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CONQUISTADORES OF THE USELESS

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Almost ninety years ago in a room only slightly larger than this, for a club only slightly better known and before an audience only slightly more distinguished a dinner was held. At the Willard Hotel in Washington the National Geographic Society honored Frederick Cook for the first ascent of Mt. McKinley while simultaneously President Theodore Roosevelt bestowed the Hubbard Medal upon Commander Robert Peary for attaining a record furthest north. The stimulus of this public acclaim, notwithstanding the fact that neither man had reached these goals, is merely a prelude to the last chapters of the heroic age of exploration and its effects upon three men which is the subject of this evening's paper.

By the beginning of this century three geographic symbols had captured the imagination of the public, and especially a handful of men competing for the fame accruing to the successful. These were the three "poles" - 90 degrees north and south latitude and the summit of the highest mountain on earth - if you will, the north pole, the south pole and Mount Everest. Tonight we will examine three men most closely linked to these poles: Peary, Scott and Mallory. None succeeded (in all probability) yet their names and deeds have been held as exemplars of the heroic ideal for nearly a century. We shall look at them and their motives and try to determine what kind of heroes they were.

Before plunging ahead, an aside about my own interest is in order. I began reading about Everest even before Hillary and Tenzing climbed it in 1953 and my interest soon expanded into polar literature. I have climbed in the alps and have sailed beyond the arctic and antarctic circles. I have been fortunate to meet and talk with the French climber Maurice Herzog who in 1950 conquered the first 8,000 meter summit, Annapurna, the British explorers Wally Herbert and Angus Erskine, the glaciologist, Sir Charles Swithinbank, and the American astronomer, Dennis Rawlins. From them I gained many insights incorporated in this paper.

Symbiotically, exploration is both a requisite for expanded commerce and a beneficiary of it. Even before the industrial revolution, commerce (or more narrowly trade) was creating secular wealth for the first time in history. Such capital could fund exploration for its own sake rather than as a necessity for survival and indirectly create wealth and leisure time for the fortunate to pursue it. Less obviously, to be secure, trade required the extension of naval power which in turn provided the raw material - ships, leaders and

men for exploring. Now, large navies, indispensable to island nations in war, quickly become luxuries whenever peace breaks out. What better use for rotting ships, idle crews and captains on half pay than to send them out to discover something. It is no coincidence that the first spasm of exploration occurred following Britain's triumph over the Spanish Armada; led by captains such as Frobisher, Hudson and Baffin. The end of the Napoleonic Wars saw explosive growth in polar exploration under navy auspices: the two Rosses, Edward Parry, and the ill-fated John Franklin to name a few.

By the late 19th century commerce ceased to be an economic justification for exploration. The northwest passage, even if it could be forced, obviously wasn't going to be a practical route to the Orient and the Suez Canal had made it redundant anyway. But by then, stimulated by Cook and Darwin's voyages, science had replaced commerce as the rationale for discovery. Geographic Societies - essentially male bonding clubs - had arisen and sought the prestige of the older Scientific Societies. What better way to obtain it than by combining goals and funding and borrowing from the navy. Permanent Secretaries such as Clements Markham of the Royal Geographic Society, Gilbert Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society and Morris Jesup of the Natural History Museum embodied the power and prestige of their societies. Thus it was not surprising that Grosvenor and Jesup linked together to create the Peary Arctic Club and insure his ready availability from the US Navy.

By the time of the 1906 dinner when the final impetus for the three poles was unleashed, science too had become a weak reed on which to justify exploration. In the quest of the three poles hardly anything of scientific importance was yet to be learned. In the north Nansen had established that the pole sat on a permanent ice cap drifting on the polar sea, and both the northeast and northwest passages had been completed. In the south Shackleton surmounted the Beardmore Glacier, the last barrier to the 9,000 foot polar plateau. Men such as Younghusband and Bruce had cracked the door on the forbidden kingdoms of Tibet and Nepal and incidentally proved man could acclimatize to and function at over 22,000 feet.

In fact in terms of pure exploration there was little left to accomplish before Peary, Scott and Mallory's attempts at the three poles. Nansen had reached a latitude of 86 degrees north, 227 miles from the pole in 1895. In Antarctica in 1906 Shackleton had done even better, turning back just 97 miles from the goal. In 1922 Mallory and Norton had each climbed to within 2,000 feet of the summit of Everest. There was no cause to believe that in the last hundred or so miles or feet in the case of Everest, explorers were going to encounter anything new.

But they hadn't gotten there yet! And that was the ultimate

rationale - not commerce, not science, not discovery. It was the quest for adventure for its own sake. Institutionally it became an extension of the Great Game of the British Empire in India or the Manifest Destiny of the United States. Individually at worst it reflected a need for adulation or possessiveness as shown by the "Mine at last!" exultation in Peary's diary, or at best Mallory's self realization: "Have we conquered the enemy? None but ourselves." These thoughts prompted my title: **Conquistadores of the Useless** from the book by the French mountaineer, Lionel Terray who saved Herzog's life on Annapurna. But great games are not without heroes, be they comic, tragic or romantic, and it's time to look at each.

Peary must have had mixed emotions at the National Geographic Society dinner that December in 1906. At 50 years of age he had been north eight times, spending the better part of 16 of the last 18 years in the arctic. Frostbite had taken most of his toes and he already suffered from the pernicious anemia that would prove fatal. As the recipient of the first Hubbard Medal awarded by the President, surely this was the time to retire honorably. Yet the audience was there also to honor his one-time protege, the nine year younger Dr. Cook who accompanied him twice north, who was the first to winter in the Antarctic with Amundsen and whose fame grew with his claim of the first ascent of Mt. McKinley.

These were President Roosevelt's words to Peary:

> "You who for months had to face perils and overcome the greatest risks and difficulties, with resting on your shoulders the undivided responsibility which meant life or death to you and your followers...you had to show all the moral qualities...you did a great deed, a deed that counted for all mankind, a deed which reacted credit upon you and upon your country, and on behalf of those present and speaking also for the millions of your countrymen, I take pleasure in handing you this Hubbard Medal..."

Peary responded:

> "The true explorer does not work for any hope of rewards or honor but because the thing he has set himself to do is part of his very being...To me the final and complete solution of the polar mystery which has engaged the best thought and interest of the best men of the most vigorous and enlightened nations ... and today quickens the pulse of every man or woman whose veins hold red blood is the thing which should be done for the honor and credit of this country, the thing which it is intended that I should do, and the thing that I must do."

