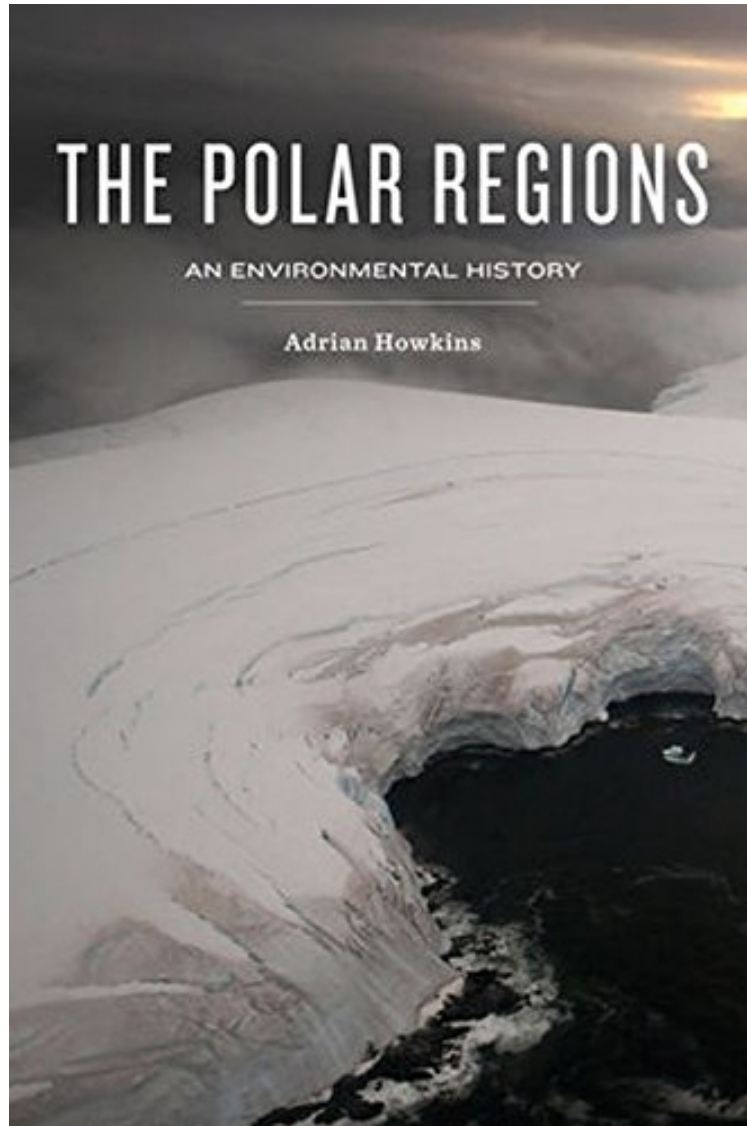


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The Polar Regions: An Environmental History

Adrian Howkins

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Adrian Howkins : The Polar Regions: An Environmental History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Polar Regions: An Environmental History:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. History of the Human Relationship to the Polar Regions: The Arctic and Antarctica.By mirasreviewsAdrian Howkins environmental history of The Polar Regions takes an unusual approach, not only in considering both the Arctic and Antarctica together, but in examining the myths and perceptions of these polar regions held by Europeans as well as indigenous Arctic cultures and how they shaped the human relationships to these environments, including competing views espoused by early explorers. This is an environmental

