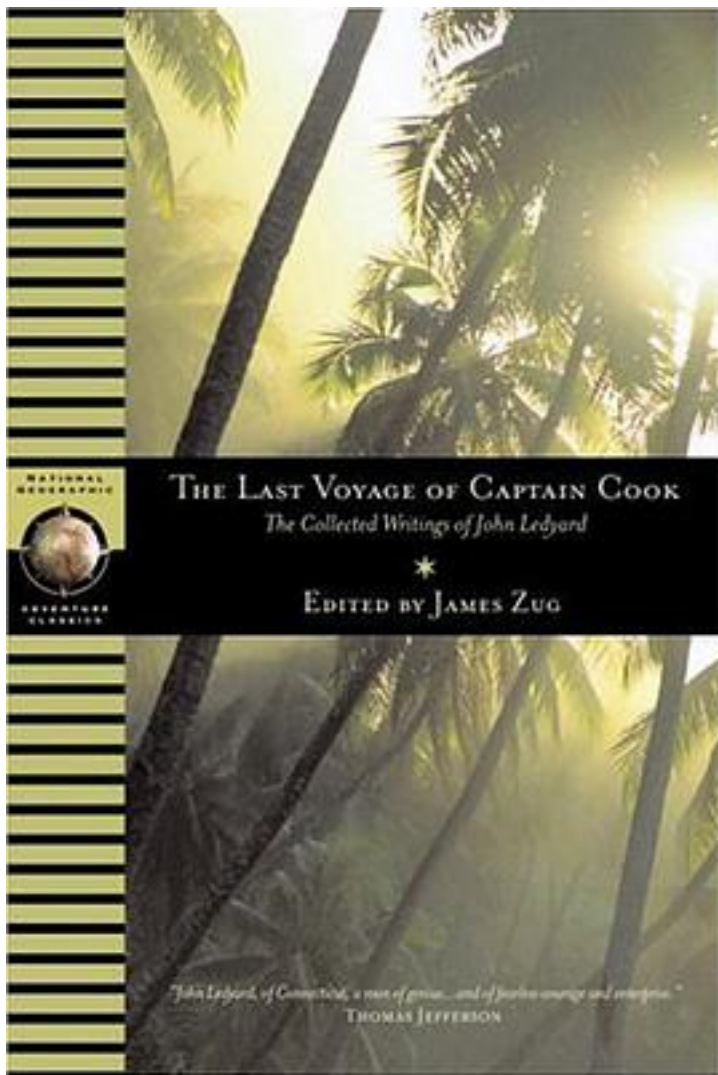


# Last Voyage of Captain Cook



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出版者:Random House Inc

出版时间:2005-3

装帧:Pap

isbn:9780792293477

John Ledyard, the man who dreamed of crossing the United States on foot 20 years before Lewis and Clark, who sailed with Captain Cook, formed a fur-trading company with John Paul Jones, and explored Russian Siberia at a time when it was a vast blank marked "unknown" on the map is perhaps the greatest and least-known explorer of all time. After leaving Dartmouth in 1772, Ledyard took to the seas and found himself at Gibraltar, where he enlisted then deserted from the British Navy. He reported for duty with Captain Cook in Plymouth, England. With Cook he explored Tasmania, New Zealand, Tahiti, the coast of what would become California and Oregon, Nootka Sound, the Bering Sea, Unalaska Island, China, and Java, all the while observing and recording in his journals the exotic ports of call and native cultures. On land he walked two-thirds of the way across Russia before being arrested by guards of Catherine the Great and deported to Poland. Returning to England he was engaged by Sir Joseph Banks to explore overland routes from Alexandria to the Niger and it was on this expedition, in Cairo, where Ledyard died of an overdose of vitriolic acid. He was 38. In his short life Ledyard saw more of the world than any person of the 18th century. His tales of adventure captivated his contemporaries like Jefferson; and earned him the nickname "the American Marco Polo." He had a capacious and curious intellect, a boundless imagination, and his writing sparkles with bright, incisive prose. John Ledyard forged a new American archetype. Before him, Americans did not by and large travel great distances. They stayed close to home, huddled in their bleak outposts in the New World. Exploration was piecemeal, hesitant, mostly a matter of getting just to the next mountain range. By going to all parts known and unknown, Ledyard created the persona of the explorer. He made the traveling life glamorous. He sailed the seven seas and touched six continents. He persisted despite continual failure. He invented a profession. He had a title like Lewis the cooper or O'Reilly the collier: he was Ledyard the Traveler. 1. The text of the book he wrote and published, *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage*. It was originally published in Hartford in 1783. It was reprinted twice in 1963, by Oregon State University Press (with extensive annotation and introduction) and by Quadrangle Books in Chicago (with no annotation and introduction, as a part of their series of reprinting "Americana Classics"). 2. The journal of his Siberian expedition. The journal was unpublished in his lifetime. 3. A selection of letters. There are about thirty-five letters extant. We would reprint perhaps a dozen of his more substantive letters, concerning Paris in the 1780s and his journey through Europe and Russia.

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