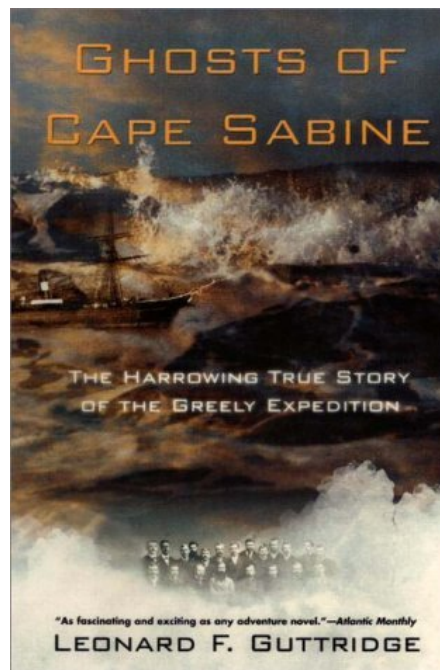




Ghosts of Cape Sabine: The Harrowing True Story of the Greely Expedition

Leonard F. Guttridge

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The Arctic's most notorious expedition...

A true story of mutiny, madness, suicide, and cannibalism.

In *Icebound*, acclaimed historian Leonard F. Guttridge told a "truly exciting" (*Atlantic Monthly*) and "gripping tale" (*Washington Post*) of exploration that was "well worth reading." (*New York Times*) Now, he uncovers a notorious true story of man against nature-and the nature of man-that will chill the soul of anyone who read *Alive* or thrilled to the legend of the Shackleton voyage.

In July 1881, twenty-five men set sail to establish a scientific base in the Arctic region of Lady Franklin Bay. Three years later only six returned. Through private letters and diaries of the doomed men, Guttridge-an author who has the power to tell "a gripping story of suspense and adventure" (*Publishers Weekly*)-gives a day-by-day chronicle that is brilliantly told, unbelievably true, and absolutely unforgettable.

"As fascinating and exciting as any adventure novel."--*The Atlantic Monthly*

"Guttridge's account-vivid in its whiteness and raw in its themes-is a thriller."--*Salon.com*

Ghosts of Cape Sabine: The Harrowing True Story of the Greely Expedition Details

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Eric says

Excellent account of an Arctic expedition gone horribly wrong. The author includes not just the grisly details of the expedition itself, but the political fighting in Washington and the two failed relief attempts. The times, names and faces may change, but politics will always be politics and, like the poor, will always be with us.

Walt says

In my view, the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition is the worst polar venture ever attempted. You have to have a very strong heart to read it all. When in the last part of the book, you just wish God the misery those men lived will be over shortly. You find yourself hurrying the relief ships to arrive.

What those poor men experienced was intolerable, and the author puts it cleanly on paper.

So, yes, Shackleton's Endurance voyage, Mawson's forced solo march without food in Antarctica and the Robert Falcon Scott tragedy were horrible, but no so horrible in my mind to what A.W. Greely and his men went through.

Weak heart, stay away from the book.

Frederick Bingham says

The story of the Greely expedition, sent to the arctic for some obscure purpose in the late 19th century. Most of the members of the expedition ended up dying. The survivors had to eat the dead to survive. This is what happens when you send stupid people into a potentially dangerous situation.

Ethan says

Guttridge tells the story of an Army expedition to the High Arctic in 1881 to set up a scientific monitoring station as part of a world wide polar scientific study. 21 men arrived at Lady Franklin Bay, only 6 would return home 3 years later. The story is a fascinating counter example to the later expeditions of Shackleton, Amundsen and Scott. Greely was an Army Signal Corps Officer, who had no naval or Arctic experience and with the exception of his surgeon, none of his men did. Greely was also not a natural leader or man, but he and his men struggled together through immense hardships and deprivations. This is a tragic story but one worth reading.

Amerynth says

Unfortunately, I found Leonard F. Guttridge's "Ghosts of Cape Sabine" too poorly written to enjoy. This should have been a great, epic tale of the Greeley expedition's misfortunes while spending years exploring the arctic. The story itself is fairly dramatic and interesting-- there is plenty of source material to make this a story worth telling.

Under Guttridge's pen, the story is extremely difficult to follow and unskillfully woven. (I defy you to find a paragraph in this book that does not mention at least three different people... it just becomes a confusing jumble of names all too frequently.) I found myself skimming and skipping page after boring page before I finally put down the book for good.

I love a good arctic (or antarctic) exploration story... there are tons of great books out there focused on the trials and tribulations of different expeditions. Unfortunately, this is not one of them.

Jeanne says

Twenty-five men led by Greeley set off to the North Pole for a science expedition that is slated for a year of study that turns into three years of frozen hell and starvation. The U.S. government had a lackluster interest in funding the research to begin with, and then less so after completion of the first year. Left with provisions for a year and then stretching into three miserably frozen years, pretty much gives you the scope of their miserable existence. Compounding the disastrous expedition was the decision to leave their fort (in small boats) to reach a destination closer to a rescue point where they had no cover, no wildlife, no vegetation and little hope for a rescue. It seems the U.S. government had a penchant for ignoring the value of science going back centuries.

