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John Long, Tim Bowden

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John Long, Tim Bowden : Mountains of Madness: A Scientist's Odyssey in Antarctica before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mountains of Madness: A Scientist's Odyssey in Antarctica:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyable scientific adventure in AntarcticaBy Tim F. Martin_Mountains of Madness_ is an account of two fossil-hunting expeditions to Antarctica by Australian paleontologist John Long. In this entertaining book, Long provides details of what it was like to travel and work in

Antarctica, describing what he saw and felt, and also providing details of the results of his expeditions. Long with his colleagues made two trips to the southernmost continent, the first time in December 1988 and the second time in October 1991, though the bulk of the book describes his experiences on his significantly more productive second trip. Long's 1991 expedition was not one for the faint-hearted. A "deep field" expedition - so-called because it was more than 200 kilometers from base and outside helicopter rescue range - was necessary for Long to reach the target of his fossil explorations, the remote Cook Mountains, part of the Transantarctic Mountain chain (Long dubbed the northernmost Cook Mountains the "Mountains of Madness" after a famous H.P. Lovecraft 1931 tale of a doomed Antarctic fossil hunting expedition). In order to get to the fossil-bearing strata that was the expedition's target (Long was after fish fossils from the Devonian period, 355-408 million years ago), Long spent eight weeks out in the field on a two man, two woman expedition. Arriving on top of a glacier thanks to a ski-equipped C-130 transport aircraft, the expedition carried all of its supplies (including climbing gear, rations, and geological equipment) on top of sledges towed by snowmobiles called skidoos. Though they had many advantages over the earliest explorers of Antarctica - notably motorized transport and satellite and radio communication - they were still at considerable risk. Only the thin fabric of their polar tents protected them from the howling, super-chilled winds of Antarctica. Frostbite, hypothermia, and dehydration (Antarctica is the driest continent) were constant concerns. Sudden blizzards could produce whiteout conditions, preventing all movement and keeping the expedition inside their tents for days, even delaying the expedition from reaching food caches and causing them to worry about running low or out of supplies. Glacial crevasses were difficult to detect as well as being deadly, nearly invisible dangers that could swallow up people or even vehicles. Long and his colleagues came up with the term "the A factor" to describe that no matter how well they thought they had planned for something, for various unpredictable reasons they lost about one day in four when working in the field in Antarctica, whether it was due to mechanical failure, waiting for someone or something to arrive, an injury or illness, or the weather. On Long's first expedition, denied access due to events to prime fossil-hunting locales, the author was able to take in some of Antarctica's amazing sites. He visited the Dry Valleys region, a 1,860 square mile region of exposed rock and sand, an area in the Transantarctic Mountain region that remains free of ice and snow year round because the land is rising at a faster rate than glaciers can encroach on it and the scouring, howling, arid winds make snow and ice buildup impossible. Interesting locales within the Dry Valleys include Lake Vanda (an interesting stratified lake, usually covered by four meters of ice but whose deepest layers of water are considerably warmer thanks to a salty and chemical-rich makeup), the Onyx River (the continent's only river, which flows for a mere 60 days each year at the peak of summer), and seal mummies (half-skeletonized remains of desiccated seals, half buried in sand; it is believed that they are the remains of seals that had an ear infection, became disoriented, wandered inland, and starved to death). Long also visited Cape Royds, where he was able to visit Ernest Shackleton's preserved hut, restored to look as it did when the great explorer was there, and an Adelie penguin colony. Long provided a little history of fossil exploration in Antarctica. The first fossils found were pieces of fossilized wood from Seymour Island, collected by Captain Carl Larsen, a Norwegian, in 1892-1893. The first major fossil expedition was in 1902 by Swedish geologist Otto Nordenskjöld, who collected from the western islands off the Antarctic Peninsula, discovering Jurassic plant fossils, giant penguin fossils, and many fossil shells. The first vertebrate fossils from the Antarctic mainland were Devonian-age fish found in rocks near Mackay Glacier near Granite Harbor in 1911-1912 by Australian scientist Frank Debenham. The main interest Long had though were his fish fossils. Long sought out what had been dubbed the Aztec Siltstone, fossil-bearing Devonian-age rocks that got their name from their original site of discovery that was a pyramidal mountain in a shape that suggested to the geologists an Aztec temple. The author had long been interested in the Devonian period as that was when fish evolution was at its most exciting and in Antarctic fossils as discoveries there could shed tremendous light on fish evolution in other areas of the long gone super continent known as Gondwana (which at one time was comprised of many now separate areas, such as Antarctica, Australia, New Zealand, South America, Africa, and India). Long's second expedition was tremendously successful, resulting in the discovery of five new genera of lobe-finned fish, three new genera of sharks, and one genus of placoderms (an extinct group of armored fish). Long details in the book (published in 2001) how he was still preparing and analyzing specimens, including some as yet undescribed forms of lungfish, placoderms, some new types of acanthodians (an extinct group of spiny fishes), and a new ray-finned fish (ray-finned fish are the largest modern group of fish and include such familiar types as trout and goldfish). Long's fossil discoveries also aided in formulating theories regarding the reconstruction of Gondwana faunas from both Antarctica and other countries and also theories relating to the reconstruction of the geographic position of Gondwana itself. Long enthusiastically described the fossils he found and their great importance. My only complaint was that there were no illustrations of either the fossils or how the fish might have looked in life. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Colorful, scientifically interesting, and the author's a Douglas Mawson fan! By M. Bailey Australian paleontologist John Long recounts two fossil-collecting trips to Antarctica, the second of which, in 1991, involved spending several months inland with 3 other scientists. He colorfully describes the training required for acceptance to an Antarctic research program, life on the ice, especially for long periods out in the mountains, and the types of fossils to be found, many of which are also found across all the southern continents, providing further details of how the

