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To the Denmark Strait: Oceanographers Search for a Mysterious Current

By Dallas Murphy, 2013, Burford Books, 144 pages, ISBN 978-1-58080-173-7, Hardcover \$35 US

REVIEWED BY CRAIG M. LEE

Seagoing research figures prominently in the culture of ocean science, with new observations driving advances in understanding and pointing toward new questions. The challenge and excitement of exploration and seagoing experimentation provide inspiration for both professional oceanographers and a public that grows increasingly interested in the ocean and its role in the climate system. Dallas Murphy's new book, *To the Denmark Strait*, captures the excitement and romance of seagoing research by combining, in equal parts, science thriller, subarctic North Atlantic travelogue, and a valentine to the venerable R/V *Knorr* and the ship's exceptional crew. Author Murphy is a writer, author of four novels, two plays, and two previous nonfiction books about the ocean.

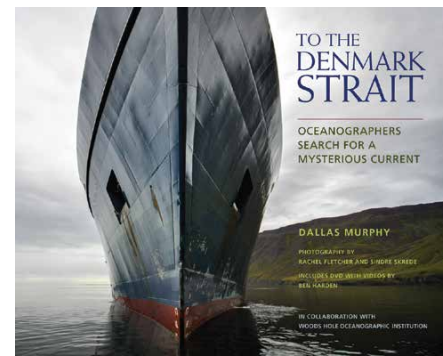
An expedition focused on understanding the origins of the recently discovered North Icelandic Jet provides the narrative arc that Murphy uses to give readers the flavor of setting sail in the pursuit of science. The search for the current's headwaters unfolds in real time throughout the cruise, providing an element of tension to the story. Through anecdotes, plain-language explanations, and a smattering of nicely plotted data, the book places the North Icelandic Jet within the broader context of ocean circulation and climate, and then guides the reader through the (successful) testing of a compelling theory about its origins.

Set in the form of a journal, Murphy's

narrative also provides a unique look behind the scenes of an oceanographic expedition. Collaboration with the Icelandic scientists who discovered the North Icelandic Jet illustrates the way science builds upon previous investigations and launches an explanation of how seagoing experiments develop from concept to execution. Interactions with Chief Scientist Bob Pickart and his fellow investigators shape the narrative, supplemented by interview footage included on an accompanying DVD. The journal format also serves as an excellent platform for describing the realities of making measurements at sea, including descriptions of the planning process, instrument preparation, deck operations, and the vagaries of subarctic weather that complicate all of the above.

For those of us who are fascinated by the high latitudes, *To the Denmark Strait* provides a beautiful travelogue of the subarctic North Atlantic. Murphy's prose captures the experience of wonder when encountering sites such as the East Greenland coast and the dramatic topography of the Faroe Islands that lie halfway between Iceland and Norway, while an excellent collection of photographs draws the reader into these truly amazing locales. The potential for visiting stunning, exotic places is one of the attractive side benefits of seagoing oceanography, and this expedition does not disappoint.

At this point, I must confess that having led over 10 expeditions aboard R/V *Knorr* (including the one that immediately followed the adventure chronicled



in this book), I am an ardent fan of the ship and her crew. I was thus predisposed to enjoy this book, and especially happy to read Murphy's personal recounting of his times spent aboard. Both text and photographs capture the feel and tempo of life at sea exceptionally well. They portray the long periods of quiet spent amid great natural beauty, punctuated by short bursts of frantic activity. Murphy's writing clearly reflects his history with, and fondness for, *Knorr's* crew. He captures their understated demeanor, consummate professionalism, good humor, and, underlying it all, enthusiasm for the science.

To the Denmark Strait offers a timely paean to R/V *Knorr* on the occasion of the ship's imminent retirement. Launched in 1968 and entering service in 1970, *Knorr* is scheduled to end 45 years of service to science later this year. This book provides a fitting tribute and a nice record of life aboard.

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