

## Franklin in Siberia? — Lieutenant Bedford Pim's Proposal to Search the Arctic Coast of Siberia, 1851-52

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**ABSTRACT.** Like many of his contemporaries, Lieutenant Bedford Pim, of the Royal Navy, believed in the existence of an "open polar sea" beyond a zone of coastal ice around the margins of the Arctic Ocean. On the basis of this, in fall 1851 he postulated that Sir John Franklin's expedition had sailed north through Wellington Channel and then set a course across the "Polar Sea" directly for Bering Strait, but had then become entangled in an ice-bound chain of islands extending from what are now the Canadian Arctic Islands to the vicinity of Ostrov Vrangeliya. Having been refused Admiralty approval for his plan to mount a small overland expedition to Chukotka, from whence he proposed to push north across the sea ice in search of Franklin's ships, Pim was able to gain the support of Lady Franklin and the Royal Geographical Society. He travelled to St. Petersburg in December 1851 but after considerable delay was refused permission by the Russian authorities to proceed farther east. The main stated reason for this refusal was that the Russians had somehow translated Pim's plans for a small expedition of two or three men into an operation that would necessitate 1200-1500 sledge dogs; it was anticipated that such an operation would seriously disrupt the economy of the Kolyma basin and cause real hardship to the local people. One can only speculate as to the reasons for the lack of Russian cooperation; one suspects, on the basis of Pim's own account, that the tone of his remarks to the tsar during a personal audience and the implied lack of confidence in the tsar's commitment to arrange for a search to be mounted along the arctic coasts of Siberia for wreckage or survivors from the Franklin expedition may have contributed significantly to the rejection of his proposal.

Key words: Franklin search, Siberia, Lieutenant Bedford Pim

**RÉSUMÉ.** Comme bien de ses contemporains, le lieutenant Bedford Pim de la Royal Navy, croyait à l'existence d'une mer polaire ouverte, au-delà d'une zone de glace côtière bordant l'océan Arctique. Fort de cette croyance, à l'automne de 1851, il émit l'hypothèse que l'expédition de sir John Franklin avait navigué en direction du nord par le détroit de Wellington, mettant ensuite directement le cap à travers la mer polaire sur le détroit de Béring, mais qu'elle s'était fourvoyée dans une chaîne d'îles prises par les glaces allant de ce qui est maintenant l'archipel Arctique jusqu'aux environs de l'île Vrangeli. Après s'être vu refuser l'autorisation de l'Amirauté pour mettre à exécution son plan consistant à monter une expédition par terre de petite envergure vers Chukotka — d'où il comptait pousser plus au nord à travers la banquise à la recherche des navires de Franklin —, Pim parvint à gagner l'appui de Lady Franklin et de la Royal Geographical Society. En décembre 1851, il se rendit à Saint-Petersbourg, où, après une très longue attente, il se vit refuser par les autorités russes l'autorisation de pousser plus à l'est. La principale raison invoquée pour ce refus tenait à l'envergure de l'expédition: les Russes, d'une manière ou d'une autre, avaient mal interprété les plans de Pim, et de deux ou trois hommes qu'elle devait comporter au départ, l'expédition était devenue une opération majeure nécessitant de 1200 à 1500 chiens de traîneau; les Russes pensaient qu'une opération de ce genre bouleverserait l'économie du bassin de la Kolyma et constituerait une perturbation importante pour les habitants. On ne peut que spéculer quant aux véritables raisons du manque de coopération russe, et il est permis de penser, à la lumière du récit de Pim même, que le ton des remarques adressées au tsar en audience privée, ainsi que le manque de confiance qui en ressort vis-à-vis de l'engagement du tsar à autoriser des recherches le long des côtes arctiques de Sibérie en vue de trouver des traces des survivants de l'expédition Franklin, peuvent avoir contribué de façon significative au rejet de sa proposition.

Mots clés: recherche de l'expédition Franklin, Sibérie, lieutenant Bedford Pim

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### INTRODUCTION

By autumn 1851 Sir John Franklin's expedition aboard HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, which had sailed from England in summer 1845 to attempt the Northwest Passage, had been missing for six years. A wide-ranging series of expeditions, operating both by sea and overland and mounted by the Royal Navy, the Hudson's Bay Company and private individuals, was dispatched to the North American Arctic from 1847 onwards. In fall 1850, clear evidence in the form of graves and other signs of a wintering at Beechey Island at the southwest tip of Devon Island indicated that Franklin's ships had wintered at least once in 1845-46. Despite thorough searches, no message was found to indicate the direction Franklin had headed on leaving Beechey Island. Charles Forsyth, of *Prince Albert*, brought news of the finds back to England in fall 1850 (Snow, 1851). Despite a wide-ranging pattern of sledge searches, no further traces of the Franklin expedition were found by other expeditions in summer 1851. The clues at Beechey Island were the only indications of the fate of the Franklin expedition to be uncovered by this array of searches.

