



Franklin's Fate: New Book, Based on Inuit Testimony, Reconstructs John Franklin's Failed 1845 Arctic Expedition

Dr John Roobol's 'Franklin's Fate' takes the form of an armchair investigation to explore and showcase all of the known facts surrounding John Franklin's fatal 1845 expedition to navigate the Northwest Passage. Particularly inspired by Parks Canada's recent discovery of the wreckages of H.M.S. Erebus and H.M.S. Terror, the volume comprises the appraisal of original records, officer correspondence, Inuit testimony and modern forensics to reconstruct the history of the lost expedition. It's fascinating to say the very least.

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United Kingdom – Parks Canada led a consortium to try and locate the wreckages of H.M.S. Erebus and H.M.S. Terror, which had by now been abandoned for over 170 years. Using preserved and abundant Inuit testimony, in 2014 and 2016 both ship wrecks were miraculously found.

It has reignited interest and passion for John Franklin's 1845 attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage and now, for the first time, an up-to-date reconstruction through the evidence has finally hit the shelves.

Everything unravels in 'Franklin's Fate', by Dr. John Roobol, a retired geologist.

Synopsis:

On 26th July 1845 Sir John Franklin with 129 men aboard the two ships H.M.S. Erebus and Terror were last seen by whaling ships. The expedition ships were moored to an iceberg awaiting passage through pack ice into Lancaster Sound in search of a North-West Passage – a sea route north of the American continent linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The expedition was the best equipped ever, with many new scientific inventions including two railway train engines to drive propellers, that could be raised and

lowered, and a central hot water heating system. The expedition never returned and the puzzle has created numerous searches and a library of writing.

In 2014, a Parks Canada led consortium, after years of searching, located the sunken wreck of H.M.S. Erebus and in 2016 H.M.S. Terror. Both ships were found in places that had been described in Inuit testimony (the Utjulik and Imnguyaaluk ships respectively). Considerable amounts of Inuit testimony exist but this was largely rejected in Victorian times because it contained reports of cannibalism, recently confirmed by modern forensic study. In 1859, two very brief notes (the 1847 and 1848 records) were recovered stating that Sir John Franklin had died and the ships had been abandoned on 22nd April 1848. A trail of remains 180 miles long marked their lines of retreat in 1848 and 1850, south to the estuary of Back's Great Fish River. Modern studies are revealing new pieces of information. Autopsies have been carried out on three frozen bodies of crewmen from graves at the expedition's 1845-46 winter quarters on Beechey Island. Modern forensic studies have been made on skeletal remains of the retreat and on a skeleton recovered in 1869 and interred at Greenwich Old Royal Navy College, London.

This volume is a reappraisal of the copious Inuit testimony, the brief 1847 and 1848 records, correspondence of some of the officers, archaeological remains including relatively recent discoveries including the results of modern forensic studies. Identification of the missing flagship H.M.S. Erebus and her consort H.M.S. Terror, has clarified the picture by eliminating other possible interpretations. An up-to-date reconstruction of what probably happened to the expedition is summarised below.

The 1847 record tells of great initial success, mapping new areas by sailing up Wellington Channel and back via Cornwallis Island to a winter harbour at Beechey Island. Here a vigorous scientific program was carried out until the ships were released the following summer. From there they sailed south, but failed to penetrate the reef filled waters of 'Poctes /Poet's Bay' on the east side of King William Island where they were seen by the Inuit. Next the ships attempted the route to the west of the island. Here, as the 1847 record states, they became entombed in the great conveyor belt of a branch of the Beaufort ice stream that bisects the Canadian Arctic, flowing towards the south east. The two ships were trapped without a winter harbour in the worst part off the ice stream, where it piles up onto the north-west shore of King William Island.

The 1848 record tells how a sledge party set out to complete mapping of the North-West Passage in spring 1848, and that during this time Sir John Franklin died. The crews must have hoped for a release in the summer of 1847 and a speedy return to England to report their successes. However summer 1847 proved very cold and the ships were not released. Inuit testimony records how one ship (H.M.S. Terror) was ice heaved onto her beam ends. Without the shelter of a winter harbour, there must have been great concern that the remaining ship would also be crushed by the ice and rendered incapable of returning home, for it seems that one of the first actions after abandoning H.M.S. Terror, was for the crews to build a depot camp on King William Island. This was likely called Terror Camp (today known as "Crozier's Landing") as many things salvaged from Terror were found there. Heavy coils of rope, including one with a diameter of 5 centimetres, may have been the contents of HMS Erebus's rope locker, emptied to make additional winter quarters for H.M.S. Terror's crew.

