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THE CONQUEST OF THE POLE

By Dr. FREDERICK A. COOK

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Final Dash for the Pole.
The "Big Nail" Reached at Last and "Old Glory" Unfurled—Endless Fields of Purple Snows—No North, No East, No West

THE observations of April 14 gave latitude 88 degrees 21 minutes, longitude 95 degrees 52 minutes. We were but 100 miles from the pole, but there was nothing to relieve the mental strain of the icy despair. The wind came with the same satanic cut from the west. There had been little drift, but the ice before us displayed signs of recent activity. It was more irregular, with an open crack here and there, but the sleds glided with less friction, and the dreary dogs maintained a better speed under rising tails.

With teeth set and newly sharpened resolutions, we set out for that last 100 miles. Some dogs had gone into the stomachs of their hungry companions, but there still remained a sufficient pull of well tried brute force for each sled, and, though their noisy vigor had been lost in the long drag, they still broke the frigid silence with an occasional outburst. A little fresh enthusiasm from the drivers was quickly followed by canine activity.

We were in good trim to cover distance economically. The sledges were light; our bodies were thin. All the muscles had shriveled, but the dogs retained much of their strength. Thus stripped for the last lap, one horizon after another was lifted.

In the forced effort which followed we were frequently overheated. The temperature was steady at 44 degrees below zero F., but perspiration came with ease and a certain amount of pleasure. Later, however, there followed a train of suffering for many days. The delight of the birdskin shirt was changed for the chill of the wet blanket.

Fortunately, at this time the sun was warm enough to dry the furs in about three days if lashed to the sunny side of the sled. In these last days we felt more keenly the pangs of perspiration than in all our earlier adventures.

The amber colored goggles were persistently used, and they afforded a protection to the eyes which was quite a revelation, but in spite of every precaution our distorted, frozen, burned and withered faces lined a map of the hardships en route.

We were curious looking savages. The perpetual glitter induced a squint which distorted the face in a remarkable manner. The strong light reflected from the crystal surface threw the muscles about the eye into a state of chronic contraction. The pupil was reduced to a mere pinhole.

There was no end of trouble at hand in endeavoring to keep the windows of the soul open, and all of the effort was run together in a set expression of hardship and wrinkles which should be called the boreal squint.

This boreal squint is a part of the russet bronze physiognomy which falls to the lot of every arctic explorer. The early winds, with a piercing temperature, start a flush of scarlet, while

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yards ahead of the sleds I could not resist the temptation to turn frequently to see the movement of the dog train with its new fire. In this direction the color scheme was reversed. The icy walls were in gold and burning colors, while the plains represented every shade of purple and blue.

Through this sea of color the dogs came with a spirited tread, noses down, tails up and shoulders braced to the straps like chariot horses. The young Eskimos, chanting songs of love, came with easy step. The long whip was swung with a brisk crack, and all over there rose a cloud of frosted breath.

