

schools. Isserman doesn't overstate the case for the importance of the 10th Mountain Division in creating the modern outdoor movement, but readers may be startled by the number of familiar and important figures who appear.

This is a well-written and presented volume that skillfully fits many vivid first-person accounts into a historical narrative. It is free of the padding and repetition that blights some publishing nowadays due to computer drafting. I would have liked a few more maps.

—Nat Eddy

### **Starvation Shore**

*By Laura Waterman*

*University of Wisconsin Press, 2019, 416 pages.*

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CANNIBALISM HAS SUCH AN UGLY RING TO IT.

The word brings to mind the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer or the character Hannibal Lecter from *The Silence of the Lambs*. But wouldn't any of us resort to eating human flesh to survive, if the circumstances became dire enough?

In Laura Waterman's first historical novel, *Starvation Shore*, the reader must consider the moral line where cannibalism might become ethically permissible. In re-creating the 1881–1884 Lady Franklin Bay Expedition to the Arctic, when Americans set a new “farthest north” record in the race to the North Pole, Waterman reimagines the barren path that brought starving men so close to death that they would eat their shipmates' corpses. Stranded for three years along the Arctic waters of Ellesmere Island, only seven of 25 men survived the ordeal.

Waterman herself brings a unique viewpoint to this story. In an interview with her on the podcast *Time to Eat the Dogs*, the historian Michael Robinson of the University of Hartford suggested that Waterman may have better understood the strain faced by polar explorers. Because of the physical and psychological pressures she faced while homesteading for 30 years with her



late husband, Guy. She had to accept his choice to end his life in frigid temperatures on the summit of Mount Lafayette in 2000. One cannot read *Starvation Shore* without wondering if Laura Waterman subconsciously related to the explorers' feelings of isolation and their blunt encounters with death.

I picked up *Starvation Shore* because I love the nonfiction works of the Watermans, who co-authored five books on the history of Northeast exploration and the ethics of wilderness travel. I wanted to see what she did with her first novel. I was also curious as to why Waterman—who is now 80 years old—had switched to fiction set in a land far from her native Northeast.

To gain insight, I caught up with Waterman in May at a reading in southern New Hampshire.

"I have never been to the Arctic, and I don't have great interest in going there," she told a small audience gathered at the Toadstool Bookshop in Peterborough. "But I knew to a certain degree what these men were up against, in terms of very low temperatures and extremely strong winds. We have the benefit with the Presidential Range of being able to stick our noses above the treeline and pushing it as far as we want to. You can be out in extremely debilitating weather."

Waterman said she first learned of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition in 2008, when she read the anthology *Ice: Stories of Survival from Polar Exploration* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999), which included an excerpt from the diary of David L. Brainard, the first sergeant under expedition leader Adolphus Greely. Brainard's diaries happened to be in the archives of the Dartmouth College Library, not far away from Waterman's home in Vermont, so she checked them out. Fascinated with stories of exploration since childhood, she became engrossed with Brainard's iced-over hell.

"I fell in love with these guys in a funny way," Waterman told me after the book talk. "I got to know them as people, as human beings. They were in an incredibly stressful situation and they were doing their best to get out of it."

*Starvation Shore* took a decade to research and write. During the process, Waterman said she would wake up at 4:30 A.M., make coffee or tea, and read an entry from Brainard's diary to put herself in the right frame of mind before writing from 6:30 to 11:30 A.M. Background research came from nonfiction books about the expedition, notably Alden Todd's *Abandoned* (University of Alaska Press, 2001), Leonard Guttridge's *Ghosts of Cape Sabine* (Putnam, 2000), and Theodore Powell's *The Long Rescue* (Doubleday, 1960).

“I had nothing to contribute to the nonfiction books,” Waterman said, explaining why she chose the novel form. “I was interested in the emotional minds of these 25 men, and you can’t get at that through nonfiction. I wanted to get at the emotions.”

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Arctic exploration, although readers unfamiliar with the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition may find themselves seeking additional historical context to appreciate the significance and “epicness” of this expedition. I often found myself tripping over the question of fact versus fiction. Did the crew *really* jump from one ice floe to another? (Yes.) Did Sgt. Brainard *really* use his ice ax to chop apart two men whose clothing had frozen together? (Yes.) Was Lt. Greely *really* unaware of the cannibalism? (So he claimed.)

This was not the only Arctic expedition to devolve into cannibalism. Among the more famous examples is British explorer Sir John Franklin’s failed search for the Northwest Passage, which ended with all 129 men dead *despite* the fact that they’d eaten their crewmates’ corpses.

Waterman said she hoped readers of *Starvation Shore* would take inspiration from its stories of heroism, particularly that of Brainard. One of the strongest crewmates both physically and mentally, he becomes the primary food provider, netting shrimp in subfreezing temperatures when others are too weak to stand. He also carries the ethical burden of fortifying the crew’s rations with meat he cuts from corpses.

Waterman said she hoped her readers might “learn to live better from good role models” and vice versa: “Maybe we can learn how to avoid our mistakes from poor role models.”

When it comes to role models, one of the greatest is the indefatigable author herself. She walks to her local library daily for a ration of emails and the online world, although she has no intention of ever having internet or a computer at home. She types her manuscripts on a Royal typewriter and is already at work on two more books: a historical novel about the opera singer Maria Callas and a memoir that picks up where her 2006 book *Losing the Garden* ends. Perhaps writing *Starvation Shore* was a necessary personal step before she could root deeper into her psychological cellar.

—Stephen Kurczy