The two crews wintered aboard Erebus, that became a hell ship with men on reduced rations. Over the winter illness in the crew resulted in 20 deaths (1847 record). The tinned food was probably condemned by the ships doctors, as unopened tins of meat were found by the Inuit in the abandoned ships. Scurvy, lead poisoning and possibly botulism from undercooked tinned meat, hastily produced in time for the sailing date, have been blamed for the high death rate. In the cold and darkness of the polar winter of 1847-48, the crews did not take their dead the 15 miles across the ice hummocks to hard frozen ground, but instead placed them in the abandoned Terror, which became a mortuary ship (a ship with many dead men as later described in Inuit testimony).

Captain Crozier in his first polar expedition command (he was a veteran of seven previous polar expeditions) decided, because of the poor health of the crew, and three year supply of food, to retreat during the following spring (the third year) as a single party of 105 men to the south (1846 record). Probably only four boats (possibly five) as well as a number of sledges were taken. One of the boats (a twenty eight foot pinnace from Erebus) found eleven years later by Admiral Sir Leopold McClintock (mainly buried in snow), had been modified to lighten her and she was to be propelled by paddles made from cut down oars. She carried fifty fathoms of line for being towed up rivers.

The party of 105 survivors set out to the south in April 1848 before the ice melted, hauling the boats on sledges. The object was to get to the southern shores of King William Island and the estuary of Back's Great Fish River, where an abundance of deer, musk oxen, birds and fish were reported in June, July and August by earlier explorers. In 1869, some twenty one years later, American Lieutenant Schwatka and party encountered thousands of deer on the southwestern part of King William Island in June. The retreat could carry only short rations for forty days (lasting until the first week of June). Their target was to pull for life, fresh food and home. They had to make six miles a day to get to the estuary before the food ran out. The urgency was for fresh food, so the party could strengthen themselves, then with the summer thaw and the opening of the seaways, the boats could be used. They probably did not plan to ascend the 500 miles of Back's Great Fish River with its eighty three rapids, falls and cascades, but perhaps to tackle the more navigable Mackenzie or Coppermine rivers, along the already-explored northern sea coast of the American continent.

Crozier had been forced into a premature departure by the ill health of the crew, shortage of food supplies and probably was urged by the ships doctors. It was a case of get out now, six weeks before the thaw began, or never get out. Survival chances would have been greater if smaller parties had set out at different times, but this would have left many aboard the ships too weak and ill to make the long trip of over 1,250 miles to the nearest Hudson's Bay outpost. Because of the illness of some of the crew, Crozier decided upon the convoy system of retreat – one large party travelling together with the strong supporting the weak. They abandoned the two ships that had drifted only nine miles in the nineteen months while trapped in the ice stream. The men travelled fifteen miles across the ice to their depot camp known today as Crozier's Landing. From there they set off to the south, the remaining officers no doubt encouraging the men to pull for their lives, for fresh food and for home.

The retreat failed. Bad weather particularly snow storms was probably a major factor for the men had no fur clothing and wore their uniforms, often with leather boots and shoes. In addition the men were weak and in particular the hard exercise of sledge hauling and illnesses, combined to incapacitate the crews.

According to the 1848 record, it had taken the boat party about three to four days to cross the well-used track across fifteen miles of ice to Crozier's Landing at a rate of four to five miles a day. The retreat from Crozier's Landing was slower. Instead of making the required six miles a day, the positions of the boats show that they could barely make two. At Erebus Bay only fifty miles from Crozier's Landing two large boats, with about a half of the retreating men, were halted. The method of the retreat was to follow the smoothest ice along the shore and to camp at night near clear ground, as the men carried no ground sheets. Many would sleep inside the boats with the sails as wind protectors and the others in tents on ground free of snow and ice. The two boats halted in Erebus Bay never moved again and numerous skeletal remains (of at least twenty men) have been found associated with them. Modern forensic study of these remains found evidence of cannibalism. Since leaving Crozier's Landing, the two boats had travelled only eighty miles in about forty days – an average of two miles per day.

The advance part of the retreat with two remaining boats and sledges reached a further thirty miles to Terror Bay, where their retreat stopped. There a hospital tent was set up for the immobile sick. The retreat had failed and the crews could not escape by marching out.

About a half of the men, led by their two Captains, returned to the ships, where the last resort was to sail out. Not all of the able bodied returned to the ships. Some men (possibly Erebus Ice Master James Reid) remained to look after the sick. Some smaller parties continued south, one may have hauled a boat into Wilmot Bay. The immobile sick died at the two boat places in Erebus Bay and the camp at Terror Bay in 1848. These three sites are now known as "the death camps".