### LIEUTENANT BEDFORD PIM

On the basis of the Beechey Island finds, as well as his own experience and reading, a young naval officer, Lieutenant Bedford Clapperton Trevelyan Pim, conceived a rather novel scheme for a further search. Born on 12 June 1826 at Bideford in Devon (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 1921-22; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 1982), the son of a naval lieutenant, Pim was educated at the Royal Naval School, New Cross, and entered the Navy in 1842. In 1845 he was posted to HMS *Herald*, under Captain Henry Kellett, who had been commissioned to survey and map the Pacific coast of north-western South America, Central America and Baja California.

On 9 May 1848 *Herald* was lying at Panama when she was ordered north to support *Plover* in the search for Franklin. Hence Bedford Pim was aboard *Herald* when, during a swing west in the Chukchi Sea along the edge of the pack, the high, rocky mass of Ostrov Geral'da was sighted on 17 August 1849 (Seemann, 1853[2]). A landing party went ashore and both from Ostrov Geral'da and from the ship another land mass with high, broken peaks was sighted to the west, some 96 km

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away by Kellett's estimate. Kellett identified this land mass with that mentioned earlier (from reports by the Chukchi on the Siberian mainland) by Leytenant Ferdinand Vrangeli in the early 1820s. Kellett named it Plover Land, after *Herald's* consort, but it appeared on the Admiralty charts as Kellett's Land, its northern extent being left deliberately vague.

Before sailing south to winter in Mexican waters, *Herald* met *Plover* at Kotzebue Sound, where Bedford Pim transferred to the latter ship and wintered aboard her at Chamisso Island in Kotzebue Sound.

During that wintering Pim and the other officers aboard *Plover* picked up rumours from local people of two ships that had been seen east of Point Barrow. For at least a year they had also been hearing persistent rumours among the natives of white men living and travelling in the interior of Alaska. Pim logically decided that clarification of both rumours could probably be obtained from the Russian authorities at Mikhailovskiy (now St. Michael) and offered to travel there by sledge to enquire (Seemann, 1853[2]). Commander Moore was receptive, and on 11 March 1850, accompanied by a Russian interpreter, Bosky, Pim started out with supplies for 15 days. Heading south across the hilly interior of the Seward Peninsula and then across the ice of Norton Sound, they ran into foul weather and poor sledging conditions. They reached Mikhailovskiy on 6 April, having survived for 26 days on what they had been able to hunt or to procure from the natives. Pim was very warmly welcomed by the Russian commander Andrey Gusev.

The latter confirmed the rumour of whites living in the interior of Alaska on the banks of a river called the Ekko, and Pim concluded that they must be members of the missing Franklin expedition. But since he himself was short of funds and provisions, there was no point in setting off in search, and he decided to report back to Commander Moore. He was back aboard *Plover* in her winter quarters on 29 April 1850. Although he had high hopes of being allowed to head into the interior to track down the intriguing rumour, to his surprise and disappointment Commander Moore "did not consider any of the rumours of importance" (Seemann, 1853[2]:145). Nonetheless this sledge trip of Pim's is of great significance to his career in that it gave him firsthand experience in winter sledge travel in the North and also experience of amicable, productive contacts with cooperative Russian officials.

Transferring back to *Herald* in summer 1850, Pim returned to England on 6 June 1851. He was promoted lieutenant that September.

#### PIM'S PROPOSAL

At about this time Pim conceived his plan for an independent search for Franklin on the northeast coast of Siberia, a plan on which several of the aforementioned earlier incidents and aspects of his career have important bearings. Another aspect with a significant bearing on Pim's proposal is the fact that while Sir John Franklin's instructions stressed that his primary aim was to reach the longitude of Cape Walker and from there to "steer to the southward and westward towards Bering Strait in as straight a line as is permitted by ice or any unknown land" (Cyriax, 1939:45), the next clause specified that "should a permanent obstruction be found to the southward of Cape Walker, he is to consider the alternative of passing between Cornwallis Island and North Devon if the strait between them (Wellington Channel) is open" (Cyriax, 1939:46). This plus

the evidence of Franklin's ships having wintered at Beechey Island and the lack of any traces of the expedition along the mainland coast or the coasts of Victoria Island from Amundsen Gulf west to Bering Strait persuaded Pim that Franklin's ships must have pushed north along Wellington Channel.

Like many of his contemporaries, Pim firmly believed in the existence of an "open polar sea." This concept appears to have been first mooted in 1765 by the Swiss geographer Samuel Engel, who, believing that ice formed only from fresh water and could be expected only near land, proposed that an extensive open sea should be located in the High Arctic latitudes, away from land (Engel, 1765). In Britain the idea was vigorously promoted by Daines Barrington, a vice president of the Royal Society, who read two papers to the society on the topic in 1774 and published his ideas at considerable length (Barrington, 1775). At the time of the Franklin searches, as we will see, the idea was fully espoused by such an eminent scientist as the hydrographer to the Navy, Sir Francis Beaufort, while even as late as 1875 such an experienced whaling captain as David Gray of Peterhead was arguing, quite convincingly, that there must be a "wide, open sea" to the north of 80°, on the basis of his own observations of the amount of ice he had seen being evacuated with the East Greenland Current in 1874 (Gray, 1984; Barr, 1984). Belief in the idea was badly shaken by Albert Markham's discovery in spring 1876 (during the British North Pole Expedition) that sea ice extended at least as far north as 83°, to the north of Ellesmere Island (Markham, 1878). The concept was finally laid to rest by the drift of Fridtjof Nansen's *Fram* across the Arctic Basin in 1893-96 (Nansen, 1897).

