

Under the Covers: Ten Tales to Pass a Long Winter

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Since the invention of the movable type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 – and thus the invention of an efficient, sustainable form of mass media – one thing has remained constant. A good book has always been and will always be a good book. Besides death, taxes, and a good book always being a good book, one other aspect of life remains so constant. In the Northeast, winters are cold. And dark. And long. Lending warmth, light, and brevity to your forthcoming winter, the following ten tales will have you look forward to next winter for another round of reading. From a 16th century sailor quelling mutinies in the Pacific to a Navy SEAL fighting for his life in Afghanistan, the textual personalities below have completed some of the greatest adventures of all time.

Undaunted Courage by Stephen Ambrose

Though captain Meriwether Lewis and lieutenant William Clark were not the first white men to cross the upper North American continent (the Scottish-Canadian Alexander McKenzie was first in the 1790s), their trip was still, to put it mildly, one hell of an adventure. Ambrose's tale is a combination of Lewis's journals and Ambrose's own comments as one of America's greatest historians.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition traveled 8,000 miles from Illinois to the Pacific Ocean and back, losing one man. The expedition was touted by Thomas Jefferson's administration as scientific, but the French, Russians, and Spanish knew better. Lewis and Clark and company were sent to establish trade and catalog the raw material of the West. However, the expedition did discover and catalog more than thirty new species of flora and fauna including the grizzly bear, pronghorn, and trumpeter swan.

Packing a Herculean load of supplies that included 600 pounds of grease, 4,000 pounds of flour, fifty kegs of pork, and thirty gallons of wine, the men easily expended their staples by the time they reached the Pacific Ocean. Living off the land and trading with Native Americans eastward, they "went Indian" to survive. Despite Lewis estimating that they would "be gone

eighteen months or two years," the team took more than 28 months to complete their journey. So overdue was the expedition that most Americans, including Jefferson, gave them up for dead.

Over the Edge of the World by Laurence Bergreen

My grandmother tells me I was born 300 years too late. I agree. My quest for adventure has rarely been quenched. However, I am very happy I was not born 400 years ago because – who knows? – maybe I would have ended up on one of Magellan's ships that set sail in 1519.

Portuguese by birth, Magellan sailed under the auspices of Spain in the early 1500s, desperately seeking a passage to the Spice Islands. Spice was perhaps the most valuable commodity on Earth during the 16th century seeing 100 pounds of cinnamon could buy an entire armada. Scanty amounts of black pepper were bequeathed in wills. Therefore, some men were willing to take obscene risk in the name of spice. Magellan was one of them.

With one ship smashed to pieces and another one AWOL by the time they reached the Straits of Magellan, things were not looking good for the fleet. A series of mutinies, executions, scurvy infections, and shipwrecks defined the term "bad trip." However, these death throes were interrupted here and there by beautiful white sand beaches, banquets, and week-long orgies and binge drinking in native paradise with plenty of native women. In the end, the crew sailed nearly 60,000 miles (fifteen times the distance of Columbus's first voyage to the New World) over a period of nearly three years. Of the original crew of 260, a mere eighteen men completed their circumnavigation of the globe and lived to tell about it. Magellan was not one of them.

Adrift by Steven Callahan

While participating in a solo transatlantic yacht race, anything can happen. Maybe even a whale will ram your boat in the middle of the night, which will then have it sink to the bottom of the ocean. Though the chances are obscenely slim, this is what happened to Steven Callahan's 21-foot *Napoleon Solo* while racing from the Canary Islands to Antigua in 1982. Or as Callahan writes, "BANG! A deafening explosion blankets the subtler sounds of torn wood fiber and rush of seas." He jumps out of bed to find himself in waist deep water. In panic he screams, "Get out, get out! She's going down!" And down she went, 450 miles from the nearest shipping lane.

Thanks to Callahan's quick thinking, he was able to deploy his life raft and release his emergency duffel bag. His meager supplies included the raft, the duffel, and a copy of Dougal

Robertson's *Sea Survival*, which Callahan reported being "worth a king's ransom." Harassed by sharks, starving, and dehydrated in the middle of the ocean, Callahan watched no less than nine ships pass him by, completely unaware of his raft. By the time he was rescued 76 days and 1,800 miles later, Callahan had lost one-third of his body weight. Named one of National Geographic's "100 best adventure books of all time," *Adrift* will renew appreciation for dry land.