Wow! Even allowing for the orotund style of turn of the century speeches, this is heady stuff. Peary not only would have to return to the polar quest, he would have to succeed. In the wonderful phrase coined by Wally Herbert, "the noose

of laurels" was tightening around his neck.

Peary's early life is eerily reminiscent of Douglas MacArthur's. Raised by dominant mothers who went with their sons to college - (Mrs. Peary did Mrs. MacArthur one better and accompanied Robert on his honeymoon) both men developed passionate ambitions and an unquenchable need for adulation. In a revealing letter Peary describes himself: "Tall, erect, broad-shouldered, full-chested, tough, wiry-limbed, clear-eyed, full-mustached, a dead shot, powerful swimmer, first class rider, skillful boxer and fencer, perfectly at home in any company, master of German, Spanish and French". Despite such humility, Peary did possess perseverance, stamina, and insensitivity to pain.

As if Peary needed further incentive, there was his hated rival Cook at the dais that evening. Cook had heard the same speeches and was equally motivated. This isn't the time to get into the Cook-Peary controversy which still rages some 88 years after the events and has spawned dozens of books and monographs. Just two years ago the Byrd Polar Research Center here at Ohio State held a three day seminar on the subject which I was able to attend. Briefly, while Cook was a very likable, even endearing personality, in marked contrast to Peary; his tales simply don't hold water. The arctic explorer, Peter Freuchen's quip: "Cook was a gentleman and a liar, Peary was neither" expresses at least a three-quarter truth. Anyway, Cook claimed to have reached the pole in April 1908, almost exactly a year before Peary would claim it. With no navigation records, no independent verifications, and on the heels of his now demonstrated false claim to Mt. McKinley, Cook soon was thoroughly discredited in the eyes of most. One final word from Dennis Rawlins: "Cook so lacked elementary navigational skills, he couldn't have found the pole or known he was there if he had." Cook was the first American to have made significant contributions in both the Arctic and Antarctic, but perhaps also he was the first victim of Herbert's "noose of laurels".

Peary set out for the pole from Cape Columbia, the northernmost point of land in North America, on March 1, 1909 (shown on your 1st map). Using the system of sled relays which he had perfected, depots were established by other members of his team, culminating in Captain Bartlett's final depot at 87 degrees 47' north, where Peary arrived on Mar 31. This was 133 nautical miles south of the pole. Peary sent Bartlett and his team back and with Henson, his servant who'd accompanied him on all polar excursions and 4 Inuits, none of whom knew how to navigate, set out for the pole on April 2nd. After 5 marches on April 6th, Peary halted, wandered off to take latitudinal sightings, and returned to camp with a glum face. Henson asked: "We are now at the pole are we not? If we have travelled in the right direction we are at the pole, if we have not, then it is your fault", to which Peary

cryptically replied: "I do not suppose we can swear we are exactly at the pole." He spent the next 30 hours traversing the area and then they headed back along the original route, returning to Cape Columbia on April 23, just three days after Bartlett had reached it. There Bartlett immediately congratulated him to which Peary replied: "I have not been altogether unsuccessful." Peary kept to himself during the return, and by telegraph to the Peary Arctic Club from Labrador on September 5th, announced his attainment of the Pole.

Now absent any independent verification, one must either accept Peary's word or examine what evidence he did provide. Questions fall into three categories: distance actually made good, navigation, and Peary's own actions.

The inconsistencies in Peary's alleged distances alone are a huge indictment. To believe Peary reached the pole one must believe the following:

After averaging 11.5 nautical miles made good per march up to Bartlett's camp (where the last independent verification of latitude was made), Peary then made good the remaining 133 nautical miles in just 5 marches. Allowing 25% for errors and detours (Peary's own figure up to the Bartlett camp which he then conveniently ignores for the rest of his journey) means Peary had to average 33 miles per day. It gets better, for he returns to the Bartlett camp in just 3 days. In fact from the 5th to the 10th of April Peary made good 196 nautical miles in 4 marches for an average of 49 miles per march. Contrast this average to the best days recorded on polar ice by others: Steger averaged 18 miles, with a best day of 27. Uemura's best day was 32 miles. Wally Herbert on his 3,800 mile transpolar crossing had a best day of 26 miles. Don't forget, in contrast to these men Peary was far from fit - as Henson attested "the boss rode to the pole strapped to a sledge." From the Bartlett camp to the pole and back Peary had to travel in a straight line 302 nautical miles father than Bartlett, yet it took him only three additional days.

Now let's examine his navigation claims. Having taken no longitudinal sightings, made no compass corrections and no allowances for polar drift, Peary starts out from the Bartlett camp, makes five marches in a northerly direction, stops, takes a latitude sight and claims he is within four miles of the pole. A la Don Quixote, he starts not knowing where he is (no idea where on an east-west axis the Bartlett camp actually is) not knowing what direction he's going, and not knowing where he is when he arrives. Rawlins and Herbert have independently shown the combination of polar drift because of the easterly winds, chronometer error, and magnetic drift would most probably left Peary some 100 miles west and 50 miles short of the pole at his closest. What was he to do, given no one with him knew where he was. He alone

made the observations, realized how far he was from his goal of 18 years, was congratulated by Henson, knew the game was up, returned to Bartlett who also congratulated him, and retired to his cabin to make calculations. Now, navigational computations at the poles are the easiest to invent, given that absent any longitude, there is no local time at either pole. Thus anyone here in a cosy armchair could create the solar declensions necessary to "prove" he was there on any given day.

Lastly, look at Peary's own actions. In addition to his cryptic replies to Henson and Bartlett, his diary has no entries from April fifth to ninth. Later a spotlessly clean loose leaf was inserted with the famous April sixth entry: "Mine at last!" Peary's photographs when subjected to computer analysis show only that they were taken within 300 miles of the pole. Henson took over 100 photos which Peary borrowed. They were never returned or seen again. Henson inadvertently hurt the cause when he described seeing the sun rising and setting at the pole, whereas in the course of a given day there is no visible change in the sun's position relative to the horizon at the pole.

