

Obituaries

Sir Laurence Kirwan, archaeologist, historian, and long-time director and secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, died in London on 16 April 1999, aged 91.

Laurence Patrick Kirwan was born 13 May 1907 in Cregg, County Galway, Ireland. He was educated at Wimbledon School and Merton College, Oxford. He initially left university without a degree, but returned to take an Oxford BLitt in 1935. After coming down from Oxford, he spent a season working in Egypt for the British Museum, which led to his appointment in 1929 as the assistant director of the Archaeological Survey of Nubia, run by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities in anticipation of the building of the Aswan Dam. He spent five years in this position, making exciting discoveries of tombs in Nubia. In 1935 he co-authored the scholarly *Excavations and survey between Wadi-es-Sebua and Adindan*, which discussed the archaeological evidence of the early settlements of that region of the Sudan.

From 1934 to 1937, Kirwan carried out further excavations in that area while serving as field director of the Oxford University archaeological expeditions to the Sudan. During these years he increased his reputation for scholarly work and publications, which, in turn, helped lead to his receiving the Tweedie Fellowship in archaeology at the University of Edinburgh, which he held from 1937 to 1939. Despite his sometimes lofty attitude and intimidating exterior — he was six feet, six inches tall — at Edinburgh he became known as a painstaking but gentle educator.

Kirwan joined the Territorial Army Reserve in 1938, and, when World War II broke out, he was posted to the General Staff. From 1942 to 1945 he served on the joint planning staff of the Offices of the Cabinet and the Ministry of Defence. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1943.

Soon after the war Kirwan was named the director and secretary of the Royal Geographical Society. At that time, the RGS seemed to some to be a cross between a Victorian-style municipal museum suffering from neglect, and a musty, all-male London club. As its President, Lord Rennell, said near the time, ‘the Society’s premises are still, I regret to say, in a somewhat shabby state.’ Kirwan immediately threw himself wholeheartedly into updating and expanding the RGS and its building, which grew from its dim, draughty, dusty postwar austerity to a modern facility combining pleasant offices and impressive public rooms with world-class research facilities in the library, the archives, the map room, and the picture library.

But Kirwan did a lot more in his 30 years as director, 1945–75, than simply be concerned with the physical plant of the RGS. He served, as one president described him, as ‘the linchpin of all the Society’s work, who brings to bear

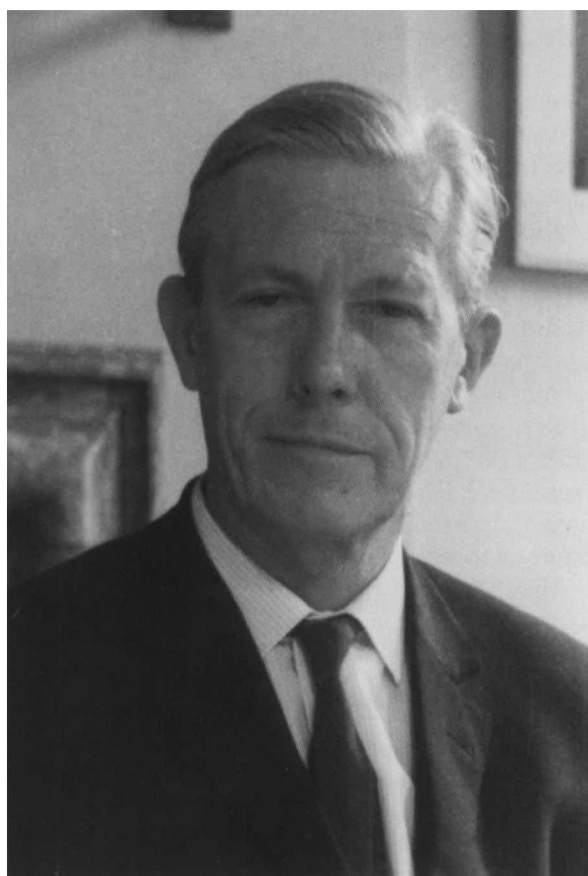


Fig. 1. Sir Laurence Kirwan.

not merely a skilled devotion but a great patience and an unlimited expenditure of time and energy.’ He led the way in the re-establishment of the RGS as a centre of academic geographical research, by introducing rigorous demands on the collection and analysis of scientific evidence. He also stimulated both public and official interest in not only the RGS and geography as a whole, but specifically in exploration. And he succeeded admirably at the extremely difficult task of bringing together the widely varying interests and goals of academic geographers, field researchers, and explorers, and encouraging them to march to the same drummer.

