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Frozen In Time: The Fate Of The Franklin Expedition



Synopsis

Re-released to coincide with the discovery of one of the lost Franklin Expedition ships. Frozen in Time tells the dramatic story of how Sir John Franklin's elite naval forces came within sight of the Northwest Passage, only to succumb to unimaginable horrors. A gripping tale of cannibalism, bureaucratic hubris, great courage and ground-breaking science, it shows how the excavation of three sailors from the 1845-48 Franklin expedition, buried for 138 years on the Arctic headland of Beechey Island, has shed new light on what has been one of the world's great maritime mysteries.

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Customer Reviews

While not perhaps a "must-have" for aficionados of the field of polar literature, this is nevertheless a very good book and is well suited as a sort of primer to those who have only a casual interest in the subject. The book provides a brief outline of the disappearance of the Franklin Expedition on its quest for the Northwest Passage in the early 1800s and the aftermath of the search conducted by various international parties, government and otherwise. It then relates the events of three research expeditions undertaken by the author, a forensic anthropologist who was interested in finding and reviewing various skeletal remains originally discovered decades after the loss of the Franklin party. Eventually, he concentrates his efforts on exhuming the frozen bodies of three crewmen who had died in the Franklin Expedition's first icebound season, before they had well and truly plunged irrevocably into tragedy. These men had been buried in well-prepared graves on a small island north of Canada's Hudson Bay. Even to this day, the bodies remain fantastically preserved, and the

author was able to uncover intriguing evidence that suggests that the expedition did not succumb in a heroic struggle against the large and grand forces of nature, but rather fell to altogether more pedestrian and minute agents. The exhumation and autopsy processes are well described, and the theory that later develops is explained simply enough for the layman to follow. Perhaps the biggest strength of this book is the beautifully composed color photos that show the gravesites and the actual bodies. These pictures are truly stirring and invocative. The maps are also nicely done. However, the book would have benefited from a timeline and from an additional map showing the location of various Franklin party remains and artifacts. It sometimes becomes difficult to recall who was found where and when, since as it turns out, the expedition members covered a lot of ground and some of them split up. With that exception, though, this is an interesting book and a quick but thought-provoking read.

This book provides an in-depth look into what really happened to the Franklin expedition when it left England in 1845 with 2 ships: the Erebus and the Terror. Led by Sir John Franklin, 129 men set sail in search for the Northwest Passage in the labyrinth of the Canada's arctic archipelago, the expedition boasted the most technologically advanced ship at that time with thousands of provisions that was to last for three years. After four years with no word from the expedition, the Royal Navy and the public decided to launch several search and rescue expeditions to locate the lost expedition. For several years, the rescue expeditions yielded only bits and pieces of the expedition's final days. One of the most significant finds in these rescue expeditions were 3 well-preserved corpses (due to the cold temperatures) of the Franklin expedition buried in one of the small rock islands dotting arctic Canada. Thus begins the book's forensic investigation as to what happened to the Franklin expedition. Beattie and his team exhumes the 3 corpses and conducts extensive autopsies of the remains. The book will make the reader feel as if he/she is part of the team. It never leaves the reader out of touch but rather it brings the reader into the experiences which the researchers felt as they moved closer to the truth. Great reading! One of the best true adventure books I have ever read. Pick it up!

The first time I heard about the Franklin expedition on Dr. Bob Brier's television documentary on mummies, I knew I had to learn more. Of course, the main cause of my fascination was the perfectly preserved bodies of the three sailors buried in 1846 on Beechy Island in the Canadian Arctic. The expedition set off in 1845 thoroughly equipped to find the elusive Northwest Passage. None of the 129 crewmen as well as Captain John Franklin survived. Years later expeditions were sent out to

find out what happened to Franklin and his men. One search team in the 1850s led by M`Clintock, who was funded by Franklin's widow, discovered the only written record of the Franklin Expedition which gave a clue as to their progress and fate and a small boat with an odd array of articles and skeletons on King William Island. Headstones of three crewmen who died early in the expedition were also found on Beechy Island. The only conclusion that was made was that the men died of scurvy and starvation. In 1981, a team led by physical anthropologist Owen Beattie continued the investigation into the lost Franklin Expedition. The reason this event was such a famous mystery was because Franklin's crew was so well prepared. Their two ships (HMS Terror and the HMS Erebus) were lavishly outfitted with survival equipment and supplies. Among their stock was a huge supply of canned foods (canning of foods being a recent practice at the time). Franklin once bragged that his provisions could stretch for 7 years (p. 18). In fact, empty tins littered the areas Franklin's crew camped. These artifacts proved clues to Beattie as to the fate of the Franklin expedition. Tests done on the lead level in bones found near Booth Point gave evidence that Franklin's men were poisoning themselves, weakening their bodies physically and impairing their decision-making. Beattie's team would exhume the bodies of the early Franklin deaths on Beechy Island to support this theory. In addition to the exhumation and autopsies of the perfectly preserved bodies which is, of course, fascinating by itself, Beattie gives grisly details as to the evidence of cannibalism among the crew (p. 61), information on the sloppy soldering of the tin food cans (p. 113), and the rushed work of the Stephan Goldner company to fill the order for the canned foods (p. 159). A recreation of 20-year-old Chief Stoker John Torrington is described which even uses evidence found in his grave to show it was snowing lightly the day of his burial (pp. 123-7). It is unbelievable what scientists can find! One item I had not read before was that the odd choice of scriptures engraved on the headstones caused the team to first suspect foul play as the cause of the deaths (p. 93). The graves are a time capsule, and the Beattie team did an excellent job of learning from them yet also honoring them. The book includes amazing color photos of the bodies. I have the 1987 out-of-print 180-page edition. This new edition appears to have additional information on other polar explorations giving all the more reason to check this book out. My copy ends with a comparison with the Challenger tragedy which is understandable as the 1986 disaster was still very fresh when this book was written. The big flaw with this comparison is that the powers-that-be in charge of launching Challenger knew of the dangers beforehand (even the specific warning about the fragility of the O-rings in frigid temperatures) and chose to ignore them. The Franklin Expedition really believed they were properly equipped with no idea of the fatal cargo they carried. There is a definite innocence about this tragedy on the part of all involved. They truly believed they would

succeed. I also recommend the book *Buried in Ice* by the same authors. It is a juvenile book but has additional information not found in *Frozen in Time*, including photos of some of the articles used by the Franklin Expedition including a medicine chest and a complete food tin.

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