My Life by Benvenuto Cellini

Cellini was born in just the right era. During the 1500s, those of two employes were loved by all. These were artists and warriors. Luckily for Cellini, he was both. A sculptor, silversmith, and goldsmith by trade, Cellini produced art for dukes, kings, and popes, including the ruling Medici family. His most revered work is *Perseus Holding the Head of Medusa*, a bronze statue still on display in his hometown, Florence, Italy. Cellini also produced *Salt Cellar*, a salt container for King Francis I of France. Today, this ten-inch-tall vessel is conservatively valued at eighty million dollars. Most of his other work involved production of medallions and sculptures. Unfortunately, many of these works have been lost due to thievery or being inadvertently destroyed during battles.

Cellini was also a warrior who left more than a few cities as smoking ruins. Avenging deaths and murdering anyone who dared call him a coward or liar (back then, saying such things was grounds for being killed), Cellini eliminated many men. Or as he told one gentleman, in typical Cellini-esque detail, "I'll stab you so many times with this dagger that I'll make everything in your guts spill out." The artist's apex of battle came during the Sac of Rome in 1527 when Cellini saved the Pope's life. Events like this duly qualify *My Life* as "the most notorious autobiography ever written."

Minus 148 by Art Davidson

The coldest temperature I have camped in is minus 36 degrees, in the Adirondack Mountains. The grueling task of climbing Denali, the highest peak in North America, during winter makes my Adirondack adventure seem like an autumn stroll. Though the first ascent of Denali was completed in 1913, it took another 54 years for someone stand on the roof of North America during winter. In 1967, Art Davidson, Dave Johnston, and Ray Genet, part of an initial eight-man team, successfully navigated crevasses, avalanches, snowstorms, and icy slopes to reach the

summit as if possessed. Or as Davidson put it, "Sometimes I thought of our reaching up into the cold, darkness, and thin air of McKinley's summit in winter as simply our way of obeying a force we couldn't understand." What was understood on the way down was that it gets mighty cold on Denali during winter.

Shortly after leaving the summit, the three men encountered what they had only heard rumors of. This was a lethal combination of wind and cold that had kept sane men from exploring the summit during winter for more than half a century. The wind groaned like a freight train, and the cold plummeted like a meteor, bottoming out at a windchill of 148 degrees below zero, hence the title of Davidson's work. A tale filled with candor on the shortcomings of such an ambitious expedition, *Minus 148* will send a shiver down your spine no matter what time of year.

The Adventures of Captain Bonneville by Washington Irving

Bonneville Salt Flats, Bonneville County, Lake Bonneville, and Bonneville Dam are a few of the "Bonneville's" in the United States. To have such formidable and famous features named after you, you had to have been extraordinary. This word best sums captain Louis Eulalie de Bonneville, a soldier, fur trapper, explorer, and trader.

Born in France in 1796, Bonneville immigrated to the United States with his family when he was 7 years old, his crossing paid for by revolutionist Thomas Paine. Bonneville attended West Point Military Academy and advanced through the ranks, eventually taking a leave of absence to explore the land he had read about for years. This was the Wild West. The expedition Bonneville led became legend. It was one of the most bold and valuable explorations of the West during the 1800s. During the spring of 1832, the captain and his 110 men left Missouri. Over the next two-and-a-half years, they explored Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. Part of this party was also sent to California and Utah. Unlike many whites of the West, Bonneville was known for his respect of all Native Americans, particularly the Flatheads, Nez Perces, Bannocks, and Shoshones. An adventurer at heart, Bonneville made the first recorded ascent of one of Wyoming's high peaks. He and his companion climbed it "on hands and knees, with their guns slung upon their backs."

Lone Survivor by Marcus Luttrell

Luttrell is one of the "warrior elite." Of the 164 men who began the Navy SEAL training program in 2002, Luttrell was one of 30 who finished, earning the coveted Navy Special Warfare Trident. Little did Luttrell know that he would soon use his SEAL talents to save his own life.