Under Kirwan’s leadership — and usually involving his extensive personal involvement — the RGS helped plan and gain sponsorship and financing for numerous expeditions in the quarter century after World War II. It has been stated that, as much as anyone, Kirwan established the pattern of sponsored multi-disciplinary research projects, which have continued to be one of the Royal Geographical Society’s most significant achievements.

The first of these major expeditions was the Norwegian–British–Swedish Expedition to Dronning Maud Land,

1949–52. Kirwan was very much the hands-on executive officer for the expedition, and, as this was to be the first modern, truly international expedition to go to the Antarctic, tact, patience, and diplomacy were required in all decisions. He provided not only this, but contacts at every level to help sort out a wide variety of problems, both before and during the expedition. It was clear that this expedition, which actually had members drawn from five nations — Norway, Sweden, Britain, Canada, and Australia — with no common mother tongue, could have been a disaster. Rather, it was a resounding success, achieving almost all it had set out to do and, above all, being a ‘happy’ base.

Kirwan’s scholarly mind and great administrative skills next were put to use as the RGS joined with the Alpine Club to launch John Hunt’s 1953 expedition to Mount Everest, which concluded successfully, with Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay becoming the first to reach the summit of the world’s highest mountain. Kirwan was involved in much of the planning of the expedition in the old Everest Room at the RGS, which now serves as the Expedition Advisory Centre. It was only fitting that it was in the lecture room at Lowther Hall that the first public lecture on the expedition was presented.

The RGS and Kirwan were then almost immediately involved in the behind-the-scenes success of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1955–58, led by Vivian Fuchs. Although Kirwan maintained strong interests in the polar regions, he also was behind the Royal Geographical Society’s research projects in other parts of the world, including in Mato Grosso, Brazil, 1967–69; South Turkana, Kenya, 1968–70; and Musandam, Oman, 1971.

Meanwhile, Kirwan extended his professional and scholarly involvement with projects nearer afield. From 1946 to 1978 he personally edited *The Geographical Journal*; his efforts helped it to gain a fine reputation as a refereed academic journal. In 1947 he was elected chairman of the executive committee of the first council of the Institute of Navigation, which he did much to help found and to assist, most notably by offering it accommodation at the RGS. And in 1959 he wrote one of the classics of the literature of polar exploration, *The white road*, which, for many, is virtually unequalled as an accurate and unbiased account.

Kirwan’s presence also continued to be felt in many areas on the international scene. From 1958 to 1961 he served as an advisor to the Sudanese government regarding the imminent flooding of Nubian antiquities due to the Aswan High Dam. From 1961 to 1981 he was the first president of the British Institute of History and Archaeology of Eastern Africa. And in 1966 he served as the leader of the field mission for the Court of Arbitration in the dispute between Chile and Argentina over the Encuentro Valley in the Andian frontier between the two countries.

Yet it was perhaps not his academic achievements, his careful planning, his administrative excellence, nor his remarkable energy for which Kirwan will most fondly be

remembered. His humour, warmth, and gentleness, and perhaps most of all his care for the education and development of young people, were the personal qualities that truly set him apart.

In 1958 Kirwan was appointed CMG, and he was knighted in 1972. Three years later, when he retired, the RGS awarded him its Founder’s Medal. In his later years, Kirwan became quite blind, but he managed to keep his humour and his boyish charm. He was married twice; his second wife, Stella, died in 1997. He is survived by his daughter from his first marriage.

Beau Riffenburgh

Kevin Walton

Hugh Alison Lang, Arctic enthusiast, field botanist and archaeologist, mountaineer, photographer, and a Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) doctor, died in Newton Stewart on 18 November 1999, aged 80.

Born in 1919 in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, Lang entered Glasgow University in 1937, first obtaining a science degree and then a medical degree in 1943. Joining the RAMC, he was, in 1945, among the first doctors parachuted into the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps in Burma. In 1947 he returned to Scotland and general practice, first in Stranraer and Barrhill, and in 1958 in Newton Stewart, setting up his own practice, helped by his wife, Anne, whom he married in 1955. As a GP, climber, and walker, he established the Dumfries and Galloway Mountain Rescue Team, becoming its first chairman in 1975. His science degree and the investigative skills acquired through medical training made him, like many doctors, an excellent field botanist, and he soon became an expert on the botanical rarities of Galloway. He joined the Botanical Society of the British Isles in 1973 and served on its Scottish Committee.

Retiring as a GP in 1985, Lang travelled, via Erskine Expeditions, to Mesters Vig, northeast Greenland, where he was instantly captivated by the Arctic riviera’s charms. For the next 14 years he used the opportunities offered by fellow Scot Angus Erskine and, latterly, Arcturus Expeditions to go on Arctic field trips. His tiny blue tent, somehow accommodating his six-foot two-inch frame, bulky camera equipment, and an extensive bar, became every summer a feature of some part of the high Arctic landscape.

