

‡4 Peary, Verifiability, and Altered Data

A Melting Myth

A1 The greatest of US polar explorers, Robert Peary, claimed to have reached his long-sought grail, the North Pole, on 1909 April 6-7, after 5 weeks of arduous dogsledging over the rough, broken, and drifting ice-floes of the Arctic Ocean. For 8 decades, the claim has been allowed, though [1] Peary did not provide normal specific, verifiable scientific proof or fruit of it and [2] his reports are riddled with anomalies. He was initially believed due to his brilliant previous explorations, which included his and Matt Henson's unquestioned 1900 discovery of the world's northernmost point of land, Cape Jesup (latitude 83.7 degrees).

A2 The case against Peary's 1909 claim rests on numerous firm and independently self-sufficient lines of evidence, many presented in my 1973 book, *Peary at the North Pole: Fact or Fiction?* Most polar explorers¹ have agreed with the negative verdict of *Fiction*, long the premier skeptical volume on the subject. (Cited in *Encyclopedia Americana*. And see *Science* 1989 March 3 [SCI 243:1131]; this article also severely dispenses with one document I misfired on, but it details how convincing *Fiction's* case is and provides welcome indication that the science community will now apply standard verifiability criteria to all scientific claims, no matter how sacred.) And much agnostic evidence appeared in the epochal centenary 1988 September *National Geographic* [NGM 174.3:387] (surprising many, since National Geographic had co-sponsored the 1909 trip).

A3 I will précis *Fiction* below, adding various startling new confirmatory materials, most not in the 1988 article.

B Late Claims

B1 In Peary's 1907 book, *Nearest the Pole*, he reported as his 1906 expedition's 2nd most important achievement [PY 280 & map] the discovery of "Crocker Land", perhaps the northernmost land on Earth, supposedly seen (from north Canada) by him and his Eskimos upon the distant northwest horizon on 1906 June 24 and 28 [PY 202, 207]. Crocker Land does not exist. *Fiction* noted its absence in Peary's then-known 1906 records (including his handwritten June 30 description of his June 28 "clear view of northern horizon") and so argued [F72-77] that Crocker Land wasn't seen in 1906 June but materialized only in 1907 to reward banker George Crocker for a \$50,000 contribution.

B2 Peary's 1906 June diary has now been recovered. It never mentions Crocker Land. To the contrary, the June 24 entry says [PC 1906/6/24 p.39]: "No land visible west of [nearby] Jesup Land." Peary's 1907 book (*Nearest . . .*) is for 1906 June 24-28 copied virtually verbatim from the diary.² Except for 2 passages, inserted whole into the account. These contain both the later-alleged sightings of Crocker Land.³

B3 Also newly available in the Peary Papers (US National Archives) is a typescript copy of Peary's diary for 1906 April 2-20. Explorer Wally Herbert revealed [NGM 174.3:398] in the 1988 *National Geographic* that the typescript stops just 1 day before Peary's long-suspect alleged Farthest North (87.1 degrees), with his party way too far south to cover in a day the enormous last-minute [distances] required by his book's account [PC 1906/4/20

¹ [E.g., Umberto Nobile, Martin Lindsay, Finn Ronne, Joseph Fletcher, Bertrand Imbert, Ralph Plaisted, Wally Herbert. See also explorer David Roberts' perceptive look into the exploration-hoaxer's mentality (e.g., RH viii).]

² [For 1906/6/23-7/1, compare PY 200-212 to PC 1906/6/24-28 pp.35-56. Note that Peary deletes from PY 211 his diary's p.55 reference (1906/7/1) to his having on 1906/6/30 left at Cape Hubbard a handwritten cairn record (later recovered only by chance: FC 187, F75). This record, photoreproduced at F77, contains the above-quoted (§B1) devastating reference to the clear northern-horizon view on 1906/6/28, the very moment at which Peary later stated (PY 207) he resighted Crocker Land.]

