

## The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica

*Stephen J. Pyne*

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**Stephen J. Pyne : The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Wonderful Account of Antarctic Exploration and ExploitationBy Roger D. LauniusThis ambitious book by Stephen E. Pyne approaches the massive ice-sheet of Antarctica from all possible angles and has been appropriately hailed as a pathbreaking study. Upon its publication in 1986, "The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica" immediately gained credence as a profound exploration of the sublime nothingness of the continent. Pyne touches on the elements of Antarctica emphasized it as a realm of history, a place of dominant landscapes, an inspiration for literature and art, and a scientific treasure trove. He argues that for all of its geology and geography, geomagnetism and weather, biology and boredom, Antarctica remains at sum a diminished location in which water has been transformed into mineral. There are no cultural studies beyond those on the explorers themselves.As many have commented, the ice of Pyne's characterization is a study in nihilism. According to one reviewer, "The appeal of this rich and awestruck book lies in its author's strenuous attempts to come to terms with the sheer negativity and materialism of Antarctica" (Kirkus Review, available on-line at <http://www..co.uk/Ice-Antarctica-Stephen-J-Pyne/dp/1842126741>, accessed February 15, 2009). As another reviewer remarked, "Pyne uses two metaphors throughout the book. Antarctica is an information sink, requiring the input of huge amounts of information before it will give anything in return; it is a reductionist, abstract environment, both physically and intellectually alienating. Second, Antarctica is a distorted mirror, reflecting back what each individual and culture brings to it." Pyne offers "a mystical mood in this book that hints that human endeavors in Antarctica will never really touch "The Ice"

(Richard Gillespie, review in "Isis" 78 (September 1987): 456-57). Environmental historian Donald Wooster commented about Pyne's Antarctica, "To penetrate it scientifically required airplanes, remote sensors, and advanced crystallography. To apprehend it aesthetically took the modernist evolution in the arts, which has emphasized abstraction, subjectivity, and minimalism." All of these reviewers agree, however, that this is a powerful, important book requiring consideration in any study of Antarctica. 11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. As dense as the ice shield... By Cybamuse Like the previous reviewer, I too quailed at the start of this book. Immediately I was plunged to half page paragraphs and dense terms, swimming between excessive description and dense science. But, I'm a geologist. I've been to Antarctica. I knew I could do it... I suspect that this book will remain unsurpassed for being an all encompassing tome on Antarctica for decades, possibly even centuries ... maybe even until we emerge from this interglacial period and the Western Ice sheet melts, thus giving up the secrets to climate control and Antarctica. I can't imagine much has been left out at all - Pyne is unbelievably, incredibly thorough. Every facet of the ice, and every facet he could think to associate with ice has been methodically slotted into this book. And if he ran out of talking about anything to do with the ice, he'd talk about Antarctica. But this book is very, very, very, VERY heavy going. I set myself a goal of 25 pages/night - but it still took 2 months to read... Sometimes, I just had to take a break. And as I ploughed ever onwards, I constantly wondered, 'how would someone be able to read this if they hadn't actually been to Antarctica???' And other times, I even qualified that with a "would anyone really understand this if they weren't a geologist or in a similar field?" I mean, Pyne can be descriptive, but at other times, adjectives seem to be insufficient, so he swoops into heavy scientific jargon. I also missed having some diagrams. A few 'colour' photos even... (Ok, colour is a bit misleading - its all white, blue and grey down there...). Antarctica is so stark and sparse, that sometimes, it is just better to look at a photograph of the deep glacier blue of ice (well, actually, WHY ice is blue was something Pyne overlooked in this book, now I think of it! Rainbows and bubbles people...), or a vast plain of continental ice, or the weird solar and weather patterns that can pervade above the ice... If you can't make it down to Antarctica, but want to become an authority on it, then you can go no further than this book. If wading through the heaviest and densest book written in a long time is something you will need to build up to, the maybe start with something like, Antarctica: The Blue Continent, and see if you want to progress from there - at least then you will have some pictures in mind of what to expect when Pyne melts into deep prose... 11 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Heorism - required By George Reid The planning to buy this book was detailed and meticulous. Consultations had to be held with interested parties (my sons) and the wait for it to arrive was lengthy - at least ten days. It was with a sense of mounting excitement that we eagerly surveyed the flat white cover of the package, I could sense our goal. I knew it wasn't going to be easy traversing 428 pages of a book titled "The Ice" but I had completed intensive practical training for this expedition. I was a veteran of Huntsford's "Schackleton", Huxley's "Scott of the Antarctic", Fuchs Hillary's "The Crossing of Antarctica", the list was long but rewarding. Here was my biggest challenge to date. The warnings were stark right from the start, the prologue uses half a page to list 72 ways to name ice. I stumbled and nearly gave up. Willpower, only willpower kept me going. I was becoming word blind. Reaching my first goal, the middle, I could only contemplate with horror the trials still awaiting me. "Great God, this is an awful book", I thought as I turned the next page. I wondered if I had the stamina to make it, others before me must have faltered. My son looked at me, "I'm just going out, I may be some time". I could only admire his courage, at having come so far. I ploughed on, yet another reference to Admiral Byrd appeared on the horizon. Until now I had been unaware of his supreme importance as an American and Antarctic explorer. Similarly I had been foolishly unaware of the fact that "...there is nothing in the Heroic age to compare with Ellsworth's all-or-nothing transcontinental flight, even Schackleton turned back..." The fact that Ellsworth achieved precisely nothing is of no importance, he was an American. Things were looking bleak, stamina was draining fast. A crevasse nearly finished me as I learned that TMW Turner (English) had painted sunsets. I began to lose hope, I was hallucinating, could he really mean JMW Turner who painted ships too, and trains? It was my darkest hour, all hope was gone. I closed the book. This is a book for the fanatical written by someone who equates flowery, overblown prose with literature, it is so bad it is almost a parody. If you want to read about the modern Antarctic, read Sara Wheeler's polar classic "Terra Incognita". The best place for Pyne's tome is on an iceberg, drifting slowly out of sight towards the equator.