Given his views, Pim was able to envisage that *Erebus* and *Terror* had sailed across the Pole in open water heading for Bering Strait but had somehow run into difficulties on the Siberian coast. On 27 September 1851 Pim wrote to their lordships of the Admiralty proposing that he mount an overland search of the northeast shores of Siberia, having first travelled overland from St. Petersburg to the Kolyma River. From there he would

completely explore every approachable part of the Arctic shore (from Cape Sievero Vostochini Nos [*sic*] to the Cape North of Cook, a distance of about 1,300 miles), and thus finally set the question at rest whether the missing ships, or any traces of them, are to be found [Great Britain, 1852: 94-95].

Pim specifically proposed a *small* party, namely, himself and two companions. It is significant that he warned the Admiralty that the major shipborne expeditions still in the Arctic (Austin's Royal Navy squadron of four ships, William Penny's expedition with two ships and Sir John Ross's expedition with two ships, quite apart from the American effort represented by the expedition in *Advance* and *Rescue*, and the Royal Navy's attempt at searching the North American Arctic via Bering Strait, represented by *Enterprise* and *Investigator*) "with the utmost exertion of talent and bravery can only follow in the path and consequently incur a similar risk as Sir John Franklin" (Great Britain, 1852:94-95).

Some clarification of precisely the section of the Siberian coast Pim had in mind is in order (Fig. 1). Even when Pim was writing, Mys Severo-Vostochnyy was an archaic name for Mys Dezhneva, the headland on the west side of Bering Strait, generally known in Russia at the time as Vostochnyy Mys. This was almost certainly the cape Pim had in mind; in other words he was proposing to search just the Russian shore of the Chukchi Sea. But to confuse the issue, the length of coast

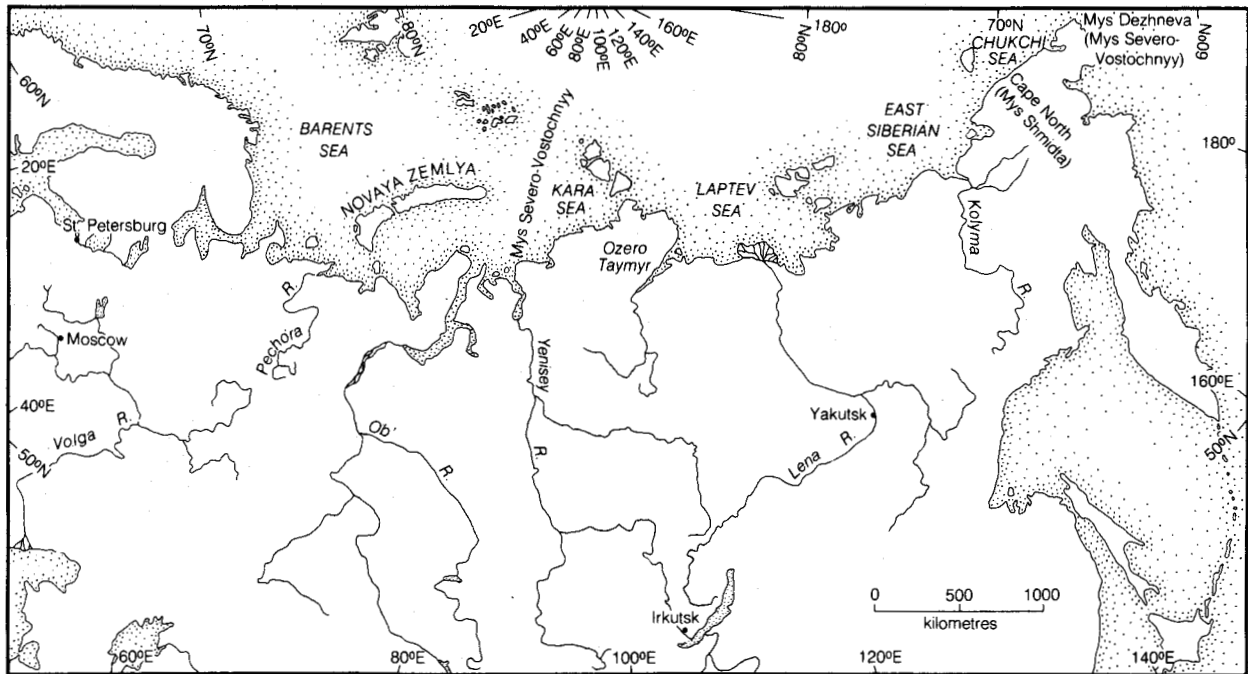


FIG. 1. Map of Siberia, showing Pim's proposed route and search area.

between there and Mys Severnyy (Cook's Cape North, now Mys Shmidta) is only about 750 km, even including the shores of Kolyuchinskaya Guba, and hence was only about one-third the length Pim quoted. There is, however, another Mys Severo-Vostochnyy, and this was the one to which the name was more commonly applied. It is located near Dikson, at the mouth of the Yenisey, at least 3500 km west of Mys Shmidta. If one takes this to be the cape Pim had in mind, one would conclude that he wanted to search most of the arctic coast of Siberia. This may well have been a disastrous source of confusion in terms of how Pim's proposal was later received in St. Petersburg; and even if the Russian authorities realized the source of the confusion, it may well have provided a convenient excuse for a simulated misunderstanding.

