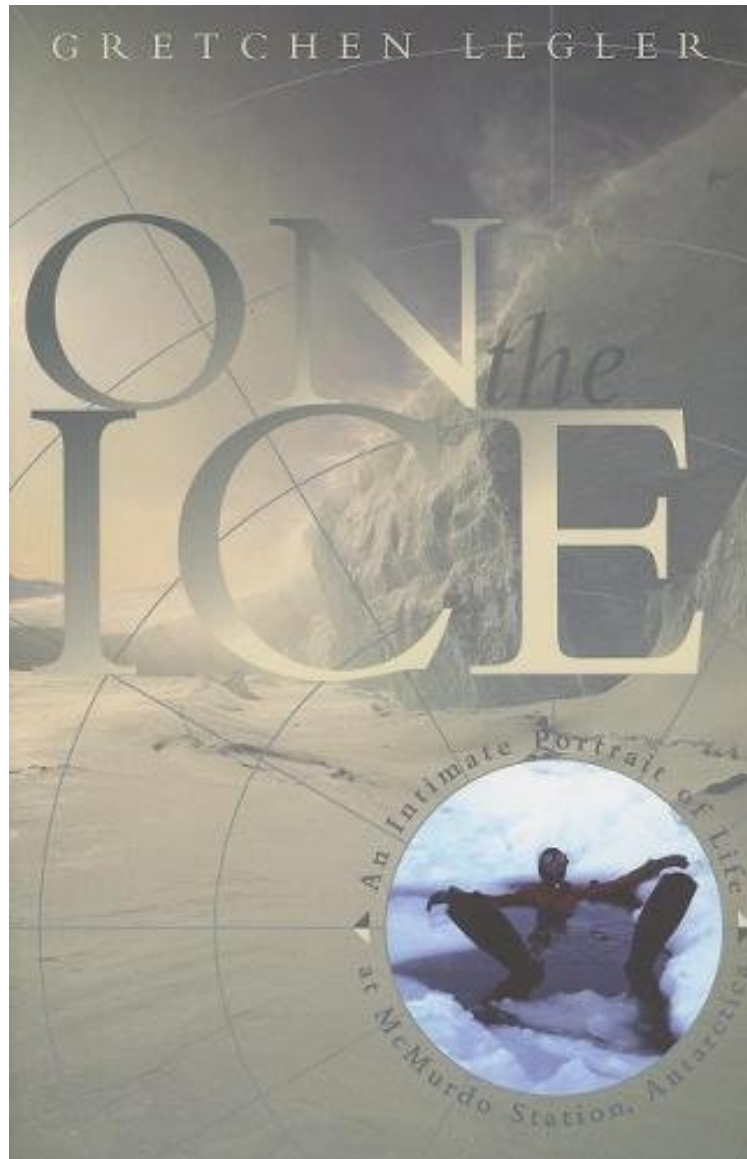


On the Ice: An Intimate Portrait of Life at McMurdo Station, Antarctica (The World As Home)

Gretchen Legler

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Gretchen Legler : On the Ice: An Intimate Portrait of Life at McMurdo Station, Antarctica (The World As Home) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On the Ice: An Intimate Portrait of Life at McMurdo Station, Antarctica (The World As Home):