³ Peary advocates cannot regard his 1906 exaggerations as irrelevant to his 1909 Pole claim since the Peary Arctic Club used Cook's 1906 fake climb of Mt. McKinley to discredit Cook's 1908 Pole story [FC 175f].

vs. PY 133-139]. The diary reveals other serious misreportages in his book: alleged Peary steering by compass at head of party all day (April 14, Henson way ahead [see below, fn 12]); 10-20 percent exaggerations of marching time (April 14), distance (April 14, 15), and speed (April 16).⁴ The April 14 entry says the pace "I think has been nearly three miles an hour" for 9 hours (less than 27 miles or about 25 miles);⁵ the April 15 entry says explicitly that the day's march was 25 miles. But both days' distances are reported in his 1907 book as 30 miles [PY 131]. Such Peary-critics as geographer Rev. James Gordon Hayes (1929) have long scoffed at these claimed 1906 distances as incredible [HR 61]; and all doubters of the subsequent Pole claim have believed that Peary stretched his estimates of the unverified 1909 march-distances [e.g., HR 87]. The 1906 diary entries now provide black-and-white proof that critics' suspicions were justified.

B4 In 1911, Peary's arch-rival, explorer Frederick Cook (who claimed he reached the Pole in 1908, a year before Peary), reported [CM 542] that Peary's sextant was too damaged in 1906 for accurate navigation. Peary's 1906 April 13 diary entry confirms this.⁶ Cook stated [CM 490, 559; C54A:54, 59] that Peary's 1906 Eskimos said Crocker Land was never seen. Peary's 1906 records verify that. Cook was the first to publicize Peary's natural children [CM 493 opp., 601], now displayed in the 1988 *National Geographic* [NGM 174.3:417-429]. *Fiction* deemed Cook's 1908 Pole trip a fantasy [F79f] (triggered by inside knowledge of nonverification of the Peary 1906 Farthest [CM 542, F82]) but regarded these 3 Cook reports as accurate [F69, 73, 74, 201]; and all new evidence backs this position.

C Final Shot

C1 With Peary's years and funds running out, 1909 was his last chance for fame eternal [PZ 9-10, 192]. On February 28-March 1, his sledge parties left land at Cape Columbia (Canada's north tip, 83.1 degrees latitude), heading for the Pole, 413 nautical miles distant. On April 1, Peary sent back his last navigator-witness, Capt. Bob Bartlett, at least 135 miles from the Pole (Bartlett camp). Accompanied only by loyal Matt Henson and 4 Eskimos, Peary then proceeded on, allegedly to the Pole.

C2 Peary, a highly skilled surveyor, had on all his previous Arctic Ocean trips (1900, 1902, 1906) brought back theodolite data for the magnetic compass' "variation" from true north [RR 36 n.34, F130]. But in 1909 he observed none [F130, 226-228], though his theodolite was ever at hand [PZ 288n]. New physical data are the prime scientific justification for exploration [F130-132]. (And Peary had in 1908 requested proof be demanded if Cook claimed the Pole [F126].) Along Peary's route, the needle points somewhat nearer south than north. So frequent observational checks of the large and changing compass variation are required for steering north. But Peary denied at his 1911 Congressional hearings that he took such data in 1909 [SPH 299, 310; F226-228; & note F128-131].

C3 He also there admitted another Peary first: no astronomical observations (solar altitudes via sextant) for longitude to check his 1909 left-right deviation from the intended path to his goal [SPH 317, F136, 140, 143, 231]. His diary and reports never mention or even contemplate [F136] veering leftward or rightward (short of the elusive Pole) in order to correct [F117, 142] for the inevitable misaim all real North Pole trips experience, going over icefloes that drift a few miles a day, with frequent interruptions between these floes,

⁴ [PY 132 has "not less than two and one-half miles per hour." But the diary (PC 1906/4/16) says instead: "Hope we have come at rate of two miles an hour at least, and am sure we did as long as it was clear:"]

⁵ His book [PY 131] has 10 hours at "not less than three miles an hour." I.e., total at least 30 miles.

⁶ The 1906/4/20 diary entry also reveals Peary's understandable concern that calculation from his April 19-20 sunsights has given a falsely high latitude (86°.5 N) since these data weren't observed at local noon. This point is crucial to his 1906 Farthest [since the reported Abruzzi-Cagni 1900 latitude record Peary aimed to beat with a long 1906/4/21 march was 86°.6 N] and to his later Pole claim — but is unnoted in either trip's reports [e.g., PY 133, PZ 268, 284].

from “pressure-ridges” (high barriers of ice) and “leads” (lanes of open water) [PHm 25:11, F146]. The resultant detour-zigzags take one east-west as often as north.⁷

C4 [The] key point here: Peary had ample and repeated opportunity in his official hearings and reports to explain how he aimed towards the Pole;⁸ but he steadfastly avoided doing so whenever such questions arose [e.g., SPH 299, 310, 316, 317].

