



### **Captain Mac**

by **Mary Morton Cowan**

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*Arctic Explorer* allows readers to relive a young man's dreams and explore the frozen tundra. Always a voracious reader about the Arctic, Captain Mac spent countless hours on the wharf with his sea captain father listening to tales of icebergs—referred to as “castles in the sea.” The stages of his life are vividly portrayed, beginning in early childhood—his struggles as a young boy who lost both parents, his high school years, his struggle to get a college education, his teaching career, and finally his adventures as an explorer. In this fascinating tale, many of his trials and tribulations are revealed. Each episode clearly exemplifies the power of resiliency that led to the fruition of Captain Mac's ambition. After nearly 50 years as an explorer, a teacher, a researcher, and a humanitarian, his contributions are unmatched.

Excitement abounds when journeys are taken over a long period of time; just learning about the preparation needed for these expeditions is awe-inspiring. These treacherous and dangerous journeys in below-freezing temperatures, months of darkness, isolation, wind and snow are cleverly described with realistic photographs. An expedition of this magnitude required the use of many talents—constructing and equipping a schooner; selecting and training a crew; soliciting funds; and obtaining food, tools, and dog teams. Throughout these arduous treks, he relied on Inughuit families (indigenous people of the Far North) who are referred to as the “survival experts.”

Picturesque scenarios of day-to-day activities are presented throughout. Numerous advances in technology, such as shortwave radio broadcasts, enhanced the expeditions, resulting in several “firsts.” His life was of epic proportion and exemplifies the value of setting goals; it's a shining example of how multiple careers can be attained by a person who is willing to work hard, sacrifice, and persevere. Major contributions include the discovery of islands and glaciers, a vast collection of scientific data, collections and identification of flora and fauna, and countless photographs and observations. He wrote several books about the culture and languages of indigenous people. Although he was unable to achieve his greatest dream—to accompany Robert Peary to the North Pole, it did not thwart his insatiable desire to continue to explore the Arctic. He was a compassionate man and spent years trying to gain recognition for Matthew Henson who accompanied Peary to the North Pole. Perhaps his most rewarding discovery was a cairn by his favorite author, Elisha Kent Kane.

The author's notes denote the depth and extent of this magnificent explorer and documentation of her research. Sources of quotations and a selected bibliography are also included. The “More to Explore” section lists suggestions for further reading, places to visit, and online sources. An index is also included. This fascinating story should be enjoyed by young students seeking a written adventure. As a supplementary resource, facilitators will be able to develop interdisciplinary lessons in geography, anthropology, and ecology.

*Review posted on 6/3/2010*