

Brian Payton



Picture from [Simon Fraser University](#) Continuing Studies

[Brian Payton](#) is currently the Non-Fiction Mentor for the Writers' Studio at SFU. For the past year, I've had the privilege of being one of his *Nonfictionistas*, and though the bonds we forged in Brian's class means we will forge on without him, I'll certainly miss his advice and encouragement.

Brian's well-researched story about the fate of the *Investigator* and crew, in search of the Franklin expedition and [the Northwest Passage](#), has a mythical quality. [The Ice Passage](#) (Doubleday 2009) was shortlisted for the Hubert Evans Non-fiction prize and the National Award for Canadian Non-fiction.

[Shadow of the Bear: Travels in Vanishing Wilderness](#) (Viking 2006) is another great achievement. The author's quest begins with a dream, and takes him to Cambodia in search of the Sun Bear, to Peru, to China, and to the Apennines in central Italy to learn about the few wild bears that remain there.

In France, he nearly manages to talk the guardian of the paleolithic cave [paintings](#) into letting him see inside where the images are preserved along with the bear skulls placed by early humans. This book is a fascinating meditation on the politics, economics and culture that surround the world's eight bear species, all endangered for a variety of reasons.

Brian Payton also writes fiction. [Hail Mary Corner](#) (Dundurn 2001) is a novel set in a remote Vancouver Island seminary where he attended school. Its final lines haunted me long after I put it down.

Brian Payton was born in the US and lived in Alaska as a child. His writing career began when, as a graduate of the University of Victoria, he went to Ireland to surf, wrote about it, and sold the story to *the New York Times*. He has also published in *Canadian Geographic*, *Walrus*, *The Boston Globe* and *the LA Times*.