C5 Despite attempts at compass-adjustment [HE 88], Peary’s sole extant 1909 compass course [PZ 232, F131, 138] was off by about 8 degrees; and from various such aiming errors (as well as detouring and drift), his previous shots at the Pole lurched hugely left and right, misaimed by about 10 to 15 degrees [F135]. But in 1909 he alleged a straight-line path, with about 1 degree aiming accuracy [F140, 154], hitting only 4 miles left of the goal, a navigational pole-in-one.

C6 Peary’s 1909 diary is now declassified. Its April 2 entry records his actual regular seat-of-the-pants steering [PM 0051]: “setting course by moon, our shadows, etc.” (Hardly the stuff of 1 degree aiming precision.) The most vital portion of the entire diary, these 7 words are Peary’s sole inexplicable omission [SPH 302] when reading the diary at his 1911 hearings.

C7 In 1911, individualist writer W. Henry Lewin remarked [LF 8; also Cook: CM 505-506n] that Peary’s speed allegedly doubled as soon as he was out of sight of navigator Bartlett (April 1-2). *Fiction* noted [F159] a matching oddity: during the return southward, Peary’s speed suddenly halved (reverting to normal) after he passed Bartlett camp again (April 9). Which suggests that the trip was genuine south of Bartlett camp, while north of it (April 2 to 9) all the reported mileages were roughly doubled [F158].

C8 Arctic Ocean ice slows travel both from roughness and detouring; for full sledges over an unbroken trail, 10 to 15 miles (net northing) per day is excellent speed. (Peary diary, 1906 April 4: “It takes more travelling to cover a given distance up here than anywhere else in the world.”) But Peary’s 1910 book *The North Pole* says that on 1909 April 1 he planned [PZ 269] “my program . . . five marches of at least twenty-five miles each” from Bartlett camp to the Pole. (Peary’s first detailed telegram inadvertently says instead “fifteen miles each”).⁹ But the April 1 diary just hopes for 6 or 8 better-than-average marches while saying that for typical daily distances (15 miles, as in his first wire) it will take 9 marches to get to the Pole.¹⁰ Nine is glaringly near double 5; notably, Peary read the key datum “Nine” as “Eight” at his hearings [SPH 301].¹¹

D Fudge

D1 The Pole claim’s 2 starkest fictions are aim and speed. We have now found that Peary misread or altered his diary in 2 key places, one related to aim, the other to speed. And when J. Eddie Weems’ 1967 standard (family-approved) Peary biography published

⁷ Ralph Plaisted and Wally Herbert, the genuine 1st attainers of the Pole by surface (1968 and 1969, respectively), report that each mile of net northing actually required 1 3/4 miles of weaving travel. Thus, their left and right angular deflections from the ideal northward path averaged roughly 1/2 a right angle [F136].

⁸ [The original 1989/4/16 preprint attributed this point from memory to Carnegie Institute astronomer Harry Raymond. A brief subsequent search failed to uncover such a remark in the Raymond correspondence with Bowman; a memo of American Geographical Society expert Oliver Maitland Miller (BPJ 1935/8/12) is perhaps the source I recalled. Miller just notes that Peary did not explain his aiming procedures “when he had the opportunity of stating them at the Congressional investigation.”]

⁹ [NYT 9/11:1:5.] Relic-glimpse of a prior trial-version of events? The context suggests that 25 miles is meant; but it’s odd that a verbal typo agrees with such a realistic expected mean distance, and with the diary’s expectation of 9 normal marches: 9 times 15 miles is virtually the distance he says he was from the Pole on April 1.

¹⁰ The diary [PM 0049]: “Nine marches same average as our last 8, or 8 equal to the 3 from [85.8 degrees] or 6 like yesterday’s will do the trick.” (At his hearings, Peary read this as [SPH 301] “Eight marches same average as our last 8, or 8 equal to the 3”) “Nine” is written in the diary as a word, not a digit; so there is no question of accidental misreading.

