



Who Discovered the North Pole?



The northernmost point of planet Earth is known as the North Pole. Standing here, every direction you point in is south; you are literally on top of the world. Despite knowing this, actually finding the North Pole is quite tricky. Unlike the South Pole, which lies on the land of the continent of Antarctica, the North Pole is in the middle of the Arctic Ocean; an ocean which is over 4000m deep and almost constantly covered by floating sea ice. The nearest landmass (Kaffeklubben Island) is over 700km away, just off the coast of Greenland, and with waves and ice which are constantly moving, planting a flag or building a permanent structure, such as the Amundsen-Scott Research Station at the South Pole, is practically impossible.



The Amundsen-Scott Research Centre

Now imagine trying to discover the North Pole without any modern technology. In the early days of polar exploration, which records serious attempts as far back as the 1500s, tools we use today to help with navigation weren't available. In fact, basic maps hadn't yet been created, as much of the Arctic regions lay undiscovered and unexplored. Although the ancient magnetic compass, which had helped travellers to navigate for centuries, *did* exist, it could never help an explorer to find a place which, when stood upon, their compass would point south in every direction.



A Chronometer

Some of the first explorers in search of the North Pole would only use two tools, though they required a lot of skill and expertise. The first, a *chronometer* – a very accurate clock – would help them to determine *longitude* (how far east or west they were heading). The second, known as a *sextant* – a piece of equipment used for measuring angles – would determine *latitude* (how far north or south they were). Between these tools, with a lot of effort, the North Pole could be found.

The honour and glory of being the first explorer to stand on the North Pole was a prize that countless adventurers longed for – many losing their lives to try and be the first to discover one of the last unexplored places on Earth. For years, unsuccessful attempts were made, one after the other – the harsh and inhospitable climate of the Polar Regions claiming numerous victims and forcing the rest to turn back. That was until the early 1900s when two American explorers *both* tried to claim the title at the same time... and no one quite knew who to believe.

Newspaper headlines around the world announced the phenomenal news that explorer Robert Peary had finally reached the North Pole on 6th April 1909. Boarding the SS Roosevelt from New York City in July the year before, Peary and his crew of twenty-three men set off to be



Robert Peary

the first to make the groundbreaking discovery. After great difficulty, and most of his party turning back due to bitter conditions, Peary is finally said to have reached the pole with his five assistants: American Matthew Henson and four Inuit men named *Ootah*, *Egigingwah*, *Seegloo* and *Ooqueah*.

However, upon seeing the news of his victory, a rival American explorer, Dr Frederick Cook, insisted that he had *already* reached the pole almost a full year earlier on 21st April 1908. Travelling with just two Inuit men named *Ahwelah* and *Etukishook*, Cook claimed that bad weather and the movement of the sea ice had stopped him from returning home to tell

everyone of his discovery, and that he and his companions were forced to spend the winter in an ice cave. So, who to believe? The North Pole can only be discovered once and, with no telephones to make the immediate call and no independent person to verify either attempt, it was left to both Peary and Cook to try and prove their victory.

Shortly after returning from the North Pole, both Peary and Cook each wrote their own version of the truth in books, which detailed their expedition and supposed discoveries. Unsurprisingly, both books immediately became bestsellers and the public continued to debate about who *they* thought had been first to the North Pole. However, when evidence provided by both explorers was examined by scientists back in America, things did not look good for either of them.



Dr Frederick Cook

Cook's evidence was rejected almost straight away by the American courts; his own companions testified against him and said that they had stopped hundreds of miles short of the Pole. They also revealed that the photographs of the North Pole itself were actually taken far away from it. Cook was a fraud.

Initially, Peary refused to hand over any details about his expedition at all and the few pieces of evidence he did show aroused suspicion. Doubt continued to rise as scholars took a closer look at his diaries and navigational techniques. However, just over seventy years after his victory was declared, scientists have discovered that Peary could also have stopped short of the North Pole, missing it by as much as thirty to sixty miles.

Did either man actually discover the North Pole?

Did both lie to claim victory and their place in the world record books?

Or did both men genuinely believe they had stepped foot on the North Pole itself?

The truth remains uncertain.

Q1: Find and copy two facts about the Arctic Ocean from the text.

- _____
- _____



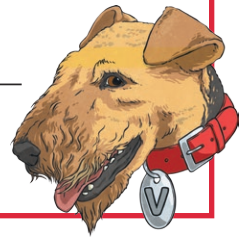
Q2: 'Now imagine trying to discover the North Pole without any modern technology.'

In this sentence, the author speaks directly to the reader. Why do you think they do this?



Q3: Find and copy two words or phrases from the text which mean that something is very difficult.

- _____
- _____



Q4: On which date did Cook claim he had discovered the North Pole?



Q5: Find and copy two adjectives from the text which describe the climate of the North Pole.



Q6: How do you think Cook reacted when reading the headlines about Peary?
Explain your answer.



Q7: State one way in which Peary and Cook are similar and one way in which they differ.

Similar: _____

Different: _____



Q8: Why do you think that Peary was hesitant to give over any details about his expedition?



Q9: Sum up what you have read in the last four paragraphs in twenty words or less.