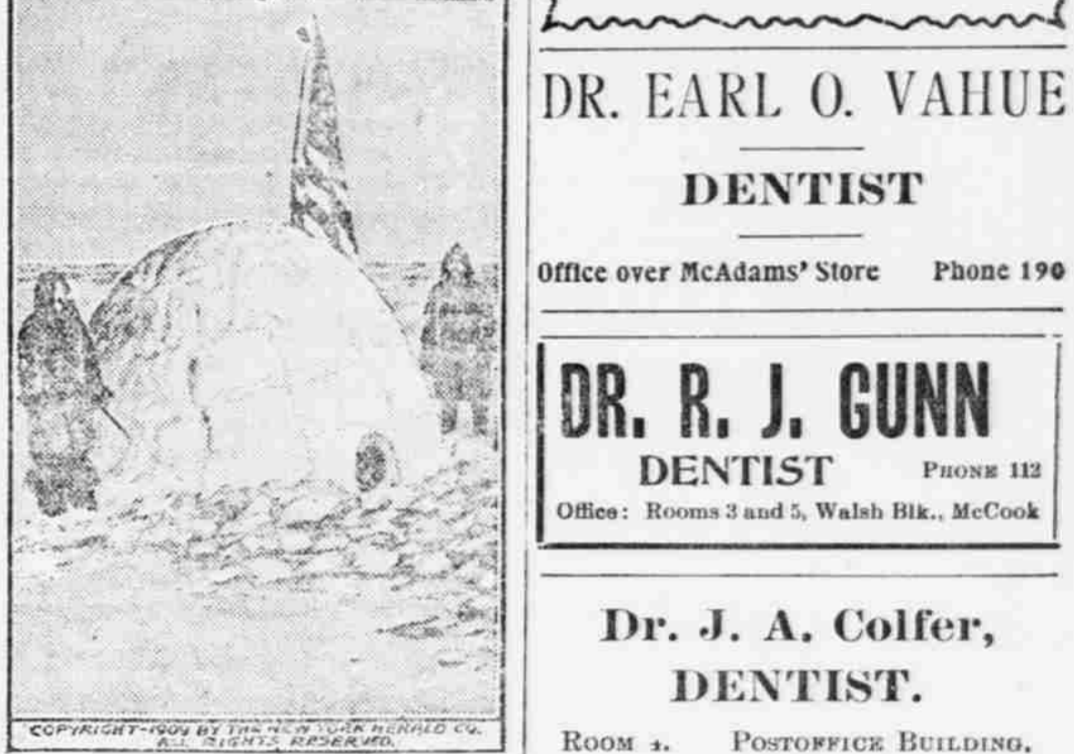
Camp was pitched early in the morning of April 20. The sun was northeast; the park glowed in tones of blue; the normal westerly air of shivers brushed our frosty faces. The surprising burst of enthusiasm had been nursed to its limit, and under it a long march was made over average ice with the usual result of overbearing fatigue. Too tired and sleepy to wait for a cup of tea, melted snows were poured down, and the pemmican was pounded with the ax to ease the task of the jaws. The eyes closed before the meal was finished, and the world was lost to us for eight hours. The observation gave latitude 89 degrees 46.5 minutes, longitude 94 degrees 52 minutes.

With the boys singing and the dogs howling we started off after midnight on April 21. The dogs looked large and noble as they came along that day, while Etukishuk and Ahwehah.

It seemed that something must happen, some line must cross our horizon, to mark the important area into which we were pressing.

When the sun was low the eye ran over moving plains in brilliant waves of color to dancing horizons. The mirages turned things topsy turvy. Inverted lands and queer objects ever rose and fell in shrouds of mystery, but all of this was due to the atmospheric magic of the midnight sun.

With a lucky series of daily astronomical observations our position was now accurately fixed for each stage of progress. As we neared the pole the imagination quickened, and a restless, almost hysterical excitement came over us. The boys fancied they saw beaver and seals, and I had a new land under observation frequently, but with a change in the direction of light or an altered trend in our temperament the horizon cleared and we became eager only to push farther into the mystery.



DR. COOK'S ESKIMOS PHOTOGRAPHED BY HIM AT THE POLE.

From the eighty-eighth to the eighty-ninth the ice was in very large fields and the surface was less irregular, but in other respects it was about the same as below the eighty-seventh. We noticed here also an extension of the range of vision. We seemed to see longer distances and the ice along the horizon had a less angular outline.

The color of the sky and the ice also changed to deeper purple blues. We had no way of checking these impressions by other observations. The eagerness to find something unusual may have fired the imagination, but since the earth is flattened at the pole perhaps a widened horizon should be detected.

At 8 o'clock on the morning of April 19 we camped on a picturesque old field with convenient hummocks, to which we could easily rise for the frequent outlook which we now maintained. The tent was pitched. The dogs were silenced by blocks of pemmican. In us new enthusiasm was aroused by a liberal pot of pea soup and a few chips of frozen meat, and then we bathed in life giving sunbeams, screened from the piercing air by silk strands. It was a beautiful day, and had our sense of appreciation not been blunted by accumulated fatigue we would have greatly enjoyed the play of light and color in the ever changing scene of sparkle.

The Eskimos were soon lost in a profound sleep, the only comfort in their hard lives, but I remained awake, as had been my habit on succeeding days, to get nautical observations. The longitude calculations lined us at 94 degrees 3 minutes. At noon the sun's altitude was carefully set on the sextant, and the latitude quickly reduced gave 89 degrees 31 minutes—twenty-nine miles from the pole.

My heart jumped for joy, and the unconscious emotion which I was creating awakened Etukishuk. I told him that in two average marches we would reach the "tigi shu" (the big nail).

