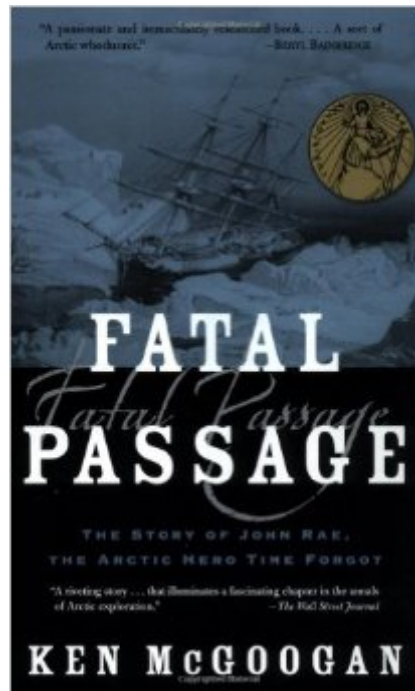


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Fatal Passage: The Story Of John Rae, The Arctic Hero Time Forgot



Synopsis

John Rae's accomplishments, surpassing all nineteenth-century Arctic explorers, were worthy of honors and international fame. No explorer even approached Rae's prolific record: 1,776 miles surveyed of uncharted territory; 6,555 miles hiked on snowshoes; and 6,700 miles navigated in small boats. Yet, he was denied fair recognition of his discoveries because he dared to utter the truth about the fate of Sir John Franklin and his crew, Rae's predecessors in the far north. Author Ken McGoogan vividly narrates the astonishing adventures of Rae, who found the last link to the Northwest Passage and uncovered the grisly truth about the cannibalism of Franklin and his crew. A bitter smear campaign by Franklin's supporters would deny Rae his knighthood and bury him in ignominy for over one hundred and fifty years. Ken McGoogan's passion to secure justice for a true North American hero in this revelatory book produces a completely original and compelling portrait that elevates Rae to his rightful place as one of history's greatest explorers.

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Customer Reviews

When one thinks of Arctic travel, the names that probably come to your mind first are Scott, Peary, Shackleton, Amundsen, Henry Hudson, Davis and, of course, Sir John Franklin. Wait a minute ... what about John Rae? "John Rae?" you say ... "Who's John Rae?" Well, exactly! One might say that this is precisely the point of the book. Ken McGoogan's "Fatal Passage" is a thrilling biography of John Rae who is probably the least known, least understood and least respected Arctic explorer in history but he is also arguably the finest, the strongest, most accomplished, most extraordinary and

most skilled white man to ever set foot into Canada's far north! The list of his accomplishments, frankly, beggars the imagination. Endowed with almost superhuman physical strength and endurance, he led four major Arctic expeditions traveling more than 23,000 miles. Educated in Orkney as a medical man, he essentially taught himself the mechanics of surveying and cartography. Having done so, he then proceeded to accurately survey over 1,700 miles of unexplored territory including more than 1,500 miles of Canada's northern coastline. Demonstrating unparalleled stamina, resourcefulness and resilience, he trekked over 6,500 miles in the Arctic alone, most of it on snowshoes with a fully loaded pack and sledge, and he traveled an additional 6,600 miles in canoe and small boats. Whether alone or leading a group of men, he traveled light and fast often walking 30 to 40 miles per day (on snowshoes, in frigid temperatures with that fully loaded pack, mind you!).

I enjoy reading non-fictional accounts of exploration, and have found two geographic regions particularly interesting; ian and Arctic exploration. Perhaps this is because the issues faced by explorers of those regions are particularly challenging. This book is essentially a biography of Dr. John Rae, a longtime employee of the Hudson Bay Company, who spent much of his life on or North of the Arctic Circle. The author is an unabashed fan of Dr. Rae, and even points out in his preface that the purpose of the book is to elevate Dr. Rae to a position in the pantheon of Arctic explorers, a position that the author firmly believes that Dr. Rae has been unjustly denied. As a result, the question arises as to whether the author presents an unbiased picture of Rae and his achievements. For the greatest part of the book, this is really not a factor. There is no dispute as to Rae's exploits, his discoveries, or the incredible feats of endurance and competence he displayed in his endeavors. However, the final quarter of the book, dealing with controversy concerning his report on the Franklin expedition and the long running feud between Rae and Lady Jane Franklin certainly have the potential to present a biased and perhaps overly complementary picture of Rae's actions. The final segment of the book, dealing with discovery of the Northwest Passage and the honors associated therewith, give the author a final opportunity to argue the poor treatment accorded Rae. While virtually every other explorer with a hand in charting the region was awarded knighthoods and cash rewards, Rae was excluded from official plaudits. Doubtless, this was a political decision as was the decision by many to credit Franklin with discovery of the Passage (which he most certainly did not).

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