

*Working the Tides:
A Portrait of Canada's West Coast Fishery*

Peter A. Robson and Michael Skog, eds.

Madeira Park: Harbour, 1996. 216 pp. Illus., maps. \$34.95 cloth.

The Fraser River

Alan Haig-Brown

Madeira Park: Harbour, 1996. 200 pp. Illus., maps. \$49.95 cloth.

By SUSAN STACEY, *Richmond, British Columbia*

WE'VE ALL HEARD the laments of expatriate British Columbians, longing to return to life as it's lived nowhere else in Canada. When pressed to specify just what they miss so keenly, they often wistfully identify some aspect of the province's aquatic landscape. British Columbia's ocean-front and its rivers and lakes have a huge influence on its citizens' working lives, leisure plans, and spirituality. Two recent offerings from Harbour Publishing explore how this wild water defines our provincial psyche.

Working the Tides: A Portrait of Canada's West Coast Fishery is a collection of forty-seven slice-of-life narratives depicting BC fishers and their work. Editors Peter Robson and Michael Skog are both fishers who write about the fishery and former editors of *Westcoast Fisherman*, a popular trade journal serving BC's commercial fishing industry. For the past decade, *Westcoast Fisherman* has created a forum for "inside-the-skin" writing to balance the business and political angles that dominate reporting on this sector. Robson and Skog gleaned all but three of the book's selections from the magazine's archives.

The articles, which average three pages each, are fine examples of mari-

time storytelling. Most are personal anecdotes, some are creative non-fiction. The writers/storytellers (some accounts are retold by professional writers) are of both genders and represent many ethnic and age groups. The book is divided into sections based on the type of fishing technique used by the subject of the article: gillnetting, salmon seining, herring seining, groundline fishing, trawl fishing, jigging and trolling, and dive fishing. While this type of organization is a great aid to readers unfamiliar with the fishing industry, there is a sense that this is a book by fishers for fishers. Trade terminology is not explained, there is no glossary, and descriptions of machinery assume that the reader recognizes the business end of a bevel gear. Despite this insider feel, the articles centre on the human side of the fishery and all readers could easily come away spellbound by stories such as Maxine Matilpi's account (as told by Vickie Jensen) of being trapped underwater for two and a half hours in a capsized seiner.

While there is no profound analysis of the fishing industry, readers can gain a perspective on the day-to-day, season-to-season concerns of fishers and a sense of what it is like living as pawns of nature and the minister of fisheries.

Researchers a generation from now could use this as an instructive text for social history and as a data source for trade jargon, technology, and local names for landmarks and fishing territories. It is also a good source of information about some of the low profile fisheries (like jigging and trolling), thus balancing the media's emphasis on the salmon industry. Helpful maps at the beginning of most articles pinpoint the story's setting, and a generous selection of black-and-white photos, many from family scrapbooks, add a personal element to these accounts of life and labour on BC's coast.

If *Working the Tides* has the feel of a home video at a family reunion, then *The Fraser River*, by Alan Haig-Brown, could be likened to a Hollywood extravaganza. A beautifully produced book, most readers will probably first be drawn to its visual element. Rick Blacklaws' photographs of the Fraser River, from its headwaters to its delta, are stunning. The book's designer has taken full advantage of his material, creating a visual effect that, with the captions, appears to tell the story by itself. It would be a shame to consider the text as a secondary element, however, as

Haig-Brown, assuming the role of advocate, has melded history, anthropology, archaeology, geology, geography, fish biology, and modern-day travel writing into a passionate argument for attentive stewardship of one of the continent's great rivers.

Full of anthropomorphic language, the book would have readers revere the river as a living entity. Haig-Brown suggests requiring every young person in British Columbia to make a trip down the river before letting her or him vote in a provincial election. However, reading this book would probably be the next best thing. While some readers may find his fervour a bit over the top, the book is exceptionally well written and engaging — a worthy recipient of the Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize it took home from the 1997 BC Book Prizes.

Although seeing the Gulf of Georgia National Historic Site identified in the photo captions as the Britannia Heritage Shipyards complex was a disappointment, there is little else to mar the pleasure of poring over this book. In addition to learning a great deal about the Fraser River and how it has shaped BC's land and peoples, the reader can enjoy a fine example of environmental advocacy writing.

How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example Marshall Sahlins

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. 318 pp. US\$14.95

By KEITH THOR CARLSON, *University of British Columbia*

FIVE YEARS AGO Marshall Sahlins's reputation as one of the most respected and influential figures in ethnohistory seemed secure. However, the professional accolades given Gananath Obeyesekere's

revisionist study *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* threatened to destroy Sahlins's professional reputation. In *The Apotheosis*, Obeyesekere went beyond challenging Sahlins's inter-