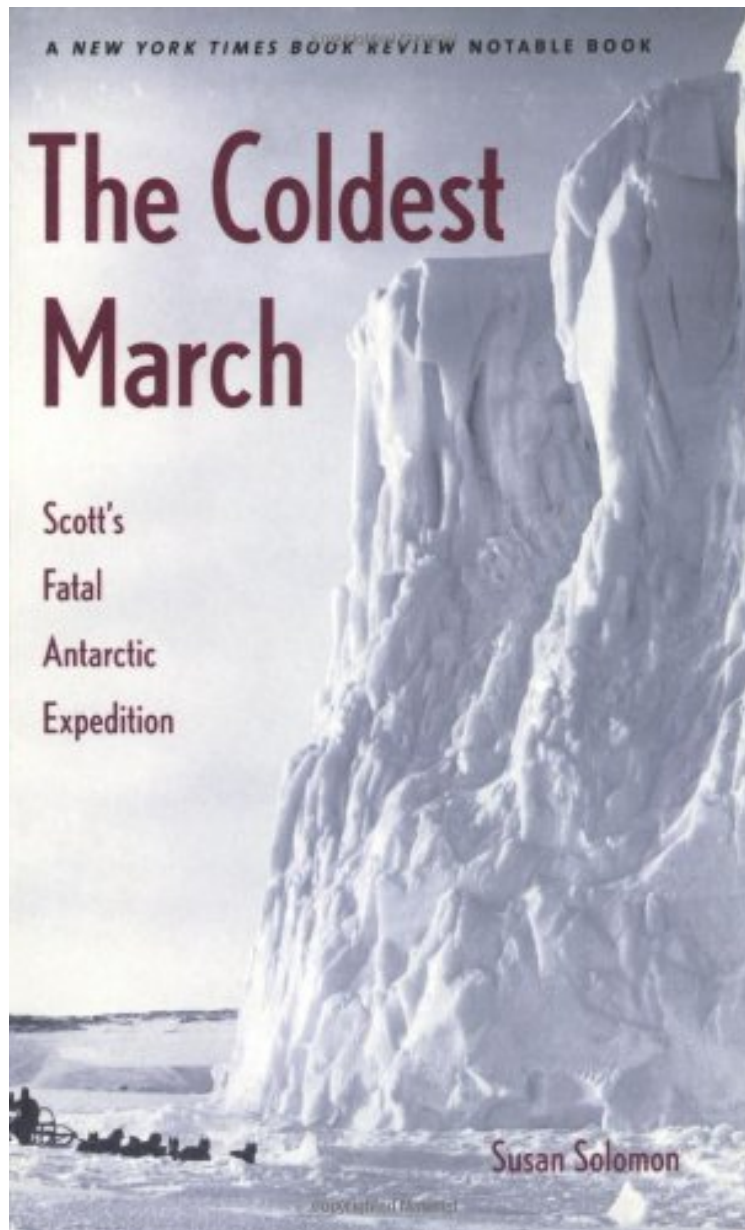


(Free read ebook) The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition

# The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition

*Susan Solomon*

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**Susan Solomon : The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. "The worst weather in the world"By mwreviewThe Coldest March

