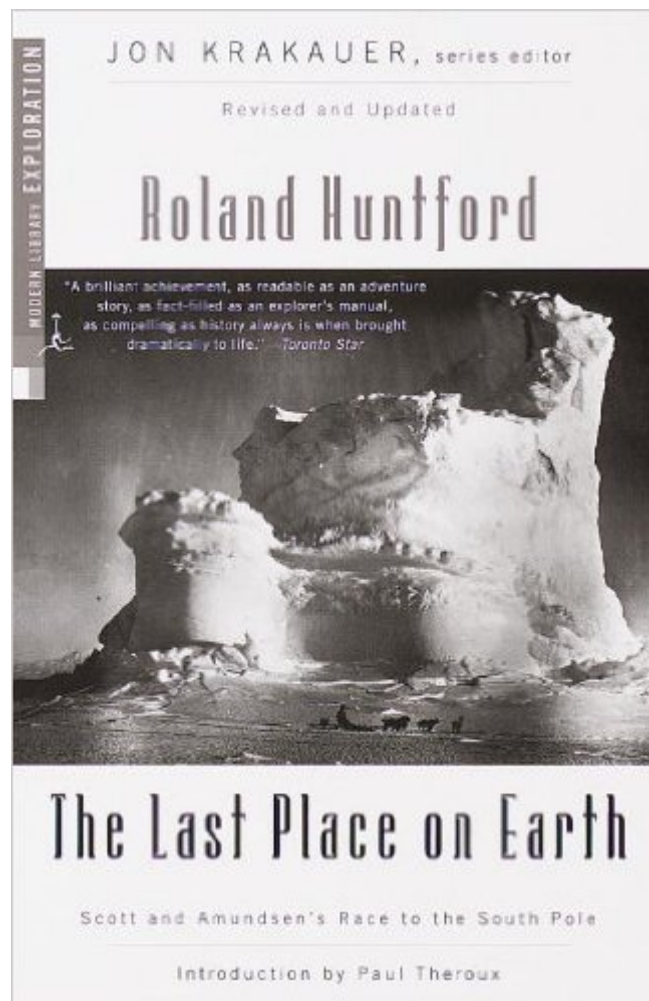


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The Last Place On Earth: Scott And Amundsen's Race To The South Pole, Revised And Updated (Modern Library Exploration)



Synopsis

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the South Pole was the most coveted prize in the fiercely nationalistic modern age of exploration. In the brilliant dual biography, the award-winning writer Roland Huntford re-examines every detail of the great race to the South Pole between Britain's Robert Scott and Norway's Roald Amundsen. Scott, who dies along with four of his men only eleven miles from his next cache of supplies, became Britain's beloved failure, while Amundsen, who not only beat Scott to the Pole but returned alive, was largely forgotten. This account of their race is a gripping, highly readable history that captures the driving ambitions of the era and the complex, often deeply flawed men who were charged with carrying them out. **THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH** is the first of Huntford's masterly trilogy of polar biographies. It is also the only work on the subject in the English language based on the original Norwegian sources, to which Huntford returned to revise and update this edition.

Book Information

Series: Modern Library Exploration

Paperback: 640 pages

Publisher: Modern Library; Highlighting edition (September 7, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375754741

ISBN-13: 978-0375754746

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.3 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviewsÂ (135 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #54,013 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 inÂ Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia > Norway #7 inÂ Books > Travel > Polar Regions > Antarctica #12 inÂ Books > History > Arctic & Antarctica

Customer Reviews

I recently read "Scott's Last Expedition", the edited version of his diaries from his South Pole expedition. This left me interested but unfulfilled: I wanted to learn more about Amundsen and the context for both expeditions, and to get more analysis of the bald facts as related in Scott's diaries. So I turned to Huntford's "The Last Place on Earth". I was not disappointed. Huntford narrates the entire lives of both Amundsen and Scott, with edifying discursions on Nansen, Shackleton, and other Polar explorers. Huntford knows Norwegian and thus was able to consult primary sources for

Amundsen's expedition directly; he provides many excerpts from the letters and diaries of both British and Norwegian expedition members. He also reveals some of the omissions in the edited version of Scott's diaries. As a minor quibble, Huntford only rarely gives full dates, so that I found myself frequently having to page back a considerable way to remind myself which year or even which month it was. An appendix chronology would have been immeasurably helpful. As other reviewers have noted, the author is highly critical of Scott -- occasionally unfairly so, as when he notes that Scott's first depot journey brought "a ton of supplies not quite to 80 degrees South" where Amundsen's party had "moved three tons another two degrees of latitude closer to the Pole", omitting to mention that Amundsen started about a degree farther south than Scott. But from the evidence Huntford adduces, even without his interpretations, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Scott was criminally unprepared, negligent, and generally incompetent.

This book works at several levels. First, it is a thrilling adventure story. Second, it is a wonderful management study in planning, goal setting and organization. Third, it is a classic debunker, undermining the aura (at least in the English speaking world) surrounding Robert Scott and his tragic assault on the South Pole. Scott and Roald Amundsen engaged in a great struggle to reach "The last place on earth," the South Pole. Each had been to polar regions before, each had become national and even international celebrities due to their trekking. Each was aware of the other party's presence on the Antarctic Continent during the same months of 1911-1912 as they raced to be the first men to stand at the bottom of the world. Scott and Amundsen were two different breeds. Scott was a helpless romantic. Even after bitter experience and near tragedy in previous expeditions, he refused to learn from Eskimos, Norwegians or others who were battling around the turn of the century to achieve various cold weather firsts (first to the north pole, first to traverse the Northwest Passage -- which went to Amundsen -- first to cross Greenland, etc.) Thus, Scott relied on British pluck and manliness instead of skis, dogs, deer and seal suits and a properly suited diet. Amundsen was a consummate student on the other hand. He possessed not only the gift of great vision and the ego necessary to pursue it, but also the humility to know that his trip did not have to feature every facet made anew, but should be the culmination of what others had learned when surviving and moving over the planet's most forbidding environment.

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