



Arctic Disaster!

History Is Filled With People Who Tried—and Failed—to Explore the Arctic

Imagine you're driving a dogsled across dangerous Arctic ice. Cold wind bites at your face. Your fingers are frozen. It's snowing so hard you can barely see the black ears of your dog. The temperature is fifty below zero. You're lost. What do you do?

Modern Arctic and Antarctic explorers can get help in emergencies. They can radio for emergency rescue. Helicopters can swoop in and drop food and supplies. Many early Western explorers went to the Arctic to map it or look for passageways to improve trade. But they were on their own when they became lost or stranded.

The history of polar exploration is full of disasters. One of the first occurred in 1553, when the Englishman Sir Hugh Willoughby and his crew died after their boat was blocked by ice. They didn't have the proper clothing or food to survive the winter.

Today's explorers can choose from high-tech, waterproof fabrics that protect the skin from damaging cold. Special boots protect toes from frostbite. But early Western explorers usually wore leather boots. Sometimes the men's feet got so numb their socks would burn before they felt the heat of a fire!

Food and vitamins were another problem. The freeze-dried foods, nutrition bars, and vitamins of today weren't available. Explorers often suffered from scurvy, a painful disease caused by the lack of vitamin C.

The most famous Arctic disaster was the Franklin expedition. In 1845, Sir John Franklin set out from England with two of the best ships available. When Franklin vanished, at least 40 search parties were sent out. Eventually the remains of the party were found. Some of the men had died from the cold or starvation. Scientists now believe some of the men were poisoned from eating tins of food that weren't prepared properly.

The thick pack ice of the Arctic also caused serious problems for early expeditions. Many explorers had to continue by foot when their boats were crushed by ice. Today, boats in the Arctic are equipped with thick steel hulls to cut through ice. Modern technology also helps ships locate dangerous icebergs. And, of course, since the area has now been mapped, there's far less danger of getting lost.

Robert E. Peary and Matthew Henson, who discovered the North Pole in 1909, were two of the most successful Arctic explorers. Their secret? Unlike most other Western explorers, they spent years living with and learning from the native people, the *Inuit* (IN-yoo-it). Peary and Henson traveled on sleds like the Inuit, wore the same fur boots and parkas, slept in igloos, and learned to hunt and eat the same foods. Their respect for the Inuit way of life helped save their lives.

By Deborah Hopkinson
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Dear Parents

Tales of exploration are thrilling to readers young and old—I hope you and your child enjoy reading about the challenges of exploring the Arctic. Your child may encounter several new and difficult words as he or she reads aloud, so you may need to help out with the unfamiliar names and terms.

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TIP OF THE WEEK

An important reading skill is the ability to compare and contrast information. This article makes many comparisons between exploration in the past and exploration today. Help your child interpret the article and realize that the author gives information about past and present methods of exploration.

The Questions

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Use the information from the text to tell how exploration was different in years past from exploration today. Write sentences on each line to make the comparisons.

Communication Then: _____

Communication Now: _____

Transportation Then: _____

Transportation Now: _____

Clothing Then: _____

Clothing Now: _____

We have completed this assignment together.

Child's Signature

Parent's Signature