

Opinion of Captain
Sir W. Edward
Parry

season of 1848 to get as far westward as Melville Island, as I find that independently of our discovery and examination of Prince Regent's Inlet, and notwithstanding the disadvantages of a navigation then entirely unknown, the "Hecla" and "Griper" were only 19 days actually engaged in making their way from the entrance of Lancaster Sound to the longitude of Winter Harbour; that is, from the 1st to the 5th August, and from the 21st August to the 5th September.

It appears to me not improbable, therefore, that Sir James Ross in the "Enterprize," may have succeeded in penetrating as far to the westward as Winter Harbour in 1848, or still further westward, perhaps along a portion of "Banks' Land," if, in trying a more southern latitude, the ice should have been found to present somewhat less serious obstacles. But I should not expect that any excursions by way of search, as contemplated by the Admiralty instruction could be made that season by boats from the "Enterprize," or that much could be effected by travelling parties.

With respect to Captain Bird in the "Investigator," I see no reason to doubt his having been able to place that ship in some sufficiently safe harbour, in the neighbourhood of Cape Rennell, as directed by the Admiralty instructions, as early as about the 5th of September, since the impediments from ice between that point and the entrance of Lancaster Sound will probably not prove of very formidable character.

This would leave 10 days at the utmost in the season of 1848 for the prosecution of the proposed search by the boats of the "Investigator." I say at the utmost, because the navigation by ships, which is necessarily conducted at some distance from land, may be continued somewhat later in the season than would be practicable for the closer examination of coasts and inlets by boats, on account of the earlier formation of "young ice" close in shore, whereby the progress of a boat is always seriously impeded, her planks cut, and the difficulty of close and effectual examination immensely increased. Considering, also, the severity with which winter sets in after the middle of September in this latitude, with 10 hours of darkness, I do not expect that anything effectual could be accomplished by land journeys after that period.

Upon the whole, therefore, it does not appear to me likely that any great progress could have been made in the proposed search by Captain Bird before the close of the season of 1848, but I should hope that, considering the proximity of Wellington Channel to his intended anchorage, something may have been done in that direction.

To continue my speculations as to the operations of Captain Bird (for I consider those of Sir James Ross in the "Enterprize" to be quite beyond the reach of conjecture), I should expect that his search by land or across ice, in the present season (1849), could not commence much before the 1st June, principally on account of the want of water for drinking, and the difficulty of carrying fuel melt snow for that purpose.

Captain Bird's operations by boats are not likely to commence until after the middle of July, judging from my own experience in those regions, unless there be any favourable peculiarity in that particular locality whereby the navigation in-shore may be opened somewhat earlier than is usual in this latitude.

The remarkable absence of ice in the summer season in most parts of Barrow Straits, may possibly constitute such a peculiarity.

As to the period at which Captain Bird may be expected (in pursuance of instructions) to send his steam launch or other boat to the eastward, to communicate, as intended, with some vessel from England, it may be some guide to consider the periods at which the three expeditions of 1819, 1824, and 1848 respectively, were enabled to reach the entrance of Lancaster Sound; the object in all these instances being to gain that point as early as possible. These were as follows:

In 1819 -	-	-	-	-	1st August.
„ 1824 -	-	-	-	-	11th September.
„ 1848 -	-	-	-	-	28th August.

affording, by the by, conclusive proof of the uncertain nature of this navigation even before entering what may be termed the threshold of this enterprize.

Thus it would appear that the very earliest period at which Captain Bird might expect his boat to meet any vessel in Lancaster Sound, is the first week in August, the probability being against her doing so till one, two, or three weeks later than this.