One suspects that Pim initially received, at best, only a non-committal acknowledgement, since, concerned at the way time was slipping, on 9 October he sent a more detailed outline of his proposal to the secretary of the Admiralty, with a request that he be provided with an official letter to Tsar Nicholas I asking for his cooperation in facilitating his journey to the Kolyma (Great Britain, 1852:95-96).

Their lordships of the Admiralty had not been idle but had solicited Captain Kellett's views on Pim's proposal. Kellett responded in very supportive terms on 11 October, stressing Pim's ability, enthusiasm, endurance, perseverance and physical strength and urging that he should start immediately (Great Britain, 1852:96).

#### *Rebuff from the Admiralty*

But the reaction from the Admiralty, as relayed in a letter from J. Parker, secretary of the Admiralty, 21 October, was negative and indeed rather curt (Great Britain, 1852:96). One wonders whether the tone of Pim's letter was not his downfall. While it was probably appropriate for a captain of Kellett's seniority to make suggestions to their lordships as to the tim-

ing of a proposed operation, they probably did not take very kindly to being told by a newly commissioned lieutenant that he wanted to proceed with the preliminaries "at once."

It also seems likely that part of the reason for Pim's offer being declined was that the lords of the Admiralty conceived that the same objective might be more effectively attained (and the risk of ruffling Russian feathers greatly reduced) if the Russians could be persuaded to search their own arctic coasts. On the same day that he wrote to reject Pim's proposal, Parker had written to H. Addington at the Foreign Office requesting that

his Lordship will communicate with the Russian minister, if he sees no objection, and represent to the Emperor the thanks of the Board of Admiralty for the interest His Imperial Majesty has always taken in the fate of our officers and that Lord Palmerston will state to him the expectation entertained in some quarters, and express a hope that His Majesty may be induced to issue directions that any information of wrecked vessels may be carefully investigated and transmitted to his Government [Great Britain, 1852:97-98].

The message, as requested, was relayed to St. Petersburg and in due course, on 19 November, Sir Hamilton Seymour, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, wrote to say that the message had been forwarded to Count Senyavin, the imperial chancellor.

On 14 November the latter replied to the effect that:

His Majesty the Emperor, who possesses a true interest in the fate of the famous navigator and of his brave companions, has deigned to receive this request with benevolence and the Ministers of the Marine and of the Interior will take, as a matter of high priority, and each as to how it concerns him, the necessary dispositions so that very careful investigations are implemented with the above-mentioned goal on the north coasts of Asia, where Russia possesses some establishments or some support with the natives [Great Britain, 1852:98].

### *Support from Beaufort and Lady Franklin*

Pim refused to be discouraged by the rebuff he had received from the Admiralty. He had in the interim been in touch with Lady Franklin, who had not only enthusiastically espoused his proposal, but had promised to support him to an amount of £500. On 23 October he again wrote to the secretary of the Admiralty requesting leave and support in principle (Great Britain, 1852).

If Pim expected an enthusiastic response from the Admiralty, he was soon disillusioned: on the 28th J. Parker penned a blunt, grudging response, indicating that their lordships had no intention of extending any sort of official status to Pim (Great Britain, 1852).

In the interim Pim had also been in touch with the hydrographer, Sir Francis Beaufort, concerning his scheme. In one letter, Beaufort not only confirmed the basic premises of Pim's argument but had also made a suggestion that led Pim to alter the proposed focus of his search somewhat. Beaufort wrote:

I have at all times, both publicly and privately, expressed my conviction that if the Erebus and Terror should succeed in passing through Wellington Channel, they would find the Northern Ocean comparatively free from ice, and find it an easy matter to penetrate to the westward. Franklin's difficulties would therefore begin when, having made his westing, he might endeavour to haul to the southward for Bherings [*sic*] Straits; for Cook, Beechey, Kellett and all navigators who have passed through that opening, found the soundings decrease, on approaching the southern edge of the ice, thus making it almost demonstrable that a bank of some hundreds of miles in length, and most likely rising up into many islands, stretches across from east to west. If those ships, therefore, did find their way through Wellington Channel (of which there cannot be any doubt B.P.) they have got into some labyrinth of ice and islands abreast of Bherings Straits, or perhaps further west on the flats of the coast of Siberia [Pim, 1851a].

No doubt recalling the distant view of "Kellett Land" as seen from Ostrov Geral'da, which he interpreted as the most westerly of the chain of icebound islands that Beaufort envisaged extending right across to link up with the Canadian Arctic Islands, Pim immediately identified with this alternate view of the probable fate of the Franklin expedition.