Working with other botanists in providing records for Dr Geoffrey Halliday’s Arctic herbarium, Lang was a driving force behind the finding of rare plants in particular areas, including *Pedicularis sudetica* on McCormick Fjord (with Will Higgs and Jean Balfour), not previously identified in Greenland; *Dryopteris fragrans* in Milne Land (with Rod Corner), last recorded a century ago; and, on his last trip to Clavering Ø in 1999, *Potentilla stipularis* (with David Shaw and Kathleen Cartwright).

Lang’s archaeological interests developed quickly, and by 1989, at Hold-with-Hope, and 1991, Traill Ø, he and I collaborated in recording Inuit archaeological features,

information later passed to the Greenland Museum at Nuuk. Lang joined Halliday's 1990 northeast Greenland expedition to Kuhn Ø, and assisted Rob David in archaeological fieldwork (reported in *Polar Record* 31 (179): 389–398). In 1995 he discovered Inuit archaeological remains at Frigg Fjord, Peary Land, which had not previously been seen by Eigil Knuth. Even on his last trip to Clavering Ø, Lang found two tent-rings and a series of enigmatic structures not recorded before.

Lang naturally took on the role of expedition doctor (sometimes sharing it with Corner), dealing with minor injuries and ailments. James Morrison, the Scottish painter, mentioned Lang in the brochure accompanying his 1995 exhibition of Arctic paintings at the Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, thanking him for medical help and reassurance in dealing with mosquito bites acquired while painting on Otto Fiord, Ellesmere Island. Others, too, had reasons to thank Lang for his medical expertise, including Inuit parents at Syd Kap in 1998, whose baby had a scalded foot. Lang's ministrations and advice so impressed the Inuit camping party that our expedition was twice supplied with fresh char.

Expeditions enabled Lang to indulge further in his passion for photography. As well as his Nikon, he put, in his apparently bottomless rucksack, camera bodies, lenses, and even plates. On return home, hundreds of large monochrome photographs emerged from his darkroom, as well as slides from processing laboratories. These high-quality images, including landscapes and portraits of expeditioners as well as plants and archaeological features, were familiar to many fellow Arctic enthusiasts, and were shown at dinners of the Scottish Arctic Club, of which he became a member in 1985, and the Arctic Club, of which he was elected a member in 1986.

Like many Arctic travellers, Lang became an Arctic bibliophile, and he built up a comprehensive collection of Arctic books that, following his wish, now complement the Scottish Arctic Club Library.

Lang planned to take part in a millennium circumnavigation of Greenland by air, organised and piloted by Siggi Adalsteinson of Akureyri, whose Twin Otters had taken him to many Greenland airstrips. Sadly his involvement was not to be, but he will be missed, both on that trip and on field expeditions to Greenland. On Ymers Ø this year we shall miss his Glaswegian stories and jokes, his keen eye for floristic rarities and Inuit artifacts, and his late returns to camp caused by his preoccupation with, and love of, the Arctic wilderness.

Lang's wife Anne pre-deceased him by four years, and he is survived by his son, Hugh Angus.
Ray Woolmore

Moirra Dunbar, authority on the exploration and geography of the Canadian Arctic and specialist on the distribution of sea ice in Canadian and Greenlandic waters, died 22 November 1999, at the age of 81.

Isobel Moira Dunbar was born in Edinburgh on 3

February 1918. She was educated at Cranley School for Girls before going to St Anne's College, Oxford, where she gained her BA in geography in 1939. She took part in the productions of the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and also enjoyed her first experience of the Arctic on a pony-trekking holiday in Iceland. During World War II and throughout the blitz, she acted professionally on the West End stage in London, and elsewhere. In 1947 she emigrated to Canada, where her brother Max, the marine biologist and oceanographer, was already established at McGill University. As a scientific staff officer, Dunbar joined the Arctic Research Section (later the Division of Earth Sciences) of the Defence Research Board in Ottawa, and soon carved out a niche for herself as an Arctic specialist.

In her early years in Canada, Dunbar faced an uphill struggle in her chosen fields of research, for in those days the Canadian Arctic islands were a virtual male preserve for military and weather-station personnel and for field scientists, whose wives remained in the south. Apart from annual resupply ships, the Royal Canadian Air Force provided the only regular communication with the far north, and the Air Force did not want women in its aircraft or on its stations, if only because no suitable toilet facilities were available.