(referring to the month as well as the verb) is about British explorer Robert Falcon Scott and his team of explorers and scientists who raced a Norwegian team led by Roald Amundsen to the South Pole in 1911-12. Amundsen was the first ever to reach the Pole. Scott and four of his crew (hand-chosen by Scott) reached the Pole a month later. Amundsen's team made it back but Scott's did not. Many books and reports have been written since trying to explain why Scott failed to return. Many critics site several bad decisions on the part of Scott leading to the legend that he was a bumbler. Scott kept a journal right to the end and sometimes his self-effacing entries fueled the criticism. Susan Solomon may seem to have an agenda. Throughout the book, Solomon attempts to defend many of Scott's decisions and actions. She has tremendous expertise in the subject. Solomon studied the Ozone layer in the Antarctic. She is a senior scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Boulder, Colorado. When considering the legend of Scott, Solomon admits that she assumed the Brit explorer foolishly disregarded the power of Mother Nature until she studied the data and diaries left by Scott and his crew (xvii). While Solomon often defends Scott against highly critical historical accounts like Huntford's *The Last Place on Earth*, she is no apologist. She also points out Scott's errors and baffling decisions. At the beginning of each chapter, Solomon includes part of the experiences of a modern-day Antarctic visitor. This visitor is not a specific person but a conglomeration of typical visitors. At first I was confused as, while reading about this modern experience, the story would shift gears to 1911-12. Soon, I figured out the pattern. The modern stories are at the beginning of each chapter (only about 2-3 pages each) and are in bold print. These stories are able to demonstrate clearly the issues or problems surrounding the Scott legend: i.e. comparing the huge stock of frozen vegetables at the warehouse there today and the comfortable living conditions against what Scott and his men faced (pp. 71-2), the importance of drinking plenty of water in higher elevations versus the meager cups of tea Scott and company could drink each day with the scarce fuel they had, (p. 209), how much a visitor suffers in just a short period in extreme conditions (p. 286), etc. These stories, especially one explaining the need to risk snowblindness to better see crevasses (p. 183) helped me, as a reader who will never experience anything remotely close to the Antarctic, better understand the issues people face there. Solomon clearly refutes points of criticism of Scott: i.e. that his men suffered from scurvy because they refused to eat seal meat or their ponies (pp. 3, 176), that the final five men who journeyed to the Pole did not have enough to eat because they only prepared food for four (p. 213), etc. She does point out Scott's weaknesses and mistakes. For example, he put too much faith in the opinions of some of his men (p. 86) and, even more importantly, he planned by the margins, putting too much stock in past experiences and not preparing for the possibility of worse case scenarios as did Amundsen. The inferior sleeping bags and faulty fuel cans were significant problems stemming from a lack of proper testing and preparation. Solomon is no sycophant and makes a fair assessment based on Scott's and his men's diaries and other primary sources. What makes this work a fresh approach is the information on weather conditions taken from stations set up near Scott's path. They provided data for several decades demonstrating that the conditions Scott faced during the last month of their lives (March 1912) were extremely rare and perhaps unprecedented. What is puzzling is Solomon's conclusions which are contradictory. She discusses the rarity of the blizzard they faced in March 1912 and then shifts to explain that a 10-day blizzard noted in Scott's diary probably did not occur and that the men stayed in their tent for other reasons; one possibly being Scott's frost-bitten foot. Then, out-of-the-blue, Solomon mentions a suicide plan Scott wrote in his diary on March 11 involving opium tablets (p. 322). They decided not to take them but it seems odd to only mention such an entry briefly towards the end of the book. They probably lived another 18 or more days. Her confusing and inconclusive ending is the only criticism I have of this well-written and fascinating book. It is extremely well-researched and, on a historical level, offers fresh ideas and approaches. She also discusses the men on Scott's team (Edward Wilson, Lawrence Oates, Henry Bowers, Edgar Evans, Lt. Edward Evans, Apsely Cherry-Garrard, etc.) describing some of their backgrounds, characters, and personalities which added a lot to the human side of the story.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An intriguing polar mystery story  
By Silver Springer  
I am not an avid reader of polar exploration but I found this tale of adventure, exploration and bravery very much like a good detective story. Even though you know from the beginning what the ending will be, the author slowly reveals facts and builds suspense about the outcome of parts of the story. While reading this book in the comfort of my home, I could imagine what it must have been like in that frozen world: spending several hours inching my way into an ice-filled sleeping bag or rescuing my companions when they repeatedly fell into one of the hundreds of crevices in the ice. The controversy about Scott's leadership was fully discussed, with the author showing his flaws as well as his contributions. I had my favorites among Scott's party and was so involved with them that I found myself almost talking to them. I particularly enjoyed the stories about the modern visitor to Antarctica at the beginning of each chapter which revealed how difficult life there can still be. The "visitor" plot lines always tied into some aspect of the story, illustrating some point or raising a question. There cannot be final proof about the cause of the polar party's deaths but Susan Solomon makes a convincing case that unusually cold weather was a deciding but not the only factor. The author poses an interesting hypothesis at the end of the book about the final factor that prevented the party from reaching the one-ton depot and safety, but I won't spoil it for you. Most of us will never have the opportunity to go to Antarctica, lead explorations or perform feats of daring. This is the appeal of Scott and his men and why this is such an interesting story.

27 of 30 people found the following review helpful. The wrong questions  
By A Customer  
This book is worth having and reading as a contribution to the pool of

information available to the general reader to frame an informed imagining of what it might have been like, what could have happened, how people might have felt in Antarctica with Captain Scott. However, many of the points the author raises in defense of Captain Scott seem to be in answer to the wrong questions. Why were Scott's people wearing fabric clothing? Because fur clothing would have been too hot for manhauling. This is an entirely reasonable answer to the wrong question. The expedition had ponies, dogs, and motor-sledges, and yet the expedition was dressed for manhauling; and why was that? That underlying decision process may have been a good one, but it is not touched on, leaving us with a good answer to the wrong question. The author's election of a frame-story puts me in mind of that used by Josephine Tey for her wonderful "The Daughter of Time." I enjoyed reading the real-time comparisons but quickly got tired of being preached at, and I find remarks such as "The visitor shakes his head at his own ignorant failure to truly grasp . . . the enormity of the task that Scott and his men faced" (p. 264) to be unnecessarily confrontational. Susan Solomon writes well; I have no doubt that she is very intelligent, highly educated, passionate about her subject, and persuaded that an historical injustice has been committed. This book earns three stars well and truly for the shocking implications of the final chapter, "The Winds of Chance and Choice." Her book sheds interesting light on what was going on during the Scott expedition, and I fully empathize with her desire to right what clearly seems to her to be a grotesque wrong done in the court of public opinion to Captain Scott's memory. She vigorously defends Scott on several issues raised about his decisions and conduct, frequently by shifting the blame to his subordinates -- a tactic distasteful to people with a military background. But her answers are to the wrong questions, and the book provides no grounds for defense of Captain Scott against many of the pertinent questions raised about avoidable errors of judgment contributory to the failure of the Scott polar expedition beyond that of "He made a mistake."