Still enthused with the concept of mounting an overland search, he decided to proceed on his own. His first step was to get official clearance to go to Russia. "An interview with the noble head of the Foreign Office was obtained, and I cannot speak too gratefully of the kindness of Lord Palmerston on that occasion, as well as Mr. Addington's promptness in forwarding the necessary documents" (Pim, 1851a).

### *Backing of the Royal Geographical Society*

A more auspicious development was Lieutenant Pim's success in gaining the support of Robert Brown, president of the Linnaean Society and a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Brown introduced him to Sir Roderick Murchison, president of the Royal Geographical Society, who was extremely supportive of Pim's plans (Pim, 1851a). Among the letters of introduction written by Sir Roderick was one to Grand Duke Constantine, dated 6 November, with the stated objective to "venture to ask Your Impl. Highness to exercise those feelings of a true seaman by which I know you are animated, and to take under your high protection the young British officer who

devotes his services to this very arduous task" (Murchison, 1851a). The very next day Sir Roderick wrote in similar vein to Count Karl Nesselrode, Russian minister of Foreign Affairs (Pasetskiy, 1984).

Another of these letters of introduction, written on 10 November, was addressed to the secretary of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. Having again outlined Pim's plan, Sir Roderick (writing in French) appealed for that society's support for Pim's enterprise (Murchison, 1851b).

At Sir Roderick's invitation, Pim presented his plan and an outline of the most recent developments to a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society on 10 November (Pim, 1851a). Among those present were the Russian ambassador, F.I. Brynov, the secretary to the Russian Embassy, Count Wielhorskiy, Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort, Robert Brown, Captain William Penny and Captain Henry Kellett.

Pim reported that he planned to depart for St. Petersburg on 15 November; initially he had hoped that Berthold Seemann, his former shipmate aboard *Herald*, would be able to accompany him, but Seemann was too busy with his book on the *Herald* voyage. Pim was obliged to go alone, in anticipation of a companion being provided by the Russian government.

Supposing that the negotiations with the Court of Russia terminate favourably, my track would lead from St. Petersburg to Moscow by railway; from Moscow to Irkutsk [Irkutsk] by *telegi* or sledges, a distance of 3544 miles and from Irkutsk to Iakoutz [Yakutsk] also on sledges, a distance of 1824, the whole journey occupying about 4 months.

At Iakoutz all regular travelling conveniences terminate, and the 1200 miles to the River Kolyma as well as the 2000 miles of search will have to be performed in a manner best adapted to the resources of the country. In 1854 the task may be completed if unfortunately before that time no traces should have been found [Pim, 1851a].

After Pim's presentation his former commanding officer, Captain Henry Kellett, complimented him on his presentation and assured the meeting that he "was an officer fully competent to perform the journey he had taken in hand (Cheers)" (*The Times*, 1851a). Similarly supportive remarks were also made by Captain William Penny, Major Carmichael Smyth and Sir Woodbine Parrish. Significantly Count Wielhorskiy, secretary to the Russian Embassy, "promised, on the part of the Russian Government, that Lieutenant Pim should receive from the Imperial Government at St. Petersburg the best reception, and that every means would be afforded him to assist him in so noble and generous an enterprise" (*The Times*, 1851a). To close the meeting a resolution was passed that on Pim's behalf the Council of the Society should "solicit the countenance and assistance of the Admiralty" (*The Times*, 1851a).

Sir Roderick Murchison's letter, written in compliance with that resolution, included one quite specific request:

that waiving in this very special & remarkable occasion the technical rules of ordinary service, you will induce the Board [of] Admiralty to place Lt. Pim on full pay during this mission [Murchison, 1851b].

This appeal, however, was unsuccessful. Perhaps anticipating this result, on the same day Murchison also wrote to the prime minister, Lord John Russell, to request that "... as First Lord of the Treasury . . . you will, if you deem it right, direct that the sum of £500 be contributed by the public to aid in carrying out the arduous survey proposal, which will occupy two or three years" (Murchison, 1851c; *The Times*, 1851b). This appeal was substantially more successful than that made to the

Admiralty. The prime minister approved payment of £500 to Pim and even added a personal note of concern, trusting that: ". . . he will not, in the ardour of his pursuit, risk unduly his own life. I wish him every success. Yours faithfully, J. Russell" (*The Times*, 1851b).

Immediately prior to Pim's departure from London for St. Petersburg, also on 25 November, Sir Roderick Murchison wrote him a final letter of advice (Murchison, 1851d). In it he noted that he had already given him hints on making geological observations and that he had already referred him to Colonel Sabine for advice on magnetic observations. He had also given him letters of introduction to Baron Alexander von Humboldt and Adolf Erman in Berlin, with the intention that they might give him further advice. Erman was known particularly for his temperature measurements made in 1829 in a shaft sunk in the permafrost at Yakutsk (Belov, 1956). Murchison had also paved Pim's way, once he arrived in St. Petersburg, with letters to Admiral Ferdinand von Wrangel', Professor A.F. Middendorf, Academician K.M. Baer and Academician L. Helmersen, as well as to the secretary of the Imperial Geographical Society; the intent was that they, "in case your journey should be approved, will furnish you with every requisite suggestion" (Murchison, 1851d). The letter concluded with the solicitous suggestion: "Do not omit to take a few essential medicines; though I trust that with your good constitution you will have no want of them" (Murchison, 1851d).

