

Matthew Henson

Matthew Henson was an explorer who is thought to have been one of the first people to reach the North Pole. However, Matthew's achievements were not widely reported at the time. It wasn't until many years later that his success was recognised and celebrated.

Early Life

Matthew Alexander Henson was born on 8th August 1866 in the USA. When he was 12, he started working on a ship named 'Katie Hines'. During his time on 'Katie Hines', Matthew visited many countries and continents and learnt how to work a ship.

Years later, Matthew was working in a shop when an explorer called Robert Peary visited. He talked to Matthew about his experiences and was impressed with the skills that he had gained from working on the ship. As a result, he offered him a job as his personal assistant.

Exploration

Initially, the pair spent two years exploring jungles and rainforests in Central America. After this, Robert asked Matthew to join him as he explored the Arctic.

While in the Arctic, Matthew learnt from the Inuit who lived in the challenging environment. He learnt how to build sleds, how to train dogs to pull them along and how to build igloos.



Reaching the North Pole

In 1908, Matthew and Robert began trying to reach the North Pole for the eighth time. The Arctic is not an easy place to explore and the team faced many challenges, such as freezing temperatures and cracking ice.

In the final days of the journey, the party was made up of six explorers. They were Matthew Henson, Robert Peary and four Inuit named Ooqueah, Ootah, Egingwah and Seegloo. On 6th April 1909, they reached what they believed to be the North Pole.

When the explorers returned home, Matthew said that he was walking at the front of the group. Therefore, he believed that he was the first ever person to reach the North Pole.

Were the Team Really at the North Pole?

When the team reached what they believed to be the North Pole, there were no buildings or landmarks that they could look out for to know that they had arrived. Instead, they had to work out where they were using the location of the sun at midday.

Due to this, many people have wondered whether the team really did reach the North Pole. Some people even think that their calculations may have been wrong. This could have meant that they were far away from where they wanted to be.

However, most people believe that the team did reach the North Pole and have chosen to trust their calculations. Whether or not they had made it to the true North Pole, they still faced huge challenges during their journey and achieved something amazing.

Recognition

In 1906, Robert Peary was awarded a gold medal for his achievements in an expedition. Although Matthew was also part of the expedition, he did not receive an award. It is thought that he was overlooked because he was Black. It wasn't until nearly 100 years later that Matthew's achievements were also recognised and he was named as a winner of the same medal.

Questions

1. How long did Matthew and Robert spend together exploring Central America? Tick one.

- one year
 two years
 three years
 four years

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- Matthew met Robert Peary.
 Matthew began the eighth attempt to reach the North Pole.
 Matthew started working on a ship.
 Matthew explored Central America.

3. What was 'Katie Hines'?

4. What is the name of the section that explains how difficult it is to know whether you have reached the North Pole?

5. Look at the paragraph that begins **Years later, Matthew was working...**
Find and copy one word that means the same as **acquired**.

6. Explain how the author has made the Arctic sound dangerous.

7. How do you think that Matthew Henson felt when Robert Peary was given a medal in 1906? Explain your answer.

8. Do you think that Matthew and the team reached the North Pole? Explain your answer.

Matthew Henson

Matthew Henson was an American explorer who is thought to have been one of the first people to reach the North Pole. At the time, Matthew's achievements were not widely reported. Instead, reports focused more on the expedition's leader, Robert Peary. It wasn't until many years later that Matthew's success and contribution was also celebrated.

Early Life

Matthew Alexander Henson was born on 8th August 1866 in the USA. When he was 12, he started working on a ship named 'Katie Hines'. Here, Matthew met Captain Childs, who is thought to have ensured that Matthew received an education while working. During his time on 'Katie Hines', Matthew learnt how to work a ship and visited many countries and continents.

A few years later, Matthew began working in a shop in Washington DC. One day, an explorer named Robert Peary visited the shop after returning from an expedition in Greenland. He talked to Matthew and was impressed with the skills that he had gained from his time at sea. As a result, Robert offered him a job as his personal assistant.