¹¹ “Eight” agrees with Bartlett’s 1909/4/1 written certificate [PZ 360-361]: “At the same average as our last eight marches Commander Peary should reach the Pole in eight days.”

the diary’s text, it neatly omitted these same 2 revealing passages [see WP 265].¹² (Peary’s 1910 book dropped the part in the diary about 9 marches like the last 8 but used the rest of the same sentence [PZ 270]. Weems [WP 264] gives this truncated version from Peary’s book while on the opposite page [WP 265] Weems’ quotation from the original April 1 diary entry ceases exactly 1 word before the word “Nine”. For the final 5 marches, 1909 April 2 through 6, Weems quotes [WP 265-268] every single word from the original diary except the key 7 words “setting course by moon, our shadows, etc.”)

D2 Peary unquestionably altered yet another key document: the very statement he claimed to have left in a bottle at the Pole. He retained a copy, the text of which appears in Peary’s 1910 book [PZ 296]. It begins: “90 N. Lat., North Pole, April 6, 1909. Arrived here today, 27 marches from Cape Columbia.” But Helgesen in 1916 found that Peary’s own handwritten statement [C53A:1628, F284-285] (otherwise identical) read “28 marches from Cape Columbia.”

D3 Putting these 1909 items together with the 1906 exaggerations already noted, we discern an impressive collection of provable late-career data-alterations¹³ by Peary: [a] Crocker Land (1906-7), [b] 25 miles vs. 30 miles (1906; twice), [c] 7 deleted 1909 diary words on aiming, [d] “Nine” marches vs. “Eight”, and [e] 28th march vs. 27th. Such a record is inconsistent with claims worthy of acceptance by scientific societies.

D4 Peary defended his controversial 1909 April 1 jettisoning of the powerful if over-worked¹⁴ Capt. Bartlett (age 34) by calling [the considerably older] Henson uniquely indispensable. [PZ 272, SPH 311, RD 7, F103-107.] Every defense of the Pole myth [e.g., WR 180] leans upon this essential foundation. But Peary’s newly found 1906 April diary cruelly defaces it. April 2: Henson “not turning out as I expected.” April 5: “Was not surprised at the end of six hours to come upon Henson humped up in camp . . . his [Eskimos] belly aching about being so far away [from land], and the hard travelling, etc. and he as bad as any of them, though of course he would not admit it. . . . fallen down badly on his job and if he does not do better very soon I shall make a change.”¹⁵ Diary, 1906 April 6: “the delays [some unlike 1909] and Henson’s sluggishness have cut our advancement down to five miles per day.” This is the same Henson (now 3 years further past physical prime at age 42) which Peary’s 1909 fable alleges he must choose to have with him in order to make 25 to 50 or more unverified miles per day.¹⁶ Diary, 1906 April 15: “came upon [Henson] camped beside a *closed* lead, where he had been for some 20 hours. He claimed that it had just closed, but that is a lie, and if I had not come up, he would be there still. The truth is, he is worse than the eskimos in being frightened to death with these leads.” I question Peary’s view of Henson’s veracity. (And stamina-loss with age deserves sympathy not abuse.) But

¹² Herbert’s 1988 *National Geographic* article publishes both [NGM 174.3:402], but without noting their previous multiple suppressions. ([PZ 276, SPH 302, WP 265; PZ 270, SPH 301, WP 265.] Note that the 7 diary words on rough aiming by shadows & Moon are replaced at PZ 276 by the precise-sounding report: “Our course was nearly, as the crow flies, due north, across floe after floe, pressure ridge after pressure ridge, headed straight for some hummock or pinnacle of ice which I had lined in with my compass.” (How convenient that a distinctive pinnacle was always just due north — and remained recognizable even after huge zigzags en route to approaching it.) Note that Peary alleges at PY 131 that he was leading with the compass for 10 hours on 1906/4/14, though that day’s diary entry says that he came upon trail-breaker Henson’s igloo after 83% of the day’s 9 hour march! Thus, we have two demonstrable instances where Peary has published statements that he was steering precisely by compass, though the diary says otherwise.)

¹³ [Others include: time spent riding & time in the lead.]

¹⁴ Henson claimed ([SPC] 1926/6/11) that Bartlett was worn out. (Peary had made Bartlett break most of the 1909 March trail.)