MaggyGray says

Mit mehreren Unterbrechungen heute in der Mittagspause zu Ende gelesen.

Mein Faible für Reiseberichte aller Art konnte auch dieses Buch bedienen, auch wenn ich es mit einigen Unterbrechungen lesen musste, und das lag nicht an den Unmengen von Namen und Personen, die mich irgendwann nur noch verwirrt haben.

Letztendlich geht es um eine amerikanische Polar-Expedition unter der Leitung von Adolphus Greely - man möchte die Briten überholen, die den (bis dahin) nördlichsten Punkt in der Arktis erreicht haben (leider ist in meinem Kopf untergegangen, von wem und wo genau). 1881 wird ein Schiff gerüstet - die Protheus - es läuft aus und macht sich auf den Weg von Neufundland aus in den hohen Norden, vorbei an Disko durch die Melville Bay bis nach Ellesmere Island. Dort wird in der Lady Franklin Bay das Lager zum Überwintern aufgeschlagen: Fort Conger. 24 Männer bleiben dort zurück (während die Protheus wieder nach Hause fährt) um zwei Jahre lang naturwissenschaftliche Forschungen durchzuführen. Nach einem vorher ausgetüftelten Plan sollte 1882 ein Versorgungsschiff Nachschub an Lebensmitteln, Medikamenten, Kleidung und andere wichtige Dinge liefern; sollte dies nicht möglich sein (zugefrorene Wasserwege), dann 1883, sobald die Fahrrinne passierbar ist.

So weit so gut.

Im Fort ist man mehr oder weniger guter Dinge. Man geht seiner Arbeit nach, man gibt und nimmt an "Unterhaltungsprogrammen" teil, es gibt zu Geburts- oder Feiertagen Extrarationen und/oder Alkohol. Doch schon da kommen die ersten gereizten Resentiments ans Tageslicht: Befehle werden teilweise oder ganz verweigert, man ist dem Kommandanten gegenüber respektlos, es wird degradiert, unter Arrest gestellt, bestraft, ab und an auch befördert. Als weder 1882 noch 1883 Nachschub eintrifft, befiehlt Greely, ebenfalls nach Plan, das Lager aufzugeben, und nach Süden zu wandern.

Sowohl von Greely als auch von anderen, früheren Expeditionen, wurden Caches angelegt, in denen sich Proviant, Material und Aufzeichnungen befinden. Auf diese Caches spekulieren die Männer der Greely-Expedition, und darauf, dass sie von einem Schiff aufgenommen werden, wenn sie erst einmal in der Nähe von Littleton Island (schräg "gegenüber" liegt Kap Sabine) sind, denn bis dahin bleibt das Wasser eher offen, während weiter nördlich auch das Packeis immer fieser wird. Für die damaligen Schiffe gab es in so einer Situation kein Durchkommen.

Doch irgendwie geht alles schief. Die Mannschaft schlägt auf Kap Sabine ihr Lager auf, können aber nicht nach Littleton Island - auf der Proviant gelagert gewesen wäre - da das Eis zu dünn ist, um sie zu tragen, die Eisschollen aber ein Befahren mit einem Boot unmöglich machen. Die Vorräte gehen aus, die Männer werden nach und nach immer schwächer und sterben einer nach dem anderen. Als ein drittes Rettungsschiff die Mannschaft endlich erreicht, sind noch sieben am Leben, von denen einer auf der Fahrt nach Hause auch noch verstirbt.

Das Grauen, im ewigen Eis fest zu sitzen (dann auch noch in der monatelangen Polarnacht), nicht die leiseste Ahnung zu haben, warum die vereinbarten Schiffe nicht kommen und ohne die geringste Möglichkeit ein irgendwie geartetes Lebenszeichen zu geben, war für mich bei diesem Buch so spürbar, dass ich es beispielsweise abends im Bett (dunkel!!) nicht lesen konnte. Der Autor zeichnet ein so lebendiges Bild und schreibt so spannend und voller Emotion, dass ich mir einmal sogar meine flauschigen Hüttenhausschuhe anziehen musste (Ende Juli!), weil ich den Polarwind regelrecht gefühlt habe. Vielleicht habe ich mich auch ein bisschen zu sehr reingesteigert, das kann schon sein, aber ich habe mit den Männern der Expedition mitgefiebert. Sehr tragisch war der erste Tote auf Kap Sabine, William Cross, der zwei Tage vor seinem Geburtstag stirbt und extra für diesen Tag "Brotrümel zum Feiern aufbewahrt hatte".

