

successfully integrated reconnaissance using traditional sledging techniques with aerial photography and surveys from a motorboat, and Rymill ensured that aerial discoveries were always supported by accurate ground control surveys. A major achievement of the expedition was the discovery and mapping of George VI Sound and Ice Shelf: Rymill unselfishly withdrew from this survey party in order to provide back-up depot support. The BGLE also confirmed that Graham Land was a peninsula rather than a series of islands as suggested by Wilkins, and Rymill completed a sledging trip across the spine of the Peninsula to within sight of the Weddell Sea. The work of this expedition set the scene for many of the postwar government expeditions.

Rymill planned further polar explorations, but marriage in 1938, the Second World War, and the death of his mother intervened. He spent the rest of his life restoring the business and property at Old Penola Estate, and in a developing interest in equestrian sport. Not even Sir Douglas Mawson's entreaty that he be involved in establishing an Australian presence in Antarctica convinced him otherwise. John Rymill, like his father, was killed as a result of a car accident, in 1968.

The book is thoroughly researched and an accurate and complete biography. Béchervaise is precise and correct in his use of English, but his style is somewhat formal and stilted, and the result is a volume that is thorough, but not exciting. He uses his own knowledge of Antarctic conditions to provide background information, in footnotes, on the physical environment experienced by Rymill. These are not always strictly scientifically correct, but they provide a useful lay description. A fuller appreciation of the achievements of Rymill's expeditions would have been helped by the inclusion of simplified and better maps, rather than the poorly reproduced versions taken from the original expedition reports. But overall, this biography provides an excellent portrait of a great polar explorer and fills a void in polar history. It will provide a valuable resource for the polar specialist and enthusiast, but will probably do little to popularize Rymill with the general reader.

*Ian Allison*  
*Antarctic Cooperative Research Centre*  
*and Australian Antarctic Division*  
*GPO Box 252-80*  
*Hobart, 7001*  
*Australia*

**COOK & PEARY: THE POLAR CONTROVERSY, RESOLVED.** By ROBERT M. BRYCE. Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Press, 1997. 1105 p., maps, b&w illus., notes. Hardbound. US\$49.95.

Several years ago in these pages, Moira Dunbar of McGill University wrote that the Cook-Peary controversy over the discovery of the North Pole "was one of the most dismal and undignified episodes in the history of exploration" (Dunbar,

1957:54). Reading one thousand plus pages of this prodigious tome will not lead most hard-core Polar history buffs to dissent from that assessment. It is the latest—and by far the weightiest—to make the shelf of those who have followed the great debate on the attainment of what Farley Mowat (1967:238) called "that peculiarly non-objective yet passionately desired Holy Grail of so many men."

Dr. Frederick A. Cook and his rival, U.S. Navy engineer Robert E. Peary, evoked all of the passions and actions of early twentieth-century America and Europe. Their names were associated (after well-managed publicity campaigns and the participation of endorsing newspapers) with images of heroism, self-sacrifice, and patriotism. In truth, both of these driven men would in time succumb to the temptations of all heroes and would-be heroes: incompetence, occasional deception, commercial gain, and alleged failure would tarnish their achievements. The popular appeal of the last of the dog-team explorers of the Arctic swept both rivals into their respective niches of history.

Robert M. Bryce is a librarian at a community college in Maryland, which offered him a good logistical base from which to journey to the National Archives and the Library of Congress, where access to both the Peary and Cook papers was opened to scholars in 1989. The author's fascination with the subject is said to have spanned two decades, but we may assume that his "thousands of hours spent [and] hundreds of thousands of pages read" (p. xv) were concentrated upon the previously restricted papers of both explorers. What becomes apparent in the reading of this book, however, is what may be called a publisher's choice in title and promotion which expands its scope beyond the author's declaration in the preface: "[this story]...is of an extraordinary life...because by choice and by chance, Frederick Albert Cook was no ordinary man" (p. xiv).

Is this, then, a biography of the physician-explorer consigned to the footnotes of history as a pretender, a geographic charlatan, and an outright faker? Or is it an account of two Arctic travellers who spent years in the most inhospitable environment on earth seeking what the Inuit called "The Big Nail"? Because Cook and Peary were—as countless others have observed—inexorably tied to each other, any serious account of Cook must deal with his rival. The author's prologue (p. xi) suggests that both sought "one last heroic deed...before the romantic age departed."

Bryce has exhibited the patience and attention to detail of a meticulous researcher and has mined information never before made available about the controversy (he even told this reviewer why his invited biographical sketch of Cook was shelved by an encyclopedia many years ago). His book not only walks away with the girth award, but its 1814 reference notes must achieve landmark status among biographers. *Cook & Peary* might have been a candidate for a definitive category—except that those familiar with the debate and the two historic figures recognize that much was simply ignored or dismissed without substantive discussion. Bryce, defending his research at a symposium at the Byrd

Polar Research Center in September, acknowledged that “I am not a historian but a librarian.”