¹⁵ This was to prove impossible since Peary had lost contact with all non-Eskimo members of the expedition but Henson. Peary was first certain he was isolated from navigator-witness verification on 1906 April 14. ([PY 130:] “It was evident that I could no longer count in the slightest degree upon my supporting parties, and that whatever was to be done now, must be done with the party, the equipment, the supplies which I had with me.”) And it is on precisely this date that his diary’s estimated marches suddenly became enormous (25 miles/day), exactly as later happened on 1909 April 2 — though at a very different latitude: 85°N in 1906 vs. 88°N in 1909.

¹⁶ [See above citations. However, note Peary’s PZ 240 remarks on the 1909 Henson — very like those of PY 124, which is a much-muted version of what appears in the corresponding 1906/4/5 diary entry just quoted above.]

if you plan — as Peary did in 1909 — to choose one companion as the prime sledgemaster and witness to a daring, swift polar miracle, then your claim is necessarily undercut when your own doubts of his drive and integrity surface.

D5 In 1916, Congressman Henry Helgesen's speeches [F247-248] doubting Peary's 1909 success anticipated numerous evidential points later rediscovered by others' researches, mine included. (Weems suggests [WR 200, WP 310, 346-347] that upright explorer Adolphus Greeley of National Geographic may have given Helgesen much of his material.) E.g., Helgesen noted [C53A:282, 1636] that Peary in 1911 renounced¹⁷ his most crucial 1909 sight (April 5), his only zeroing-in navigational datum. *Fiction* found [F150] that as early as 1913, this sunshot alone was missing from the 1909 records. It still is. (Some Peary supporters hope eventually to recover it. But this would not now save the unsalvageable Pole claim because Peary disowned the sight and such data are fakable anyway. Again, crucially, veering to aim at the Pole is never mentioned by Peary.)

D6 At his hearings, Peary defended his pole-in-one by saying [SPH 317-318] he'd accurately paced large distances on the smooth Greenland icecap [1892-1895]. But this is irrelevant to drifted and detoured sea-ice travel, and Peary rode on a sledge most of the 1909 trip anyway. [See below, §E7.] (His icecap distance-estimates were by odometer-wheel [PG 1:280 n.2]; but his 1910 book notes [PZ 211, F232] that such a wheel could not be used in 1909. Incidentally, riding affects not only distance-estimation but steering, since [a] one must be in the lead to steer, and [b] proper use of the magnetic compass required repeatedly removing it some distance from his sledges' ferrous metal [MH 185].)

D7 Thus, Peary's 1909 yarn in brief: he paced distance from a sitting position and steered north by compass without measuring its variation from north.

E Eyewitness

E1 In 1917, disbelieving ship's captain Thomas Hall noted [HH 66f, 143f], evidently 2nd hand, that an obscure written Henson account (*Boston American* 1910 July 17) reported that reaching the purported Pole from Bartlett camp in merely 5 marches was a "surprise" to Peary who himself had underestimated his superspeed until after arrival [HA 1]. (Recall that Peary's own April 1 diary entry expected more than 5 marches [above §C8].) *Fiction* recovered the original of Henson's article and found in it the lethal direct eyewitness testimony: Peary's face was "long and serious" [HA 1] after the April 7 sextant observations gave his position (likely about 350 miles from land, admirable but well short and right of the Pole). Without warning Henson, Peary had snuck out of the northernmost camp for just an hour [HA 1], not enough time for significant nothing, in order to make his first post-Bartlett sunsights; the 2 Eskimos with him told Henson that Peary's face showed "disappointment" [HA 3] when he completed the observations.

E2 Henson saw this [HA, HE iv-v 1969 ed] as a Peary funk over sharing the Pole. He told Peary that they had both already gone far enough to be there [HA 2]. Was this: [a] navigational advice? [b] hope? or [c] expression of a prudent consensus for instantly heading back to Bartlett camp and home, before the ice was scattered by storm, tides, or spring, cutting off Bartlett's freshly-knitted southward trail (pre-broken and pre-iglooed)?

