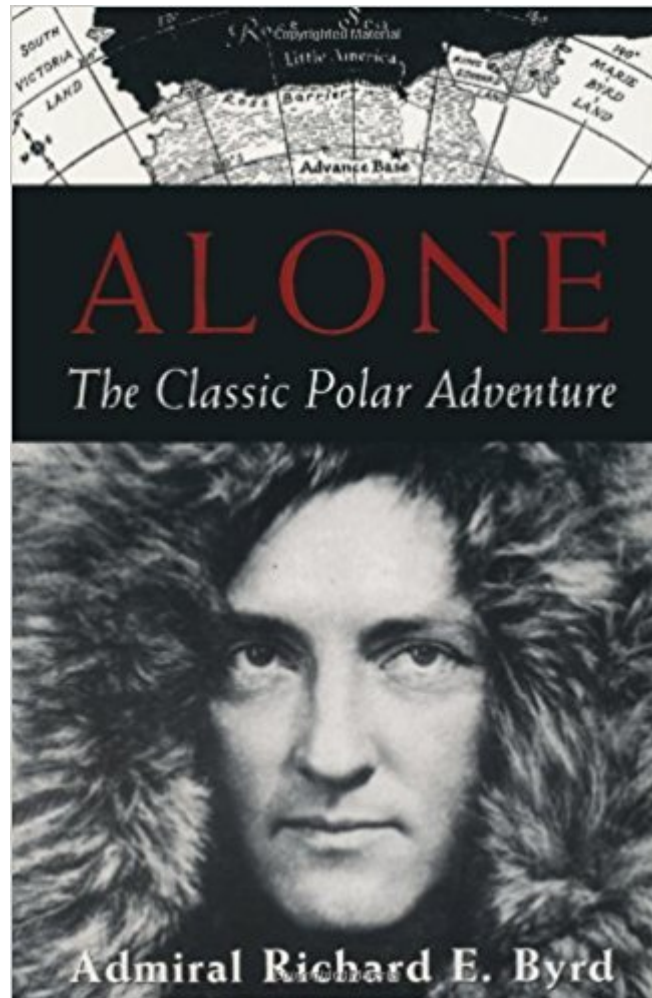




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Alone: The Classic Polar Adventure



Synopsis

When Admiral Richard E. Byrd set out on his second Antarctic expedition in 1934, he was already an international hero for having piloted the first flights over the North and South Poles. His plan for this latest adventure was to spend six months alone near the bottom of the world, gathering weather data and indulging his desire “to taste peace and quiet long enough to know how good they really are.” But early on things went terribly wrong. Isolated in the pervasive polar night with no hope of release until spring, Byrd began suffering inexplicable symptoms of mental and physical illness. By the time he discovered that carbon monoxide from a defective stovepipe was poisoning him, Byrd was already engaged in a monumental struggle to save his life and preserve his sanity. When *Alone* was first published in 1938, it became an enormous bestseller. This edition keeps alive Byrd’s unforgettable narrative for new generations of readers.

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Customer Reviews

In 1934, Admiral Richard Byrd took residence in a shack in the South Pole’s interior to monitor the harsh weather and active auroras throughout the long, dark winter. Initially, the operation was going to use three men, each having their own jobs throughout the 6 month period, but due to the tiny size