In 1956 Dunbar and her colleague Wing Commander Keith Greenaway, RCAF, a specialist air navigator, published *Arctic Canada from the air*, a book that exploited the recently completed air photographic coverage of the Canadian Arctic to provide a regional geographic description of the land, supported by a profusion of maps and air photographs, and with additional chapters on the Arctic Ocean, weather, and Arctic aviation. At the same time, she was building up her expertise on sea ice, and, in 1958, recognizing the need to read Russian literature on the subject, she qualified as a Russian linguist after a year's study at the United States Army Language School in Monterey, California. In 1964 she was a member of a North American delegation to Moscow to study icebreaker operations in the USSR.

By the late 1960s, changed attitudes and improved accommodation made it relatively easy for women to travel in the far north, and Dunbar voyaged during several summers as ice observer in Canadian icebreakers operating in the Northwest Passage and channels of the Arctic islands. In 1972 she achieved her great ambition to work in the field in the far north. She was a member of a party established on high sea cliffs in northeastern Ellesmere Island, the task of which was to use time-lapse photography to monitor the southward movement of sea ice down Robeson Channel, separating northernmost Canada from northernmost Greenland.

During her 30-year career in Canada, Dunbar published numerous papers on sea-ice research. She also served as a governor of the Arctic Institute of North America, as a member of the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council, and as a member of the Committee on Glaciology of the

United States Polar Research Board. Her work was recognized with the Centennial Award of the Canadian Meteorological Service in 1971, the Massey Medal of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society in 1972, and fellowship of the Royal Society of Canada in 1973. She was later made an Officer of the Order of Canada. At the time of her retirement in 1978 she was acting director of the Division of Earth Sciences.

Moira Dunbar was an amusing and convivial friend to many. She was always welcome at parties, particularly if her brother was present and they could be persuaded to sing traditional Scottish songs accompanied by a guitar. In retirement, she lived at Dunrobin, in the countryside south of Ottawa, where she kept animals on her property.

Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith

Alton A. Lindsey, member of Byrd's second Antarctic expedition and plant ecologist, died on December 19, 1999, at the age of 92 at his home in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

In 1933, encouraged by his friend Paul Siple, who had been a zoologist on Admiral Richard E. Byrd's first Antarctic expedition, Lindsey, then a graduate student at Cornell University, applied to join Byrd's second Antarctic expedition. He was chosen and subsequently served as vertebrate zoologist on the scientific staff at Little America, returning with Byrd and his party to Washington, DC, on 10 May 1935 (three days after Lindsey's twenty-eighth birthday). Lindsey's work on the ecological life history of the Weddell and crabeater seal resulted in four papers in biological journals in the 1930s, and his taxidermy work produced material for museums in the United States.

During a subsequent long and distinguished career as a plant ecologist and naturalist — including fieldwork in the northern Mackenzie Basin — Lindsey seldom thought about his experiences with Byrd's expedition, although he kept in touch with Siple and Finn Ronne, and had the occasional letter from the senior scientist, Dr Thomas Poulter, and from former Royal Navy man Bob Young (who had helped him weigh seals near the Bay of Whales). But a few years after his retirement from the Department of Biological Sciences at Purdue University, Lindsey compiled some notes on the surviving 'Byrdmen of Little America,' and in 1983 he reminisced about the Aurora australis, the Ross Ice Shelf, and icebergs in the 'Devil's Graveyard' in his autobiographical memoir *Naturalist on watch*. In June 1984 Lindsey joined his old shipmates for the fiftieth reunion of the second Byrd expedition (BAE2). And then in 1985 he was moved to type up his 'scarcely legible, handwritten' personal diary from BAE2 and to record several hours of conversation about the expedition. The interviews were subsequently published on microfiche as an interview in *FRAM: The Journal of Polar Studies*; Lindsey had been expecting it to be published in paper form, and he could not resist commenting in a letter that 'it seemed a bit microfiche.'

An admirer of Byrd, whom he thought to be a 'magnificent organizer' and an 'entrepreneurial explorer,'

Lindsey was not directly involved in the politics that went on at Little America while Byrd was alone at Advance Base for some months. However, he shared the view that 'the least mechanically inclined and practical person on the continent, Byrd had gotten himself into trouble.' Neither was Lindsey — who was the son of a Methodist minister — one of those at the base who craved alcohol (and conspired to obtain it from various sources), although in his late seventies he seemed a little more understanding of the 'boozing' that went on at Little America than he evidently had been when a young man surrounded by the 'kinds of men I had never encountered before.' He remained mildly scornful of the 'fruitless group discussions of trivial things,' discussions that had often disturbed his reading or work. His own conversations with biologists Siple and Jim Sterrett during the many hours they labored flensing seal skins in 'Blubberheim' were 'cherished memories.'

