

Peary's Second Attempt to Reach the North Pole

Adapted from a work by J. Kennedy McLean

On February 28, Peary hurried on with all possible speed, hoping to reach the Pole at last. For some days, the ice was in motion everywhere, but over time it became quieter, and as there was very little wind the traveling was good. Full of impatience as he tramped along, and grudging every moment given to rest, Peary dreaded meeting some obstacle, such as open water or impassable ice, that would put an end to the journey.

Delayed by gales and open water, and driven off his course seventy miles to the east, Peary was cut off from his support team. He determined to make a dash for the Pole with the group, eight in all, and the supplies that he had with him.

Leaving behind everything he did not absolutely need, and trying to set a record pace, the group traveled thirty miles in a ten hours' march. Storms added many problems to the journey, the strain of which told severely on both men and dogs.

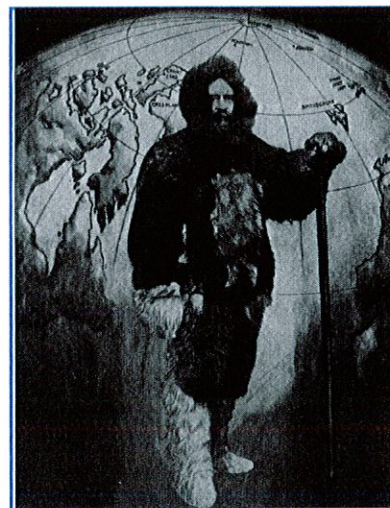
The 20th of April brought the weary group into a region where many streams of water broke through the ice. By noon of the 21st, they came to a final halt.

Disappointed at once more having to stop, Peary would have liked to make the last dash with only one or two of his men. But he dared not do this in view of all the melting ice, and he had to confess that once again he must turn back without reaching the North Pole. He determined that they were in 87°, 6' north latitude. This was the farthest north that any explorer had yet reached.

Warned by the drawn faces of his comrades and the skeleton figures of the few dogs left, Peary saw that no time must be lost in turning back. After planting a flag at the highest point, and leaving a bottle with a record of the journey, the exhausted men turned their backs on the Pole and started the long march home.

Trying as the outward march had been, the dangers of the return journey were even greater. Besides, there was no longer the thrill of possible victory to keep the men going in the face of hardships. Killing their dogs for food, and breaking up the sleds to provide fires for cooking, the group pushed on until they found themselves stranded on an island of ice. Was this, then, to be the end of it all? Were they to meet death in that cold and pitiless sea? Just as they were preparing for the worst, two of the Eskimo scouts came hurrying back to the camp with the report that, a few miles farther on, the water was covered with a film of young ice, and that there was a chance of their being able to cross on snowshoes.

It was a desperate chance, but they were prepared to take it. Following the more experienced Eskimos, they crossed in silence, the ice swaying beneath them as they skimmed along. What the result would be none could tell, but they all felt the greatness of their peril.



9 Peary himself admits that this was the first and only time in the Arctic that he felt doubtful as to what would happen. In fact, near the middle of the crossing, when his snowshoe broke through the ice, he thought to himself, "This is the finish. A little later there was a cry from someone in the line, but I dared not take my eyes from the steady gliding of my snowshoes. When we stepped upon the firm ice on the southern side of the lead, sighs of relief from the two men nearest me were distinctly audible. The cry I had heard had been from one of my men, whose toe, like mine, had broken through the ice." The crossing had been made just in time, for, as the travelers looked round for a moment before turning their faces southward, they saw that the sheet of ice on which they had crossed was in two pieces.

Still, they were not yet out of danger. Peary and his men ascended a high mass of ice to have a better view of the area, and to look for a way of escape. What they saw might well have struck terror into the boldest heart. Before them lay "such a mass of shattered ice" as Peary had never seen before and hoped never to see again.

Once again, death was looking them in the face, for there seemed to be no path through that frozen wilderness. But they determined to struggle. Stumbling forward at every step, bruised and sore, they at last struck a better road. They made their way to Britannia Island and then to Cape May and Cape Bryant.

Reaching their ship at the end of July, they returned to America a few months later. After twenty years of heroic striving, Peary had again missed the prize, but the victory was postponed only for a little while.

5. Which statement *best* explains why Peary and his group survived the return journey?
- A They at last found a better road through the wilderness.
 - B They climbed up to high points to view the land and make decisions.
 - C Two Eskimos led them to safety at the most dangerous moment.
 - D They were filled with determination.
6. What is the *main* way in which the reader learns about Peary in this selection?
- A through his spoken words and actions
 - B through the thoughts of his companions
 - C through his thoughts and actions
 - D through the thoughts of later explorers
17. Which set of words contributes *most* to the tone of the selection?
- A frozen, ice, Eskimos
 - B boldest, prize, victory
 - C struggle, wilderness, disappointed
 - D desperate, death, terror
48. Which argument *most accurately* evaluates the information in this selection?
- A Peary was foolish even to attempt a second journey to the Pole.
 - B Peary chose exactly the right time to turn back.
 - C Peary probably should have turned back sooner than he did.
 - D Peary ought to have made more use of his support team on the return journey.
49. Peary's experience in this selection was *most* like that of which other explorer or adventurer?
- A an astronaut who successfully planted a flag on the moon
 - B a climber who hoped to be the first to reach the top of Everest but had to turn back
 - C an explorer whose ships were wrecked while trying to find the Northwest Passage
 - D a deep sea explorer who discovered previously unknown forms of life
50. Which meaning of *lead* is used in paragraph 9?
- A first place; the place ahead of all others
 - B a leash, rope, or strap for an animal, such as a sled dog
 - C the opening paragraph or line of a news story or other writing; hook
 - D any fracture or melted area in an ice field