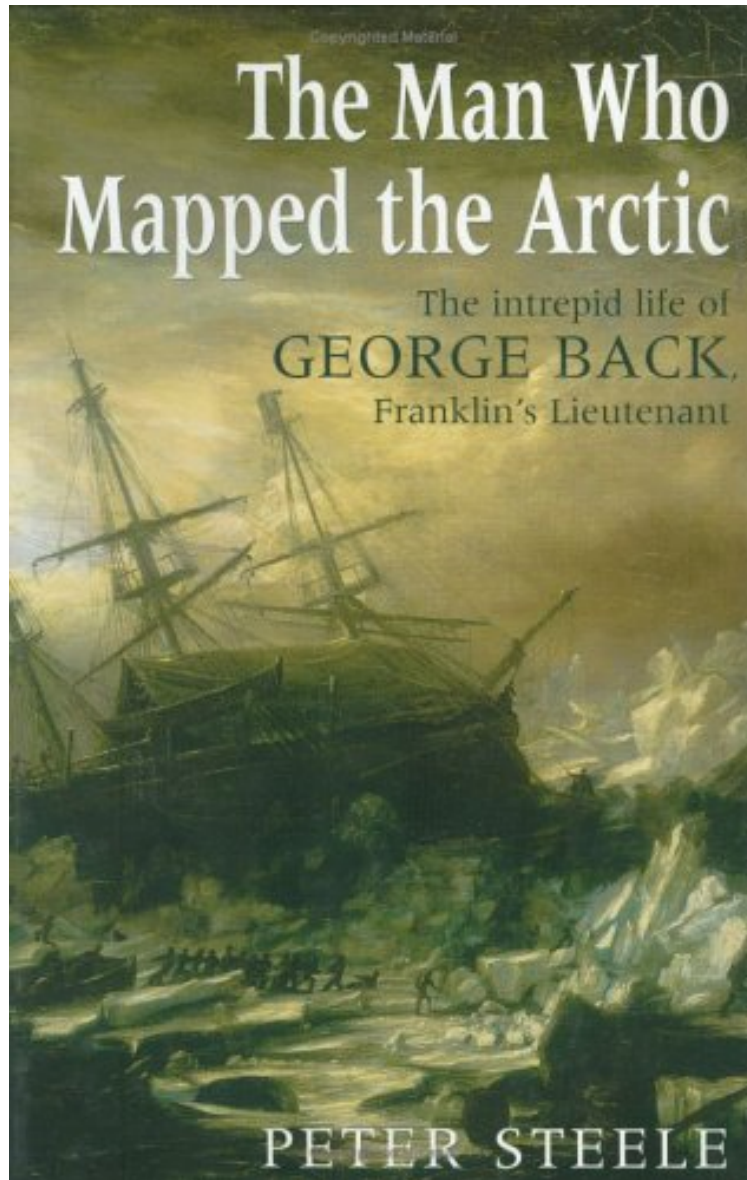


The Man Who Mapped the Arctic: The Intrepid Life of George Back, Franklin's Lieutenant

Peter Steele

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Peter Steele : The Man Who Mapped the Arctic: The Intrepid Life of George Back, Franklin's Lieutenant
before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Man Who Mapped the Arctic: The Intrepid Life of George Back, Franklin's Lieutenant:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Worthwhile Addition to any Library of Arctic ExplorationBy