#### *Reception in St. Petersburg*

Although there was no lack of volunteers to accompany him, Pim left London on 18 November accompanied only by Captain Robbins, one of the queen's Foreign Service messengers (by arrangement of Lord Palmerston). In Berlin he "received the most marked attention and approval of my plan from the illustrious Humboldt and Adolf Erman, both great Siberian travellers, and His Majesty the King of Prussia took a deep interest in the project, and strongly recommended me to the Emperor of Russia" (Pim, 1851d). No doubt greatly encouraged by this positive response, Pim continued to St. Petersburg, arriving on 5 December 1851.

There the British ambassador, Sir Hamilton Seymour, took him under his wing and arranged for him to see Count Nesselrode (Pim, 1851b) and other influential people. On 9 December Pim received a visit from Captain Kruzenshtern. That evening he met Helmersen and Middendorf at a gathering at Baer's house. Middendorf gave Pim what the latter considered good advice. "He recommended three things. To ask the Emperor for a *particular* order to travel through Siberia, that orders should be at once transmitted to preserve and collect dogs at Niznei Kolymsk. And that meal should be sent from Jakutz to that place as early as possible" (Pim, 1851d:31). On the following day Kruzenshtern took Pim to see Admiral Matyushkin, "and from him I obtained a great deal of useful information but largely tinged with the besetting cry 'impossibilité'. Turn which way I will it is the same" (Pim, 1851d:32). On a visit to General Muravyev, vice president of the Imperial Geographical Society, on 11 December Pim's host advised him "that nothing could be done until the Emperor's decision was known" (Pim, 1851d:33). On 16 December Middendorf visited the British embassy to inspect Pim's boat, guns and other equipment.

Although Pim may have been somewhat frustrated by the results, he had already met some of the most eminent arctic

travellers and scientists in Russia. Academician G.P. Helmersen had sponsored and encouraged a number of expeditions to the arctic coasts of European Russia in the 1830s and 1840s (Pasetskiy, 1984). Academician K.M. Baer, a botanist and zoologist, had led the first truly scientific expedition to Novaya Zemlya in 1843 (Belov, 1956). A.F. Middendorf had discovered Ozero Taymyr and had explored the Taymyr River to its mouth during his extensive travels across Siberia in 1843 (Belov, 1956). P.I. Kruzenshtern had explored the Pechora basin to the sea, also in 1843 (Pasetskiy, 1984). And finally F.F. Matyushkin was probably the most experienced arctic traveller of them all, having accompanied Ferdinand Wrangel' on several of his trips across the sea ice of the East Siberian Sea and having made an impressive inland journey through Chukotka on his own behalf in 1822 (Wrangell, 1841).

But still there was no definite response from Count Nesselrode, and Pim became increasingly frustrated. The level of frustration is clearly apparent in the letter he wrote to Lady Franklin on New Year's Eve:

It is impossible to imagine my impatience and anxiety at a delay so detrimental to the cause when day after day passed and I received no intimation of the Imperial pleasure. In the meantime, however, I consulted everyone capable of forming a judgement on the subject, particularly those Sir Roderick Murchison advised me to see and whose experience rendered them well able to do so. All of them invariably expressed the same opinion as to the impossibility of overcoming the dangers and difficulties which would oppose my undertakings but when I asked those who had accomplished the very same journey how they managed I never could get any other answer than the oft-repeated one "you *cannot* succeed." From this universal concurrence of opinion it would appear these people had received their cue before my arrival. In fact some of the English residents, well informed in such matters, told me such was the case [Pim, 1851b].

On 19 December Pim was somewhat encouraged to be informed by the Court Chamberlain that he was to be presented to the tsar on 21 December, although his enthusiasm was somewhat dampened by the fact that others would also be present and hence "I should not have sufficient time to say I all wished" (Pim, 1851d:36).

#### *Official Reaction*

That afternoon Pim received discouraging news from Count Nesselrode. In the interim the count had in fact set the wheels in motion. The files of the Archives of Foreign Policy of Russia (Arkhir vneshney politiki Rossii) in Moscow contain a memorandum addressed to Nesselrode and, according to the Soviet historian Pasetskiy (1984), probably written by Academician A.A. Keyzerling. Keyzerling, along with P.I. Kruzenshtern, had explored and surveyed the basins of the Upper Vychegda and the Pechora in summer 1843 (Pasetskiy, 1984). Keyzerling's reaction to Pim's proposal was far from encouraging. Probably his most damning remark was that "The idea of travelling by dog team of itself is scarcely feasible since by Pim's own calculations he would need about 1500 dogs, a number which would be quite difficult to assemble in the whole of Siberia" (Pasetskiy, 1984:254). Since, in its final form, Pim's plan envisaged him travelling with only one companion, it seems very unlikely that he would have specified such an unbelievably large number of dogs and indeed, as we will see, he went to great lengths to counter this idea. Perhaps Keyzerling had simply mistranslated some crucial phrase in Pim's submission. Be that as it may, Keyzerling deduced that

to supply Pim's expedition with these sorts of numbers of dogs, sledges, drivers and appropriate amounts of dog food would involve "setting an entire people in motion." Whether Pim's proposed plan had been misconstrued accidentally or deliberately, Keyzerling's arguments were readily seized upon by the Russian authorities as providing legitimate grounds for refusing Pim permission to proceed.

