Cold: Adventures in the World's Frozen Places

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COLD: ADVENTURES IN THE WORLD'S FROZEN PLACES. By Bill Streever. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009. 304 pp. $24.99 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-316-04291-8.

This book is hard to characterize. The author is a biologist by training who lives in Alaska. He chairs the North Slope Initiative's Science Technical Advisory Panel among other activities. The book is, in many ways, a "natural history" of what we understand as "cold," that is, a combination of temperature and wind that results in freezing conditions. Each chapter or section starts with a date, a location, and a temperature, usually in °F. The chapters run from July of one year to June but the text does not necessarily follow the progression of the seasons. Near the beginning of the book there is an interesting historical account of the development of the various temperature scales (Fahrenheit, Celsius and Kelvin).

The book covers a broad range of topics that can be classified as having a "cold" focus. Thus at various stages in the book the author discusses the Sir John Franklin Expedition, whose aim was to discover the Northwest Passage; the theories and evidence for

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the late Cenozoic Ice Age; the fossil evidence for woolly mammoths in Siberia and Alaska and the cause of their extinction; and the permafrost tunnel near Fairbanks, Alaska. There is also considerable, and interesting, discussion of the various biological adaptations to polar winters with their combination of little or no daylight, and temperatures usually well below 32°F.

This book is not a scientific text but it is intended to be read and enjoyed by interested individuals who either live in cold winter climates, or who work there on specific problems and would enjoy understanding more about the physical and biological worlds that cause or have adapted to cold.

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