These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale. So penned Captain Robert Falcon Scott in 1912 as he confronted defeat and death in the crippling subzero temperatures of Antarctica. In this riveting book, Susan Solomon finishes the interrupted tale of Scott and his British expedition, depicting the staggering 900-mile trek to the South Pole and resolving the debate over the journey's failure. An absorbing, fascinating read . . . a book that will appeal to the explorer in everyone. Sally Ride Solomon argues her case well, in exact and graceful prose. Dennis Drabelle, Washington Post Book World Persuasive. . . . [Solomon] reaches important new conclusions about Scott's expedition. Sara Wheeler, New York Times Book Review Brilliant. . . . A marvelous and complex book: at once a detective story, a brilliant vindication of a maligned man, and an elegy both for Scott and his men and for the crystalline continent on which they died. Robert MacFarlane, Guardian Solomon has crafted a smart, terrific book and an important addition to polar history. Roberta MacInnis, Houston Chronicle

.com The icy deaths of Robert Falcon Scott and his companions on their return from the South Pole in 1912 made them English icons of courage and sacrifice. Soon, however, Scott's judgments and decisions were questioned, and his reputation became one of inept bungler rather than heroic pioneer. Susan Solomon, senior scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Colorado, approaches Scott's story from a meteorologist's point of view. She shows that the three weeks from February 27 to March 19, during which the explorers fell further and further behind the daily distances they had to cover in order to survive, were far colder than normal. Unusual blizzards of wet snow had already slowed the party and depleted their provisions and strength. Without these once-in-a-decade phenomena, Solomon believes the party would have returned to its base on the Ross Sea--second after Roald Amundsen in the race to the Pole, but safely. She opens each chapter with comments from a hypothetical modern visitor to Antarctica, presumably to give a wider context to the human drama of the last century, though this reviewer finds them inappropriate. She enriches her narratives of Scott's two Antarctic expeditions with vintage photographs and tables of meteorological data that highlight the explorers' achievements. Their determination was pitted against the worst weather in the world. Scott's story has been told many times before, but its weather information makes *The Coldest March* a useful addition to the literature. --John Stevenson From Publishers Weekly British explorer Robert Scott's legacy has been debated since his ill-fated 1911 expedition. Initially pegged a hero, he's subsequently been maligned as a bumbler who lost the race to the South Pole and died, with four companions, because of his mistakes. Solomon, a senior scientist at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, attempts to restore Scott's reputation, arguing that unnaturally cold weather (weeks of -35 F.), not poor judgment, caused the captain's demise. She traces the polar expedition (Scott's second) using modern scientific evidence and the explorers' diaries. In clear, well-paced prose, Solomon paints characters and landscape deftly and delivers well-conceived arguments. But the book is not without flaws. Each chapter has a forced, heavy-handed though sometimes amusing introduction featuring a fictional visitor to contemporary Antarctica. And while Solomon's arguments are plausible, they are not ironclad. To her contention that Scott's plans didn't work because of extreme weather, one might answer that he should have planned for any possible situation; his Norwegian rivals, for instance, took more than enough provisions. Still, whatever opinion readers have of Scott when they start the book, by the end he will have risen in their esteem. Solomon's exhaustive research provides readers with enough information to form their own opinion. Bw photos and

illus. (Sept. 10)Forecast: This book should be popular among exploration buffs because of its new scientific information. The book could get lost among the many polar adventure tales, though Solomon's fluid, accessible writing, her five-city tour and events at the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian may distinguish it from the crowd. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalIn November 1911, Capt. Robert Falcon Scott and his British team set out to be the first to reach the South Pole. Battling the brutal weather of Antarctica, they reached the pole in January 1912 only to discover that a Norwegian team had beat them there by nearly a month. On their return from the Pole, Scott and four of his companions died in harsh conditions. Ever since, history has not known whether to label them heroes or bunglers. Solomon, senior scientist at the Aeronomy Laboratory, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Boulder, CO) and recipient of the U.S. National Medal of Science in 2001 for her insights into explaining the cause of the Antarctic ozone layer, analyzes all the factors present during Scott's expedition in an attempt to explain that his failure was due not to incompetence but to a combination of unpredictable weather, erroneous choices, and bad luck. She retells the story of the expedition bit by bit, inserting scientific facts concerning the climatology of Antarctica today and in 1912. Meticulously covering the minutest details, she paints a different but accurate picture of Captain Scott and his ill-fated expedition. An interesting read for anyone interested in true explorers; recommended for all libraries. Sandy Knowles, Henderson Cty. P.L., NC Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.