



# Barren Grounds: The Story of the Tragic Moffatt Canoe Trip

*Skip Pessl*

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In 1955 Arthur Moffatt led an expedition consisting of young college students and recent graduates to the Inuit lands of Nunavut, Canada, to follow the path of the 1893 Tyrrell expedition and to film and photograph the group's progress. The expedition, a 900-mile epic journey across the Barren Lands of Arctic Canada, has stirred controversy and criticism for over fifty years. The trip has been variously described as "the pioneering venture in modern recreational canoe travel" and as "an excellent example of how not to conduct a canoe trip." Delays took their toll on the adventurers, exhausted by the seemingly endless paddling through unknown rivers and lakes, the trek across the windswept tundra, and torment by voracious insects. Threatened with diminishing food reserves and increasingly harsh weather, the members of the expedition were forced to travel with greater speed and less caution, and ultimately a fatal mistake was made. Two of the canoes capsized, dumping four men into the frigid waters. Moffatt, the leader, died of exposure. It took the survivors ten days of arduous travel with minimum food and equipment to reach the safety of the Hudson's Bay Company post.

Barren Grounds features passages from the journals of two young Moffatt party members and excerpts about the 1893 expedition of Joseph Burr Tyrrell, along with entries from the journal of Art Moffatt himself.

Part cautionary tale, part nail-biting adventure, the book will appeal to outdoorsmen and armchair adventurers alike.

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