E3 From the moment of the "Pole" sextant sights, Peary for the rest of his life ceased conversing with Henson [HA 1-2, 4, HE v 1969 ed], his faithful companion of 22 years. No other still-accepted Pole attainment has such a peculiarity attached to it. And no other rests entirely upon the leader's unsupported word: though Henson could take sunshots [HA 2, F128], Peary shared none [*idem*]. (The Poles are the easiest places on Earth to fake sextant data for: simple arithmetic [RR 35, F154]. But data for aiming *toward* the Pole are not

¹⁷ [Helgesen quotes Peary's SPH 317 statement that there were no observations taken [between] Bartlett Camp (4/1-2) & Camp Jesup (4/6-7). The hitherto-unnoted Peary statement of SPH 316 is equally important in certifying that the only observations were taken on 1909/3/22, 3/25, 4/1, 4/6, 4/7. Thus, as at the 1913 IGC presentation [F150]: no 1909/4/5 observation.]

so easily faked.) *Fiction* revealed skeptic C.Henshaw Ward's 1935 discovery that in 1909 Peary had, before showing his "Pole" sextant data to his official judges, pre-checked them out for consistency, using a surveying expert he kept secretly at his home that Autumn [F285-289].

E4 Set Henson's testimony beside Peary's final navigational story (which only came out under 1911 cross-examination [SPH 316-317]): no precise sextant data [1] for aiming (left-right) during the whole 413 mile trip, or [2] for gauging forward progress over the last 135 miles, the 5 northward marches (April 2-6) after leaving Bartlett.

E5 *Fiction* induced the simple and nonconspiratorial solution [F149f] to these oddities: Peary 1st took 1909 aiming data on April 7, but they showed he was way too far from the Pole to reach it (roughly 100 miles away); so within hours he was wisely speeding southward.¹⁸ Therefore, his eventual 1909 story had to put *at* the Pole the very camp where he 1st took data to aim himself *to* the Pole. Thus the origin of Peary's incredible 1909 pole-in-one navigational fantasy.

E6 Henson has been quoted as saying various things, some under Peary's dominance, others in dotage. For the historian, the premier Henson accounts must be his 2 independent written 1910 articles, in *Worlds Work* (April) [HW] and *Boston American* [HA], based on his now-lost 1909 diary.

E7 In these articles, Henson makes 3 crucial statements contradicting Peary's 1909-1910 reports. In each case, we find that Henson told the truth. [1] Henson [HA 1, 4]: no observations from Bartlett camp (1909 April 1-2) to the "Pole" camp, "Camp Jesup" (April 6-7). Peary at first reported an April 5 shot [PM 0061, NYT 9/11:1:7, PZ 284] but later dropped it [§D5]. [2] Henson: Peary, age 52, rode most of the time [HA1-2, SPC 1926/6/11]. (This is noted by Hall [HH 67, 116, 143-144], who also shows [HH 67-70] that, north of Bartlett camp, rougher ice and more transverse leads than Peary recalls were reported by Henson's first account, though not later ones [e.g., HA 4].) Peary: "there is no riding when you go hunting the pole" [NYT 9/20:2:4]; starting April 2, "whatever pace I set, [the others] would make good. If anyone was played out, I would stop for a short time." [NYT 9/11:1:4, PZ 271.] (And [PZ 274] "I took my proper place in the lead." In fact, Henson usually led. [HA 2. Note the similarity to Peary's revision of the 1906/4/14 situation: above, §B3 & fn 12.] But the Eskimos testified [HP 366 n.15] that Peary rode on the sledges most of each day, customarily for hours at a stretch. (Peary at the 1911 hearings: "never over 5 minutes at a time" [SPH 303].) [3] Henson: the ice-drift near Camp Jesup was to the east (rightward as seen from Cape Columbia [HW 12837]). In a hitherto secret highlevel 1926 June 11 document, Henson describes in detail a systematic ice-drift to the east throughout the 1909 trip, revealed by shearing ice-breaks in the trail [SPC 1926/6/11]. (This alone sinks the Pole claim because of the effect on unchecked aim.) Yet Peary and his defenders say there was no east-west ice-drift in 1909 [PZ 307, WR 173]. (The nonfantasy 1906 diary worries about east drift, even — as on April 9 — when not visible as local eastward ice-shear, which it often was anyway.) But the Transpolar Drift Stream, 3-4 miles per day, in the direction Henson (and Helgesen [C53A:273, also 3-4 mi/day]) described, is now on National Geographic's excellent maps [e.g., NGM 170.3:297]. (And the brevity of Bartlett's April 1 sunshot hints that he was way east of [where it was noon].)

