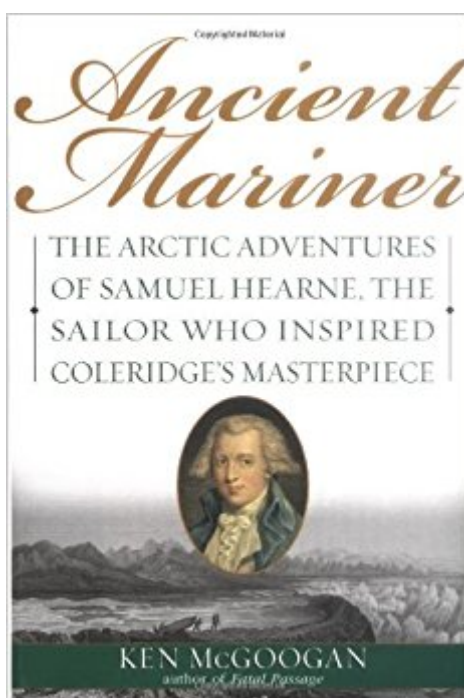


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Ancient Mariner: The Arctic Adventures Of Samuel Hearne, The Sailor Who Inspired Coleridge's Masterpiece



Synopsis

Though immortalized by Samuel Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," few people know that eighteenth-century British adventurer Samuel Hearne became the first European to see the Arctic Ocean while standing on America's northernmost shore. In *Ancient Mariner*, McGoogan demonstrates that Hearne was far more complex, accomplished, and influential than history has shown. A Royal Navy midshipman during the Seven Years' War, Hearne moved to London, and in 1766, just twenty-one, joined the Hudson's Bay Company. He embarked on an overland quest for rich veins of copper supposedly located "far to the northward where the sun don't set" and also to discover the Northwest Passage. Hearne's posthumously published journal, the first book by a European explorer on the Arctic, describes a journey of 3,500 miles marked by hardship, and mitigated only by his friendship with the legendary Dene leader Matonabee. His epic adventure culminated in the infamous and still-controversial massacre at "Bloody Falls" a murderous battle between two native tribes that changed him forever. In a fascinating example of literary detective work, McGoogan determines that, having returned to London to live out his final days, Hearne met Samuel Taylor Coleridge, inspiring the poet to write "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

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Customer Reviews

Although more concerned with the harsh realities of 18th-century exploration than the vagaries of rhyme and syntax, McGoogan's study does relate an often brutal tale with a surprising amount of

grace and poetry. The book's hero, Samuel Hearne, first went to sea at age 12, as a British navy junior officer, and later became one of the most storied North American adventurers of his day, inspiring Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Hearne (1745-1792) is a compelling subject: a learned man with a passion for Voltaire, and a sailor of some repute in the Seven Years' War, he went on to work for the Hudson Bay Company at its northernmost base, from where he set off on a three-year exploration of northern Canada, a journey he recorded in meticulous detail. The first European to stand on North America's northernmost shore, Hearne had, for a European of his time, an unusual amount of empathy for Native Americans (and a surprising facility with several of their languages). Thus it was especially difficult for him to understand the events that occurred at "Bloody Falls," in which the band Hearne was traveling with massacred a camp of Inuits for no apparent reason. The event haunted Hearne for the rest of his life and played a role in Coleridge's epic poem. Moving from England's bustling ports to the frozen tundra, from disease-wracked trading posts to London's coffeehouses, this work is a swift epic in its own right, providing a snapshot of a delicate world on the cusp of irrevocable change. B&w illus., maps. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Although he began his career as a sailor, Samuel Hearne is better known as the first European to make an overland excursion across northern Canada to the Arctic Ocean, an exploit that he chronicled in a posthumously published journal. McGoogan's account of Hearne's service in the Royal Navy and of his years working for the Hudson's Bay Company sets out to burnish the explorer's reputation as a humanist, anthropologist, and literary pioneer. The detailed narrative of Hearne's trek north with a band of Dene Indians is absorbing, despite the insertion of some clumsily dramatized scenes. But McGoogan fails to make the case for his most arresting claim: that Hearne's compulsive recounting of a massacre he once witnessed inspired the figure of the haunted sailor in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker

The order was processed and shipped the same day and I received it in two days, a completely unexpected and delightful surprise. What a wonderful book service which I'll use again and again.