Keyzerling continued: "What he proposes is not to advance in a single direction, but a comprehensive journey around the entire coastal strip of Siberia, from people to people, nomad camp to nomad camp, village to village, i.e., a progress around, and a search of the entire country" (Pasetkiy, 1984:254). One wonders if in his submission to St. Petersburg Pim had again identified Mys Severo-Vostochniy as one of the end points of his search. If it was assumed to be the one on the Kara Sea coast (or if a pretense of that interpretation was being made), some of Keyzerling's pretended concern starts to make sense.

Certainly Keyzerling suspected Pim of an ulterior motive, namely, an extensive reconnaissance of northern Siberia, implementation of which might be detrimental to Russian interests. Anglo-Russian relations had deteriorated drastically from the heady years of rapprochement, both political and commercial, negotiated by Nesselrode between 1836 and 1843 and culminating in Tsar Nicholas's visit to England in June 1844 (Ingle, 1976). Since then relations had cooled significantly as a result of conflicting policies on the complicated range of topics that by 1851 had dragged the two countries close to open warfare, destined to erupt in the Crimean War in March 1854. In this era of distrust, any hint of such an ulterior design would have been enough to scuttle Pim's project. In conclusion Keyzerling argued that if Franklin had landed anywhere on the north coast of Siberia the local Nentsi, Evenki, Ostyaki or Chukchi, being nomadic, would long since have found traces of the expedition and would immediately have informed the Russian authorities.

On the basis of this memorandum, and presumably after consultation with other arctic experts, on 18 December Count Nesselrode wrote (in French) to Sir Hamilton Seymour to present the official reaction of the Russian government to Pim's plan. This was the "despatch of the most discouraging nature" that Pim received on 19 December. Count Nesselrode started by stressing the tsar's ongoing interest in the search for Franklin; he had transmitted orders to the Siberian and Alaskan authorities to provide every assistance to Royal Navy ships engaged in the search, had arranged for the rewards offered by Lady Franklin and by the British Government to be publicized, and most recently had ordered that any information on recent shipwrecks on the northern coasts of Siberia be forwarded to St. Petersburg.

While sympathetic to Pim's plan, the tsar felt that it was totally impracticable:

it cannot be forgotten that independently of the enormous distances to be covered, vast wildernesses buried beneath eternal snows must also be traversed, where no means of transporting provisions can be found, unexplored regions over whose surfaces are scattered totally wild tribes over whom Russia exercises only very limited control and whose belligerent nature, barbarous customs and hatred of strangers are such that the Imperial Government would find itself unable to guarantee even the personal safety of Mr. Pim or his companions. To give some idea of the difficulties such a journey presents, one cannot do better than to recall the expedition undertaken several years ago under the command of Admiral Vrangeli'. Although the local authorities had prepared for it beforehand,

and although undertaken on an infinitely smaller scale than the one now under consideration, that expedition had to be reduced even further due to an epidemic which was raging amongst the dogs used for hauling the sledges and yet, despite all the reductions he was able to make Admiral Vrangeli' still required 50 sledges, necessitating the use of 600 dogs [Nesselrode, 1851a].

On the basis of Vrangeli's experience, Nesselrode argued that Pim's expedition would require 1200-1500 dogs and corresponding amounts of dog food:

Now these animals are kept by the inhabitants only in sufficient numbers for their own use and it is doubtful whether such a large number could be assembled even if one were to disregard the total ruin of the population. As for the notion of undertaking such a journey at once and without any of the essential preparations, the Imperial Government does not hesitate to consider it *physically impossible* [Nesselrode, 1851a].

Possibly the crux of the objections to Pim's plan lies in one of Nesselrode's concluding paragraphs:

One must conclude from such considerations that the goal of Mr. Pim's plan in practical terms can scarcely be attained otherwise than by the dispositions already made by the Imperial Government, aimed at collecting through the local authorities as intermediaries, both from the inhabitants of the Arctic Ocean coast and from Russian or foreign navigators frequenting these seas, all possible information on ships which had been wrecked there over the past few years [Nesselrode, 1851a].

Since the experiences of Baron Ferdinand Petrovich Vrangeli' during his expedition of 1820-24 are central to the arguments of both sides, it is appropriate to examine that expedition briefly. Vrangeli's mandate (Wrangeli, 1841) was to survey the coast east from Shelagskiy Nos (Fig. 2) towards Bering Strait and also the Medvezh'i Ostrova and to search for land north of Chukotka, land whose existence had long been reported by the local Chukchi. Over the course of three years (1821-23) Vrangeli' surveyed the entire coast from the mouth of the Kolyma to Kolyuchinskaya Guba and also made repeated determined attempts to search for land to the north. At different times these attempts got him to 71°43'N to the northeast of the Medvezh'i Ostrova, to 71°52'N to the north of Mys Bol'shoy Baranov, and then to 72°02'N, 164°10'E, and finally to 70°51'N, 175°27'E, in Proliv Longa. The latter effort was in response to a report obtained from the local Chukchi that land was visible to the north in fine weather. Significantly every one of these endeavours by Vrangeli' was brought to a halt by thin, dangerous ice or by open water. On one occasion, in Proliv Longa, the party even spent a night adrift on a floe but managed to reach the fast ice again safely (Wrangeli, 1841).

