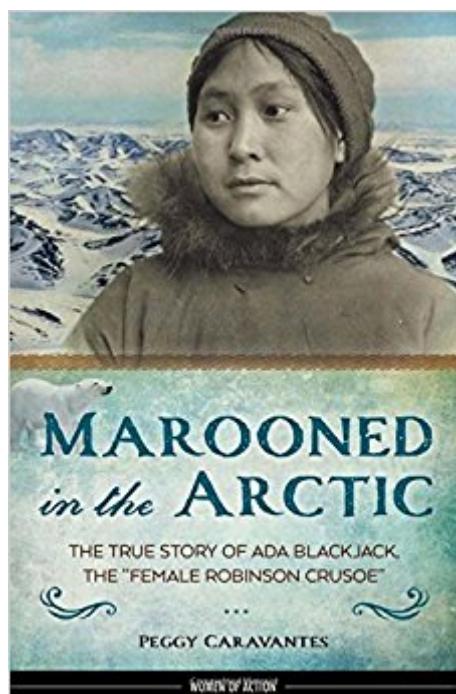


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# Marooned In The Arctic: The True Story Of Ada Blackjack, The "Female Robinson Crusoe" (Women Of Action)



## Synopsis

In 1921, four men ventured into the Arctic for a top-secret expedition: an attempt to claim uninhabited Wrangel Island in northern Siberia for Great Britain. With the men was a young Inuit woman named Ada Blackjack, who had signed on as cook and seamstress to earn money to care for her sick son. Conditions soon turned dire for the team when they were unable to kill enough game to survive. Three of the men tried to cross the frozen Chukchi Sea for help but were never seen again, leaving Ada with one remaining team member who soon died of scurvy. Determined to be reunited with her son, Ada learned to survive alone in the icy world by trapping foxes, catching seals, and avoiding polar bears. After she was finally rescued in August 1923, after two years total on the island, Ada became a celebrity, with newspapers calling her a real "female Robinson Crusoe." The first young adult book about Blackjack's remarkable story, *Marooned in the Arctic* includes sidebars on relevant topics of interest to teens, including the use of cats on ships, the phenomenon known as Arctic hysteria, and aspects of Inuit culture and beliefs. With excerpts from diaries, letters, and telegrams; historic photos; a map; source notes; and a bibliography, this is an indispensable resource for any young adventure lover, classroom, or library.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up  
•Caravantes provides an account of the ill-fated 1921 Wrangel Island expedition (in which explorers were sent to claim the land for Canada), relying mostly on the notes and journals of Milton Galle, Lorne Knight, Allan Crawford, and Frederick Maurer. Ada Blackjack Johnson accompanied the men, acting as their cook and seamstress to earn money to care for her sick son. Although Johnson is supposed to be the focus of the book, most information on her is from secondary sources, and the few entries from her diary featured are brief and factual. The narrative covers why Vilhjalmur Stefansson sent the expedition to the island and the party's exploration and fight for survival. Johnson is mentioned briefly, with the men stating whether she is acting as expected, behaving strangely, or refusing to work. Their treatment of her was questionable: on one occasion, they tied her to the flagpole for not working. After Johnson's rescue, she was briefly covered in the press but spent the rest of her life in relative obscurity and poverty. Although the author explains why she used the term Eskimo rather than Inuit, she glosses over other issues, such as the flagpole incident, never questioning if the men treated Johnson differently because she wasn't white. Black-and-white photographs, along with diary and newspaper excerpts, are included. Gray boxes of text provide in-depth information on topics. VERDICT This grim account of survival in the Arctic is appropriate for larger libraries looking to expand their history sections.  
•Tamara Saarinen, Pierce County Library, WA