Ahwehah was awakened with a kick, and together they went out to a hummock and through glasses sought for a mark to locate so important a place as the terrestrial axis. If but one sleep beyond it must be seen.

I tried to explain that the pole was not visible to the eye; that its position was located only by a repeated use of the various instruments. This entirely satisfied their curiosity, and they burst out in hurrahs of joy. For two hours they chanted and danced the passions of wild life.

It was the first real sign of pleasure or rational emotion which they had shown for several weeks. For some time I had entertained the fear that we no longer possessed the strength to return to land, but the unbridled flow of vigor dispelled that idea.

More sleep was quite impossible. We brewed an extra pot of tea, prepared a favorite broth of pemmican, dug up a surprise of fancy biscuits and filled up on good things to the limit of the allowance for our final feast days. The dogs, which had joined the chorus of gladness, were given an extra lump of pemmican. A few hours more were agreeably spent in the tent, and then we started with a new spirit for the uttermost north.

We were excited to a fever heat. The feet were light on this run. Even the dogs caught the infectious enthusiasm and rushed along at a pace which made it difficult for me to keep a sufficient advance to set a good course. The horizon was still searched for something to mark the approaching boreal center, but nothing unusual was seen. It was the same expanse of moving seas of ice on which we had lived for 500 miles.

But, looking through gladdened eyes, the scene assumed a new glory. There were plains of gold fencd in purple walls, with gilded crests. It was one of the few days on the stormy pack when all nature smiled with cheering lights.

As the day advanced and the splendor of summer night was run into the continued day the beams of gold on the surface snows thickened, while the shadows of hummocks and ridges spread a line of violet barriers through which a way must be sought.

From my position a few hundred

though thin and ragged, had a dignity as heroes of the greatest human battle which had ever been fought with remarkable success.

We were all lifted to the paradise of winners as we stepped over the snows of a destiny for which we had risked life and willingly suffered the tortures of an icy hell.

The ice under us seemed almost sacred. When the pedometer registered fourteen and a half miles we camped and calmly went to sleep, feeling that we were turning on the earth's axis.

The observations, however, gave 89 degrees 50 minutes 45 seconds. We therefore had the pole, or the exact spot where it should be, within sight.

We advanced the fifteen seconds, made supplementary observations, pitched the tent, built a snow igloo and prepared to make ourselves comfortable for a stay long enough for two rounds of observations.

Our position was thus doubly assured, and a necessary day of rest was gained. Etukishuk and Ahwehah enjoyed the day in quiet repose, but I slept very little. My goal was reached; the ambition of my life had been fulfilled. How could I sleep away such overwhelming moments of elation?

At last we had reached the boreal center. The dream of centuries had been realized. The race of centuries was ours. The flag was planted to the coveted pole. The year was 1908, the day April 21.

The sun indicated local noon, but time was a negative problem, for here all meridians meet. With a step it was possible to go from one part of the globe to the opposite side—from the hour of midnight to that of midday. Here there are but one day and one night in each year. The latitude was 90 degrees, the temperature —38.7, the atmospheric pressure 29.83. North, east and west had vanished. It was south in every direction, but the compass, pointing to the magnetic pole, was as useful as ever.

Though overjoyed with the success of the conquest our spirits began to change on the next day after all the observations had been taken and the local conditions were studied. A sense of intense loneliness came with a careful scrutiny of the horizon. What a cheerless spot to have aroused the ambition of man for so many ages! Endless fields of purple snows! No life, no land, no spot, to relieve the monotony of frost! We were the only pulsating creatures in a dead world of ice.

On April 22, 1908, Dr. Cook began the long return march. With fair weather, good ice and the inspiration of the home run long distances were at first quickly covered.

With a good deal of anxiety Cook watched the daily reduction of the food supply. It now became evident that the crucial stage of the campaign was to be transferred from the taking of the pole to a final battle for life against famine and frost. Early in July farther southward progress became impossible, and in quest of food he crossed the Firth of Devon into Jones sound. On Feb. 18, 1909, the start was made for Annotok. With a newly prepared equipment the Greenland shores were reached on April 15. Here Dr. Cook was greeted by Harry Whitney and anxious Eskimo friends. To facilitate an early return he moved southward to the Danish settlement and reached Upernavik on May 24, 1909. The Danish ship Hans Egede took him from Upernavik to Denmark.

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