In June 2005, after serving in Iraq, Luttrell was assigned to a four-man SEAL team in Afghanistan to find a notorious al Qaeda leader. All was going relatively smoothly on their reconnaissance mission until the team was inadvertently discovered by three Afghan herders. A critical decision faced the team. They could let the herders live and risk them alarming nearby masses of al Qaeda and Taliban fighters, or they could kill them. The team decided to let them go. Soon enough, 200 enemies encircled the SEAL's encampment like a swarm of hornets. The SEAL's were less than happy to have unexpected visitors but more than happy to try to kill them all. An intense firefight ensued, described in detail by Luttrell. Within hours, the four SEAL's killed sixty fighters, but Luttrell's three comrades succumbed to multiple wounds, leaving Luttrell on his own.

What followed is a miraculous tale of survival while on the lam in one of the most rugged areas on Earth. After sustaining a gunshot wound, shrapnel from an RPG, head wounds, a broken nose, a broken wrist, and three cracked vertebrae, Luttrell lost 37 pounds due to sparse provisions. It is only after this immense suffering for nearly a week that Luttrell is rescued.

Grizzly Years by Doug Peacock

After recommending this book to a friend and hearing he read it, I asked, "What did you think?" Without hesitation he reported, "Peacock is a warrior." His assessment was fair. Doug Peacock has the distinction of living unarmed among grizzly bears the longest of any human being, even longer than Timothy Treadwell of *Grizzly Man* fame.

In the late 1960s, Peacock returned stateside from the Vietnam War. Serving as a Special Forces medic for two tours, Peacock wished to rid himself of memories of crawling through Vietcong tunnels and being shot at much too often. He found serenity in the rugged grizzly bear country of Montana and Wyoming. So enthralled and appreciative of the bears, Peacock remained their cohabitant for nearly twenty years, all the time unarmed. What Peacock produced is a 288-page chronicle of adrenaline. Possessing an ever-entertaining and hardcore personality, author Edward Abbey befriended Peacock and fictionalized him as the unforgettable renegade

George Washington Hayduke III, the main character in Abbey's 1975 best-seller, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

One Man's Wilderness by Dick Proenneke

"Destination – Back and Beyond." So read the placard Dick Proenneke attached to his camper that would take him to Alaska. Proenneke, a mechanic and jack-of-all-trades from the Midwest, dared to do what the rest of us only dream about. He retired in the wilds of Alaska and lived in a log cabin he built with his own hands. For Proenneke, it was not just retirement. It was a pilgrimage. Thanks to his copious notes and images produced while in Alaska, today's dreamers figuratively follow Proenneke into the wilderness.

Landing on the shore of Twin Lakes in May 1968, Proenneke quickly set to work with rudimentary hand tools, building a cabin out of white spruce logs. Besides being a master craftsman, Proenneke was an adventurer at heart. His tome is peppered with grizzly bear attacks, wolverine hijinks, and snowstorms, set in temperatures down to minus 54 degrees. Proenneke was also the dreamer, reflecting in poetic prose about fall colors, ice forming on nearby Hope Creek, and the patterns of animal tracks. Scenes like these kept Proenneke at Twin Lakes until 1999, when he was 82 years old. A compilation of journals and images edited by friend Sam Keith, *One Man's Wilderness* communicates the beauty of one man creating, entirely on his own, a life many of us will never experience in the "beyond."

Sailing Alone Around the World by Joshua Slocum

For captain Joshua Slocum, the biggest, most expensive boat would not do for sailing around the world. Only a simple, economic design would spell success. Thus his selection of the *Spray*, a 36-foot-long sloop that, according to Slocum's neighbors, "had been built in the year 1." But Slocum's approach worked. While bigger ships smashed headlong into the midribs of towering waves, the *Spray* rode down one side of a wave and up the side of another unharmed. It was a lucky choice but typical of Slocum. For a man to think he could sail around the world solo in the 1800s was unconventional to begin with.

Untying from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on April 24, 1895, Slocum made his way toward the sea, and the history books, and did not return until the summer of 1898. Sailing more than 46,000 miles during his 38-month sabbatical, the *Spray* and Slocum performed marvelously,

battling gales, marauding pirates, mined harbors, and coral reefs that laid in waiting. The continuous tribulations are told in a perfect blend of self-deprecation, detail, and humor, complimented by simple black and white illustrations. Still in publication more than a century later, *Sailing Alone around the World* continues to entertain armchair adventurers and hardcore sailors alike. Throughout the text, Slocum shares his enthusiasm with unfailing pluck all the way back to port. "To young men contemplating a voyage I would say go."