super-continent Gondwana broke apart into the distinct continents we have today. During the months on the ice, the scientists had regular radio contact with Scott Station (the New Zealand station very close to McMurdo), but they otherwise had only each other for companionship. Rest periods and weather-related confinements were occasions for writing up notes, reading in various scientific fields, playing games, and reading lighter materials, sometimes to each other. One story they shared was Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness", and their enjoyment spurred me to reread that as well. I also like the author's affinity for Australia's Sir Douglas Mawson, whose own solo journey over 100s of miles of Antarctica after the death of his companions remains my favorite adventure story, as Mawson himself remains my favorite explorer.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Fascinating Read By E. Cuddy John Long's "Mountains of Madness" tells the story of the author's fossil-hunting expeditions in Antarctica. The book's title comes from H.P. Lovecraft's jarring epic "At the Mountains of Madness" -- a classic novella of science and horror set in the southern continent. The author's references to Lovecraft's terrifying tale effectively convey the splendor and danger of the Antarctic wilderness. Long also writes with a wonderful sense of humour -- his warmth and charm draw the reader into an entertaining and informative narrative of scientific discovery and individual experience. This book is a must read for anyone who enjoys stories of popular science and adventure.

This extraordinary book is the first-person account of John Long's two unforgettable "summers" on the southern continent. Told in a highly accessible and entertaining style, Mountains of Madness is the account of his three-month long fossil hunt. As the story unfolds, we learn of both the highs of scientific discovery as well as the grueling yet essential routines that must be practiced every day just to stay alive in one of the harshest environments on our planet. Alternating with the author's wonder at the intense beauty of his surroundings are his immense frustration and boredom that stem from being completely at the mercy of the elements. Throughout the course of the expedition, danger is never far off in this inhospitable land. Despite having been trained in the art of building snow caves and practiced in the skill of traversing glaciers, Long tells of two brushes with death in just one afternoon. The hair-raising escape from a deep crevasse is fraught with tension -- only to be followed by yet another encounter with sudden disaster when the crash of an avalanche buries Long deep in the snow.

From Publishers Weekly Antarctica, once the center of the prehistoric supercontinent Gondwana, contains some of the richest and best-preserved fossil deposits in the world. Long, a paleontologist, recounts his two expeditions (in 1988 and 1992) to Antarctica to recover some of these fossils. He relates details ranging from the thrilling to the mundane, describing plane rides to Antarctica, life at the base camp and his actual fieldwork. In a down-to-earth and often funny manner, he conveys a sense of the daily routine of a scientist living at the bottom of the world. At times the lay reader might get bogged down by some of Long's technical lexicon, but for the most part the author successfully intersperses accessible passages about the crew's more banal activities -- cooking (including some recipes for Antarctic delicacies), celebrating Christmas, and playing in the snow -- with the passages concerning his work. Because these trips constitute Long's introduction to the continent, the book maintains a tone of immediacy and an infectious spirit of discovery, effectively articulating the awe experienced by first-time visitors upon confronting Antarctica's danger and beauty. Long supplements his own words with quotations from a variety of texts ranging from the diaries of famous Antarctic explorers to H.P. Lovecraft's fictional horror tale At the Mountain of Madness, from which this book takes its title. Although the narrative may not have enough action to satisfy hardcore exploration and adventure readers, it provides an informative, well-written and deliberate account of contemporary paleontological research, and presents some interesting theories on how Antarctica's resources could help solve certain environmental crises. Long's book should appeal to lay and professional readers interested in current scientific and ecological study. (Feb.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. "...a fascinating account of his two expeditions to Antarctica's remote Cook Mountains, a virtually untouched fossil hunter's paradise." -- Discover.com, May 2001 "...an infectious spirit of discovery...an informative, well-written and deliberate account of contemporary paleontological research." -- Publisher's Weekly, Nov. 27, 2000 "...straightforward, eminently readable, and variously humorous, dramatic, and emotional. ...an unusual and enjoyable pleasure." -- British Bulletin of Publications, April 2002 "...very readable memoir. I recommend this book to anyone with curiosity about the southern continent..." -- PALAIOS, February 2002 "Long comes over as a dogged, cheerful character in whose company you might be happy to spend a field season." -- New Scientist, Feb. 10, 2001 "Long's gripping story, told in the first person, brings the excitement and dangers of Antarctica to life." -- ICE CAP NEWS, July-Sept. 2001 "Writing in a pleasant, informal style, the author describes what it's really like to be a researcher in the Transarctic Mountains." -- SFRA REVIEW, Jan-Feb 2002 In addition to a travelogue, though, Mountains of Madness is also an account of Long's fascinating paleontological work. -- Rain Taxi of Books, Summer 2001 Long is at his best when describing the fossil finds. -- Washington Post Book World, April 15, 2001 "...an interesting read for scientists who have worked in Antarctica and for the general public...interested in polar exploration." -- PALAEONTOLOGIA ELECTRONICA, January 2002 About the Author John Long, Foreword by Tim Bowden