Inuit testimony suggests that only H.M.S. Erebus was reoccupied, and H.M.S. Terror was still on her beam ends in Spring 1849. The two captains worked Erebus south, in an attempt to rescue some of the sick men immobilised in tents in Erebus and Terror Bays. Although Erebus reached an area (south of Cape Crozier at Imnguyaaluk Island in the Royal Geographical Society Islands) where the hospital tent at Terror Bay could be seen, graphic Inuit descriptions of the three "death camps" indicate that most had died when the hunting had failed. Inuit testimony and modern forensic study confirm that cannibalism occurred at the three death camps by the last survivors.

Imnguyaaluk Island was in an area much frequented by the Inuit for hunting and contact was made with them. There adjacent to the Royal Geographical Society Islands, Erebus spent two years (1849 and 1850) with many visits and good relations with the Inuit, including a successful joint summer hunt when many caribou were killed. In Inuit testimony she was known as the ship at Imnguyaaluk Island and the Inuit gave descriptions of some of her crew. An attempt was probably made to send a boat back along their route to seek help.

Through 1849 and 1850 the two crews fed themselves by hunting caribou and birds in summer and seals in winter and learned the survival techniques of the Inuit out of necessity (the ships had only been supplied for three years). The winter hunters left a "Fireplace Trail" of sites, where they cooked their seal meat over blubber fires. The oil sank into the ground where it remains today. On the southern end of Imnguyaaluk Island adjacent to where Erebus was anchored, Inuit have identified a campsite where the ground is saturated in seal oil. It appears that the two Captains kept the men away from the death camps. Inuit testimonies give descriptions of some of the men.

Captain Crozier is believed to have died some time in 1849-50, and his military burial was witnessed by the Inuit along with the burial of paper expedition records. In summer 1850, after the death of Captain Crozier and with Erebus still trapped in the ice, most of the remaining crew dominated by Terror men, set out to retreat overland to Repulse Bay. They were led by a senior officer (possibly Ice Master Thomas Blanky of H.M.S. Terror) and a marine officer (possibly Marine Sergeant Solomon Tozer also of H.M.S. Terror). The retreating party encountered Inuit in Washington Bay which provided detailed testimony. The party next divided and a boat party crossed to the mainland and reached a place named "Starvation Cove" by the later Schwatka search expedition. Here many perished but a few continued into Chantry Inlet. Their undisturbed remains were found by the Inuit. The rest of the party followed the coast of King William Island and left a trail of graves and remains along the south-west coast. The senior officer (carrying a telescope) with four colleagues died on the Todd Islets to be found by the Inuit. Significantly the party was carrying an unopened tin of pemmican that was promptly eaten by the Inuit without ill effects.

Later in 1848, the last four survivors of the 1850 retreat arrived near the Boothian Peninsula and were befriended by an Inuit. They were led by a man who may have been Marine Sergeant Tozer. They wintered with the Inuit and set off south for Fort Churchill in 1851 carrying a Halkett inflatable dinghy. Inuit testimony suggests they reached the Chesterfield Inlet area, where the last one or two survivors may have been mistaken for Indians, and were killed by the fierce Kinnapattoo Inuit of the area, only some 350 miles from Fort Churchill.

Meanwhile aboard Erebus, possibly as early as the summer thaw of 1850, a physically large officer, probably Captain Fitzjames, possibly Lieutenant Fairholme, took the intact Erebus with a very small crew directly south. He headed for the summer open sea lane along the northern margin of the American continent. Fitzjames's writing from Greenland indicates that he had intended to get to Bering Strait and

Petro Paulowski in Kamchatka to where he had mail forwarded. In the 1850 or 1851 thaw, Erebus arrived in Wilmot and Compton Bay on the west side of the Adelaide Peninsula. It appears that Fitzjames had died on or shortly after arrival, for the body of a very large man was found by the Inuit in the great cabin. After his death, with no surviving officers, the ship was turned towards the west side of the Adelaide Peninsula (away from the route to Bering Strait), probably for proximity to summer hunting. Camps were established on islands in the vicinity for hunting. There is some possibility that a boat left Erebus and travelled west, as there are several mentions of "white men" in the vicinity of the McKenzie River, who tried to live by hunting but died.

Possibly in summer 1851 or 1852, the last four survivors from Erebus, being a small group of accomplished hunters accompanied by a dog (possibly Neptune the ship's dog brought from England, now used to locate seal holes in the ice), set out for the west. Inuit testimony indicates that they arrived on the Melville Peninsula where their trail fades. An abandoned H.M.S. Erebus was found by the Inuit completely intact with doors locked and with five boats in the davits. She was salvaged by the Inuit for at least eight years. During that time she became known to the Inuit as "The Utjulik ship" and she drifted ashore, where her fore part probably became submerged. In 1859 the McClintock expedition was told that she had last been visited during the previous summer when not much remained to be salvaged. This is consistent with the state of the recently discovered wreck where much of the stern is missing. She was later ice rafted offshore, where she sank with her masts showing above the water. The Erebus wreck was located in 2014, in the area where her sinking had been described by the Inuit.