From *The Ice*: "It appears out of the fog and low clouds, like a white comet in the twilight. To enter Greater Antarctica is to be drawn into a maelstrom of ice. Ice is the beginning of Antarctica and ice is its end. As one moves from perimeter to interior, the proportion of ice relentlessly increases. Ice creates more ice, and ice defines ice. Everything else is suppressed. This is a world derived from a single substance, water, in a single crystalline state, snow, transformed into a lithosphere composed of a single mineral, ice."

From *Library Journal* Half of this book is a detailed, scientific, sometimes rhapsodic dissertation on Antarctica's most prominent feature: ice in its various forms. Interspersed are chapters on the exploration, geopolitics, earth sciences, literature, and art of the region: intellectual histories assuming background knowledge. The alienness of Antarctica is stressed. Pyne, a professional historian, author of books such as *Fire in America* (1982), has written a work of interest

to scholars and specialists, though likely to overwhelm the general reader. J.F. Husband, Framingham State Coll. Lib., Mass. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. "The Ice is a compilation of more about ice than you knew you wanted to know, yet sheer compelling significance holds attention page by page . . . Mr. Pyne dizzies the mind yet conveys a view of Antarctica that interweaves physical science with humanistic inquiry and perception. His audacity as well as his presentation warrant admiration, for the implications of The Ice are vast." - The New York Times Book ". . . an impressive work, one enhanced by a beautiful cover photograph and a selection of quotes by writers and explorers, including Tennyson, Poe, Byrd, and Cook." - Canadian Book Annual "Stephen Pyne long ago realized that life is but a special case of the more general chemistry of carbon and oxygen that are constantly setting earth aflame. The frozen waste of Antarctica is thus a glimpse at the future that awaits us at the end of all time, when life and fire finally cease." William Cronon