Dieses Buch hätte volle Punktzahl verdient, wären da nicht, wie schon erwähnt, die vielen vielen Namen, die ziemlich verwirren, sofern man kein fotografisches Gedächtnis hat. Vor allem die Verwicklungen, die dazu geführt haben, dass die beiden Versorgungsexpeditionen, aber auch die Rettungsmission nur schleppend angelaufen und dann teilweise gescheitert sind, spricht Bände über starre Bla-Bla-Männer, die vor allem ihren Kopf durchsetzen wollen, anstatt auf logischen Schlussfolgerungen aufbauend, konstruktiv werden. Um dies zu beschreiben, verwickelt sich Guttridge teilweise in ellenlangen Beschreibungen von Minister X, Y, Z, über Kongressabgeordnete A,B,C, dann gibt es Offiziere, Generäle, Laufburschen, Anwälte und und und. Das hat den Lesefluss dann ein bisschen holpern lassen, aber dafür verflogen die Beschreibungen im ewigen Eis wie im Flug.

Absolute Leseempfehlung von mir!

Dennis says

While the book was not spellbinding from cover to cover, it offered an interesting insight into the tragic Greeley expedition that set a record for trekking the furthest north, thus taking the record away from Britain. What followed their stay in Fort Conger, the northern most outpost, and their trek south to ultimately be rescued on Cape Sabine led to controversy and recriminations. While Greeley may have been considered a good leader, his lack of knowledge of the Arctic contributed to the large loss of life of his party. I would recommend reading the book for the value of learning more about early Arctic expeditions and the hardships endured while trying to travel the furthest north and ultimately reach the North Pole. I have read plenty of books on Arctic and Antarctic exploration and would rate this accounting as one of the best.

Mike Gunderloy says

Most people today probably don't remember the Greeley expedition at all - but it was big news in the 1880s. An ill-prepared detachment from the Signal Corps of the US Army pushed closer to the North Pole than previous expeditions, spent two winters, and then had a disastrous retreat culminating in most of the party dying and shocking stories of cannibalism. Guttridge digs back to primary sources to give us a picture of a man (Greeley) out of his depth but stubbornly sticking to his ideas while the expedition crumbles about him, and of Washington politics condemning innocents to death. The latter at least is completely believable. He doesn't dwell on the cannibalism but treats it as a proven fact, unlike some other commentators. I can't imagine what life must have been like for early Arctic explorers but I'm very glad I wasn't one of them.

Tom says

Considering several other polar exploration stories I've read that devolve into struggles for survival this tale shares some common elements, i.e. inadequate funding, lack of political support, last minute changes in leadership, logistical errors and of course poor communication. An additional complicating issue is the misappropriation of funds associated with the program. Considering these problems it's a wonder that anyone made it back to civilization.

I found the writing somewhat awkward but it's a good story. If you like reading about people living in and dealing with hostile conditions this is for you.

Brian says

I liked this book, sort of as an exercise in schadenfreude. Dude had no idea what he was doing and ended up dooming his entire party, surviving the last few months by basically hiding in their tents. Ghastly.

William says

Great adventure and human folly story

krin says

Last year I read *North* by Roger Hubank, a fictional account of the Greeley expedition. Afterwards, I wanted to read an historical account of the Greeley expedition. In this book, I learned more about problems with the first two relief attempts. I liked Guttridge's detailed end notes describing the sources from institutions such as the National Archives and the Library of Congress.

Unwisely says

Okay, this is another gripping tale of arctic exploration and the race for Farthest North. This time it's an American expedition. They have the usual logistical, weather, and leadership problems that seem to plague most of the expeditions, combined with political dithering and flubbed rescue attempts. Pretty exciting stuff...except the dry-as-dust narration manages to suck most of the excitement out of it.

It's not that it's not well-researched, because it is, it's just that there are some really big questions hanging over the story - the journal that mysteriously gets from arctic Canada to the Mississippi river is mentioned, then dismissed with "and no one knows how it got there". (Minor spoiler ahead.) The bodies were found mutilated, it's pretty clear there was some cannibalism going on, and although the author mentions that there was a scandal at the time, everyone involved denied it, and the author pretty much leaves it at that - he makes no attempt to explain it.

So, not great, but by no means bad. If you're into arctic exploration books, add it to your list. If you're not, I would start elsewhere. (Say with Pierre Berton, *_Arctic Grail_*.)

William Battersby says

A well written account of a truly terrifying but relatively little know event. Having eery parallels with the Franklin Expedition, a group of US servicemen were left in the high Arctic with ample supplies and every convenience of modern (late nineteenth century) live. We watch them as, through a series of coincidences, ll of this is gradually stripped away and we see them left desperate, starving and freezing. Most died and the rescue of the few survivor seems like something out of the Arctic version of 'Lord of the Flies'.

Strange also how the survivors simply went back to their prior lives.

This should be required reading for anyone interested in Exploration, and especially for anyone looking for insights into what the latter stages of the Franklin Expedition my have been like.