In Rawlins' somewhat cruel paraphrase Peary's motto of "find a way or **make** one", becomes "find a way or **fake** one." Now we see the comic or absurd hero, a Don Quixote emerging. The blind non-navigator, Henson, as Sancho, leading the halt, the toe-less Peary, as Quixote, strapped to his Rosinante - a sled in lieu of a horse.

A Peary diary entry reveals this as he muses: "Order of the North Pole, meterorite with diamond pendant...have portrait taken unshaven in deer coat, colorized to show gray eyes, sunburned skin, bleached beard, frosted eyebrows...Harpers to get book, magazine articles for $100,000...name camps northward for Peary Club members...monument faced with marble, statue with flag on top, lighted room for two sarcophagi, bronze figures of arctic animals and Eskimos, ...England promoted, knighted and paid thousands...". It was well that he'd told the President, the true explorer doesn't work for rewards or honor. These are surely fantasies of a knight tilting at windmills. Would that he'd taken the time to shoot the sun or determine his compass variance!

So, to close the chapter, who did first attain the north pole? It's a more difficult question than you'd imagine for it depends on what you mean by attaining.

Amundsen overflew the pole in the airship Norge in 1926, thus becoming the first to see the north and the south pole.

In 1959 the nuclear submarine USS Skate surfaced at the pole, crew members becoming the first men to stand at 90 degrees north.

Ralph Plaisted attained the pole in 1968 roughly over Peary's route using motorized sleds and receiving aerial

resupply.
But the first classic attainment, sledging with dogs, belongs to Wally Herbert as part of his transpolar crossing in 1969.

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Now let's turn our attention to the opposite end of the world, the Antarctic (the critical area is shown on your 2nd map) to trace the emergence of a tragic hero. Here farce spawned tragedy as Roald Amundsen, upon hearing of the conquest of the north pole, and not bothering to sort who if any had truly attained it, scrubbed his northern plans and set sail south. This in turn caused Scott to accelerate his return to the Antarctic and created a race for the pole.

In background Robert Scott and Robert Peary were remarkably similar. Like Peary, Scott was raised in a matriarchal household with a weak father, dominant mother and four sisters. He was even more a product of the navy, entering the Royal Naval Academy at the age of thirteen. At that time the Royal Navy was at its nadir. Basking in the almost 100 year old glories of Trafalgar and not yet stimulated by Jacky Fisher's reforms, it resembled nothing so much as an aristocratic yacht club. Family connections, spit and polish counted far more than ability or initiative. On her majesty's warships, gunnery practice was actually discouraged for it tended to mar the paintwork. Even in this environment Scott failed to distinguish himself and languished for ten years as a lieutenant. He did come to the attention of Clements Markham, the eminence grise of the Royal Geographic Society, who had a fondness for attractive young naval officers of good breeding. Markham was seeking to revive British exploration and vicariously relive his adventures of 1850 as a naval officer on one of the innumerable Franklin rescue expeditions. Scott, who up to then knew and cared nothing about polar exploration recognized an opportunity for advancement when he saw it. His polar ignorance and inexperience proved no obstacle to the old boy network and in 1900 he was speedily promoted and appointed commander of the British Antarctic expedition.

For forms sake, Markham sent him to Norway to meet the great explorers, Nansen and Amundsen, from whom he apparently learned little and comprehended less. He was Markham's Pygmalion, believing with his mentor in a 50 year old arctic tradition. Markham had never seen skis used on snow, thought that dog sled travel suited Eskimos and Greenlanders but wasn't proper for Englishmen. He passionately believed the only way was the Royal Navy way of his day with man hauling of sledges the epitome of polar travel.

Scott, lacking natural leadership ability turned to what he did know and ran the 1901-2 expedition like a navy ship.

Discipline, blind obedience to orders, and tradition was all that was required. He kept separate messes for officers and ratings not only at sea but for 18 months at the hut at McMurdo Sound.

With all this Scott, Dr. Edward Wilson and Ernest Shackleton made an forlorn dash to establish a furthest south at a modest 82 degrees. Even this almost led to tragedy as Scott led his scurvy-ridden, starving group past a safe return and only benign weather allowed them a narrow escape. From all this as will been seen, Achilles-like, Scott learned nothing.

Shackleton did and returned south. Despite the implacable hostility of Markham, who despised Shackleton for being Irish and merchant navy rather than English and Royal Navy and for usurping his man Scott's God or otherwise given unique right to the south pole, Shackleton led a remarkable expedition south in 1906. He discovered and climbed the Beardmore Glacier, the only practical route from the McMurdo camp to the polar plateau. A dwindling margin of time and supplies caused Shackleton to halt within 97 miles of the pole and return with an intact team. Scott was of course, indignant: how dare anyone borrow his route to the pole.

The essential facts of the tragic race for the pole of 1911-12 between Amundsen and Scott are familiar to most and not disputed. Amundsen's effort was a model of early 20th century exploration. His was the only attainment of one of the three "poles" on a first attempt. He made it seem so easy, so foreordained, that to the romantics he suffers in comparison to the futile heroism of Scott. Amundsen provided sure leadership toward a clearly defined goal - the pole alone, not pseudo-scientific research. The Norwegian team comprised 19 fit and well-equipped men, all of whom were good to expert skiers and dog handlers, supported by over 100 sled dogs. They made their permanent camp in the Bay of Whales, discovered by Shackleton and 60 miles closer to the pole than Scott's camp at McMurdo Sound. In the late Antarctic summer and fall the Norwegians moved 3 tons of supplies to establish depots to 82 degrees south. On October 20 Amundsen, four comrades and 52 dogs left for the pole which they reached on December 15th. Amundsen's logistics were so well conceived that at no point during the entire journey did they have less than a 50% margin of safety in food and fuel, even assuming they missed every depot on the return.

Scott established his camp at McMurdo where he had been 10 years before. The British team included 65 men, three motorized sledges, 19 Siberian ponies, but only 32 dogs. Scott remained ambivalent about transportation and rather than deciding, split his bet four ways. The motorized sledges were imaginative but pushed 1910 technology too far. One immediately broke through the ice and sank and the other two made good only 50 miles before breaking down completely.