Q10: Do you agree with the decision of Cook's assistants to testifying against him?
Explain your answer.



Q11: The author ends the text with three rhetorical questions. Give one reason why they might have done this.



Q12: How do you think other explorers reacted upon realising that both Cook and Peary had been discredited? Give one reason for your answer.





An Extract from George Taylor's Diary **Answers**

Q1: Find and copy two facts about the Arctic Ocean from the text.

Accept any two of the following facts:

- **The North Pole is in the middle of the Arctic Ocean.**
- **The Arctic Ocean is over 4000m deep.**
- **The Arctic Ocean is almost constantly covered by floating sea ice.**
- **The waves and ice are constantly moving.**
- **Basic maps of all of the Arctic Ocean had not been created in the 1500s.**
- **Much of the Arctic Ocean remained unexplored in the 1500s.**

Q2: *'Now imagine trying to discover the North Pole without any modern technology.'*

In this sentence, the author speaks directly to the reader. Why do you think they do this?

Accept any reasonable answer pertaining to engaging the reader, e.g.

- **The author might do this to involve the reader.**
- **They might want to make the reader think.**
- **They might want the reader to put themselves in the shoes of the explorers.**
- **The author might do this to try and bring the text to life for the reader.**

Q3: Find and copy two words or phrases from the text which mean that something is very difficult.

Accept any two of the following:

- **(quite) tricky**
- **practically impossible**
- **required a lot of skill and expertise**
- **with a lot of effort**

Q4: On which date did Cook claim he had discovered the North Pole?

Accept '21st April 1908' only.

Q5: Find and copy two adjectives from the text which describe the climate of the North Pole.

Accept any two of the following:

- **harsh**
- **inhospitable**
- **bitter**

Q6: How do you think Cook reacted when reading the headlines about Peary?
Explain your answer.

Accept any answer which proposes that Cook felt annoyed, angry, upset or determined, providing that a reasonable explanation is also given, e.g.

- **I think that Cook felt annoyed that someone else had tried to claim that they had got there before him because he knew that he had done it first.**
- **Cook may have felt determined to prove that he had discovered the North Pole first because he wanted the world record.**
- **Cook may have felt upset because his efforts could have been for nothing.**
- **Frederick Cook may have been frustrated that someone else was trying to steal the victory from him.**

Q7: State one way in which Peary and Cook are similar and one way in which they differ.

Accept one answer from each of these columns:

Similar

- **They both claim to have reached the North Pole first.**
- **Both men had assistants to help them.**
- **Both men had Inuit assistants.**
- **They had both attempted to reach the North Pole within a year of each other.**

Different

- **They reached the North Pole on different days.**
- **Peary had lots more assistants than Cook.**
- **Cook had become stranded and Peary did not.**
- **Cook had slept in an ice cave whereas Peary had not.**

Do not accept superficial answers which show a lack of understanding of the text, e.g. 'they have different names'.

Q8: Why do you think that Peary was hesitant to give over any details about his expedition?

Accept any reasonable answer which explores the themes of disbelief and discrediting, e.g.

- **Peary might have known that he had lied and that the court would find out.**
- **Peary knew he did not have to prove it to anybody because he had witnesses there who would confirm his story.**
- **Peary might not have liked being accused and did not feel the need to prove or disprove what other people were thinking.**
- **Peary had already published a book which contained everything he thought people needed to know.**
- **Peary did not want to lose the world title.**

Q9: Sum up what you have read in the last four paragraphs in twenty words or less.

Accept any reasonable attempt to sum up the main points of the final four paragraphs within the word limit, such as:

- Peary and Cook both claimed to have discovered the North Pole first but both men could not prove it.
- Two men claimed they had explored the North Pole but both were found to be lying.

Q10: Do you agree with the decision of Cook's assistants to testifying against him? Explain your answer.

Accept either yes or no as an answer providing that a relevant justification is made to support their argument, such as:

Yes

- Telling the truth in court is always the right thing to do.
- Their lie was denying Peary of the world record he could have earned.
- It is always right to be honest.
- Cook was a fraud and people needed to know.
- They knew the evidence would show they were lying otherwise.

No

- They had betrayed Cook's trust.
- They might have known they would be ruining his career.
- They knew he would lose the world title and it was unkind.

Do not accept superficial answers which do not show an understanding of the text, e.g. 'Yes because I like them.'

Q11: The author ends the text with three rhetorical questions. Give one reason why they might have done this.

Accept one reason which discusses the effect on the reader, e.g.

- The author may have used them to get the reader thinking about their own conclusions about the text.
- The author wanted to engage the audience.
- They want the readers to consider what answers they would give to the questions.
- The author might want the readers to think about who they thought the real winner was.

Q12: How do you think other explorers reacted upon realising that both Cook and Peary had been discredited? Give one reason for your answer.

Accept any reasonable answer which attributes hope, optimism or determination to other explorers, providing that a reasonable justification is provided in support, e.g.

- Explorers might have felt hopeful that they could now be the first person to reach the North Pole.
- Other explorers might have gained determination to make sure they were successful in achieving the world record.
- The other explorers might have been relieved that Cook and Peary were discredited so that they could claim the victory for themselves.