E8 When Henson's revealing accounts were published, Peary knew that openly challenging Henson to produce his diary would be suicide. Instead, Henson was privately damned to devalue his testimony. Isaiah Bowman ([BPJ] 1935 July 30): "Mrs. Peary says Matt was a 'snake in the grass' in that he would apparently say a complimentary thing and

¹⁸ This in order to elude the death he had so nearly met in 1906, when warming weather set adrift the ice, almost stranding him and Henson permanently. The story of the Peary party's 1906 May southward escape from the central Arctic Ocean pack-ice (gingerly snowshoe-shuffling over 2 miles of weak, undulating rubber ice covering the ocean depths) is a must-read both as harrowing adventure and as entirely-sufficient explanation of Peary's understandable 1909 decision not to commit suicide by going all the way to the Pole. [See PY 145, F118-123.]

take it back in the next phrase and that he was vainglorious and boastful.”¹⁹ These are unworthy reflections upon a remarkably versatile, little-rewarded explorer, who gave much of his own life to the Arctic. And attacking the credibility of his only literate Camp Jesup witness hardly boosts Peary’s case.

F Perspective

F1 Peary’s pioneering contributions to geography and to exploring technique have not always been properly appreciated by his critics.²⁰ Some wrongly doubted Peary had gotten even half way to the Pole; explorers like Greely knew better: “That Peary entered regions adjacent to the Pole is unquestioned by any Arctic expert” [HP 416]; Greely added however that many (including Greely [C53A:1645, WR 176]) believed Peary did not go all the way. But most scholars stayed silent, while Greely and Ward had the courage to speak their well balanced skepticism.

F2 Peary sacrificed, suffered, and devoted his life to seeking undying fame. And he has won it, by his magnificence in exploration and prankery. Grand success at either takes skill and courage. He had both in epic proportions.

The source-abbreviations used above are listed at *Fiction* pp.308-313, with these additions:

- BPJ Bowman Papers, Johns Hopkins University Library.
 LF W. Henry Lewin *The Great North Pole Fraud* London 1935.
 PC Peary 1906 records, US National Archives.
 PM US National Archives’ 1971 microfilm: Peary 1909 records (numbered by frame).
 F Dennis Rawlins *Peary at the North Pole: Fact or Fiction?* Washington 1973.
 RH David Roberts *Great Exploration Hoaxes* Sierra Club, San Francisco 1982.

The foregoing paper was written in 1989 Winter, mailed to several persons 1989/3/20, revised 4/16, and distributed (in the days immediately following) to numerous parties, including NGS Peary project supervisor Joe Judge (then Senior Associate Editor, later abruptly canned by NGS: early 1990). Other than extra bibliographic items (& section titles), material added since 4/16 is contained in brackets. (These additions completed 5/11. Several typo-corrections & brief clarifiers inserted 1990-1991.)

Notes added 1991:

[A] The foregoing is printed just as circulated the better part of a year before photogrammetry was publicly brought to bear on the Peary case. It will illustrate why DR has held that enough evidence already existed to justify scientists’ nonacceptance of the Peary North Pole legend. (NGS’ desperate resort to photos is embarrassingly akin to the UFO cult’s tactics for defending claims which are equally dubious on their face.) The bottom line here is stark: DR’s 1973 book pointed to 4 probable hoaxes by Peary (Jesup Land 1899, Crocker Land 1906, Farthest North 1906, North Pole 1909) and 2 genuine records (discovery of northernmost land on Earth 1900, W.Hemisphere Farthest North 1902). A decade later, when the Peary Papers were finally opened to the public, the continuous diary records exhibited blanks (at the moment of discovery) for all 4 DR-doubted claims, but contained full documentation for the 2 DR-accepted claims. Most scientists would regard such a 6-fold one-to-one correlation as something of a confirmation for the skeptical side. Not the wealthy & diehard publishing outfit run (for 5 generations) by the Hubbard-Bell-Grosvenor family under the ambitious title: the “National” Geographic Society.

