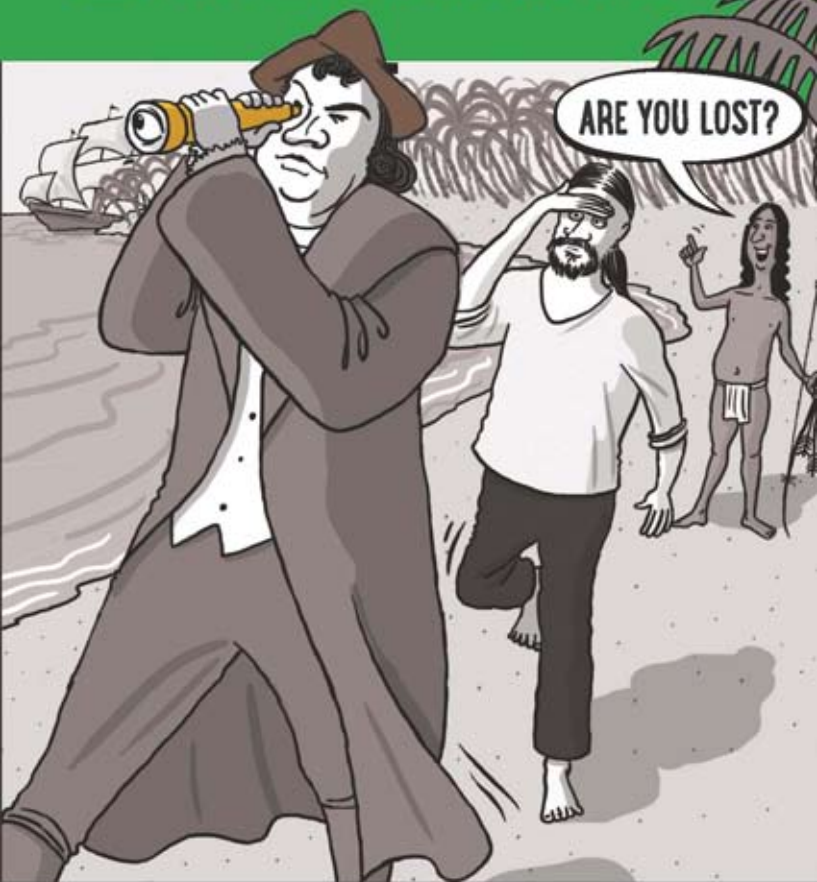


epic fails

EXPLORATION



BART KING

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Contents

Introduction	1
1 Hey, You've Been Robbed!	3
2 Be Careful What You Say	11
3 Missing in Action	21
4 That Sounds Awful	31
5 Crackpots and Liars	41
6 Amazing Fails!	50

Chapter 2

Be Careful What You Say

It's one thing for tough explorers to go off into the unknown, but what about little kids?

That's why the 1620 voyage of the *Mayflower* was special. A ship full of Pilgrim families sailed across the Atlantic, from England to America. It was a hard trip. There were heavy storms, and almost every pilgrim on board got seasick. Even the poor kids!

One young sailor thought this was really funny. Barfing Pilgrims—what a laugh! So the sailor made fun of the seasick passengers, saying half of them would die before reaching the New World. Not only that, he said he hoped to throw the dead overboard.

Of course, this really scared the kids.

Many Pilgrims and even the other sailors tried to get this jerk to stop. But he wouldn't! The young sailor just kept making the miserable people afraid of dying. Then he joked and laughed about it.

The *Mayflower* finished its voyage after more than nine weeks at sea. Fortunately, there had been only two deaths on the way across. One of these was a Pilgrim who died just before land was sighted.

The other was a sailor who became ill halfway across the Atlantic.

Can you guess *which* sailor was so unlucky? Of course you can. This just goes to show that people should be careful what they say.

Stop, Thief!

In 1768, James Cook sailed a ship from England to the South Pacific. It was a voyage of discovery. He and his crew were to help England control the seas by making maps and scientific observations. His first destination was the island of Tahiti.

When Cook reached Tahiti, things went smoothly at first. The local people were very friendly. The English were also surprised to see the islanders surfing the waves on surfboards. No European had ever seen surfing before!

