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## Review of A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670- 1870.

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*A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870.* By Richard I. Ruggles. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991. Foreword, introduction, maps, figures, appendices, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. xix + 300 pp. \$49.95 Can.

In recent years scholars have sought out the records of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) as excellent primary sources for Canadian historical research. The vast majority of this attention has been focused on the company's immense body of written documents, the product of its fur trading activities. In addition to its role in the fur trade, however, the HBC also made a critical contribution to the exploration and mapping of much of Canada prior to 1870 and has left an impressive cartographic legacy. Until now the full value of this aspect of the HBC's activities has been largely overlooked. With *A Country So Interesting* Richard Ruggles has become the first to examine fully the maps that resulted from this notable but hitherto neglected aspect of the HBC's operation.

In this pioneering work Ruggles has taken several tasks upon himself. His first is to describe the impressive contribution of the HBC and its employees to the exploration, cartography, and geographical knowledge of Canada. Second, he attempts the difficult task of reconstructing the knowledge base and "geographical conceptions" of the traders as the maps were being drafted, relating these to the business decisions being made by the company. Finally, and most important in Ruggles' mind, it is his objective to reveal the potential of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) map collection as a data source for other scholars.

The book is organized into five parts providing, among other things, the history of the HBC's mapping and exploration endeavors; several excellent reproductions of company cartography; three catalogues locating, describing, and referencing each map; and a much needed glossary. The historical essay, "Mapping a Country So Interesting," that forms the bulk of the written portion of the book is perhaps the

most significant contribution. This essay illustrates how important accurate mapping was to the distant governor and committee in London in their decision making and how its role changed over time. Also highly useful are the catalogues that enable the researcher to identify and locate appropriate maps. When used in conjunction with the essay, they demonstrate the potential uses and methods of analysis for these maps.

By considering every aspect of the HBC's mapping and exploration in its historical context and providing the information necessary to locate and use the maps, Ruggles has produced a much-needed reference work that can benefit all who study the fur trade and western Canadian history. Indeed, given the book's conclusions about the significance of the company's evolving geographical knowledge base to the formation of its policy, it would seem impossible fully to understand these subjects without considering the issues that this book brings to light.

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