

## ***So Cold a Sky: Upper Michigan Weather Stories***

**Karl Bohnak**

Cold Sky Publishing, Negaunee, MI, \$22.95 USD, softcover (338p)

ISBN: 0-9778189-0-X

People love to talk about the weather. From Maine to the Midwest, locals are convinced that their weather conditions are the weirdest. They'll tell you about the big blizzard, the great flood, or the hideous humidity, convinced that decades of harsh weather have shaped the characters of the local people.

Karl Bohnak has compiled just these kinds of stories into *So Cold A Sky: Upper Michigan Weather Stories*. As a child in Milwaukee, he longed for snow, often to find his hopes dashed by uncooperative weather systems. As an adult, he accepted a job in broadcasting in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) of Michigan, where he found all the snow he could hope for. Fascinated both by the U.P.'s unusually severe weather and by the local history, Bohnak began interviewing local residents for their recollections about weird weather occurrences; those tales were the genesis for *So Cold a Sky*.

The result is a book that is part oral history, part local color, and part meteorological record. Bohnak begins his tales of the U.P. with the trappers, soldiers, and missionaries of the 1700s. At the time, the world was still in the grip of the Little Ice Age, and winter conditions were even more severe in the U.P. than they are today. Bohnak's tales of the 1800s include the story of Frederic Baraga, the "snowshoe priest" who spent more than thirty years ministering to the Chippewa and mining populations of the U.P. The rest of the book is given over to weather events from 1864 to the present, including chapters on particularly snowy winters, unusually cold winters, floods, heat waves, and fire weather. These chapters draw heavily on oral history.

Throughout, Bohnak provides sidebars on tangential topics of interest, such as the process of maple sugaring or an interview with a school bus driver whose route cuts through the snowiest spot in Michigan. While the main text is deals with weather as it directly affects the stories told by residents, Bohnak reserves his more technical explanations for sidebars and weather maps. Bohnak's writing is clearly and accessible, although the casual reader may still skip some of the more technical writing about weather systems.

Bohnak's enthusiasm for both weather and his adopted home injects energy into the book. The stories he has uncovered are by turns charming and terrifying, and certainly give credence to the legendary hardiness of those living on the U.P. In fact, by the end of the book, this Midwesterner began to wonder why anyone would live in a place so given to blizzards, floods, and fires. But as Bohnak himself says in the introduction: "That, I believe, is the point: we cannot separate weather and environment from the milieu of our lives."

*BookWire Review*  
*September 12, 2006*