

Ruggles, Richard I. (1991) *A Country so Interesting. The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping (1670-1870)*. Montréal/Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 305 p.

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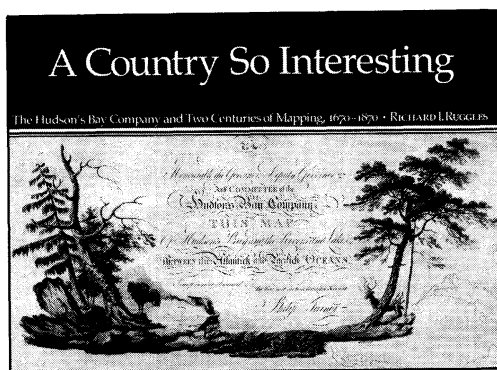
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environnementaux, que l'échelle régionale favorise l'action à ce niveau de prise de décision, et qu'ils prennent le parti de la conservation.

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A Country So Interesting, as a history and documentation of a major manuscript map group, is a model of its kind.

For many users, the section *Investigating a Country So Interesting* will be the essence of the volume. Here in ten chapters and an "afterword", Ruggles unfolds the details of the mapping and its context from 1669 with a beginning of mapping in the Bay itself through the estuaries of the rivers both east and west, to an expansion onto the Plains and across the Rockies. The Company did little mapping in eastern Canada, but the text comments upon a group of nineteen maps from interior Quebec-Labrador between 1821 and 1850. Certain periods were dominated by particular cartographers, such as 1778-1794 with the work of Philip Turnor, culminating in his 193 x 259 cm compilation of the northern part of the continent, a major source for the published Arrowsmith map of North America of 1795, and 1795-1821 was highlighted by the intense and careful mapping of Peter Fidler.

The study is not a history of the Hudson's Bay Company, but each mapping stage is put into context by brief reference to the company's main interests at the time. A series of four modern thematic maps shows the extent of European knowledge of Canadian territory in 1670, 1763, 1795 and 1870, a knowledge very largely provided by the mapping of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Part Three provides sixty-six example maps. Each is fascinating and can be studied at length. Each can be accessed from references in the narrative section or from the catalogues, and can be put into a modern geographical context through reference to five clear, specially-produced maps. The historical maps appear to have been captured through scanning of high-quality photographs of the originals and are printed on smooth paper; the reproduction is of the highest calibre and allows the reading of virtually all cartographic symbolism. In some cases, portions of a larger map are shown at a readable scale. The reproductions are monochrome, but as the Company's cartographers used colour sparingly, not a lot of information is lost.

Other sections of the book make it special and reveal more fully its depth of scholarship. The *Introduction* comments upon the important role of maps in the Company's decision-making, the education and professions of the mapmakers, the role of natives, and equipment and facilities. The three Catalogues cover 263 pages. Each map is assigned a unique number, a title or description, a date, cartographer, size and scale, and precise references to its collection number and to the text. Finally, there are ten appendices, a glossary, references, bibliography and an index. The appendices include short but directly useful comments on the Hudson's Bay Company map archives and catalogues; historical procedures for determining latitude and longitude, using actual notes of Company surveyors as examples; and alphabetical lists of persons known to have been involved in map preparation.

Richard Ruggles and McGill-Queen's University Press have done full justice to this important topic in the history of Canada. Champlain set the scene and the Hudson's Bay Company extended mapping clear across the continent. This volume is based upon intensive, careful and precise research and its preparation and production are equal to the research. In his *Afterword*, Ruggles even suggests topics for further work. *A Country So Interesting* is one of those "essential" books.

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