¹⁹ It is not pleasant bringing forth such material; but it is now part of the publicly-accessible record, so it cannot stay secret, regardless. Moreover, since Henson’s testimony is an important member of the set of independent evidences against Peary’s claim, I cannot suppress charges against his truthfulness simply because I disagree with them.

²⁰ Hall and Hayes were far too sympathetic to Cook’s [1908] claim; Helgesen was initially part of the Cook lobby [F248]. Still, that is no reason to ignore their considerable rôle in establishing the truth of the 1909 imposition.

[B] In late 1989, NGS attempted resuscitating²¹ Peary, issuing a pristine whitewash of all his exploration claims: an impressive-looking 1989/12/11 Report (NG) by NGS’ hired consultant, the “Navigation Foundation” (NF). The Report: [a] Uses shaky 2-D photogrammetric analyses (NG 127f) to prove Peary was indeed at the Pole on 1909/4/6-7, allegedly by showing that the Sun was at the correct altitude above the ice-horizon in photos from that time. (These analyses’ claimed precision has met with general skepticism in the scientific community. See, e.g., *Scientific American* 1990/3 & 1990/6.) [b] Straightfacedly explains (NG 166) that the reason Peary forgot to record his crucial 1906/6/24 discovery of Crocker Land (§B1-B2) in his diary of that date was: because he fell asleep in mid-diary-entry! (Evidence? He was tired the next day. That’s proof enough for anyone.) [c] Suppresses (NG 85) the same key 7 diary words (revealing Peary’s actual crude 1909/4/2 navigation) previously suppressed by Peary (§C6) and by official biographer Weems (§D1). . . .

[C] On the day NGS announced this Report, DR was quoted nationally as charging that it contained “more fiddle factors than the NY Philharmonic”, pointing, e.g., to *NGM* 1990/1 p.45, where NGS had unwittingly reproduced key photo E5 with 2 successive (& seriously discrepant) NF-drawn ice-horizons visible! (On the same day, DR announced that the Report’s author, “Navigation Foundation” President Adm. Tom Davies, had in 1984-1985 publicly defended, in elaborate pseudoscholarly detail, yet another dubious explorer, Amerigo Vespucci. Davies’ Vespucci-apology math analyses were based upon grossly bungled astronomical calculations, as confirmed by several astronomers; the most famous of these astronomers, Chas. Kowal, was quoted in the *Wash Post* of 1989/12/12 as commenting that Davies’ math was based on a mistake which a “freshman astronomy student wouldn’t make”. Davies has since demonstrated his integrity and ability to admit errors by refusing to discuss his Vespucci work with any inquiring reporter. The largest Davies error here, omission of lunar parallax, affected his deduced position by a trifling 2000 mi — placing Vespucci in Africa rather than S.America as claimed. See *J.Hysterical Astronomy* 1990 preprint: “Incontinental Drift”. The purported precision of Davies’ Vespucci analysis was what caused NGS to select Davies to head its investigation-renovation of Peary’s N.Pole claim.) Subsequently, DR circulated detailed exposures of the NF Peary Report’s amateurish & remarkably overneat²² statistics and photogrammetry, as well as producing his own (3-D) photogrammetric analyses²³ of Peary’s 1909/4/6-7 photos (American Astronomical Society presentation 1990/10/22), showing that the explorer turned back approximately 100 mi from the Pole (§1 fn 14 item [e]), which at this point will probably surprise almost nobody outside the immediate Peary & Grosvenor families.

²¹ NGS’ closedminded re-turnabout adds credence to the theory (suggested by DR in *Science* 1989/3/3) that longtime stalwart NGS had (shockingly: §A2) published doubts of Peary (1988/9 *NGMag*) solely due to recent frightening rumors that documentary disproof of the Pole claim might have surfaced from the newly-opened Peary Papers.

²² Noted at *Scientific American* 1990/6. In the NF photogrammetric work, DR finds repeated serious inconsistencies, affecting deduced solar altitude by amounts running as high as about 100 mi. The NF’s relative azimuths are funnier yet, exhibiting errors of as much as 44° (100 standard deviations off!) and even 135°.

²³ If the azimuthal orientations of these photos are what Peary stated, then Camp Jesup was well west of the 70°W meridian, as W.Herbert has steadily maintained (contra DR).