of the shack, Byrd thought it would be detrimental to relationships and decided to go it alone. He thought the time alone would be good for reflection, reading and listening to music. Although it seems comical that soon after his crew deserts him, his biggest troubles are that he cannot find two very important articles: his alarm clock and his cookbook. However, the Admiral had bigger fish to fry than making perfect pancakes in the 60 below temperatures with the cold and dark. Admiral Byrd had guessed that something may be amiss with his stove. As several pieces of pipe were lost in transit, they used makeshift pieces made of paint cans to put the stove and pipe together. This was the Admiral's only heat source. His shack had a trapdoor to the snowy landscape above and a side door which lead into snow/ice tunnels where he stored his food, equipment and fuel. Since he gathered it possible that toxic fumes could be leaking into his shack, he would sleep with the stove off and the door open during the night. In the morning he would struggle into his frozen clothing, start the stove and begin the day. Often times his equipment would be frozen, and his antennae above frozen with a thick crust of ice. His ventilation pipes also froze and gathered large chunks of ice inside which had to be scraped away. This is a very harrowing story. Richard Byrd penned -Alone- several years after his antarctic stay and used his diary and memory to honestly account his experiences. There is beauty, pain, happiness and much sorrow in his story. The bitter cold was horrible, but the beauty of the auroras breathtaking. His reflections on how little humans actually need to survive is very refreshing as he had much time to reflect on the important things in his life. In conjunction with reading this book, I watched the 1941 film, "Scott Of The Antarctic," and I found it a fascinating look at the area I was reading about. The white out conditions, frostbitten explorers in heavy woolen clothing and furs, the glacial cliffs and dangerous crevices in the movie, made the book even more stunning. Byrd mentions many explorers and ill-fated expeditions in this book. I highly recommend this book as a testament to the great explorers of the Antarctic and to Admiral Byrd who truly did have a harrowing time. It's a great and interesting read.

The book is written four years after his trip to the Antarctic but he remembers it vividly and includes many notes from his diary during that time. I love reading books from long ago because of the verbiage they use. It is very old world and really makes you ponder on how language has changed. That being said, it is a very easy read. Admiral Byrd has more fortitude than I probably ever will. His fine balance between running the stove which was poisoning him with carbon monoxide and leaving it off while trying to survive the cold was very heart wrenching. It really makes you feel for the guy. His description of the interior walls of the cabin slowly becoming more and more encased in ice each day was bone chilling. I read this book in Texas in the middle of summer and I swear I got cold

every time I started to read it. There is a small amount of mundane jargon in the book that is scientific based like weather observations and readings but this is his sole purpose for the trip so I don't feel it detracts much from the story despite it's repetitiveness.

It was by pure chance, while watching a TV program, that I heard about Admiral Byrd's book, *Alone*. I'd been reading about the history of Antarctic exploration for many years and the story promised by this book sounded astonishing in the extreme. Byrd, and his team, were on an exploratory expedition in Antarctica in 1934. During this expedition, Byrd spent the winter months alone in a hut buried in the snow and ice on the Ross Ice Shelf. He passed his time recording the weather and leaving the hut for celestial observations. He also had the daily tasks of working hard to stay alive due to the many design faults in his hut. During this time, he had no support from outside, except for intermittent radio contact with his team over 100 miles away. Byrd's sufferings were unbelievable and he wrote about it all in a very readable style. I could feel the constant cold and his almost constant misery on every page. His mental strength must have been unusually resilient. And how he survived at all is a mystery to me. The afterword, written in this edition of the book, may be the clue to his survival. It is suggested that Byrd wanted to be remembered for some great feat and that, being a self-publicist, he used the opportunity of this extreme experience to further that goal. Whatever drove Byrd, assuming we take the whole story as he tells it to be true in every detail, this is a remarkable record of the potential of the human spirit for endurance in a very bad situation. Most of us would have long since given up and not cared about leaving any record.

I have been interested in polar exploration for a while now. Can't say why. Truth be told, I doubt if I would last 10 minutes in these conditions. When I learned about this book from the forward of Dan Simmon's *The Abominable*, I had to pause that book for a while to pick up this one. If you are interested in what would drive a man to seek out the solitude and extreme conditions of a solo polar expedition, then you will find this book fascinating. There is a nice balance of day-to-day struggle and introspection. At one point Byrd wishes he did not have radio contact with his base, as it might allow too much of the outside world to seep in. The afterword, written some years later, adds nicely to the history of exploration in that era. In addition, perhaps because of the era in which it was written, the writing style is at times slightly more formal than you expect today, in a pleasing way. It reminded me of watching an old movie. It has a classic feel about it.

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