The ponies - Scott bought only white ones because Shackleton had written they tolerated the cold better - proved a good deal for the Russian sellers and a poor one for the British buyers. Concerning dogs he wrote: "In my mind no journey ever made with dogs can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised when a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers, and difficulties with their own unaided efforts. Surely in this case the conquest is more nobly and splendidly won." This epitomizes Edwardian amateurism - it is not getting there, but **how** you get there that matters. Essentially Scott trusted neither ponies, skis, dogs nor motor sledges: all he really believed in was human effort. He set out with 13 men, 8 ponies and 26 dogs to establish his depots. After twenty-four days they got one ton of supplies to not quite 80 degrees south (something Amundsen had done in five days). Even this modest effort, which was to have fatal consequences 11 months later, cost them 7 of the 8 ponies. Throughout this trip the dog sleds made three times the progress of the ponies - Scott's response was to hold back the dog sledges.

Waiting out the winter, instead of perfecting techniques and improving equipment as Amundsen was doing, Scott dissipated his resources. One party was sent out for geological exploration, while Dr. Wilson, Birdie Bowers and Apsley Cherry-Garrard made the epic journey around Ross Island to Cape Crozier to collect Emperor penguin eggs. Without skis, fur garments and only canvass tents, in the dead of a polar winter with temperatures reaching minus 78, they man-hauled 134 miles in 36 days, bringing back 3 frozen eggs which were soon forgotten. It did produce perhaps the greatest polar epic in Cherry-Garrard's account, <u>The Worst Journey in the World</u>. The price paid became apparent - Bowers and Wilson were to perish with Scott while Cherry-Garrard later became a recluse in a Cambridge attic, wrapped in furs and subsisting on pemmican.

Scott with 15 men set out on his final journey on November first, already 200 miles behind the Norwegians. The logistical tangle Scott created could only do credit to the royal navy. A typical sledging day involved five separate departures: first the slowest man-haulers broke camp, followed by three pony sledges in order of decrepitude and finally the fastest dog sleds. Scott fell four miles further behind the Norwegians per day. His apologists blame bad luck, citing Scott's diary references to atrocious weather. But Scott had 19 days of good weather in his first 34, the same as Amundsen and two more than the hated Shackleton. The truth was Scott **couldn't** make good time: his party hadn't learned to use their skis, the ponies weren't equipped with snow shoes, and the transport debacle ensured net progress was at the pace of the slowest man-haulers. By New Year's they had reached the polar plateau (150 miles from the pole and already 16 days too late) and Scott sent the last three

men back, chosing to go on with Wilson, Evans, Oates, and Bowers. This was the logistical coupe de grace. Everything had been planned for a 4-man dash - all sleds, tents, rations had been prepared on that basis. Scott effectively cut five weeks supplies to four. Captain Oates, included to manage the ponies which by now had all perished, was suffering from frostbitten toes plus the effects of an old Boer War wound and was thus to anyone but Scott surely now superfluous.

On January 17, 1912 they reached the pole, 34 days late, to find Amundsen's tent and navigation flags. Diary entries are revealing: Bowers is delusional: "It is sad that we have been forestalled by the Norwegians, but I am glad we have done it by good British man-haulage. This is the traditional British method and is the greatest journey done by man." Scott is melancholic: "Great God! This is an awful place and terrible enough for us to have laboured to it without the reward of priority." Only Oates is realistic: "Amundsen must have his head screwed on right...The Norskies seem to have had a comfortable trip with their dog teams, very different to our wretched man-hauling."

The return was a psychological and physical horror. Their supplies could just last from depot to depot with zero weather margin. Scott stopped on the Beardmore Glacier to pick up 30 pounds of rocks which they dutifully man-hauled to the end. Evans was the first to go, succumbing to scurvy on the lower reaches of the Beardmore. Oates followed on March 17th, suffering horribly from gangrenous frostbite. With the dignity of a British officer, he hobbled out of their tent, never to return. On March 21, Scott, Wilson and Bowers camped within 11 miles of the fateful One Ton Depot when a blizzard struck. They never emerged from their tent.

As we have seen, Scott, like the tragic heroes of Greek drama was doomed by his own character. Rigid to the point of being a martinet, ignorant of polar travel and survival skills, blinded by prejudice and out of date wisdom into making a perfect hash of the logistics, Scott achieved what he did only through the devotion and almost super-human exertions of Wilson, Bowers and Oates. Having failed, he could only die heroically. This he proceeded to do and gave England what it most wanted - better a dead lion than a live donkey. No one as I have who has seen Scott's diary in the British Museum can fail to be moved by the man's dignity and eloquence. "Had we lived I should have a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman." His last entry on March 29: "It seems a pity but I do not think I can write more. For God's sake look after our people."

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In turning to our final pole, Everest (on the 3rd map), we

enter a different arena. Both in the scope of activities and in the nature of our protagonist, there are vast differences. Let's examine the activity first. Mountaineering was one of the first sports in a modern sense to develop. The emergence of a middle class possessing time and resources to enjoy leisure, the close proximity of the Alps to Britain, the romanticizing of alpine endeavors, thanks to Ruskin and Byron, all created the so-called "Golden Age" of Mountaineering. This lasted from the mid 1850's to 1865, when the English amateur Edward Whymper made the tragically successful first ascent of the Mattterhorn. In that brief period no fewer than 31 of the 39 Alpine peaks of over 4,000 meters were first climbed by the British. It is a true measure of the prevailing soci-economic climate that so many of these climbers were tradesmen or clergy or younger sons of modestly landed gentry. Then ensued the so-called "Silver Age" from 1865 to roughly 1895 when the remaining 4,000 meter peaks were conquered, guideless climbing came into vogue and leading climbers began exploring alternative, more difficult routes such as ridges, and ultimately north faces. The next phase began when men such as Whymper and Mummery ventured first to the Caucacuses and then to the Himalayas.

This was the environment George Leigh Mallory encountered. A son of three generations of rural clergy, he grew up in Cheshire, attended a major public school, Winchester, where a master, Graham Irving stimulated a nascent climbing passion. Mallory began Alpine snow and ice and Welsh rock climbing under Irving's tutelage and early on showed a natural flair. He went up to Magdalene College, Cambridge when he joined the fringes of the Bloomsbury Set. Mallory's Cambridge friends included James and Lytton Strachey, Geoffrey and Maynard Keynes, the writer and climber Geoffrey Winthrop Young (who nicknamed him Galahad) the war poet, Rupert Brooke, and the painter, Duncan Grant. From this demi-monde of literati, socialists and asthetes, Mallory stood apart. Included because the group worshipped beauty in an Pre-Raphaelite manner, (and Mallory was beautiful, especially to the effete Stracheys), he lacked the cutting intelligence to be fully accepted. Nevertheless, Mallory earned an MA at Cambridge, wrote a scholarly and well-received biography of James Boswell, kept on climbing during academic breaks and obtained a teaching position at a lesser public school, Charterhouse. There he taught, befriended and climbed with a student, Robert Graves, who was have the most distinguished literary career of all.