What topics and thoughts elevated the serious-minded threesome as they wallowed in seal grease the world may never know. However, it is certain that the beauty and purity of the natural world in the Antarctic greatly impressed Lindsey. In 1985 he recalled, with some pain, the amount of killing of wildlife that had been necessary to sustain the expedition half a century earlier — and there was pain and indignation when he spoke of the way in which the US Navy had treated Byrd when he went south yet again in the twilight of his career.

Lindsey and his wife Elizabeth never forgot that Byrd attended their Washington wedding reception, although the retired admiral had arrived after the couple's departure, having been giving evidence in the Congress.

Alton Lindsey would smile, one fancies, to know that one of his shorter poetic efforts — entitled 'Consolation' — was used to close a brief obituary:

The South Polar weather, they say,
In December is no worse than in May.
At South-Ninety-Degrees
You assuredly freeze
But it does keep the riff-raff away.

Bruce Young

Oleg Viktorovich Bychkov, noted ethnographer and researcher, died 27 December 1999 at the age of 40 as the result of an accident while building his house in the outskirts of Irkutsk in southern Siberia.

Born 17 May 1959, Bychkov lived his entire life in Russia. He graduated from Leningrad University's Department of History, Division of Ethnography and Anthropology, in 1983. In 1988 he was appointed science director of the Irkutsk Regional Museum, a position that connected him to the world outside Soviet Russia.

Bychkov first traveled to Alaska in 1990, bringing artifacts to the Anchorage Museum of History and Art for the exhibit 'Russian America: forgotten frontier.' He shepherded crates across Siberia, up to Provideniya, across to Nome, and on to Anchorage. He later inspired and then

facilitated the loans for the Anchorage Museum's national traveling exhibition (1994–96) 'Heaven on Earth: treasures of Siberia and North America,' which marked the two-hundredth anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy's presence in North America. He promoted two separate photographic exhibits on Siberian native peoples at the University of Oregon Museum of Natural History. In at least three separate years, he made possible joint visits of Russian and American scholars to isolated Siberian villages of Evenk and Tofalar peoples, in areas previously off-limits to foreigners.

In 1991 Bychkov resigned as science director and established a modest ethnographic research organization for contract research — a bold and innovative move on his part as state communism gave way to private entrepreneurship. In 1993 he spent a month at Fort Ross, the former Russian post in California, where he shared his expertise on the architecture and social life of a Russian *sloboda* (settlement). For a short time he was political advisor to the governor of Irkutsk Oblast.

Recently, he acted as historical consultant and commentator for a documentary film produced by (Japanese) NHK, *Sakhalin: 400 years of power games — the Russian point of view*. Until his death, he worked as a political/historical consultant for the popular Irkutsk independent television station AIST. He was a regular commentator on topics as diverse as self-determination for the native people of Siberia, politics, numismatics, local history, Russian Orthodoxy, and bellringing. He served the Irkutsk Diocese as research assistant to Bishop Vadim, Bishop of Irkutsk and Chita.

Bychkov's publications were chiefly in Russian, with a few in English, their major attention on the position of

aboriginal ethnic minorities in Siberia. He also published articles on early glass and bead manufacturing, material culture, and lifestyles among Russian 'oldtimers.' He was also a frequent contributor to local publications on Irkutsk history and figures in Russian Orthodoxy: Ioann Veniaminov (St Innocent, Apostle to America, Metropolitan of Moscow) and St Innocent (Kulchitskii). Unfortunately, a projected book, *Russian hunters in the Siberian taiga*, which would have emphasized customs adopted from native inhabitants, remains unfinished.

Bychkov was active as a bellringer in Irkutsk and throughout Russia. He was largely responsible for resurrecting the art, which had nearly disappeared under Soviet rule. It was his great joy to procure and ring bells for new and renovated churches. Perhaps his most lasting contribution to Alaska was the help he provided in obtaining a set of nine bells for St Innocent Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Anchorage. After a great saga, the bells totaling one-and-a-half tons, founded in Kaminsk-Uralsk, were brought to Alaska in January 1995. They are rung regularly in the Siberian tradition.

He cared little for most worldly possessions except coins and books. He was a self-described 'book terrorist,' always returning to Russia with a duffel bag full of books and a pocket full of coins.

Bychkov had an uncompromising love of life, which meant he never slowed down. His motto was 'Arbeiten, arbeiten und Disziplin' [Work, work and discipline]. He communicated equally well with the young and the aged, the wise and the simple. He is survived by his parents, his wife Olga, and three daughters.

Don E. Dumond

Mina A. Jacobs