

## Arctic Circle: Birth and Rebirth in the Land of the Caribou

**Robert Leonard Reid**

David R Godine (June 2008)

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Imagine trekking, bare-hooved, across 800 or more miles of the most rugged, unforgiving terrain in Alaska and the Yukon. Every year, the Porcupine herd of caribou makes just such a journey. Robert Leonard Reid, accomplished armchair adventurer and experienced climber, invites us along for the ride.

Reid knows that the caribou are on to something—that the herd's ancient birthing grounds on Alaska's coastal plain, known as *ivvavik*, must be a place of great spiritual importance. In an effort to fulfill a promise to his deceased friend Fred Meader, and satisfy a long-standing curiosity about the North, Reid sets out to find the caribou. He has received conflicting reports about the nature of the Arctic: Meader found the Arctic magical, a pulsating realm of light and life, while explorers like Elisha Kent Kane declared it, quite simply, "Horrible! Horrible!" In exploring these diametrically opposed perspectives, Reid explores the differences between modern environmentalism and historic exploration.

What Reid himself finds in the Arctic is a world that transcends easy definition. He guides us through his experiences in a book which is part memoir, part spiritual quest, and part adventure story, with a healthy dose of natural history. Reid himself is an able narrator, prone to waxing philosophic about the nature of the Arctic—and indeed, the nature of life itself. He eschews dry scientific explanations in favor of poetic and playful descriptions. Observing the perpetual summer daylight and the frisky antics of nesting Arctic terns, he asks readers to behold "daying of the night" and the "screw of the tern."

Ultimately, this is a story of circles, and Reid's first-hand description shows how the Arctic and its caribou manifest the cycles of peace and hardship, winter and summer. This Arctic is a paradoxical and profound place, a unique synthesis of both ideas proposed by Fred Meader and Elisha Kent Kane. This book is perfect for anyone who enjoys a good travelogue or memoir, and the engaging blend of spiritual and scientific elements ensure a broad appeal.

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