The Great War then intervened and, unlike Peary and Scott who, despite being career naval officers, never heard a shot fired in anger, Mallory served with distinction, as an artillery officer on the Western Front. The aftermath was grim as many great British alpinists did not survive, or had aged beyond new ventures. His best friend and soon to be best man, Win Young, lost a leg but continued to climb with

and encourage Mallory, although of course he couldn't be a factor in a major expedition.

In this setting the British Alpine Club decided to launch an Everest expedition in 1921. Because Everest straddles the Tibet-Nepal border, access is subject to diplomatic ebbs and flows. In the early 20's the British Raj in India interestingly couldn't open Nepal, but could provide access into formerly forbidden Tibet. As a result all the pre war British expeditions to Everest had to use the northern route, a viable, but certainly more difficult approach.

The 1921 expedition consisted of 8 members, Mallory was the first climber chosen. The 3 other climbers, typify the dearth of available talent after the war. Dr. Kellas at 53, well past his prime, died on the route in. Dr. Raeburn, at 56 the senior climber, succumbed to altitude and retreated early on. It was left to Mallory and a former school friend, Geoff Bullocks (who in turn was a replacement for George Finch who'd failed the physical) to do all the rigorous exploration.

Despite seriously deficient staffing and equipment, the 1921 reconnaissance, for such it was called, was splendidly successful, thanks largely to Mallory's efforts. Up to this point no European had been closer than 57 miles to Everest. He and Bullock explored what turned out to be all the important approaches to Everest, missing only the East side, which was only climbed in the last decade. They photographed and mapped the Western Cwm (the key to the post World War II assaults which were ultimately successful). Mallory then found the East Rongbuk Glacier access to the North Col which proved the key to all northern assaults. They discovered the indispensibility of the Sherpas and by doing the reconnaissance from June to September, they inadvertently proved that the monsoon season was not the time to challenge Everest.

Three months after returning to England, Mallory set out on the 1922 expedition, this to be the first serious attempt for the summit. Led by General Charles Bruce, a career India Army officer, it included a stronger climbing party of Mallory, a healthy Finch, Norton, Somervell, Morshead and Bruce's nephew, Geoff. The use of contained oxygen to assist the climbers became a cause celebre of this expedition, but results were inconclusive. Mallory and Norton, without oxygen, supported by Morshead and Somervell attained a highest of 27,000 feet on the North Col route on May 21. Mallory saved all the climbers when Morshead slipped on the descent. Six days later Finch and Bruce, climbing with oxygen made it to 200 feet higher in rather less time. In deteriorating weather an ill-advised third attempt was made, again led by Mallory, during which an avalanche swept 7

Sherpas to their death - up to then the worst mountain disaster and still the worst on Everest. Mallory blamed himself, and vowed to end his Everest adventures.

But it was not to be, for now he was becoming Mallory of Everest, and like Peary and Scott was inexorably drawn to his pole. Initially he demurred, but it needed little persuasion from Younghusband and Win Young to convince him to join to 1924 attempt. Now here it must be said, in contrast to Peary and Scott, Mallory was never considered as an expedition leader or even a formal (though he certainly was always the de facto) climbing leader. Mallory's was a natural, unspoiled talent, he a romantic of the mountains. He climbed not to achieve first ascents, but because he loved it, was wonderfully gifted, appreciated the beauty of the mountain and the fellowship of his comrades. General Bruce said in typical army fashion: "He is a great dear, but forgets his boots on all occasions." Tom Longstaff, an experienced Himalayan traveller, and the 1924 expedition doctor said: "he was a very stout hearted baby, but quite unfit to placed in charge of anything including himself."

Leaving a new teaching position at Cambridge, his wife and three children under the age of six, Mallory made his ultimate return to the mountain he had become fatefully entwined with. Leaders and climbers had changed some, but the outline was familiar. After early rebuffs by challenging weather, Mallory, this time with oxygen, reached camp 6 at 26,800 feet on the Northeast ridge with Andrew Irvine on June 8th ready to make a summit attempt. From there, save for one tantalizing glimpse by Noel Odell, their support climber, they were never seen again and so passed from history into mythology.

Odell's account: "There was a sudden clearing and the entire summit ridge was unveiled...My eyes became fixed on a black spot silhouetted beneath a rock step in the ridge...Another black spot became apparent and moved to join the other on the crest...then the whole fascinating vision vanished, enveloped in cloud once more." This account, which has been subject to much interpretation still clearly says: "last seen going strongly for the summit". This also accords with all we know of Mallory - he would not be turned back this last time.

Since then a few tantalizing clues have emerged. On the next north col attempt in 1933 Irvine's ice ax was found on the summit ridge below where Odell had seen them. In 1974, a member of a Chinese team reported finding the body of a Caucasian (which by definition could only be Mallory or Irvine) above where Odell had seen them, but unfortunately this climber also was killed before he could impart further details.

Mallory and Irvine received the usual accords given British

heros - a memorial service at St. Paul's, recognition by the monarch, etc. I have seen the tasteful stained glass memorial to them in Chester Cathedral. But will we ever know what happened? Two answers come to mind. Yes, even the vastness of Everest's glaciers may ultimately disgorge secrets: a body, hopefully with a cold-preserved diary or camera might yet surface to end the mystery.

But in a larger sense, even if the ultimate mystery is revealed, it will tell us nothing of importance. For it is not the goal itself but the characters that sought it we have explored tonight. Even if eventually demonstrated, Mallory and Irvine's success, neither ennobles them more nor in any way demeans Hillary and Tenzing. Peary's stretched claims do not diminish his courage but only highlight his susceptibility to adulation and publicity. Scott attained his Grail, only to find its hollowness, and could do naught other than perish.