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HippidyI read this book for a class and while we were only required to read a parts of the book I chose to read the while thing. I really loved seeing the author of the book evolve through her journey in Antarctica.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CrystalGreat book!7 of 11 people found the following review helpful. At Home at the Bottom of the WorldBy SusanNature writing is changing. The surest mark of that change is the fact that Gretchen Legler's book, *On the Ice: An Intimate Portrait of Life at McMurdo Station, Antarctica*, was chosen as the best book of environmental creative writing published in 2005-2006 by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment.*On the Ice* is the story of what it means to find home, and heart, in the frozen place at the bottom of the world. With other artists, Gretchen Legler was offered the opportunity to spend a season in Antarctica under the auspices of the National Science Foundation Artists and Writers Program, to tell the story of the land, to try her hand "at making some human sense of its vastness and its terrible beauty." It was a quest, she says, not only to explore and discover new lands, but also inner worlds, "places that I hoped being so far from my ordinary self would help me find." Antarctica as a place is extraordinarily far from the places our ordinary selves inhabit, and Legler wants us not just to know but to feel the distance, and to feel it as the explorers of a century ago must have felt it. She sleeps in a room that is only a stone's throw from the hut where Robert Scott set off in 1911 for his tragic bid to reach the Pole: "Good God, this is an awful place," he wrote. She spends time with other explorers who are looking even farther back, into the unthinkable remote geologic past of the Polar region, into samples of sea floor at Cape Roberts, goes naked into the coldest water on the globe, and ventures into ice caves in the Erebus glacier, blue caves, blue, blue "like an endlessly deep hole in your heart . . . a color that is like some kind of yearning, some unfulfilled desire, or some constant, extreme joy." And then there is the sea ice, glowing "peach and pink, nearly neon, buttery yellow, lavender, jade, and indigo," colors painted by Edmund Wilson, Scott's chief scientist, whose watercolors, she says are filled with, focused on light and color, color and light. And finally, there is the Pole, a "sacred destination," she says, not only for explorers but scientists and, yes, artists and writers, who find it the perfect place to look down into the mysteries at the earth's heart and up, into the mysteries of the universe, "the very farthest edge of darkness." *On the Ice* is a luminous study of a remarkable place, a place that is so sublime as to almost defy human description. But as humans, we must place ourselves: we long to live in place and to make even the remotest place a home. And so the book is also about the men and women who live there, about the scientists, support staff, builders, workers, engineers, electricians, cooks, communications technicians--all the people it takes to make a home in an inhospitable place. These are people, by and large, who are willing, perhaps even anxious, to shed their ordinary selves and live in an extraordinary way, coping with the isolation and the cold and the loneliness, building a community of fellow-travelers, each with his or her own sometimes desperate reasons for coming to a place so unimaginably distant and different from the places where the rest of us live. These are funny people, weird people, misfits, heroes, people who live on hope and thrive on hard truths, people who have come away from the "real" world to invent themselves in a different reality. But *On the Ice* isn't just about the place or the people. It's about Legler's own journey to the frozen wastes within herself, into her own frozen heart, which is thawed, incredibly, by the power of love. "How do you come to know place?" she asks. "How do you come to know self? . . . How do you let go of wounds and resentments and fierce anger, not begrudgingly, but as an act of grace?" She finds the answer to this age-old question in her relationship with Ruth, an electrician who helps her to shed "all that junk . . . all those layers of old self" and discover a new and loving self, a warm and passionate heart, in this frozen world. Some readers, particularly those who believe that books of natural history ought to exclude the historian's experience, may think that this part of the journey should have been omitted, as not quite worthy of the heroic spectacle that is the Antarctic. But that's the way it's always been, Legler reminds us: the personal has always been defined, she says, as "somehow gossipy or small, beyond or below the reach of proper recording." But why? Why do we deny the human perspective of place, since this is the only perspective we have? And why exclude the innermost experience, merely to focus on the outer? "Why obscure the intimate?" Legler asks. "Why shorten the story of the glorious complexity and depth of the human in order to make a neater, grander tale?" Legler's journey--and her record of it--is all the more remarkable because it is an intimate journey, not only to the farthest place on earth but into the deepest desires and dreams of the human spirit. It's a singularly brave journey, as heroic in its way as the journeys of Scott and Shackleton and Amundsen, one more exploration of the truest human question: what it means to be at home on this earth. There are a great many books that will give you the cold, hard facts about the Antarctic. But as a book about place, a chronicle of life at the bottom of the world, and an intensely honest record of a spiritual journey, *On the Ice* is the most richly illuminating of all. Susan Wittig Albert, co-editor of *What Wildness is This: Women Write About the Southwest*, University of Texas Press, 2007

Travelogue, cultural meditation, and love story, *On the Ice* casts a panoramic view on one of the oddest communities in one of the most extreme places on earth. Sent to Antarctica as an observer by the National Science Foundation, Gretchen Legler arrives at McMurdo Station in midwinter, a time of -70 degree temperatures and months of near-total darkness. A lesbian struggling with a tumultuous past, she hopes to escape her own demons and present an intimate view of a place few will ever visit. What she discovers is a community of people stripped of any excess by the necessities of existence in a harsh land, where revered scientists are referred to as beakers; where cherished belongings

are left without regret in a communal lost-and-found; and where women are rare but lesbians in high proportion. Forced to confront her own fears, Legler experiences firsthand how landscape and community allow a life to reset.

From Publishers Weekly Legler (*All the Powerful Invisible Things*) received a grant to spend several months documenting the life of those at the Antarctic research facilities at McMurdo Station, "an old military installation, remote oil company drilling site, frontier mining camp, and college campus blended into one." Her story emerges in a series of loosely episodic essays, a function perhaps of "Antarctic time," a Zen-like mode in which human agendas submit to the bleak, unrelenting landscape. Legler is a constant observer, whether she's sailing aboard an ice-ramming research ship, visiting the huts of great explorers like Scott and Shackleton, or enjoying a getaway with friends at an isolated camping station. Details scattered about subtly steer readers toward Ruth, a mechanic who works at McMurdo, and her and Legler's romance comes to dominate the final sections. Legler's examination of her feelings after Ruth's earlier departure supplements a thoughtful study of the intense egalitarian bonds and compartmentalized sexual relationships that form among all Antarcticans during their time in isolation. Readers hoping for adventure at the bottom of the world may be disappointed, but the emotional honesty of Legler's reporting significantly increases our understanding of life on the last great frontier. (Nov. 29) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist Legler traveled to Antarctica under the National Science Foundation's Artists and Writers Program, intending to "bring back visions, to translate that which could not be communicated in the language of numbers." Legler ventured far beyond McMurdo Station, from Scott and Shackleton's original huts to Siple Dome, where scientists collect ice cores to study climate change. Her attention to detail serves her well, and her ability to explain the history and science of Antarctica in a personable and poetic style truly makes her book sing. Legler's descriptions of the past are fascinating as she explores Scott's Cape Evans hut and recreates photographs taken during his 1911-12 expedition. Equally impressive is her analysis of the region's current residents, people employed in all facets of the station's operation and coping with isolation in their own ways. Legler begins a relationship with Ruth, an electrician, and her thoughts on their romance provide insight into the motivations for her journey. Ultimately, her personal revelations illuminate her Antarctic discoveries, resulting in a perfect combination of nature writing and memoir. Colleen Mondor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "she ... adds layers of history, geography, and biology to the story of the continent ... a beautiful and nuanced picture emerges." -- Lambda Book Report