



Ledyard: In Search of the First American Explorer

Bill Gifford

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For decades after his death in 1789, John Ledyard was celebrated as the greatest explorer America had ever produced. A veteran of Captain Cook's final voyage, he walked across nearly all of Russia and suggested to his friend Thomas Jefferson that traversing the American continent was feasible—inspiring the Lewis and Clark expedition. When he died he was preparing to venture into Africa. Once as famous as the Founding Fathers whom he had befriended and beguiled, the “American traveler,” as Ledyard was called, fell into obscurity over the years, reduced to becoming a footnoted reference in *Moby Dick*.

Bill Gifford reenacted Ledyard's 1773 escape from Dartmouth College in a canoe and followed Ledyard's trail down the length of the Lena River in Siberia. In *Ledyard* he reveals the man in the legend, bringing back an American original and giving us a story that until now has not been fully told.

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