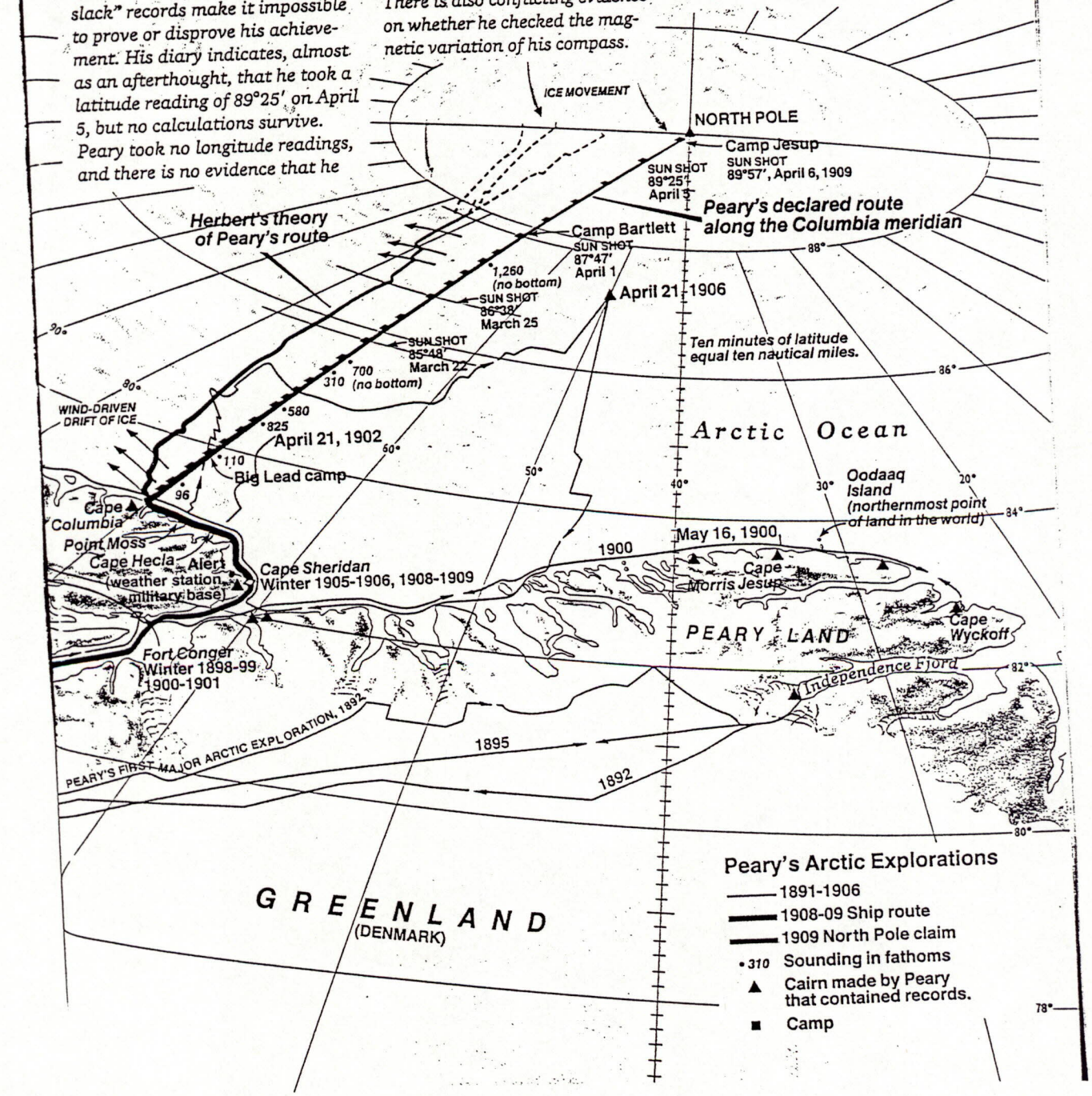
So we have Peary - Peary of nothing really, let's call him Peary of the Arctic Club, a creature of his own creation. Driven like Don Quixote by illusions of grandeur, his ego far eclipsed his modest attainments. Befitting such a manipulator of the media, the shreds of his reputation exist only thanks to the National Geographic which still can't quite admit how badly it was flummoxed. Scott is forever **Scott of the Antarctic,** to some an embodiment of an now obsolete Imperial ideal, too willing to sacrifice himself and others for king and country. But as we have seen, he was more accurately a stubborn and ignorant Achilles of Greek tragedy doomed to meet his fate in spectacular failure. Mallory, Galahad, our romantic hero, now **Mallory of Everest,** left us the perpetual question of the attainment of his Grail. But in his innate simpleness and purity - not responsive to love of self or of country - he captured the thing in itself, the true quest for adventure whereby man may grow.

