

To: Sam
From: Dave Lawrence
Re: Book proposal
Date: November 22, 1996

My idea is to write a history of the exploration of the oceans. This would be no ordinary “I’ll tell you how they filled in the blank spaces on the charts,” type of story. Maps are only two-dimensional. The oceans, however, have depth in addition to length and breadth, thus any complete history of oceanic exploration must consider all three dimensions. Time, of course, adds a fourth dimension.

The narrative, then, will address the traditional topic of the voyages and voyagers from ancient times to the Age of Discovery. But it will also delve into explorations below the surface, such as the excursions of military and civilian submarines or scientific endeavors like the Deep-Sea Drilling Project. I would also like to describe the contributions satellite- and aircraft-based remote sensing and the recent advances in computer simulation of oceanic systems. All may be considered “exploration” although the image of a remote-sensing analyst in a lab in Montgomery County, Md., is not nearly as romantic as that of rogue Vikings sailing west in stormy seas off Greenland.

As the narrative unfolds, I propose to touch upon topics important to oceanic exploration. Advances in ship design and building is one such topic. Another is navigation technology, progressing from dead reckoning to radar and satellites. Care and feeding of the crew may also be addressed (mercury poisoning from soldered meat tins may have led to the demise of the Franklin Expedition in the Arctic, for example).

I hope to recreate what it is like to be on, under or over the ocean for the reader. How does it feel to walk on the rolling deck of a caravel dwarfed by the waves, with the wind howling

and rain stinging the face? How can one sleep below deck in the oppressive heat and humidity of the tropics? How does a submariner maintain his composure as the hull creaks and groans in response to the crushing pressure of the depths? What are the dynamics of groups restricted to confined spaces for long periods of time?

Above all, I would like to get into the personalities. What kind of person goes off into the unknown, leaving family and friends for possibly years with a guarantee of low pay but none of safe return? What were the characteristics of the great explorers? What were the styles of leadership? And how do the technological wizards among today's explorers compare themselves with heroic figures like James Cook, Fridtjof Nansen or Ernest Shackleton?

An important practical question to be addressed is whether or not this has been done. As far as I can tell, no. There are a few histories of oceanography, but they don't appear to be intended for a general audience. I also believe the scope of this proposal is broader than that. There are some histories of maritime exploration, but most are either: a) decades out of date; or b) restricted to certain topics, like exploration of the polar regions, the Americas or the Pacific. They are all mostly confined to exploration by surface ship and neglect the contributions of projects like the deep-sea drilling effort and satellite remote sensing.

With all the libraries here, especially the New York Public Library, I doubt I'll have trouble locating sources for the book. In addition, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory has a number of people involved in the more recent explorations I would like to discuss. If necessary, I could also drive up to Woods Hole for help. I may also be able to find useful information at the headquarters of the American Geographical Society and the National Geographic Society.