

BOOK REVIEW

Captain Scott: icy deceits and untold realities, by Krzysztof Sienicki, Berlin, Open Academic Press, 2016, 776 pp., €86.27 (hardback), ISBN-13: 978-8394452001

Captain Scott holds a unique position in human exploration in that, despite his failures, he has obtained a status often above and beyond his ultimately more successful adversary Roald Amundsen. In a field which only celebrates the victor how did this come to pass? Perhaps it is because that, although failing to reach the South Pole first, his subsequent demise on the icy continent symbolized the extremes humans undergo in the name of exploration, the very real prospect of failure, and the strength of the human spirit. His untimely death elevated Scott from second place finisher to that of martyr – a man sacrificing himself in the name of discovery. Until now a multitude of books have analysed Scott's expedition to the Pole in great detail, without ever questioning whether Scott's legendary status is justified or indeed deserved.

In Krzysztof Sienicki's new book, *Captain Scott: icy deceits and untold realities*, the question of whether Scott is deserving of such high esteem is put to the test. The author has reviewed the records and offers additional information and novel interpretations bearing on the notorious expedition. The author argues that the evidence shows falsification of meteorological data from the original collectors, as well as erroneous explanations and conclusions by authors who have written about the same expedition.

The book is divided into three volumes. The first volume deals with all weather related issues of the expedition. In particular, analysis is presented of the extreme cold weather conditions in late February and early March 1912, which, according to Scott's Message to the Public, were the final blow to his party's demise. The author argues that the extreme cold weather conditions were an exaggeration on the part of Scott. The author also rejects Scott's account of a 10-day-long blizzard towards the end of March.

In the second volume, the author takes on the logistics of Scott's journey to the Pole and the simultaneous actions of the Cape Evans party commanded by

Dr Simpson under Scott's written orders. In analysing the distribution of food and fuel rations at the Barrier stage the author questions Scott's management of the expedition and the actions taken at Cape Evans. He argues that Dr Simpson mutinied and under a false rationale sailed back to New Zealand and then on to England. The author claims that the actual location of the last camp was not 11 but 22 miles from One Ton Depot, and that Scott's error, intentional or otherwise, was not corrected by Dr Atkinson's search party.

In the third volume, the author tackles the causes of the Captain Scott party deaths as argued by other authors and Scott himself. The author's own startling conclusion is that the party, from about 2 February 1912, decided not to return to home base at Cape Evans.

The most controversial claim in this almost 800-page volume is that Scott's party did not perish in 1912 because of weather and starvation. According to Sienicki's calculations, Scott's party had full food/fuel rations until at least 27 March 1912 and could have made it back to Cape Evans. The author also gives a large portion of the book to criticizing modern writers of Scott's expedition, many of whom are notable in their fields. The author argues that the false data and unsound analyses in their books have contributed to the myth that Captain Scott was defeated by unforeseen circumstances rather than the fallibility of Scott or his party. The book offers a novel take on the famous expedition and its appeal lies in its controversial claims and detailed analyses. Taken at face value, the author's interpretation is persuasive. However, readers are strongly advised to consult other writers' analyses before forming an opinion about the causes of the failure of the expedition. The author's arguments and findings stand in profound contradiction with the majority of authors on the subject and have been disputed by historical commentators and scientists alike.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/17518369.2017.1288845>