Sometime after Erebus sailed south from Imnguyaaluk, an abandoned ship with many dead bodies aboard was ice rafted to an area south of Cape Crozier. She was found by the Inuit who salvaged some metal and wood. The Inuit found some tins of pemmican on board and ate the contents. They became ill and several died. This and the dead men aboard seem to tell a tale. The ship when found was securely locked up, so the Inuit cut a way through the damaged side near the waterline, so that she sank next spring with only minor salvage having taken place. This ship is H.M.S. Terror and was found and identified offshore of Terror Bay in summer 2016 with her hatches still sealed.

It seems a small number of men of the expedition, by adopting Inuit survival methods, lived for up to six years (1851) and died near Chesterfield Inlet only 350 miles from Fort Churchill. The successful group of four hunters from H.M.S. Erebus appear have lived for some years longer on Erebus and on the Melville Peninsula.

The numerous Admiralty, American and private search expeditions of the 19th century only found the 1845 winter quarters of the expedition at Beechey Island. The fate of the expedition was discovered accidentally by Hudson's Bay Doctor John Rae who recorded the first Inuit testimony and bought relics from them in 1854. The first Europeans to reach the line of the Franklin expedition retreats of 1848 and 1850, were Lieutenant Hobson and Captain McClintock of the private 'Fox' expedition in 1859. The only written records of the expedition found are two sheets of paper brought back by the Fox expedition. The logbooks, records and scientific collections of the expedition remain lost, Sir John Franklin's grave has not been identified. However with the support of the Canadian government, the activities of Parks Canada diving archaeologists and the internet, interest continues to grow, publications appear frequently and there is a slow but steady progress in understanding the history of the lost expedition. Hopefully the two ship wrecks will yield more information, possibly including written records.

"The recent discoveries of the wreckages of the two ships has caused quite a stir in Canada and around the world," explains the author. "The time is now right to put the spotlight back on John Franklin, what he wanted to achieve and to learn as much as we can about one of history's most unusual yet fascinating disasters."

Continuing, "Research for this book came from a huge number of primary and secondary sources, and ultimately pieces the story back together as best we can, with what we know. The story will of course

keep evolving as forensic technology gets better and we continue to discover more about the expedition. If you're interested in Franklin, my book is a great place to further your understanding or even hear the story for the first time!"

'Franklin's Fate', from The Conrad Press, is due for release on June 1st, 2019.

About the Author:

Dr M. John Roobol is a retired geologist who spent his life working in remote and exotic places away from civilisation. His Ph.D. was in Iceland, followed by expeditions to the Antarctic and the Andes mountains of South America. He worked four years in the Caribbean and developed a lifelong interest in the Caribbean volcanoes. He spent two years on two sailing geological expeditions one from Canada to the Caribbean and the other from New Zealand around the Pacific to Australia. He has worked for 30 years in Saudi Arabia, and still returns as a consultant. Much of his Arabian work was by helicopter over the vast then-pristine desert of the Arabian Peninsula. One of his interests is human behaviour outside the confines of civilisation, as observed on his expeditions to various places. He has a biochemist wife, four children and five grandchildren. He spends the year between England, Wales, Saudi Arabia and Australia.

He became interested in the lost Franklin expedition when in 1963, a fellow undergraduate at Imperial College, London gave him a copy of McClintock's book 'The Voyage of the Fox'. This described a successful search for remains of the lost Franklin 1845 Arctic expedition seeking a North-West Passage. However the book raised more questions than it answered. How did two specially strengthened ships and 129 picked officers and men all succumb despite a vast search organised by the Admiralty as well as private expeditions for the missing expedition? The author made a study of the lost expedition as his first retirement task. The work took seven years and has resulted in two books to be published simultaneously by The Conrad Press of Canterbury.

'Franklin's Fate' is the larger book and is a complete review of everything known about the lost expedition. It relies heavily on Inuit testimony and was written for the arm-chair detective. The evidence is presented in steps each leading to the goal of a reconstructed history of what happened to the ships and men. The second book 'Trapped' is shorter and is a fictional account of the expedition based on the reconstruction. In it, it is possible to fill in chapters for which there is no evidence nor Inuit testimony. The author suggests reading 'Franklin's Fate' first and 'Trapped' second.