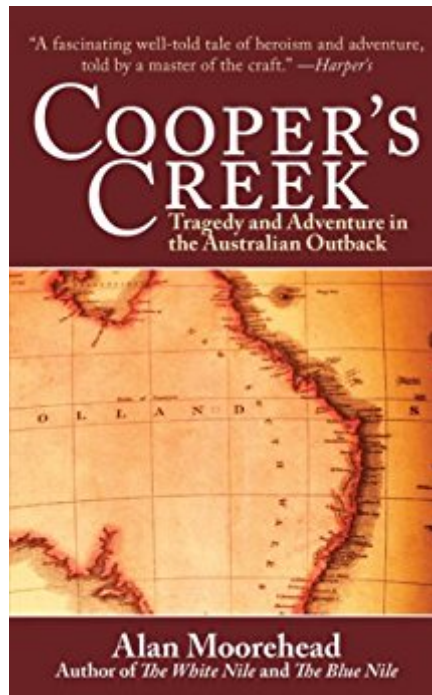




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Cooper's Creek: Tragedy And Adventure In The Australian Outback



Synopsis

In 1860, an expedition set out from Melbourne, Australia, into the interior of the country, with the mission to find a route to the northern coast. Headed by Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills, the party of adventurers, scientists, and camels set out into the outback hoping to find enough water and to keep adequate food stores for their trek into the bush. Almost one year later, Burke, Wills, and two others from their party, Gray and King, reached the northern shore but on their journey back, they were stranded at Cooper's Creek where all but King perished.

Cooper's Creek is a gripping, intense historical narrative about the harshness of the Australian outback and the people who were brave enough to go into the very depths of that uncharted country.

Book Information

File Size: 1748 KB

Print Length: 224 pages

Publisher: Skyhorse Publishing (August 1, 2010)

Publication Date: August 1, 2010

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0064DFRW8

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #295,853 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #87

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Australia & Oceania #153 in Books > History >

Australia & Oceania > Australia & New Zealand #164 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks >

History > World > Expeditions & Discoveries

Customer Reviews

This is a great little book. It tells of a journey of exploration that went wrong, of rescues that were inept, and other treks that went off like clockwork - all woven into a well-told tale. Most such stories fall into one of two categories: Follies dripping with ineptness, irony and tragedy (such as Scott's

fatal expedition to the South Pole); or well-planned and executed journeys that are practically dull and boring in their expert execution (Amundsen's successful "first" to the South Pole). "Cooper's Creek" has both - and more. In 1860-61 an expedition northwards from Melbourne across the largely unknown interior to the north coast of Australia ended with the deaths of three of the four explorers that had made the final dash. The fourth lived due to rescue by the local natives (the "black gentlemen"). The outcome was made more dramatic and tragic because men of the base depot upon whom the four depended had returned south one day before the exploring party returned. There are dozens of "what ifs" that could have changed the outcome. These (along with the interplay between individuals and supporters) make this book as much a mystery or detective story as a tale of adventure. It is also both interesting and tragic to read of these outsiders suffering and dying as they trek through groups of black gentlemen who have mastered the country. You can't but wonder to what extent the explorers' seeming contempt of the native Australians must have, in the end, turned to admiration.

I've been a staunch admirer of Alan Moorehead's best-known books about the exploration of little-known areas of the world (The Blue Nile and The White Nile) for many years. Happily I discovered that he had written a book about the dangerous and ultimately deadly attempt to fill in the map of the center of Australia soon after the middle of the 19th century, and I discovered it shortly before leaving for a trip to Australia, so the timing could not have been more perfect. The expedition seemed at first to have been very well planned, but human failings, misunderstandings, ego, arrogance, bad weather, and some singularly unfortunate decisions that were not in themselves bad ones and were fully in character ultimately led to tragedy. The center of Australia--a hot, waterless desert much of the year, inhabited by Aborigines, with whom the white settlers so far had very little connection--could hardly be more different than the Nile valley and the heavily populated jungles of East Africa that were the settings of the two earlier books, yet as before Moorehead combines an account of the almost superhuman exertions of the party to survive and the interaction of personalities that made the chances so risky. One does not need to be crossing the Australian outback to be captivated by the book, though it is a gripping companion for such an experience. But, as always, Moorehead reveals the strengths and weaknesses of men in a very challenging situation, and makes it compulsively readable.

The early days of Australian discovery are in many ways similar to the extreme conditions encountered by Lewis and Clarke with a few exceptions. Australian explorers had to deal with

impossible heat, little water and inconsistent support from the Australian government and the exploration society that was supposed to be backing them, Food supplies were often scarce and subsistence living hit or miss. This is a fascinating, detailed account of the courageous group of marginally experienced explorers who set out to find potential arable land for future settlers and to explore the vast outback. Despite the experience of the group's leaders, most of the group died in the effort. This detailed account is taken from journals and first hand reports of the few survivors and tells of the daily fight for survival in a hostile land.

This book was a little difficult to follow, but. I did enjoy learning about some of the geography of Australia.

I love first-hand historical accounts of outdoor adventure and exploration, and this one is a classic. The descriptions of wildlife alone are worth the read, but this is also a riveting story of an expedition run amok. Like the equally fascinating "Desperate Passage" and "The Ice Master," this story is also often brutal and heartbreaking. As a sensitive person who cries easily, I am nevertheless drawn to these stories because they have so much to teach us about human nature, and the extremes of cowardice and bravery of which it is capable under survival conditions.

It's a marvelous book. It's hard to believe the trials this group went through - the exploration of Australia is remarkable for the hardships people went through to map that continent. Even though I've never been able to go there, I've got any number of books and have read extensively and it's still amazing to me how very large and relatively unpopulated the country is.

Info is okay - feels like a long read - doesn't feel easy and smooth

This is one of those stories that captures my imagination and makes me want to visit Australia. One can never know the whole truth due to time delay in interviews of the aged survivors but the author adequately reasons out logical results of the facts as presented. Once again I long to visit 'down under' and see the country this book talks about.

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