"Ancient Mariner" by Ken McGoogan Full marks to Ken McGoogan for creating an accessible history of Samuel Hearne. Such a work was needed because Hearne, who survived one of the greatest epics of human endurance in all of history, is all too little known, even in Canada. During 2002 and

2003 I lived on the tundra, right on Hearne's path, in fact, and I was amazed that my Canadian colleagues had never heard of Hearne, and found the idea preposterous that a white man had visited those parts 230 years before them, let alone that he had walked there from Hudson Bay. Yet, important as the subject matter is and despite all the research that McGoogan carried out, his book was a disappointment to me. Reasons centre around what was included and what was excluded. The sins of inclusion focus upon all the relationships which Hearne may or may not have had with contemporaneous identities. While all the relationships seem entirely plausible, it is rather ridiculous to "authenticate" them by reporting the supposed dialogues as direct speech. Even the intimacies of his boudoir are quoted, as though McGoogan had somehow got hold of a cassette recording, long lost in museum archives! Thus, fact merged with fiction, which tended to undermine the credibility of the work. Barely 60 pages out of 300 relate to Hearne's great expedition. This is not to say that the other 240 do not contain interesting information. They do. But it is almost as if the author felt he had to include every titbit he stumbled across, Simon Winchester style. Some of those titbits are tasty indeed, but where they are little more than conjecture, they would have been better left fall. As an example, the whole connection with Samuel Coleridge may or may not have occurred, but really who cares? And Hearne may or may not have been the model for the Ancient Mariner, but such a possibility hardly warrants trying to make it the highlight of a tale which has more than enough substance to stand in its own right. Details of the expedition are all too scant. Nor is the text aided by the maps, which are of mediocre merit. The author makes mention of various scholarly efforts to reconcile Hearne's account with modern place names, but neglects to include any of this information in either text or maps. The text fails to convey the immensity of the difficulties of Hearne's journey. Yes, we all know that Canada is cold, but this was through the very epicentre of that coldness. Weeks on end of temperatures stuck in the low minus 30's; gales taking the wind chill down to the minus 80's. How did a man survive three years of this in 18th century clothing? How did he find liquid water when all was covered by at least a metre of ice? How did he avoid the ravenous predators (grizzlies, wolves, wolverines) which abound in the area? How did he navigate through the impossible maze of lakes in summer? How was he not driven insane by the summer insects? McGoogan mentions some of these subjects, but cursorily, leaving one with the feeling that he has not experienced them himself. He adds weight to this suspicion in the epilogue when he confides that his personal rediscovery of Hearne's route of thousands of miles was limited to a couple of miles at the Hudson Bay end. "Ancient Mariner" almost begs for comparison with another popular history account of an exploration epic of similar scale in a comparably harsh environment. I refer to "The Dig Tree" by Sarah Murgatroyd (Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 2002), an

account of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition across Australia in the 1850's. Murgatroyd, a young British journalist on assignment in Australia, decided that the Australian public needed to be better informed of this epic folly. Despite suffering a terminal case of cancer (she died the day the book was launched), she set out to follow the entire track. Her personal familiarity with the environment shines through in her account. Whereas Burke was a fool, Hearne was a sage. The difference shows most starkly in their respective attitudes to the indigenous people. Through them, Hearne survived to tell the tale. Burke treated them with contempt and died as a result. For all my criticisms, "Ancient Mariner" is an easy and informative book to read. Good, but it could have been much better.