There were two problems, however. First, the people of Tahiti believed that a person's property should be shared. Second, there was no metal on the island of Tahiti. The English, in contrast, used metal for everything. They had metal tools, metal money, even metal clothing, such as belt buckles.

Because of these two problems, the local people sometimes took things like fishhooks and hammers from the English. Once, a ship's officer brought a pair of "opera glasses" to the island. These are small binoculars used to watch fancy performances from seats that are too far back to see what's happening onstage.

When the officer's opera glasses disappeared, he was very angry. Now

he couldn't watch any fancy opera performances in Tahiti!



The English were very upset. The people of Tahiti were *thieves*! The English built a fort to keep the Tahitians from “claiming” anything really important.

Speaking of claiming, as he sailed, Cook often claimed land for England. For example, on this trip, Cook claimed the

entire continent of Australia, even though he had no clear idea of its size.

What is the difference between “claiming” something and “stealing” it?

Answer: NONE.

Cook *didn't* steal Tahiti, by the way. Two years earlier, a British captain named Samuel Wallis had already stolen the island!)

A Terrible Prediction

Have you ever bragged about some brilliant thing you were about to do, and then completely failed? Of course not. Me neither! But I have been lucky enough to hear of OTHER people who have experienced this.

Sadly, I wasn't around in the 1800s to enjoy it when a man named Robert Burke said this:

“I will cross Australia or perish in the attempt!”

In other words, Burke was determined

to cross Australia even if he died trying. (You can see where this is going, can't you?) Along the way, he planned on discovering gold and getting famous. Sadly, he had little more understanding of Australia than Captain Cook did in the previous century.

While Australia's coasts had been mapped, the middle—called “the Outback”—was a mystery. What was in the center of Australia? Rich grasslands? An inland sea? Nobody knew! Of course, now we know. The middle of Australia is a huge desert!

There were just two problems with Burke's plan. First, Burke had no idea of how to explore. Second, he had a *really* bad sense of direction. Burke was famous for getting lost in his own hometown! So, all in all, just the kind of guy you want to lead an expedition.

Even so, Burke got together a group of men, horses, and wagons. He also brought a lot of weird stuff.

☞ *The six weirdest things Burke brought:*

—1 giant gong (a metal disk that makes a loud *gong* when struck)

—1,500 pounds of sugar

—1 filing cabinet

—12 dandruff brushes (*dandruff* is the small pieces of dead skin in a person's hair)

—1 heavy wooden table and chairs

Burke even had 26 camels shipped over for the trip. (Camels don't live in Australia, but hey, one desert is just like another, right?)

In 1860, Burke's explorers started on the south coast of Australia. A crowd of thousands waved goodbye to the adventurers. Hurray!

The trip north was going to be about 4,000 miles. As the group went north, progress was slow. REALLY slow. After one whole day, the explorers had gone

only four miles. A child could ride farther than that on a tricycle!

Well, maybe in a rowboat. It rained on Burke's expedition so hard that it took Burke two months to go about 450 miles. By then, many of his men had quit. They saw that Burke had no idea what he was doing!

That's about when the expedition left the rainy coast. It was getting hotter and drier the farther north Burke and his men went.

At the halfway point, Burke reached the last watering hole. There, he split up his group. Burke would keep going with one group carrying all the water they would need. The others would wait three months at the watering hole for Burke to get back.

Right then, Australia's summer was starting. That meant it was going to get REALLY hot!

It took a long time, and Burke and his explorers suffered terribly. After many

miles, Burke got very close to Australia's north coast. He almost made it!

But Burke was worried. What if he didn't make it back to the watering hole in time?

So he turned back. The men plodded on foot across the burning outback. They had almost no water. Yet somehow, they made it back to the watering hole.



Success! But wait—where was everyone? After all, the coals in the settlement's cooking fire were still warm.

It turned out, the rest of Burke's party had left just *hours* earlier. They had waited a month longer than planned and had run low on supplies.

Now Burke and his companions were all alone. Burke died shortly afterward. What was the last thought that crossed his mind? I have no idea. But it might have been "*I will now perish in the attempt.*"

Who knows? Maybe it was something else.