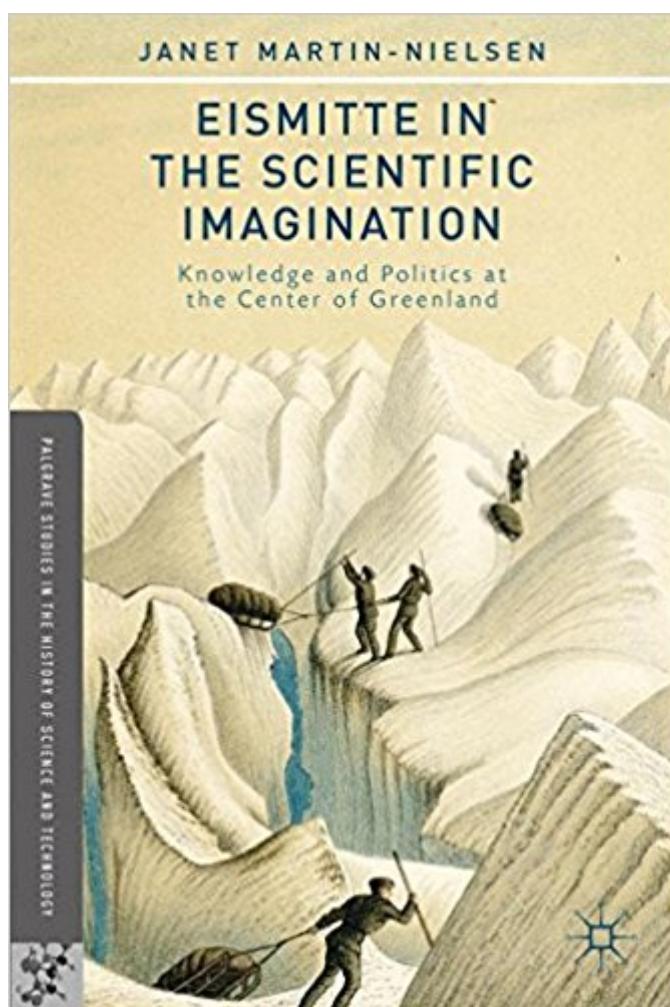


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Eismitte In The Scientific Imagination: Knowledge And Politics At The Center Of Greenland (Palgrave Studies In The History Of Science And Technology)





Synopsis

Since the 18th century, Greenland's geometric center, Eismitte, has been one of the most forbidding but scientifically rich locations in the Arctic. Tracing its history from European contact through the Cold War, this study shows how Eismitte was the setting for scientific knowledge production as well as diplomatic maneuvering.

Book Information

Series: Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology

Hardcover: 214 pages

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan; 2013 edition (December 18, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1137380799

ISBN-13: 978-1137380791

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.5 x 11.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #5,158,952 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in Books > History > Americas > Greenland #1514 in Books > History > Arctic & Antarctica #19478 in Books > Science & Math > History & Philosophy

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Janet Martin-Nielsen is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Aarhus University's Centre for Science Studies, Denmark. She has a PhD from the University of Toronto's Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Canada. Her work has appeared in *Annals of Science*, the *Journal of Historical Geography*, *History of the Human Sciences*, and the *Journal for the History of the Behavioral Sciences*.

This is a great scientific history of a single spot, in the middle of a huge ice sheet. It has brought together the people and politics of a place, Eismitte, I had never heard of. I am off to visit Greenland soon and this has helped me understand much about the whole country.

Eismette means "middle ice" in German, and this book is about the

quest to reach that middle point on the Greenland ice sheet and to learn the knowledge that might be gleaned about it. Janet Martin-Nielson has written a fine study of the four major efforts to reach that middle point. Although explorers had been enamored with this location for centuries, the first expedition to reach it was led by the German explorer, Alfred Wegener, who undertook an expedition there in 1930-1931. They came overland using dogs and sledges, established a makeshift camp, and wintered there while taking meteorological readings, ice samples, and other research. They ran out of supplies and Wegener died during the expedition but the harvest of data was very real. Wegener's was the last expedition of its type, all that came afterward used motorized vehicles and airplanes to support the effort. With the use of this technology, those efforts yielded massive amounts of scientific data, reduced the risks to members of the research teams, and allowed for the establishment of a near permanent station on the middle ice. The second expedition, under the leadership of Paul-Emile Victor, the French undertook the Expéditions Polaires Françaises between 1949 and 1953. Using surplus World War II tractors designed for harsh climates the expedition pushed its way to the Eismitte, established one of the more impressive stations in the Arctic, and systematically collected scientific data for years. Resupplied by airdrops Victor's expedition reaped a treasure of data and reestablished a post-war France which still had designs on maintaining its empire as force to be reckoned with at the Poles. The third expedition, Project Jello, was operated by the Americans at the Eismitte for several years beginning in 1955. As much as anything this was an offshoot of the Cold War situation, as the Poles became locations of competition and strategic surveillance between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Americans did not so much accommodate to the harsh environment as overcome it with their wealth and their technology. At its height of operations these stations involved several hundred people and data collection emphasized geodetic, magnetic, and other studies that would aid in ballistic missile accuracy. At sum, the American effort was a triumph of technology and logistics, lessons also proved out in Antarctica during this same era and improved upon by all scientific expeditions since that time. The fourth effort was the Expédition Glaciologique Internationale au Groenland between 1956 and 1960. This expanded on the American work, casting it into a larger international context. In very case, the scientific knowledge about this planet, and especially about Polar Regions, expended through this work. As Janet Martin-Nielson concludes that research "from the early days of the first overwinter of the ice sheet in 1930-1931, shed light on the shape, movement, and melt of Greenland's ice, on the circulation of contaminants through the atmosphere, and on the earth's climatic past" (p. 122).

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