[A] fascinating portrait of a young woman who showed strength and fortitude when thrust into a perilous environment.  
•Publishers Weekly "Using diaries (including Ada's) and other notes the five explorers left, Caravantes provides a riveting description of their ordeal."  
•Kirkus Reviews "A grim account of survival in the Arctic."  
•School Library Journal "Rush to make yourself acquainted with this dramatic read."  
•The Bookbag "A taut mashup of arctic exploration's Heroic Age and twenty-first century feminism."  
•TeenReads.com "A well-written, well-sourced survival story..."  
•The Horn Book Guide

I don't read a lot of nonfiction but this one caught my eye. Coming in with just over 200 pages it was a relatively quick read, there were actual pictures which did add to the narrative. This is targeted to a younger audience which the writing reflected nicely. The author set up the story with bio's of each of the 4 men that accompanied Ada on the journey as well as her story. An interesting read showing the harsh events of those 2 years for Ada. It wasn't an in-depth look but considering the audience I think it was enough. Local customs/traditions were defined to explain them to the reader. This was

an educational read about a woman that history seems to have forgotten. I think middle grade ages would also enjoy this one, it gave enough details without going into graphic detail. Marooned is a fine example of a young mother who did not give up, but was determined to provide and survive for her young son.

I'm surprised the other reviewer only gave this book 3 stars. I thought it was excellent! Perfect for middle school students who want to read more about explorers and/or are interested in reading about strong women. It was an exciting read and I finished the book in two nights. I couldn't put it down. I now want to see what other books are available in the "Women of Action" series.

In 1921 a top secret expedition of four Canadian men and one Inuit woman set out to occupy Wrangle Island in Siberia to claim it for Britain. Several Inuit families who were to go were no shows, but Ada Blackjack desperately needed the \$50 a month salary and decided to go alone. Her son had tuberculosis and as a single mother Ada needed to find money for his medical treatment. Ada was born in 1898 near Solomon, Alaska. Her father died when she was eight and her mother sent her to a Methodist mission in Nome. She was taught English, basic reading and writing skills, and the Christian religion. Ada never learned traditional Inuit skills, except for having a skill of turning animal skins into clothing. That was her purpose on the expedition. At sixteen Ada married Jack Blackjack and they moved to the Seward Peninsula. Ada suffered six years of abuse and starvation from Jack. Two of their children died, Bennett developed tuberculosis, and Jack deserted the family. Ada divorced Jack and took Bennett to Nome where she cleaned houses and sewed to support them. Bennett needed medical care which Ada could not afford and she took him to the Methodist orphanage for care. Ada heard that the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson was organizing an expedition. He had hired Errol Lorne Knight, Frederick W. Maurer, Milton Galle, and Allan R. Crawford to carry out the secret mission. Stefansson told the men that the Arctic land could support a comfortable life, that game was abundant, and settlement by Europeans the goal. Marooned in the Arctic by Peggy Caravantes tells the story of the doomed expedition. All four men perished, and Ada had to survive alone until she was rescued two years after her arrival. Caravantes points that the men were totally unprepared and overly optimistic. They failed to provide adequate food for the long winters. They had forgone buying the boat needed to reach the ice floes where their prey could be found. As the men fell ill with scurvy and starvation, Ada learned to set trap lines and shot a rifle, chop the wood, and nurse the men--all while suffering loneliness, cultural isolation, fear of polar bears,

homesickness for her son, and scurvy. After Ada's rescue she faced public notoriety and the pressure to provide answers to the men's fate. She was lionized and dehumanized, had another son, fell ill with tuberculosis, and died in poverty in 1983. Ada's story has all the elements of a great story. Adventure, pathos, racism, strength, maternal love, cultural imperialism, and Arctic exploration. Caravantes has done her research. But this book meant for ages 12+ lacks emotional connection, vitality, and excitement. It reads like an encyclopedia article with too much telling. The characters don't live. For instance, we are told that the ill and dying Knight wrote a melancholy letter but we don't know what he said. The book has sparked an interest and I want to know more about Ada. I received a free ebook from the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a fair and unbiased review.

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