

WARBURTON PIKE: Pioneer of the Barren Grounds

Warburton Pike was an Englishman of some means and education who chose to live a solitary life. He settled in the Cassiar District of northern British Columbia from which he journeyed on many individual expeditions into the far north. Starvation and exposure were of little concern to him when he set his heart on some exploration. He made two notable expeditions into the then practically unknown north.

In 1889, Pike journeyed to Great Slave Lake where he made arrangements with a band of Indians to join them on their fall and winter hunt for muskox. In his own words: "I had often heard of a strange animal, a relic of an earlier age, that was still to be found roaming the Barren Ground, the vast desert that lies between Hudson's Bay, the eastern ends of the three great lakes of the North, and the Arctic Sea. This animal

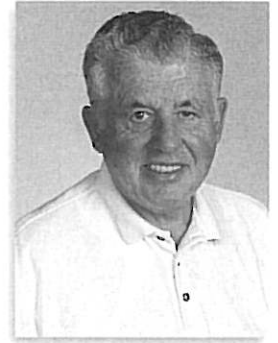
was the musk-ox, but my informants could tell me nothing from personal experience, and all that was known on the subject had been gathered from Indian reports . . . no one had ever seen much of these animals or of the method of hunting them employed by the Northern Indians.

"This then was the sole object of my journey; to try and penetrate this unknown land, to see the Musk-ox and find out as much as I could about their habits and the habits of the Indians who go in pursuit of them every year." The story of his four month expedition, during which hunger, frostbite and other dangers were a constant threat, is detailed in his book, The Barren Ground of Northern Canada. Although the book vividly details his experiences, it is unfortunate that he took no camera.

In 1892, alone, he ascended the Stikine River in northern Brit-

ish Columbia, wintered on the Dease River, and in the spring of 1893 crossed Frances Lake on the ice, and discovered the Pelly Lakes. After descending the Pelly River to its junction with the Yukon, he continued his journey to the coast. He was lucky to find a schooner which took him to Unalaska. The story of this journey, with intermittent hunting episodes, is told in his book, Through the Subarctic Forest.

Warburton Pike did not kill an enormous amount of game, although he had an opportunity to do so. Unassuming, he ranked among the highest level of the real, old-fashioned sportsmen. A professional member of the Boone and Crockett Club, he spent his last days placer mining to support his old age. He left behind a legacy of northern adventure and his two books have become priceless collector's items. ▲▲▲



Theodore J. Holsten, Jr.
Editor of Specialty Books and Limited Editions Communications, Publications and Marketing Committee

BOOKS BY WARBURTON PIKE

The Barren Ground of Northern Canada - Macmillan & Co., London and New York, 1892

Through the Subarctic Forest - Edward Arnold, London 1896