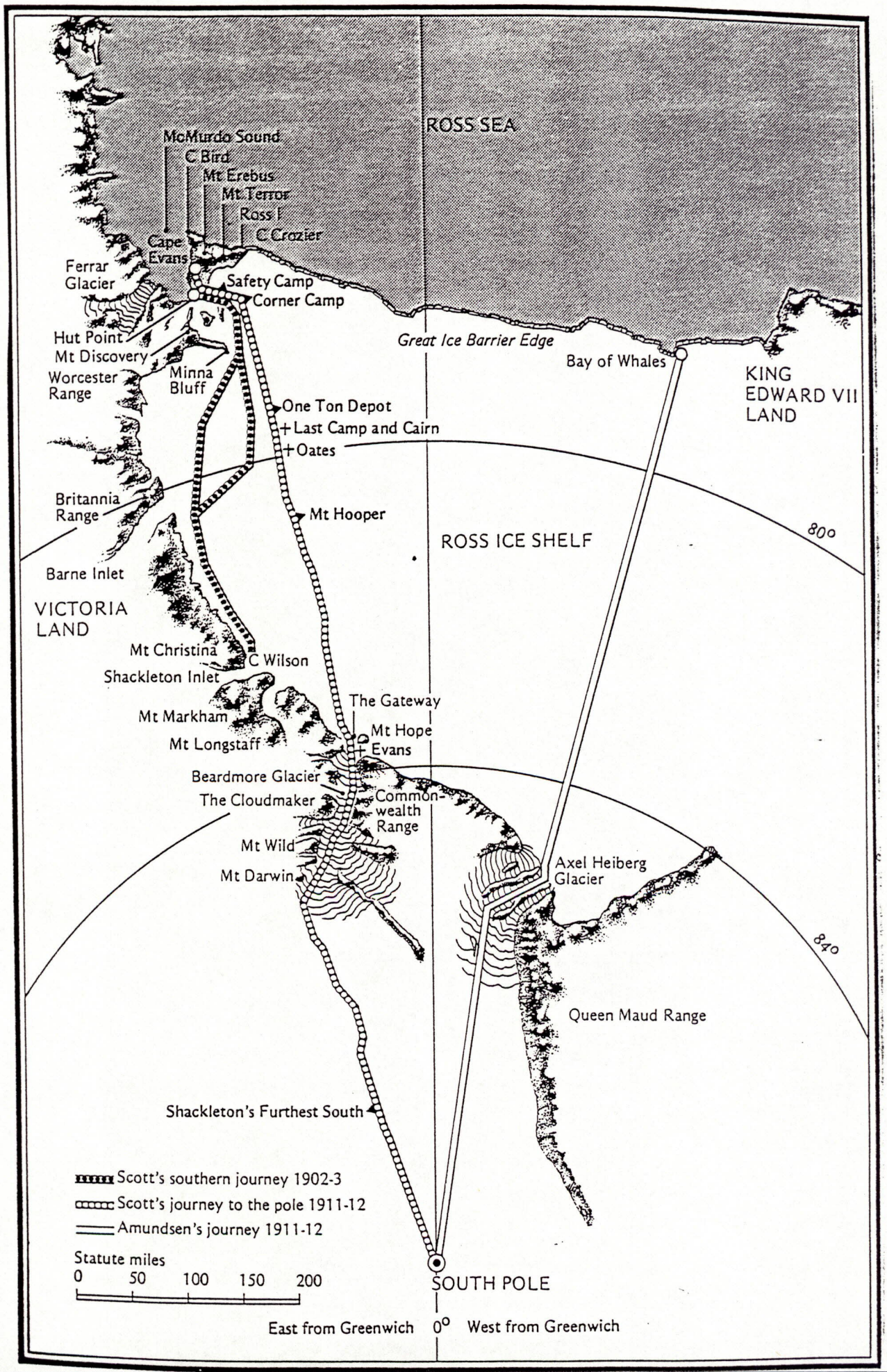
before starting for home at 4 p.m. on April 7. He later railed against critics: "No one except the most ignorant will have any doubt but what, at some time, I had passed close to the precise point, and had, perhaps, actually passed over it."

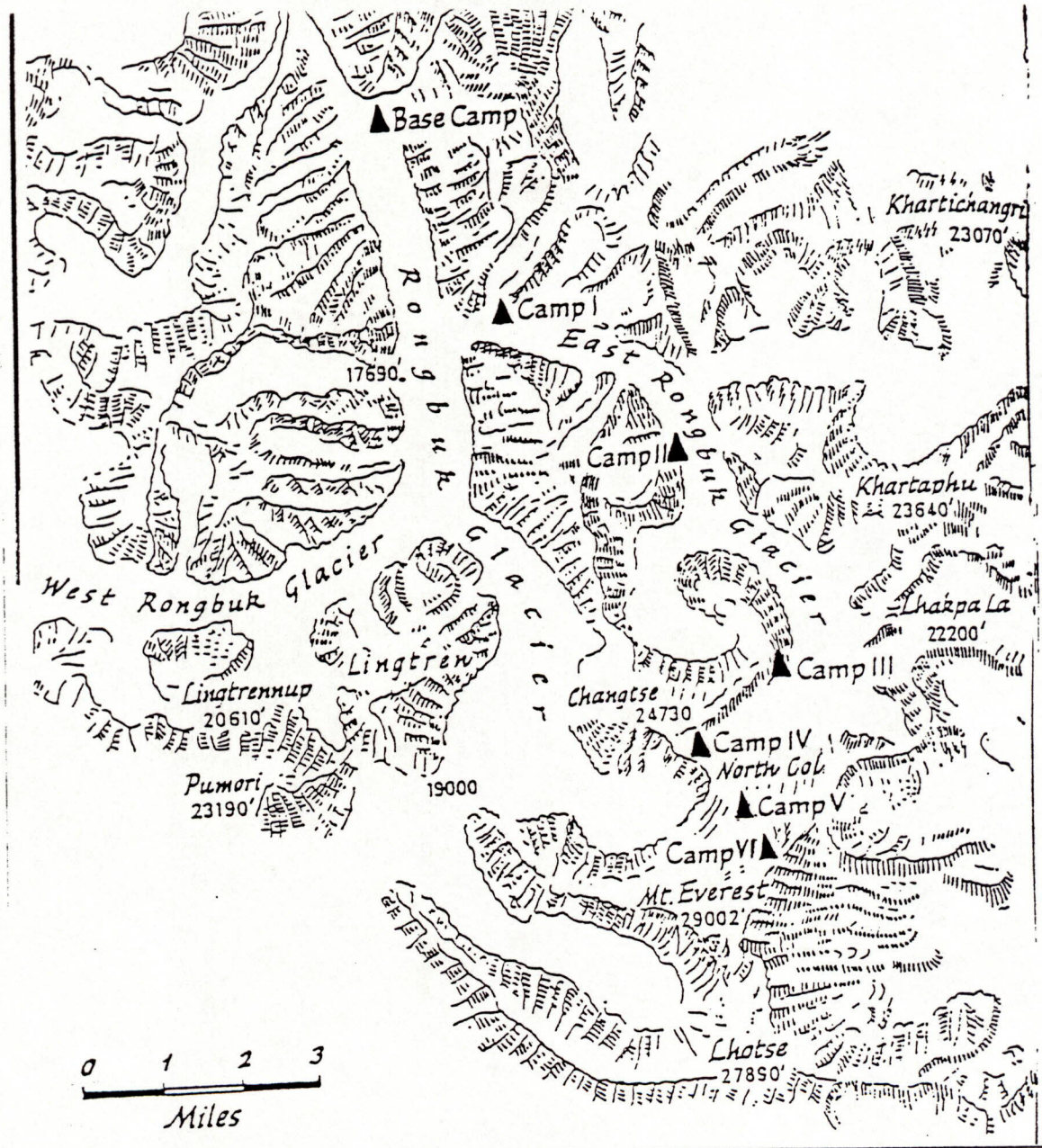
Or he may have been from 30 to 60 miles away, concludes author Wally Herbert, who has projected three locations based on different combinations of navigational errors. Peary's "astonishingly slack" records make it impossible to prove or disprove his achievement. His diary indicates, almost as an afterthought, that he took a latitude reading of 89°25′ on April 5, but no calculations survive. Peary took no longitude readings, and there is no evidence that he corrected his course for detours. Ice drifting west in "violent" easterly winds may from the start have carried Peary off his intended track, the Cape Columbia meridian. Each day his heading would have been set by the shadows cast at local noon. But if he was not on the Columbia meridian he would not have headed due north. And if his route indeed lay to the west, his error would have been increased by the fact that his chronometer was ten minutes fast. There is also conflicting evidence on whether he checked the magnetic variation of his compass.

