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**Cook-Peary North Pole Competition**

**Lead: In 1909 Robert Peary and Frederick Cook claimed to have discovered the North Pole. Their competing assertions form one of history's mysteries.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: They began this saga as friendly associates. Peary hired Cook as a physician on a Greenland expedition in 1891, and the Doctor unflappably set the bones of his leader's legs after an accident on the**

**shipboard part of the journey. They soon became competitors, however, in the race to the North Pole, which was made extremely complex because unlike the land-bound South Pole, the position of 90 North sits on drifting sea ice.**

**Cook left first, leaving northern Greenland in February 1908. In April he reached the spot he reckoned was the Pole, measured it by multiple sextant sightings, and then took a full year to return, enduring terrible privation because of the shifting ice shelf which took him 100 miles west of his cached supplies. He had been given up for dead. Peary started in August 1908, and arrived at what he claimed was the Pole in April 1909. He too took**

**sextant sightings but did not share them with his companions.**

**Over the next year, in fact over the next century, their competing claims became an international parlor game with Cook and especially Peary partisans using sometimes disreputable tactics to prove the validity of their champion's accomplishment. Essayist Bruce Henderson describes how Peary conspired to ensure that Cook's records be lost in the Arctic, and absent those records, Cook could not easily press his claim. By 1988, *National Geographic*, the magazine arm of the Society which had originally supported Peary's assertion, concluded that he had likely not**

reached his mark. The absence of conclusive results and scientific safeguards ensured that this episode is one of the least satisfying scholarly and technical disputes of the modern era. We may never know who first reached the North Pole.

From Richmond Virginia, this is Dan Roberts.

#### Resources

Bryce, Robert M. *Cook and Peary: The Polar Controversy Resolved*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997.

Henderson, Bruce, "Cook Vs. Peary," *Smithsonian* 40 (1, April 2009): 58-69.

Wally, Herbert, "Commander Robert E. Peary: Did He Reach the Pole?" *National Geographic Magazine* 174 (3, September, 1988): 367-375.