Authors should not be held to the fire for the excessive publicity of their publishers, but there should be some accountability for the assertion that Mr. Bryce was “the only one to have studied [the Cook papers] in detail and the only scholar with the right to publish excerpts.” Not so, as at least two others and this reviewer have researched the same materials and published from them. Yet what may be the most troubling for those interested in history is the subtitle, which asserts that this book has somehow “resolved” the controversy (Bryce dismisses both Peary’s and Cook’s claims). The reader must decide this, but those about to embark on this thousand plus-page experience should know that any “resolution” demands further reading and checking of authors and writers ignored or curtly dismissed in the reference notes.

Surprisingly, Bryce ignores an extensive body of European literature on the controversy, presumably because Europeans would defer to the opinion of American writers on “their” candidates for Polar honors. Bryce dismisses Canadian Farley Mowat as expounding “anti-establishment” theories because of his advocacy of Cook. He seeds doubt about the integrity of others who have researched the Cook-Peary story before him, including Thomas F. Hall, who 80 years ago published the first extensive field analysis of both explorers, and Dennis Rawlins, a contemporary critic of both explorers who as much as anyone debunked the Peary claim more than two decades ago.

The myth surrounding Peary had remained unassailed through three generations of critics until British explorer Wally Herbert—ironically, at the invitation of virtually Peary’s last institutional defender, the National Geographic Society—reexamined the Peary claims in 1991. To the Society’s dismay, Herbert (1990) declared that Peary had not been at the geographical Pole. Forgotten scholars like Britain’s J. Gordon Hayes had consigned the Peary claim to an Arctic limbo 60 years earlier, yet Bryce devotes but a few paragraphs to their work. The book’s title suggests a dual biography, but the author treats Peary as a character intertwined with Cook.

For reasons only the author knows, he only mentioned a three-day symposium on Cook held at the Byrd Polar Research Center in 1993, at which he heard Herbert, Rawlins, French explorer Jean Malaurie, and ice travellers Brian Shoemaker, Joseph Fletcher, and others expound on Cook. Bryce also dismisses with a note an expedition that followed Cook’s route to Mt. McKinley a year later.

The book will be welcome in those libraries that include collections on exploration and discovery as well as on Polar research. It is also essentially American social history and politics, for the fine selection of illustrations and cartoons portrays the press attention and commentary through which this debate fascinated the public in the years prior to World War I. Only the dedicated collector of Polar titles will not wait for remainder catalogues for this one. Despite this book’s title, its controversy will likely remain unresolved into the next century.

## REFERENCES

- DUNBAR, M. 1957. Review of *An Historical Evaluation of the Cook-Peary Controversy*, by Russell W. Gibbons. *Arctic* 10(1):54–55.
- HERBERT, W. 1990. *The noose of laurels: Robert E. Peary and the race to the North Pole*. New York: Anchor Books. 395 p.
- MOWAT, F. 1967. *The polar passion: The quest for the North Pole*. Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart Limited. 302 p.

*Russell W. Gibbons*  
*Frederick A. Cook Collection*  
*207 Grandview Drive South*  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A*  
*15215*

THE ALPINE FLORA OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, VOLUME 1, THE MIDDLE ROCKIES. By RICHARD W. SCOTT, Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1995. ix + 901 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., index, appendices. Hardbound. US\$110.00.

As subjects become better known but more complex, books often cover smaller slices of a subject. *The Alpine Flora of the Middle Rockies* by R.W. Scott is no exception. Its large format, length, and coverage of only alpine areas of Wyoming and mountain ranges in adjacent Utah, Idaho, and Montana would at first appear to give it limited use. This, however, is not the case, for most species of the southern Rockies (Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico) and many for the northern Rockies (Montana, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon) are included.

Interesting aspects of this book, seldom found in a flora, are the background pages devoted to ecologically describing the alpine zone and the adaptations of these plants. The ecology section is followed by a section on the geomorphology and glaciation within the area. The individual mountain ranges are then described geologically.

The alpine flora of 609 species and 55 subspecies is outlined via the 36 families and 204 genera represented. The species richness of this alpine flora is demonstrated by comparison with the circumpolar arctic flora of 892 species. Scott further relates floristic richness per mountain range by showing that the Hoback Range, the smallest, has 92 species, while the largest ranges, Absaroka, Beartooth, and Wind River, have the largest floras (392, 374, and 413 species respectively). The three largest families are the Asteraceae (108 spp.), Poaceae (55 spp.), and the Cyperaceae (54 spp.); of the 204 genera, 96 are represented by a single species. Scott lists eight disjunct and often rare species that are more common to the southern or northern Rockies or to the Arctic. Endemic species, species more common at lower elevations, and species found at the highest elevations are listed along with 37 species that were expected, but have not yet been found in these mountain ranges.