

Title: White Eskimo

Subtitle: *Knud Rasmussen's Fearless Journey into the Heart of the Arctic*

Author: Stephen R. Bown

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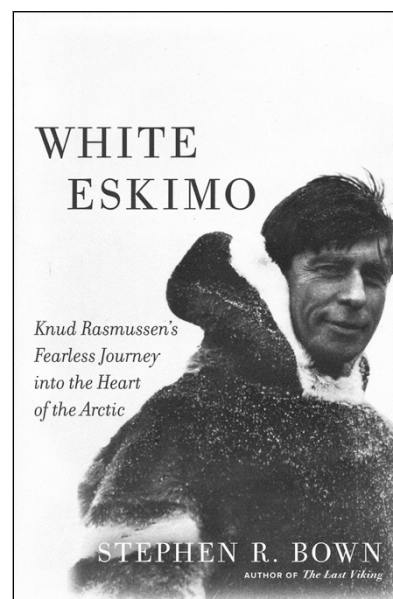
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Review: Paul Caffyn



When flying back to Greenland in 2008 for our paddle down the south-east coast, I was browsing through an Air Greenland flight magazine and read an article about an Inuit lass from the Thule region.

She accompanied Knud Rasmussen during his three year, 20,000 mile long Fifth Thule Expedition which travelled by dog sled from Hudson Bay to Nome in Alaska. Although the link to kayaking is very tenuous, discussing this biography of Rasmussen allows me to write about Arnarulunquaq.

Part Inuit on his mother's side and with a Danish father, Knud was born in 1879 and spent the first 12 years of his life in Jacobshavn (now Ilulissat) and learnt to drive a dog team and hunt. Although most Inuit boys had their first kayaks by the age of six, Knud's father felt this was too dangerous and Rasmussen later complained that he wasn't much good in a kayak because of his lack of early training.

After education in Denmark, Knud returned to Greenland with the Danish Literary Expedition, the first of seven expeditions of which the 5th is the most significant with its aim to collect stories, songs and legends of the Polar Inuit before they were influenced by Westerners (whales, trappers etc.). Because he was fluent in Greenlandic and Danish, had charm and presence and his social intelligence and intuition guided him when raising expedition funds in Europe or meeting Polar Inuit who had never met outsiders before.

With training as a writer in Denmark he was able to memorize the stories told to him in the snow houses, he would repeat them back and only then write them up in his own snow igloo. Three of his most famous books were also published in English:

- *Across Arctic America*
- *Greenland by the Polar Sea*
- *The People of the Polar North.*