White Waters and Black
Gordon MacCreagh
Foreword by George B. Schaller.
Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1985 (1926, 1954). xix + 335 pp.

Reviewer: Philip D. Young
University of Oregon

This book has no scientific value in the usual sense, nor did the author intend that it have any. In all fairness, it cannot be subjected to the usual canons of scholarly review.

MacCreagh makes no pretense to more than a description of the tragicomic human side of an ill-fated scientific expedition to the Amazon. In the early 1920s, six Harvard scientists propose to traverse the Andes and travel downriver to Manaos, all the while gathering a wealth of new scientific data. Five of the six have no previous experience in the tropical forest, nor, it would seem, in any other forest. MacCreagh (not one of the six) devotes most of the first two-thirds of the book to describing the personalities of these six men of science (all were provided with appropriate pseudonyms to protect the guilty), their misadventures, their often absurd interactions with one another, and their respective reactions to the strains of travel on the Andean trails and Amazonian rivers.

The expedition begins with an arduous mule trek over the Andes from La Paz to the Bopi River, is beset by numerous delays, proceeds by raft and boat to the Mapiri and Beni Rivers and ends a year later at Rurrenabaque on the Beni River, barely out of the Montana. There, the remaining vainglorious scientists head for home, save for MacCreagh himself and one member called Young America, sometime assistant to the Eminent Director. These two make the final leg of the journey down the Madiera River, to Manaos, and on up the Rio Negro and Rio Tiquié. Without the antics of the scientists to report, MacCreagh turns his attention in the latter third of the book to rubber barons, rubber-gatherers, and Indians.

The descriptions of conditions, communities, and activities of settlers and traders along the routes traveled give the account some limited historic value. But MacCreagh's observations are superficial, with wry wit and dry humor outweighing solid detail; and one senses a certain talent for exaggeration. The account of adventures along the black water rivers, the Rio Negro and Rio Tiquié, may be of some interest to those concerned with inter-ethnic relations in the area during the 1920s.

Especially in the latter third of the book, MacCreagh makes numerous pronouncements and draws a multitude of unsupported inferences about the customs, lives, thoughts and mentality of the native populations. These are not always unkind or unsympathetic, but far too often his characterizations are paternalistic or ethnocentric, and almost without exception his remarks are uninsightful. "They have no conception of a god" (p. 309) [reference to a Tucano group on the Tiquié River].

> We found an encampment of nomad semi-apes making a crude fish trap. A squat, misshapen gang they were, with large bellies and thin limbs and low gorilloid foreheads and prognathous jaws. . . . Dirty they were, too, with matted hair and greasy bodies; dirty by preference, like monkeys . . . (p. 327) [reference, apparently, to a Macu group].

The ethnographic observations of the native groups contained in this book are valueless today and must have been nearly so at the time they were written. That MacCreagh was not a particularly careful scholar is evidenced by the fact that he apparently thought Koch-Grunberg was two people: "I had heard of *caapi*. It had been reported by explorers as far back as Koch and Gruenberg [*sic*]" (p. 311). This statement does not occur in a context where there is the remotest chance that it was intended as wit.

Overall, the book is entertaining and often funny, despite the disquieting ethnocentrism. Many may enjoy reading this Amazon adventure tale, However, no one should expect to derive worthwhile information about the native peoples of the Amazonian tropical forest from MacCreagh's account.

Beothuk Bark Canoes: An Analysis and Comparative Study
Ingebord Constanze Luise Marshall
Ottawa, Ontario: National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper Number 102, 1985. xiii + 159 pp. gratis (paper).

Reviewer: Helen Devereux
Laurentian University

The Beothuck of the Island of Newfoundland have always proven to be an elusive quarry. They have been extinct since 1829, leaving the pages of ethnography, archaeology, linguistics and biology texts almost blank and crying for new data.

The new data which provided the impetus for this publication concerns the Beothuck birch bark canoe. The paper provides a first-hand, objective description, and a miniature or model of another canoe allegedly made by Shanadithit, the last known Beothuck. Previously published sources include two additional detailed descriptions with outline drawings, three additional miniature models, along with several dozen brief mentions in the literature, all falling within the last two hundred years of Beothuck existence.

A comparative study subsumes sixty-two birch bark canoes and kayaks from across North America. Two full-sized plywood reconstructions were used experimentally.

The purposes of the study are stated as:

1. to determine the design or designs of Beothuck canoes;
2. to provide an extensive repository of data; and
3. to reveal significant relationships with other native groups.

The conclusions reached on a cross-cultural basis are that Beothuck canoes fall within the North American canoe building tradition, but are more like western (Athabascan) than eastern canoes. They share some kayak characteristics. These similarities bespeak communication among the groups. On the basis of intra-group comparison, there are two designs of Beothuck canoes: one ancestral design with straight keel line and beam slightly abaft of midlength used on shallow rivers, and a variant having a rockered or curved keel line, with beam at midlength and requiring ballast, especially developed for use on salt water.