

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Winter 1984

Review of *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852* By Theodore J. Karamanski

John Warkentin  
York University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Warkentin, John, "Review of *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852* By Theodore J. Karamanski" (1984). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1813.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1813>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852.* By Theodore J. Karamanski. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983. Illustrations, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xxii + 330 pp. \$22.95.

Historians of Canadian exploration have repeatedly told the tale of the great journeys

that made known the major lineaments of northern North America, but rarely can one find an integrated account of the exploration of a major region. Theodore Karamanski makes an important contribution to the exploration literature of North America not only by providing a comprehensive history of the exploration by Euroamericans of northwestern Canada, a region larger than many countries, but also by providing much new information on the course of individual exploratory journeys within a context where the significance of the travels can be understood. This is no mean accomplishment.

Karamanski set himself the task of unraveling the exploration of the complex mountain, plateau, and canyon country extending between the Mackenzie River basin on the east across the northern Rockies and Mackenzie Mountains into the northern British Columbia and Yukon plateaus up to the Coast Mountains of British Columbia and the Alaskan Panhandle. This terra incognita was explored from 1821–1852 by Hudson's Bay Company traders. They were spurred on by the need to extend the fur trade in search of greater profits, by the often enticing stories of their Indian informants, fragmentary information from other distant explorations and ventures that were often misinterpreted, and their own curiosity and zeal.

The chief primary source is the splendid Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, where the past journals and correspondence of the Hudson's Bay Company servants are available. Karamanski has researched them thoroughly and used them well. He always bears in mind that the strategies by which the British fur traders advanced were related to activities

of Americans and Russians on the Pacific Coast. It was Governor George Simpson who deployed his men from afar, not always wisely, as circumstances warranted. Then within this framework Karamanski gives a succinct account of each exploration, taking space to present brief vignettes of the chief explorers—John McLeod, Robert Cambell, and John Bell—and describing those aspects of life in the fur trade related to exploration, such as provisioning.

Karamanski knows the narrative is complex and persistently tries to place each journey in perspective. But even this is not enough; the over-all pattern remains difficult to follow because there are by my count at least nineteen significant journeys, though others might reckon differently. The easiest way to have led the reader through this maze of travels would have been maps showing new areas actually opened up by each major advance. This would have revealed the over-all pattern in a proper cumulative sequence. The eight maps that Karamanski does use simply show rivers, place names, and a few relief features. No routes are shown, let alone how the unknown turned into the known. At the least there should have been a chronology or table summarizing the expeditions, and serving as an easy reference. That is what I finally resorted to. These last comments, however, directed as much to the publisher and the history and geography professions as to this book, should not detract from a fine and useful scholarly achievement—and a good read.

JOHN WARKENTIN  
Department of Geography  
York University