

Ancient Mariner: The Arctic Adventures of Samuel Hearne, the Sailor Who Inspired Coleridge's Masterpiece

Ken McGoogan

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Though immortalized by Samuel Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," few people know that eighteenth-century British adventurer Samuel Hearne became the first European to see the Arctic Ocean while standing on America's northernmost shore. In Ancient Mariner, McGoogan demonstrates that Hearne was far more complex, accomplished, and influential than history has shown. A Royal Navy midshipman during the Seven Years' War, Hearne moved to London, and in 1766, just twenty-one, joined the Hudson's Bay Company. He embarked on an overland quest for rich veins of copper supposedly located "far to the northward where the sun don't set"—and also to discover the Northwest Passage. Hearne's posthumously published journal, the first book by a European explorer on the Arctic, describes a journey of 3,500 miles marked by hardship, and mitigated only by his friendship with the legendary Dene leader Matonabbee. His epic adventure culminated in the infamous and still-controversial massacre at "Bloody Falls"—a murderous battle between two native tribes that changed him forever. In a fascinating example of literary detective work, McGoogan determines that, having returned to London to live out his final days, Hearne met Samuel Taylor Coleridge, inspiring the poet to write "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

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