to use
it, he may find it a little dry
and formal. It was not meant
to be a popular account like
we find in newspapers.

Outside of that, it is loaded
with information that can be
used not only by the Borough,
but by other Native groups.
It is a good model of the kind
of study that has to be done
to satisfy special needs such as
government planning or re-
source management. There
is a good set of notes and a
fine bibliography so that
anyone who wants to get even
more precise information can
readily find the source ma-

terial.

I think that the North Slope
Borough should be commended
both for undertaking the
project and for hiring someone
who had already spent a lot
of time researching the topic.
The use of a professional, well-
acquainted with the people and
with the needs of the academic
and governmental world pro-
vides the Borough with the
type of publication that many
other places might envy.

Reviewed by

Wallace M. Olson

Professor of Anthropology
University of Alaska, Juneau