Exploration

When Matthew started working with Robert, they spent two years exploring jungles and rainforests in Central America. When the work came to an end, Robert asked Matthew to join him in exploring the Arctic.

While exploring the Arctic, Matthew learnt from the native Inuit who were used to living in such a challenging environment. He learnt how to build sleds, how to train dogs to pull them on the ice and how to craft igloos for shelter.



Reaching the North Pole

In 1908, after seven failed attempts, Matthew and Robert reached the starting point for their eighth attempt to reach the North Pole. With the help of the Inuit, they began preparing for the perilous journey. The Arctic is a hostile place to explore and the team faced many challenges, such as freezing temperatures and cracking ice.

As they neared the end of their journey, the party was made up of six explorers. They were Matthew Henson, Robert Peary and four Inuit named Ooqueah, Ootah, Egingwah and Seegloo. On 6th April 1909, they finally reached what they believed to be the North Pole.

When the explorers returned home, Matthew said that he was walking at the front of the group. He explained that he had looked at where his footprints were and believed that he was the first ever person to reach the North Pole.

Were the Team Really at the North Pole?

The North Pole is surrounded by the Arctic Ocean and is covered by floating ice. There were no buildings, landmarks or changes in the scenery that would show the team that they had arrived. Instead, they had to calculate their location using the position of the sun at midday.

Due to this, many people have questioned whether the team were really the first people to reach the North Pole. Some people have suggested that their calculations may have been incorrect. If true, this could have meant that they were hundreds of miles away from where they intended to be.

In addition, only the six people who were there at the time can give evidence about where they were. However, most people believe that the team did reach the North Pole and have chosen to trust their calculations. Whether or not they had made it to the true North Pole, they still achieved incredible things and faced challenges that were difficult to overcome.

Recognition

In 1906, Robert Peary was awarded with an important medal for his achievements in an expedition that Matthew had accompanied him on. However, Matthew did not receive the same award. It is thought that he was overlooked because he was Black. It wasn't until nearly 100 years later that Matthew's achievements were also recognised and he became a recipient of the same medal.

Questions

1. Where did Matthew Henson meet Robert Peary? Tick one.

- on 'Katie Hines'
- in a shop
- in Central America
- in the Arctic

2. Draw **four** lines and match each sub-heading to its contents.

Early Life

Details about Matthew and Robert exploring Central America and the Arctic.

Exploration

All about the team's eighth attempt to reach the North Pole.

Reaching the North Pole

Information about when Matthew started working on a ship and in a shop.

Recognition

An explanation of why Matthew didn't initially receive the same medal as Robert.

3. **He talked to Matthew and was impressed with the skills that he had gained from his time at sea.**

What does the phrase **his time at sea** mean in the context of this sentence?

4. When did Matthew and the team reach the starting point for their eighth attempt to reach the North Pole?

5. What did the team use to calculate their location when they reached what they believed to be the North Pole?

6. Look at the section **Were the Team Really at the North Pole?**

Explain why you think that this section has been added.

7. Imagine that you are Matthew at the end of the day on 6th April 1909.

Explain how you are feeling.

8. Using evidence from the text, explain what impression the author gives of the Arctic.

9. **At the time, Matthew's achievements were not widely reported. Instead, reports focused more on the expedition's leader, Robert Peary.**

Do you think that this was fair? Fully explain your answer.

Matthew Henson

Matthew Henson was an American explorer who is believed to have been one of the first people to reach the North Pole. After the expedition, Matthew's achievements were mostly overlooked and reports tended to focus solely on the expedition's leader, Robert Peary. It wasn't until many years later that Matthew's success and contribution was equally acknowledged.

Early Life

Matthew Alexander Henson was born on 8th August 1866 in Maryland, USA. At the age of 12, he started work as a cabin boy on a ship named 'Katie Hines'. It was here that he met Captain Childs, who is credited with ensuring that Matthew received an education. During his time on 'Katie Hines', Matthew learnt how to work on a ship and visited many countries and continents around the world.