Prisoner of Planet Moron Other reviewers have summarized well the content of this book. I concur that it meets a very high standard for this genre, providing an essential contribution to readers interested in Arctic exploration. The maps are excellent. The writing is clear and to the point. Steele provides just enough context to place George Back and his contemporaries firmly in their times and stations. The approach taken by Royal Navy men like Franklin and Back stands in bold contrast to men like Samuel Hearne and John Rae, men who observed and adopted native ways and thrived as a result. Two minor nitpicks, which did not lower my rating: (1) In my edition (Raincoast Books, 2003), Chapter 21 is subtitled "1837-87." A typo, since Back died in 1878. (2) In the same chapter, referring to what appears to be 1848, it is stated that "... Franklin was already two years dead." As book correctly notes elsewhere, Franklin died in 1847. More significant concerns, which deleted a star from my rating, also appear in Chapter 21. Steele states that "Of Franklin's fate little hard fact emerged until F. Leopold McClintock's party reported in 1857." This does a disservice to John Rae, even though Rae is mentioned (inaccurately) a few pages further along. It is also a curious statement, since in 1857 McClintock was firmly locked in ice and was in no position to report anything to anyone. He did not in fact report his findings to England until 1859. In 1854 John Rae purchased several Franklin expedition artifacts from natives, including a silver plate engraved with Franklin's name. The natives also provided details about encounters with Franklin's crew, both alive and dead. The artifacts and the credible accounts constituted hard fact, as well-evidenced by subsequent events. Rae was able to deduce that at least some of the crew perished around Chantrey Inlet. Note that Rae did not, as Steele claims, visit Chantrey Inlet himself. Rae was forced to choose between (a) traveling to Chantrey Inlet to personally verify native reports or (b) returning to England with his news in order to recall or prevent futile searches for Franklin in other areas. Rae chose England. Although Rae's report of suspected cannibalism triggered disbelief and revulsion, by 1856 the Admiralty assumed that Franklin and his crew were dead. This was well before any report from McClintock. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An exciting biography of an explorer too little known! By Paul Weiss It takes considerable flair and panache to write history in a way that makes it read like a novel and not very many authors have that ability. Canada's Pierre Berton has it! Dava Sobel and Simon Winchester are certainly up to the task! In "The Man Who Mapped the Arctic", Peter Steele demonstrated his rightful claim to membership on that short list. Steele, a physician who has spent most of his life in the North and an arctic adventurer and mountaineer in his own right, has eloquently told us the astonishing tale of George Back, Franklin's undeservedly obscure and unsung Lieutenant and his astonishing exploits in exploration that rival Samuel Hearne's or Lewis and Clark's in their extraordinary scope and difficulty. Steele's prose has painted a vivid picture of Back's working life as a Navy Lieutenant and explorer and the compelling setting in which the story takes place - endless waterfalls and rapids; excruciating clouds of mosquitoes or black flies; extreme temperature swings; backbreaking 90 to 100 pound loads hauled over strenuous ankle-breaking portages; the open water of Lake Winnipeg, Lake Superior and Great Bear and Great Slave Lake that might better be described as inland oceans when observed from the perspective of a canoe; changeable unpredictable weather; the dumb-founding athleticism of ten to twelve men paddling in perfect synchrony at 50 strokes per minute for hours on end singing, if you please, to provide a rhythm and take their minds off the numbing pain in their backs and shoulders; lost rations, near starvation and cannibalism; the stinging cold and near endless dark of sub-arctic winter camps; the political struggles, bickering, corporate fighting and espionage that occurred as a matter of course in the conflict between the Hudson Bay Company and the Northwest Company; and much, much more. Of Back's cultural indoctrination by fire upon his arrival in Canada, for example, Steele wrote: "He knew nothing of the rival fur companies' years of bitter forest skirmishes, sniping from riverbanks at each others' canoes, occasionally taking prisoners, and resorting in extremis to arson and theft, kidnapping and murder - tantamount to open warfare." "Neither did he understand the cultural differences that might arise between himself and a disparate group of French Canadian voyageur canoe men, Indian hunters and Eskimo guides, who he expected would guide them through the most barren and inhospitable land anyone could imagine, among people utterly ignorant of intrusive Westerners and their strange ways." In other words, Steele has provided us with an exciting biography of a talented naval officer, explorer, mapmaker, outdoorsman and survivor who has languished for too long under the shadow of Franklin, his considerably less talented superior. The Yukon News praises "The Man Who Mapped the Arctic" by suggesting that it is destined to become a classic story of Canadian Arctic exploration. I concur. Paul Weiss 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Hood rivers then this is a great read. Amazing stories of George Back By Joseph Z. Goldes If you are going to the Back, Copper-mine, Hood rivers then this is a great read. Amazing stories of George Back!

In the mid-1800s, George Back went on three Arctic expeditions with Sir John Franklin across the barren lands of the Canadian north. But unlike Franklin, Back lived to tell his tales in journals, drawings, watercolors, and maps. Noted writer Peter Steele drew on these sources, along with contemporary accounts, to craft this gripping tale of resilience in the face of incredible odds. The book thrillingly recounts the near-impossible circumstances of these expeditions the fights with the Hudson Bay Company, rations that failed to get through, even cannibalism. Back survived these horrors to lead an exploration of the Great Fish River, now named Back River in his honor. His return upstream, hauling his handmade boat up 83 sets of rapids, is one of the greatest-ever feats of heroism and endurance. A gifted artist and

mapmaker, Back was a brave explorer forgotten by history. Steele does him belated justice with this fascinating account.

From BooklistSteele's literate, coherent biography introduces one of the undeservedly obscure figures in arctic exploration. George Back joined the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars; promptly captured, he spent five years as a POW. He became a lieutenant and went back to sea after the war, but the heart of his career lay in the search for the Northwest Passage. He was second-in-command to John Franklin, who had more enthusiasm than ability, on two overland expeditions from Canada, one of which ended in disaster. He commanded a third overland journey and also a peril-ridden voyage by sea. Throughout, he proved courageous, durable, and civilized in his dealings with voyageurs, soldiers, Indians, and Eskimos. He survived the inadequacy of nineteenth-century equipment and knowledge of the Arctic to retire to England, where he became a mentor to a later generation of arctic explorers and thereafter virtually disappeared from the pages of history--until now. Roland GreenCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved