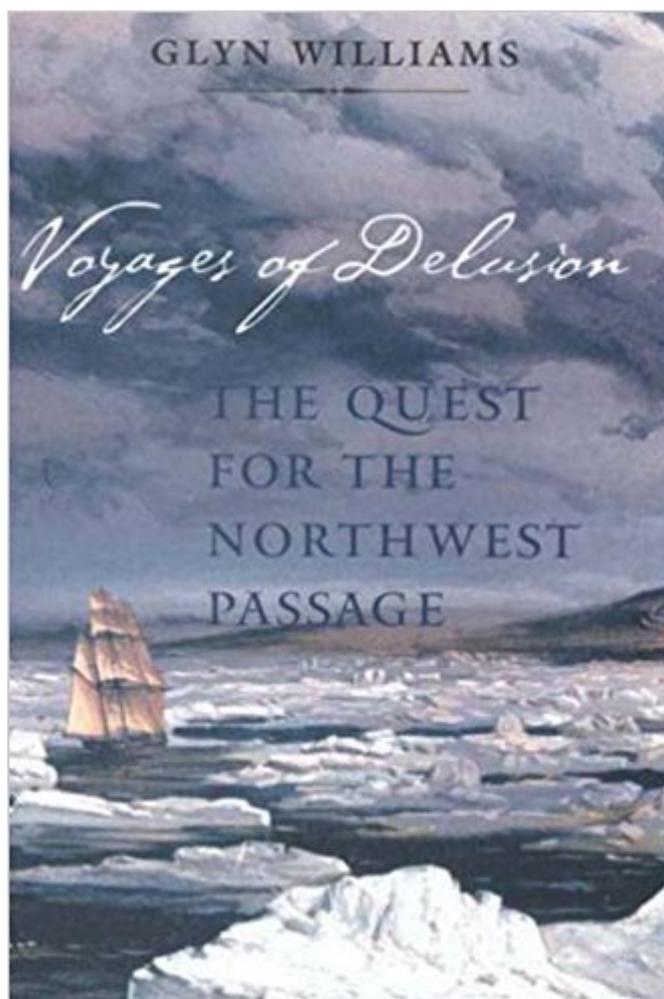


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Voyages Of Delusion: The Quest For The Northwest Passage



Synopsis

In this gripping work of narrative history, Williams describes the adventures and mishaps of the misguided expeditions of the Age of Reason--the 18th century--in search of the maritime philosopher's stone. 51 illustrations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Writing about the search for the Northwest Passage seems almost as obsessive as the quest itself. Williams' entry in the growing stack of these works has the advantage of tight focus. He limits his survey to the 18th Century - Enlightenment Europe. He illuminates a time when the Royal Navy hadn't yet gained control of the seas. The vivid accounts of 19th Century Empire building have obscured the hesitant beginnings of earlier eras. The 18th Century explorers were hesitant pioneers, largely unknown today. Williams conveys their voyages with the domestic political dramas as background. With accomplished style, this book traces the debates as it follows the early explorations into Hudson's Bay and the North Pacific. Three figures take central stage in this narrative. The first is Arthur Dobbs who set the tone and topics in support of the search. Dobbs, an MP from Ireland, saw the promise of increased trade, finding mineral riches and nationalist expansion through finding the Passage. A major aspect was his goal to demolish the monopolistic grip of the Hudson's Bay Company on trade and exploration in the North American Arctic. In Williams' account, Dobbs maintained his campaign over many years, as an open advocate and anonymously. Dobbs was instrumental in helping turn over exploration from private hands and put it under the aegis of the Royal Navy. Dobbs was convinced [or convinced himself] that fur trading

profits would be purely secondary to the potential mineral wealth to be found in the Arctic. Over the years, Williams recounts, fluctuating relationships with other European powers prodded Dobbs into more purely nationalistic reasons for pursuing the Passage.

This is a great read - a true time-travel for arm-chair-travelers. By now you already know what this book is about from the product description and the other reviews, so I won't bore you with details regarding the scope of the book. The tales of exploration of the coasts of northern North America provided in this book read like a screen play of a very exciting movie (along the lines of *Master and Commander*), but they are REAL LIFE experiences, not Hollywood fiction. (Imagine your brandy freezing solid in Hudson's Bay, or trying to dig a ship free from 10 feet of ice beneath 13 feet of snow.) Prof. Williams has done extensive research on the subject (everything from then-current newspaper articles to explorers' journals), and includes many useful maps and drawings to illuminate the text. While the title suggests a limited scope (i.e., the search for the Northwest Passage), the narrative actually touches on a much wider range of topics. In fact, this book motivated me to pursue further reading regarding the explorations and achievements of Magellan, Drake and Mackenzie. Being a resident of the Pacific Northwest, I was also surprised to discover (from this book) the origin of many of the place-names I grew up with (but never appreciated), such as Puget Sound and Vancouver Island. The narrative of this book is concise, exceedingly well written, and includes enough anecdotes and Welsh dry humor to keep the reader engaged (and possibly amused, depending on your sense of humor). While we all know the outcome of the story (i.e., no easy NW Passage was found - sorry if that's a spoiler for some readers), it's simply just fascinating to see how the tale evolved to those involved at the time.

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