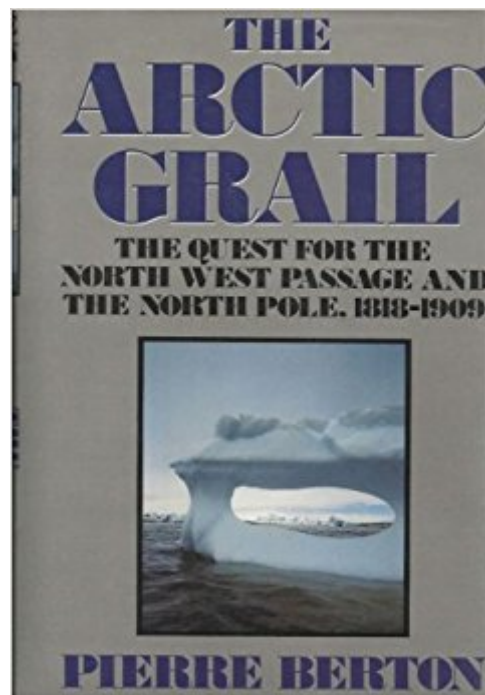




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# The Arctic Grail: The Quest For The Northwest Passage And The North Pole, 1818-1909



## Synopsis

Covering the entire period of exploration from the expedition of William Edward Perry in 1818 to that of Robert Peary in a single volume, Pierre Berton has written a revisionist history of the search for the Northwest passage and the North Pole. 26 illustrations.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 672 pages

Publisher: Viking Adult; Open market ed edition (November 1, 1988)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0670824917

ISBN-13: 978-0670824915

Product Dimensions: 20 x 20 x 20 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.5 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 46 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #389,356 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #51 in [Books > Travel > Polar Regions > Arctic](#) #88 in [Books > History > Arctic & Antarctica](#) #431 in [Books > History > World > Expeditions & Discoveries](#)

## Customer Reviews

The literature of Arctic exploration teems with exciting stories of hardship, valor, conflict and mystery. There are three distinct periods of exploration: the quest for the Northwest Passage by the British Navy, the 15-year search for the lost Franklin Expedition and the attempts to reach the North Pole. Berton ( *The Mysterious North* ) combines these voyages into a single narrative that focuses on the explorers. We see the mindset of the British, unwilling to take advice from whalers and, for 90 years, refusing to avail themselves of the dogsleds and Eskimo clothing best suited to Arctic conditions. We follow the progression from the desire for discovery and scientific knowledge to obsession with national pride and personal ambition. Berton examines in detail the Cook-Peary controversy and concludes that both men were charlatans and neither reached the North Pole; modern scholarship supports this theory. Readers who think the ultimate adventure took place at the South Pole should rediscover the Arctic explorations. Illustrations. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Culled from extensive research of handwritten diaries and private journals, *Arctic Grail* is the definitive book on the age of arctic exploration and adventure. Journey across the ice with a Who's

Who of polar explorers, men of every temperament, including the pious and ambitious Edward Perry, the first explorer to probe deep into the Arctic labyrinth; Adolphus Greely, a Civil War veteran who had to watch his men starve to death on Ellesmere Island; Robert McClure, who claimed that he was the first to find the fabled Northwest Passage; and the flawed hero John Franklin, a meek naval officer whose expeditions were responsible for the deaths of more men than those of any other Arctic explorer. Travel with the adventurer Roald Amundsen, the cool Norwegian who completed a voyage in a tiny sloop that the British Navy failed to accomplish with its great three-masted ships; Frederick Cook, who lied about reaching the North Pole; and finally, the ruthless and paranoid Robert Peary, who claimed to have reached the North Pole in 1909. As much about the explorers who braved impossible odds as it is about each expedition, *Arctic Grail* is an epic account of the Golden Age of Exploration at the top of the world. (6 X 9, 672 pages, b&w photos, maps, illustrations) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This has to be the most comprehensive work on the 19th century explorations aimed at trying to reach the north pole or finding the Northwest Passage. The author details all of the major expeditions of the era, and with special emphasis on the tragic Franklin Expedition and the highly controversial claims made by Cook and Peary as to who made it to the North Pole first (I don't believe either one of them did, given the author's thorough analysis of a dispute that still rages on to the present day). These explorers were driven by a myriad of different incentives for putting their lives and the lives of their expedition members at risk in the Arctic environment, and which is really nothing more than a frozen desert. Nationalism, science, personal glory, cartography, fame and fortune, personal ambition, love of risk-taking, rescue attempts of other expeditions, and patriotism all played parts in motivating this handful of brave souls to grapple with extreme cold, starvation, frostbite, scurvy, thirst, and madness in journeys that sometimes took up to three years to complete due to the need to ride the winter out in an ice jammed sea vessel or a literal hole in the ground until the summer came and it would allow them to escape the ice pack (but not always). A thoroughly researched and highly readable history treatise, but it is a long one to digest at 650+ pages. Best read when accompanied by a hot toddy.

Before I picked up this book, I had no idea what a detailed and interesting history lay behind the explorations of the Arctic region. This is a truly fascinating book about man's determined quest to explore one of the last unexplored regions of the world. This is a story of the search for the Northwest Passage, that elusive waterway that would let ships sail over the north of what is now

Canada, instead of having to sail around the tip of South America. Even after the British had determined that the icy arctic conditions and the maze of islands made the Northwest Passage worthless as a commercial shipping route, they were still determined to find it anyway. Ship after ship headed to the Arctic to find the passage, sometimes spending two or three winters trapped in the ice, with only a few warm summer months each year in which to explore before the winter ice returned. Many men died, mostly because of the remarkable inability of the British Navy to learn from its mistakes, or more importantly, to learn from the natives, who had lived in the Arctic for thousands of years. The British sailors wore wool instead of fur and sealskin, refused to hunt (they didn't even know how), suffered from scurvy from their impractical diets, and hauled extremely heavy sledges over the ice with man power instead of dogs. Not only did the British fail to learn from the natives, but the natives also got less than their fair share of credit at the time for helping avert death and starvation for hundreds of expeditions over the years. This is also a story of the quest to reach the North Pole. Early explorers held the belief that the top of the world was an open polar sea, and tried to sail all the way to the pole. Once that theory was abandoned, explorers tried other ways of getting there. One allowed his specially-designed boat to become trapped in the polar ice and then played a waiting game as the boat drifted with the ice. Another tried to float to the pole in a balloon. Many tried and failed to walk to the pole over the hundreds of miles of ice. And even when two explorers claimed to have separately reached the pole in this fashion, their claims were dubious. While this book is long and a bit heavy at times, it is worth it to stick with it. Pierre Berton has done his research, and he is an excellent writer. I look forward to reading more of his books.

If you like to read about the incredible world of Arctic exploration, this is a book you must read! Pierre Berton covers almost 100 years of man's effort to discover the Northwest Passage and the North Pole. Although it is a long read (over 600 pages) the author's wonderful storytelling style keeps you eagerly turning page after page. Each account seems to have been well researched and the facts are there for the reader to absorb. It is amazing to read how poorly the British were prepared for Arctic travel, how they refused to learn from the native people, yet how much they achieved in spite of their attitude. This book has a good message for us all. We can learn from others! Those explorers who did so, were a lot more successful in the long run. The book ends with Peary and Cook's claim to the North Pole. It is quite an account of two men who were more consumed with their image rather than the truth. Who was the greatest of the bunch? You'll have fun picking your winner. I vote for Roald Amundsen! This is a great book!

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