

Controversy rages over who found the North Pole

The National Geographic Society didn't say so explicitly, but it would be happy if Pierre Berton changes the last dozen pages of his latest bestseller, *The Arctic Grail*.

The findings announced by the highly-regarded research organization at a recent Washington news conference bluntly contradict the conclusion reached by Berton in his non-fiction book: that Robert E. Peary lied about reaching the North Pole.

The society says that "the most exhaustive examination ever undertaken of the 1909 Peary polar expedition" has proven that the American explorer was within five miles of the pole, which, in practical terms, makes him the first man to ever stand at the top of the world.

"We conclude that Peary did nail the Stars and Stripes to the pole," said Thomas Davies, a retired U.S. admiral and leader of the eight-member team that examined Peary's claims.

Berton isn't buying it. "The book stands; it's out and printed," he said.

In his book, the Canadian popular historian calls Peary, at best, "high-handed and evasive; at worst, he was a charlatan."

Peary was accompanied on his trek by his assistant, Matthew Henson, and four Smith Sound Eskimos, none of whom knew how to take navigational readings to verify whether Peary was accurately recording his findings. Berton said in a telephone interview from Toronto.

Since Peary returned from his last arctic expedition and claimed to have reached the North Pole on April 6, 1909, the issue has never been settled. In the mid-1970s, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* reflected the doubts by changing its unequivocal entry on Peary to record that he is "usually credited" with finding the pole.

DOUBTS LINGERED

The National Geographic Society, which partly sponsored the original expedition, endorsed Peary's claim in 1909 and Congress backed the explorer after lengthy hearings in 1911. But doubts lingered, partly because another explorer, Frederick Cook, claimed he had beaten Peary and because Peary's notebooks were not considered conclusive.

The issue lingered and finally came to boil five years ago when a television movie portrayed a villainous Peary cheating the innocent Cook out of the recognition as the first man to reach the pole. Peary's grandson, Edwin Peary Stafford, was incensed that the producers chose soft-spoken, handsome Richard Chamberlain to play Cook while hard-boiled character actor Rod Steiger played Peary.

Stafford responded by providing Peary's papers to researchers in a bid to clear his grandfather's name. The National Geographic Society finally got into the act when Baltimore astronomer Dennis Rawlins called Peary a fraud in

Kevin Bell

Washington Bureau
Thomson News Service



a front-page story in the *Washington Post* last year.

At the society's elaborate press conference here - complete with a short film and Peary's old sextant and sled - Davies said he could find no evidence to disbelieve Peary, while new research techniques turned up evidence to back Peary's claim.

Davies and his crew relied principally on Peary's depth soundings and photographs allegedly taken at the pole. The depth soundings show that Peary's expedition twice crossed a curved, underwater ridge on his dash from Ellesmere Island to the pole. Modern underwater mapping techniques have found that the northern curl of the ridge is near the pole.

WITHIN FIVE MILES

But the most compelling evidence comes from the photos, Davies said. Through sophisticated mathematic techniques developed in the Second World War, shadows in different photographs can be used to pinpoint the location anywhere in the world. And Peary's photos show he

was within five miles of the North Pole.

Stafford expressed relief that his grandfather has finally been vindicated 80 years after his heroic expedition. Davies' report says it "will help to set the record straight and perhaps put an end to the long process of vilification of a courageous American explorer."

But Berton said the issue is far from settled. While he credits Peary with coming within 150 miles of the pole, he says there are too many holes in the explorer's story.

"The fact of the matter is that it is in the National Geographic Society's interest to preserve its conclusion."

Astronomer Rawlins, who provided much of the raw data for Berton's findings, closely monitored the National Geographic presentation and concluded: "There are more fiddle factors in this report than the New York Philharmonic."

The skeptics cite a loose page inserted in Peary's arctic diary with the words, "The Pole at last!!!" It appears it was torn loose from another book and slipped into the diary to bolster Peary's claim.

The doubters also cite the 270-mile, eight-day trip from

Ellesmere Island to the pole and back. Some of the daily treks were made at twice the speed Peary achieved on other arctic expeditions.

"I find it difficult to believe he moved that fast," Berton said.

The National Geographic Society will publish its findings on the Peary expedition in the January issue of its magazine. A film documentary outlining the

evidence that Peary reached the pole is scheduled to be broadcast on a U.S. cable channel.

"That's certainly their side of the story," said Berton, who declined to talk about the National Geographic's individual findings until he had seen the complete report.

"I don't think it'll stop the controversy."

The ideal temperature?
20°C (68°F)

Every degree more could increase your fuel bill about 3%. It's the temperature most people enjoy during the day.

Home Comfort News from ICG Heating and Air Conditioning NC

WE ARE DEDICATED TO SERVICE

We have asked our carriers to complete their deliveries as early as possible, each week.

If your Herald is not delivered to your home please phone our circulation department.

CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT HOURS:
For your convenience the Circulation Department is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

WE'LL DELIVER TO YOUR HOME
877-2201

DISTRIBUTORS SHOP EARLY
FOR ALL YOUR GIFT NEEDS!
*Professional Skate Sharpening
*Professional Team Wear

873-0500
71 Main St. S., Georgetown

PHOTO REPRINTS

Available at The Herald Office in either 8"x10" or 5"x7" Sizes.

theHERALD
45 Guelph St., Georgetown - 877-2201

Beckermann Exquisite Kitchens

START YOUR NEW YEAR WITH A NEW KITCHEN

Discover the Differences...
Ask for your FREE quality comparison guide
Exclusively at:

A Touch of Class
KITCHEN SHOWROOM INC.

HOURS:
Mon.-Fri. 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Evenings and Saturday by Appointment

(519) 853-4577 or 853-4655
Telefax 853-4722

R.R. 4, ACTON
2 Mi. South of Hwy. 7 on Hwy. 25

CHURCH DIRECTORY

NON-DENOMINATIONAL (PENTECOSTAL)

ALL PEOPLES CHURCH DELIVERANCE CENTRE
41 Finchgate Blvd., Bramalea (S.W. corner Finchgate/Hwy. 7)

- Bible Study
- Worship • Deliverance

Sunday 10:30 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday 8:00 p.m.

We Provide:
-Children's Church
-Nursery Service
English-to-Italian translation

Pastor: George A. LeRoy
792-2176

TO ADVERTISE IN THIS SPACE CALL DISPLAY ADVERTISING 877-2201