After several years, Matthew left his job as a cabin boy and began working in a shop in Washington DC. One day, an explorer named Robert Peary visited the shop. Having just returned from an expedition in Greenland, he began talking to Matthew and was impressed with the skills that he had acquired from his time at sea; Robert offered him a job as his personal assistant.

Exploration

At that time, Robert had been tasked with mapping the jungles of Nicaragua. Working alongside him, Matthew spent the next two years exploring Central America. When the work came to an end, Robert asked Matthew to join him in his upcoming expedition to explore the Arctic; something that would keep the pair working together for the next 18 years.

While exploring the Arctic, Matthew learnt from the native Inuit who were accustomed to living in such a harsh environment. It is said that he even became fluent in the Inuit language. In addition, Matthew learnt how to build and maintain sleds, how to train dogs to pull the sleds on the ice and how to craft igloos for shelter. Becoming an expert in many areas, he is thought to have passed on his knowledge to other explorers of the Arctic.



Reaching the North Pole

In 1908, after seven failed attempts, Matthew and Robert reached the starting point for their eighth attempt to reach the North Pole. This preparation, which was aided by many Inuit, consisted of gathering food and crafting clothing that would keep them warm. The Arctic is a hostile place to explore and the team faced many gruelling challenges, such as freezing temperatures, cracking ice and reduced visibility.

As planned, by the final leg of the journey, six explorers remained in the party. They were Matthew Henson, Robert Peary and four Inuit named Ooqueah, Ootah, Egingwah and Seegloo. On 6th April 1909, these six people reached what they believed to be the North Pole.

Upon returning home, Matthew explained that he had been walking at the front of the group and claimed that he had used his footprints to determine that he was the first person to ever reach the North Pole.

Were the Team Really at the North Pole?

The North Pole lies in the Arctic Ocean and is covered by floating ice. At the time, there were no buildings, landmarks or changes in the scenery that would suggest to the team that they had definitely arrived. Instead, they had to rely on calculations made using the location of the sun at midday.

Due to this, some people have disputed the claims that the team were the first people to reach the North Pole. Some have even suggested that their calculations were incorrect; something that could have led them several hundred miles off course.

In addition, the only people who could verify the claim were those who were there at the time. However, most people believe that the team's claims were accurate and have chosen to trust their word. Whether or not they had made it to the true North Pole, they still achieved incredible things and completed an expedition to one of the most challenging places on the Earth.

Recognition

In 1906, Robert Peary was awarded a prestigious medal for travelling farther north than any other human: an expedition that Matthew and the team accompanied him on but received little recognition for. It is felt as though Matthew was overlooked due to the fact that he was Black. It wasn't until nearly 100 years later that Matthew's achievements were also recognised and he became a recipient of the same medal.

Questions

1. **Matthew learnt from the native Inuit who were accustomed to living in such a harsh environment.**

Tick the definition that is closest in meaning to the phrase **accustomed to** in this sentence.

- bored of
- learning how
- used to
- always

2. In which section can you find information about the dangers that you might face while exploring the Arctic? Tick one.

- Early life
- Exploration
- Reaching the North Pole
- Recognition

3. Look at the section **Reaching the North Pole.**

Find and copy one word that means the same as *assisted*.

4. Why might Matthew have felt frustrated when Robert was given a medal in 1906?

5. How many failed attempts did Matthew and Robert have before they arrived at what they believed to be the North Pole?

6. Compare Matthew when he was working on the ship to Matthew when he was exploring the Arctic.

7. Using evidence from the text, describe Matthew's character.

8. In 25 words or fewer, summarise the team's eighth attempt to reach the North Pole.

9. How do you predict that someone might use this text in the future? Explain your answer.

10. **Whether or not they had made it to the true North Pole, they still achieved incredible things and completed an expedition to one of the most challenging places on Earth.**

Explain why you think that the author thought that it was important to include this sentence.