Exploration stories often focus on the tropics. David Livingstone, Albert Russel Wallace, Richard Burton and others are readily recalled. The polar quests of Amundsen, Cook, Peary and Byrd probably follow in popularity. The upper latitudes seem almost overlooked. With little land mass approaching Antarctica and its pole, Canada and Russia are left for investigation by the enquiring mind. Having offered the life of one such wanderer in John Rae, McGoogan now reaches further back in time and place to reveal the life of Samuel Hearne. It's a fine study of a dedicated man. McGoogan's lively narrative traces Hearne's Royal Navy career, then follows him to the Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] station of Prince of Wales Fort. With the Canadian Arctic still a terra incognita, various quests were under consideration - the Northwest Passage and/or an inland sea leading to Asia being prime contenders. A more specific ambition arose with indications of a vast copper resource near the Arctic Sea. Hearne pursued this rumour by trekking across the Canadian tundra to find it. Various interludes occurred along the way. Hearne's expeditions to the Arctic seem pre-ordained to failure. Having but a hazy notion of what confronted him wasn't a hindrance. Bureaucracy proved the more serious impediment. The British attitude toward indigenous peoples compounded faulty notions of requirements for such a trip. With no idea of how Native Peoples' societies were structured, British HBC agents blundered into one crisis after another. In today's world, for a man to suggest that women must accompany the expedition to perform specialised tasks would bring down the wrath of the Human Rights Commission. In the 18th Century rise of the HBC in Canada women performed essential roles. No Native Peoples' women meant no Native Peoples' men. No men, no expedition. McGoogan explains all these circumstances without apology or condemnation. It's a professional historian's approach, worthy of full praise. The other aspect of British imperialism's shortsighted view is the relationships among Canada's Native Peoples. Hearne and others would counsel peace to those who had been warring when the British still painted

themselves blue. These animosities were not easily quelled and might break out without warning nor discernible reason. Hearne was confronted with this near the mouth of the Coppermine River. McGoogan, relying on Hearne's own account, describes the massacre of an Inuit settlement leading to the naming of "Bloody Falls". The event remained fixed in Hearne's memory for the remainder of his life. Hearne, seeking an ephemeral copper lode, traversed immense stretches of the Canadian North. With various teams, but particularly relying on a Dene negotiator, Matonabee, Hearne viewed the Arctic Ocean, the first European to reach it overland. The copper wasn't there, nor, in Hearne's opinion, was there any possibility of a Northwest Passage. He saw the Great Slave Lake, but when he later reported on his journey, skeptics were confounded by how far west it lay. Canada's vastness overwhelmed chair-bounded geographers. Hearne wasn't simply seeking mineral wealth. He recorded copious observations on plant and animal life in the region, as well as collecting information on the native peoples. More than just an adventurer, Hearne is credited by McGoogan as being one of earliest naturalists. Hearne's return to England was less than satisfactory. An account of his travels netted him not a penny - he died before publication. One event, a likely meeting with Coleridge at a boy's school, may have led Hearne to become the source of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. While the notion is McGoogan's speculative idea, it's plausible enough to be valid. It certainly provided a good, if unexpected, title for the life of an Arctic explorer. McGoogan presents that life vividly, with only minor, forgivable, embellishments. [stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

Any literature or history aficionado would enjoy this book. I have recently gotten interested in this area of the world and have just finished a historical fiction novel called *The Tenderness of Wolves* and a movie entitled *Snow Walker* that opened my eyes to this frozen area of the world and its inhabitants. The author has completed a tremendous amount of research into Mr. Hearn's life and adventures, but the anecdotes he tells make it come alive. I forgot to cook supper tonight because I was so engrossed!

Found this book in the dollar store and got a whole lot more than that dollar's worth of value. McGoogan's story of Samuel Hearne starts a little slow but continues to improve as you go through it. A lot of this is due to the life of Hearne itself as his adventures with the Hudson Bay Company become more and more interesting as they go along, particularly his interaction with the natives. One particularly interesting aspect of the book are the disputes of Hearne's accounts. Not so much the early ones but the modern ones. The objections are politically correct as they dispute the

casual warfare and slaughter practiced by Indians he encountered. The attempt to discredit that suggestion is so pedantic that it is laughable. The author treats it with less contempt than it deserves but still rejects that attempted re-write. This book is a labor of love and obsession, much like Hearne's travels. It was not a fast read, more of a slow cup of tea but the subject is so interesting that it will be very much worth what you pay if you have a love of history and adventure.

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