

ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

COPY of a REPORT from Sir John Richardson, dated *Fort Confidence, Great Bear Lake, 16th September 1848*, reporting his PROCEEDINGS in Search of Sir John Franklin's EXPEDITION.

(Presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Command.)

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Sir,

Fort Confidence, Great Bear Lake,
16 September 1848.

I HAVE the honour to acquaint you, for the information of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that with the boats and party under my charge I reached the sea-coast at the outlet of the eastern branch of the Mackenzie on the 3d of August, and having examined the coast line from thence to the Coppermine River, including almost every intervening bay, found no traces of any party of Europeans having passed, nor any indications whatever of shipwrecked vessels. We had interviews with numerous parties of Esquimaux, who uniformly declared that they had seen no ships nor any white men; and from the friendly way in which these people met us, I have no doubt of their kindness to any party of Europeans they might see in distress.

From the Mackenzie to Cape Bathurst, which we rounded in 70° 37' N. latitude, on the 10th of August, the vegetation indicated a comparatively mild climate, and we saw no ice; the Esquimaux also who were at this time assembling on the various headlands and islands to chase the black and white whales, informed us, that during their two summer moons they never saw any ice. But after crossing Franklin Bay, and rounding Cape Parry, we had to pass through many streams of drift ice, which greatly depressed the temperature, and when we attained Cape Bexley we found the Dolphin and Union Straits filled with densely packed ice, heaped against the precipitous headlands, and covering the sea as far as we could discern from the heights, entirely across to Wollaston Land.

Winter may be said to have set in with sudden rigour on the 23d of August, and we had frost, and snow either falling or lying on the ground, for many days afterwards. From that date up to the 3d of September, we had to work our way round every bay by cutting passages among the floes of ice, or making overland portages according to circumstances, being occasionally aided in our advance by a little open water, where the shore was shelving. These laborious operations were conducted by Mr. Rae, to whose sound judgment, experience, and personal exertions we were indebted, under Providence, for the progress we were enabled to make.

From the experience of four several visits to Coronation Gulf, by Franklin, Dease and Simpson, and myself, I had expected that on rounding Cape Krusenstern we should find an open sea to the Coppermine, but such is the uncertainty of the navigation in these narrow seas, that we had the disappointment of beholding the whole gulf completely packed; and had to continue our poling, cutting and carrying operations with slower progress and augmented labour as the frost became more severe, up to the 3d of September, when we were finally arrested in Icy Cove to the north of Cape Kendall, by the new ice having so glued the floes together that it was no longer in our power to move them, while the hummocky form of the masses heaped by pressure on the rocky points, precluded our launching the boats over them. Seeing that there was no prospect of a speedy change of weather, and that the ground was already covered with snow, I determined reluctantly on quitting the boats, and commencing our overland march to Bear Lake from that place.

2 REPORT OF SIR JOHN RICHARDSON OF HIS PROCEEDINGS

Had we reached the Coppermine, as I anticipated we should do under ordinary circumstances, and ascended the Kendall, we should have been, with tents, stores, &c., in comparative comfort, within four easy days' march of Fort Confidence, but it now became necessary to augment the loads in proportion to the increase of distance.

Each man being supplied with 13 days' provisions, and carrying, in addition, his clothing, spare shoes and bedding, with cooking kettles, the astronomical instruments, ammunition, hatchets, and Lieutenant Halkett's portable boat with lines and nets, we abandoned the boats and tents, having previously concealed the remaining pemmican, and on the morning of the 3d September began our march for Back's Inlet, which we reached the same evening.

Here we opportunely found a party of Esquimaux, who rendered us very essential assistance on the following morning, by ferrying us across a deep river between three and four hundred yards wide, which they informed us retained its width far up the country, and without their help we should have lost much time in passing so large a party across with Lieutenant Halkett's boat alone. I have named this river, which was previously unknown to us, in honour of Mr. Rae. On the following day we crossed the Richardson River, which is of less width, by means of Halkett's boat, and encamped in the evening on the banks of the Coppermine.

I had appointed James Hope, a half-caste native, who had formed one of Dease and Simpson's party, to meet us in the beginning of September, with two Indian hunters, on the Coppermine, but, owing to stormy weather at the time he ought to have set out, he delayed his march a week, and we missed each other altogether, having, we suppose, passed one another in a day of continued fog and snow on the banks of the Kendall.

Yesterday, being the 13th day of our march, we arrived at this place, having for the three last days had the advantage of an Indian guide who led us by easier paths than the direct route across the country.

The way in which the drift ice was packed into Coronation Gulf, and Dolphin and Union Straits, so late in the season as the 3d of September, and glued together by new ice, rendered it very improbable that it would open again this season to afford a passage for ships, and I have therefore no expectation that the Discovery Ships can have made their way in that direction this summer, and hope that they have either found a channel in a higher latitude more directly westward to the open sea off Cape Bathurst, or that they have effected a passage homewards by Lancaster Sound. The circumstances I have mentioned show that my boats could not approach Wollaston Land in this unusually untoward season, but this may be done next summer, and I shall endeavour to make arrangements for sending Mr. Rae with one boat and a select crew of active men, down the Coppermine, next July, to examine the opening between Victoria and Wollaston Lands. The flood tide, which at full and change runs in Dolphin and Union Straits at the rate of three knots an hour, comes from the eastward out of Coronation Gulf, and must flow primarily down the opening I have mentioned, or by the one between Victoria Land and Boothia, being the only two communications between Coronation Gulf and Lancaster Sound and its continuation. On this account, and also for the purpose of aiding a party which Sir James Ross proposed to send towards the Coppermine over the ice, Mr. Rae's intended expedition may be useful.

As the resources of this post are inadequate to the support of our entire party, and the ice remains fixed in this Lake till near the middle of August, too late for men wintering here to reach York Factory in time for a passage to England the same season, I have determined on sending 13 of the men from England up the Mackenzie, without delay, together with six of Mr. Bell's party, to be supported for the winter at the fishery on Big Island, Slave Lake. I purpose joining them myself in the Spring, crossing this Lake on the ice, and ascending the Mackenzie when it opens in May, taking with me the remainder of the English party not required by Mr. Rae for his summer operations. Mr. Rae will have instructions to return hither by the end of August, so as to close the establishment at that

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time, and remove the people time enough to ascend the Mackenzie and Slave Rivers before the navigation shuts up.

During our sea voyage we deposited pemmican at Point Separation, Cape Bathurst, Cape Parry, and in Paisley Cove, on the north side of Cape Krusenstern, and erected signal-posts as agreed upon with Sir James Ross.

I beg that you will be pleased to express to their Lordships the high sense I entertain of Mr. Rae's valuable services during the whole progress of the party, both on the coast and in leading the men overland, and also my gratification with the orderly conduct of the men.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

John Richardson,

Med. Insp. Commanding the Party.

To the Secretary of the Admiralty,
&c. &c. &c.