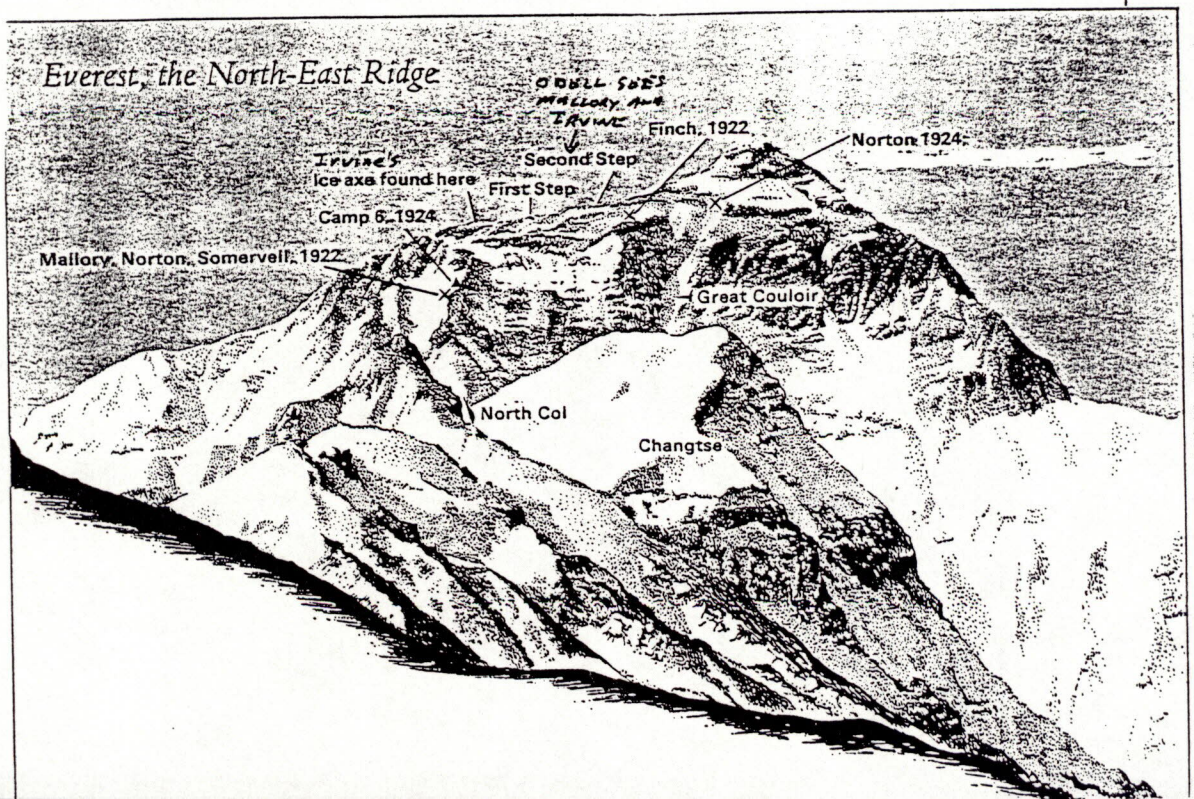
"Conditions could have been phenomenal," says Herbert, but Peary's round-trip speed from Bartlett borders on the incredible.

Equally puzzling are the psychological mysteries. If Peary's final readings told him he was off course, what was his reaction to this discovery? April 7 and 8 are blank in Peary's diary, and later accounts by him and Henson are contradictory. He "scarcely spoke" to Henson on the return trip, and back on the Roosevelt he was subdued about his feat.




ROSS SEA
McMurdo Sound
C Bird
Mt Erebus
Mt Terror
Ross I
C Crozier
Cape Evans
Ferrar Glacier
Safety Camp
Corner Camp
Hut Point
Mt Discovery
Worcester Range
Minna Bluff
Great Ice Barrier Edge
Bay of Whales
KING EDWARD VII LAND
One Ton Depot
Last Camp and Cairn
Oates
Britannia Range
Mt Hooper
ROSS ICE SHELF
800
Barne Inlet
VICTORIA LAND
Mt Christina
C Wilson
Shackleton Inlet
The Gateway
Mt Markham
Mt Hope
Mt Longstaff
Evans
Beardmore Glacier
The Cloudmaker
Common-wealth Range
Mt Wild
Mt Darwin
Axel Heiberg Glacier
840
Queen Maud Range
Shackleton's Furthest South
Scott's southern journey 1902-3
Scott's journey to the pole 1911-12
Amundsen's journey 1911-12
Statute miles
0 50 100 150 200
SOUTH POLE
East from Greenwich 0° West from Greenwich


Base Camp
Camp I
Camp II
Camp III
Camp IV
North Col
Camp V
Camp VI
Mt. Everest
29002'
Lhotse
27890'
Changtse
24730
Pumori
23190'
Lingtrennup
20610'
Lingtren
19000
Khartaphu
23640'
Lhakpa La
22200'
Kharticnangri
23070'
17690'
East Rongbuk Glacier
West Rongbuk Glacier
Rongbuk Glacier
0 1 2 3
Miles


Everest, the North-East Ridge
ODELL SEES MALLORY AND IRVINE
Finch, 1922
Norton 1924
Irvine's Ice axe found here
Second Step
First Step
Camp 6, 1924
Mallory, Norton, Somervell, 1922
Great Couloir
North Col
Changtse

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