history, meaning the relationship of humans to the polar environments, not a climate history, though that subject is breeched in the last chapters. Howkins identifies himself as a moderate environmentalist late in the book, but for most of the history, he employs a neutral tone when speaking of human ambition, accomplishment, and folly in the polar regions. But first, Howkins makes a case for discussing these two socially disparate regions together. Humans have inhabited the Arctic for thousands of years, while no one even sighted Antarctica until 1820. But both regions were sites of human economic pursuits in the 18th and 19th centuries, both subject to Cold War jockeying in the 20th century, and both the object of environmental concerns in the 21st century. Howkins first chapter looks at the myths that informed peoples perceptions of these remote places, going back as far as ancient Rome and Greece, through the Enlightenment that endeavored to replace myth with science, and even more modern myths, such as competing theories as to why the Norse colonies in Greenland failed in the 15th century. From here the author tackles one topic per chapter, discussing its bearing on both polar regions. Some topics overlap by their nature. For example, there is discussion of explorers in the chapter on economic development, and whaling in the chapter on the Cold War, even though these topics have their own chapters. Scarcity and Abundance: Marine Exploitation examines sealing and whaling, from native Inuit sealing to the excesses of commercial sealing and conservation efforts that resulted, before moving on to commercial and modern whaling. A chapter on Polar Exploration doesn't go into high adventure stories but includes the miscalculations that left so many dead and the successes that made Norwegian Roald Amundsen the preeminent polar explorer of his age. Amundsen's perspective on the polar regions is contrasted with that of polar booster Vilhjalmur Stefansson in the chapter on Economic Development. Stefansson made a career in the early 20th century by selling the idea of the Arctic as friendly and ripe for development. And develop people did, establishing bases or colonies where they could. The Cold War produced an interesting divergence between the polar regions, as the Arctic became a site of military escalation between Western powers and the Soviet Union, while Antarctica became a continent dedicated to peace and science upon the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, and commercial whaling effectively ended in the 1980s. Exploitation and Preservation: Environmental Conflict looks at more recent controversies, such as the 1967 discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska that led to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and the contradictions of polar tourism, which represents exploitation and encourages preservation. In *The Polar Regions*, Adrian Howkins gives the reader an overview of the issues and attitudes concerning the human relationship with both the Arctic and Antarctica over the past few centuries. Remote, cold and apparently hostile to human needs, these regions have been the subject of much popular imagination and heroic and commercial ambition throughout the modern era.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An Academic Treatise By L.W. Samuelson This book contains some information I found interesting. The most important takeaway for me is the "anthropogenic feedback loop created in the Polar Regions as warming temperatures and melting ice make additional fossil fuel extraction possible, and as the burning of these fuels further increases temperature and melts polar ice." Howkins does a nice job of relaying the facts without injecting his own opinions and views, but, as a reader I want more than a bland, factual account. When I finished reading *The Polar Regions*, I immediately checked to see if Adrian Howkins had ever visited the Arctic or the Antarctic. He has. Surely something an author has studied and visited and thought about would engender some passion and enthusiasm and some information he just had to share with the reader and yet this book is a dispassionate, sterile look at the polar regions. I think Howkins missed an opportunity by not describing the beauty of the poles, by not sharing some of the hardships the explorers faced in exploring these inhospitable regions through journal entries and other sources, and by not sharing some personal anecdotes about his own experiences on his visits to the poles. This leads me to believe that the audience for the book is other academics and not casual readers who are interested in our polar regions and that's okay, but don't buy this and expect to be entertained.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Book, But The Title Is Misleading By Frederick S. Goethel While this book is about the polar regions, I would say it is more a book on the history of the polar regions than an environmental book. Obviously, the term "environmental" can mean any number of things, but I took it to be a look at the polar environments through a scientific lens, yet that is nowhere near what the book covers. In fact, science based information makes up a relatively small portion of the book. Issues covered include polar exploration, the politics of polar regions, the Cold War's effect on the polar regions, the whaling and seal hunting in these regions and a few areas I have no covered. All of it is interesting, but not in the way I had expected. The writing is good for a book of this nature. It is readable, but tends toward the academic side. It certainly is not a book that is a light read or a book for someone looking for an introduction to the polar regions and their environments. In fact, I had the distinct feeling this book was written to be a text book for a course on the history of the polar regions. This is not a book for everyday readers, but for those dedicated to learning about the history of the polar regions.

The environmental histories of the Arctic and Antarctica are characterised by contrast and contradiction. These are places that have witnessed some of the worst environmental degradation in recent history. But they are also the locations of some of the most farsighted measures of environmental protection. They are places where people have sought to conquer nature through exploration and economic development, but in many ways they remain wild and untamed. They are the coldest places on Earth, yet have come to occupy an important role in the science and politics

of global warming. Despite being located at opposite ends of the planet and being significantly different in many ways, Adrian Howkins argues that the environmental histories of the Arctic and Antarctica share much in common and have often been closely connected. This book also argues that the Polar Regions are strongly linked to the rest of the world, both through physical processes and through intellectual and political themes. As places of inherent contradiction, the Polar Regions have much to contribute to the way we think about environmental history and the environment more generally.

"The Arctic and Antarctic are truly poles apart, but they share interesting concerns, which their very contrast helps illuminate. By comparing their environmental histories, Adrian Howkins has brought them together in ways that everyone concerned with our shared Earth can appreciate. A valuable contribution to both polar studies and environmental history." Stephen J. Pyne, Arizona State University "Compelling portraits of the Arctic and Antarctic, past and present. A talented story-teller, Howkins offers a fast-paced journey to the ends of the Earth." Ronald E. Doel, Florida State University "The polar latitudes are among the final frontiers for environmental history. Hawkins' book, as much history of science and exploration as environmental history, takes us on a most engaging tour to both Arctic and Antarctic." J.R. McNeill, Georgetown University "A useful and innovative contribution to this growing literature. It is highly recommended." Environmental History About the Author ADRIAN HOWKINS is Assistant Professor at Colorado State University