

# thaw comes to Franklin Expedition after 140 yrs

Beattie, a physical anthropologist at the University of Alberta, is the lead researcher for the search for the Franklin Expedition. His research is in forensic anthropology and the search for the Franklin

Expedition is the study of the remains and is used to establish the circumstances of the death. In this field, Dr. Beattie is the Medical Examiner's office, or has bones brought in for some assistance in interpreting the remains. He is certain whether the animal; then, if they

problem in the forensic sciences and forensic anthropology: to collect the physical evidence of the remains and try to interpret the disaster from that perspective.

The Franklin Expedition is remarkable because it can be looked at in the same manner as a hunting accident today. The bodies of the seamen who were buried in permafrost at Franklin's first wintering site near Resolute Bay were incredibly well preserved. This allowed Beattie's team to look at them as if they had died within a week or two of the present day, and allowed the application of modern medical autopsy by Roger Amy of the U of A's pathology department. An in-depth view of the health of these men, which would reflect many of the conditions that were being experienced by the rest of the

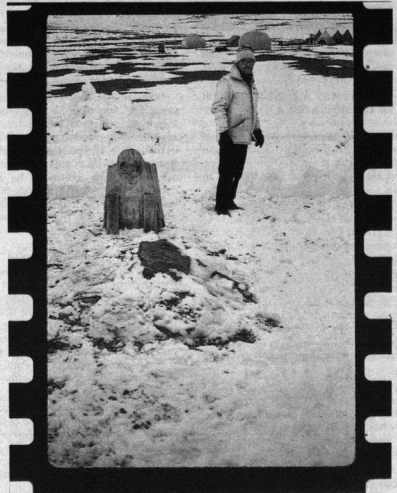
Expedition, fell into disfavor until it was recently revived. Beattie thinks that the foods were poorly packaged, that much of the food in the tins did go bad, that they were a source of possible toxic metal poisoning. These problems would have put the crew under stress relating to a lack of food later on, as supporting a crew of 129 men off the land would be extremely difficult. Beattie says that "what we've really found is that the food supply, this new technology of tinning foods, failed them, and that this failure ultimately led to the disaster, the final outcome of everybody perishing."

The initial problem that Beattie had with his study was first "... the location of the remains, then to identify them as originating from the Franklin Expedition..." When Franklin did not return to England in 1848, the British began to search for survivors. By the early 1850's, after realizing that there were no survivors, they began searching for where Franklin had gone. The site where Franklin first wintered, where the three seamen were buried, was discovered in 1850. In 1854 the site where most of the other crewmen had

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died was discovered, much further south. "Later searches in 1859, 1869 and 1879, in the area where most of the men died, found a lot of the sites, even many skeletons... on the surface. Through these searches it was possible to piece together the graphic distribution of where the Expedition went, and where it ended." In 1981 and 1982 Beattie's team followed the same route that Franklin's people did after they were forced to desert their ships. In this manner they located some of the skeletal remains.

Funding for the Franklin project was, according to Beattie, available for projects like this. "We were supported by the U of A, Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Polar Continental Shelf Project of Energy, Mines and Resources Canada." He says that "... the kind of work that we were doing is not very expensive. What is really expensive in the Arctic is transportation." Their project cost about \$15,000 per season in 1984 and 1986, when doing survey work on Kingway Island. "It



Prof. Brian Spenceley by grave of ancestor John Hartnell

(surveying) is much more economic, because it was a smaller crew, and basically we were trying to locate and document sites. We were not doing anything on the sites that required any specialized equipment or excessive freighting costs."

The seasons were quite short, only three weeks long. This was due to the physical and emotional stresses imposed on the type of work they were doing. Beattie says "... three weeks I think was tolerable, but I wouldn't want to push myself or others beyond that..."

Beattie will be taking a study leave next year to complete the reports on the Franklin Expedition and write another book on the project. Eventually he would like to investigate other historical problems using the same multidisciplinary approach. He says that "what we've done is demonstrate a certain kind of approach to a historic problem. There are many historic problems, and prehistoric problems, in Canada, south and north, that could be looked at using this approach."



graves, Beechey Island

They are prehistoric or recent, there is obviously a purpose... the identity is represented," says

which he is able to give may include sex, age, such as living stature (as on the bone, or bone that could be used with X-ray or other characteristics, when the tissue remains that at the site of the bones can help the Medical who the person was. Beattie is involved.

crew, was possible.

The autopsies showed that these three men were ill with tuberculosis, a common disease of the time, and likely died of pneumonia. The lead content in their tissues supports their hypothesis that there were toxic metals present, probably from the tinned foods.

Tinned food, Beattie believes, was a key factor contributing to the Franklin disaster. The interpretation that the new technology of tinning foods had failed Franklin had been popular when Franklin first disappeared, but

and 1982: s team the same Franklin's after they d to desert hips."

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addition to this work, authoring *Frozen in Time* is coming out in early September, and s of research into the vers the search for the to Franklin after he

ested in Arctic archaeo the U of A. Since his rensic anthropology problems could be manner as a modern



Beechey Island research team, 1986

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Photos courtesy of: Owen Beattie