



## **Mountains of Madness A Scientist's Odyssey in Antarctica**

**Reviewed by Rodney M. Feldman**

by John Long

Foreword by Tim Bowden

Joseph Henry Press, Washington D.C., 2001, 252 pp.

ISBN: 0-309-07077-5 \$24.95

Research in Antarctica is strange business. On the one hand, it is an extraordinarily personal experience but, on the other hand, the work must be supported by hundreds of individuals on several continents. There are many other contrasts; the hostility of the region against the unparalleled beauty, the tranquility that comes when working in the region against the stark terror of an accident, or the intense cold against the comfort of the tent. John Long has written a very personal book about his own experiences while conducting paleontological field work in Antarctica that explores these contrasts in a manner that will have broad appeal. John sets his own experiences searching for Paleozoic fish in the Transantarctic Mountains against a backdrop of early polar explorers. Here, again, there is a contrast. He readily admits that the working conditions in modern polar research are much more comfortable than in the past as a result of improvements of equipment and logistics; however, he also describes day-to-day situations of working in the field that convey the same thrills, excitement, and fears that will always be associated with conducting original field

research in hostile regions.

The book is generally well-crafted and will make an interesting read for scientists who have worked in Antarctica and for the general public who are interested in polar exploration. John conveys the working conditions and the problems associated with conducting research in high latitudes in a clear, conversational voice. There are some problems that may make the book a bit difficult for those who are not vertebrate paleontologists. Although the vocabulary is generally at a level appropriate for the general public, there are lapses into the jargon of paleontological terminology and geological theory that seem uneven. The problem is minor, however, when viewed in the context of the entire text. A greater problem is that the book lacks a map. Regardless of



whether the reader is seasoned in Antarctic research or has never visited the continent, a map showing the research areas within the Transantarctic Mountains, the location of Scott Base, and the historic bases would greatly enhance the enjoyment of the book.

The book is interesting and achieves the goal of portraying the rigors and the joys of Antarctic paleontological research for a general audience. Perhaps the nicest touch is the dedication of the book to Margaret Bradshaw, one of the foremost Antarctic scientists from New Zealand, and a real lady.

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31 January 2002  
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