From Vrangeli's repeated experience of encountering open water or dangerously thin ice, one can certainly see why Pim felt that his reports substantiated his belief in an open polar sea. At the same time, however, even conceding that some land (namely, Ostrov Geral'da and "Kellett Land") had been discovered in the interim, one can certainly understand why the Russian authorities felt that everything humanly possible had already been done by Vrangeli' to find land north of Chukotka in the area Pim was proposing to search and that his proposal, which implied that he felt he could penetrate farther than such an enormously experienced arctic traveller as Vrangeli', was more than a little presumptuous at best, and rather insulting at worst.

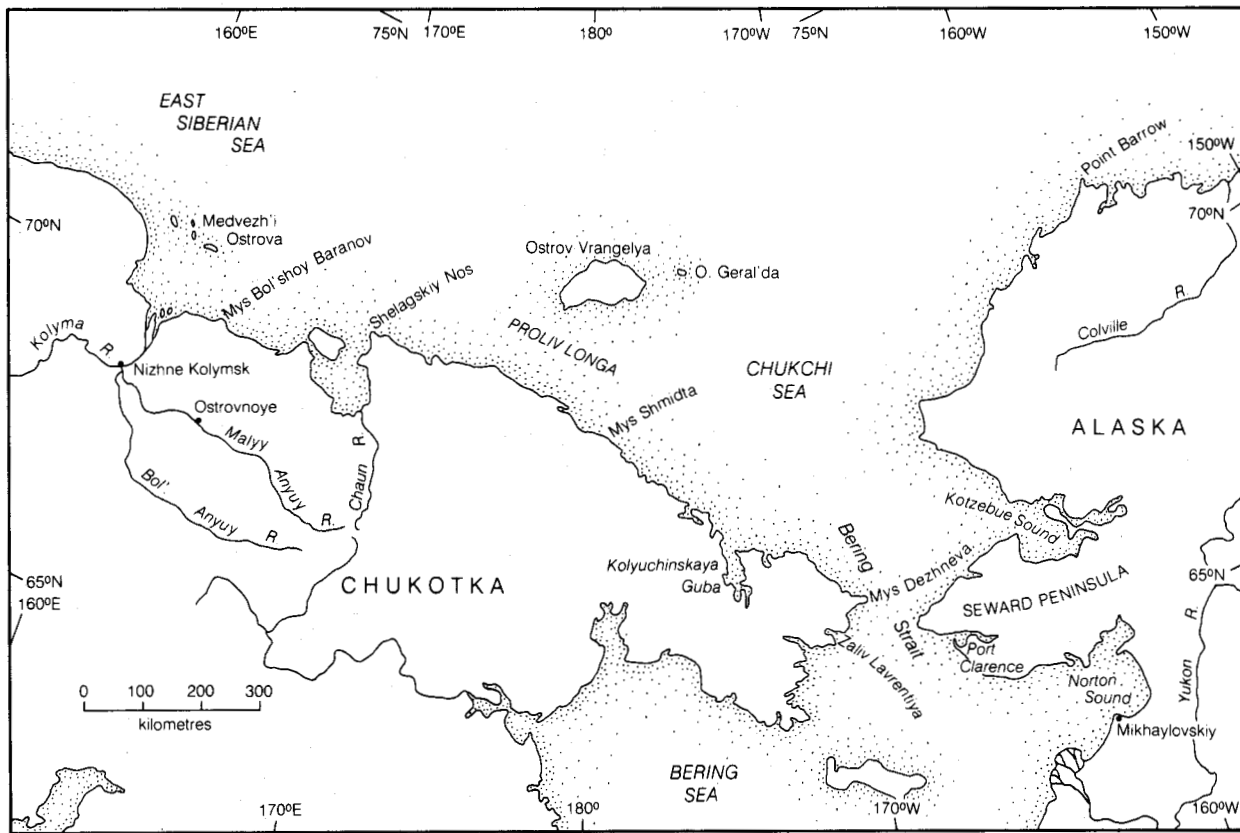


FIG. 2. Map of Chukotka and Bering Strait, showing Pim's proposed search area and the area of Wrangel's expeditions.

### *Pim's Rebuttal*

On 20 December Pim attended a "great diplomatic dinner" hosted by Sir Hamilton Seymour at the embassy "at which the ministers etc. of nearly every nation were assembled" (Pim, 1851d:37). After the guests had departed, Pim drafted a response to Count Nesselrode's dispatch, presenting his reaction to three specific points in the dispatch, namely:

- 1stly. The distance to be travelled over.
- 2ndly. The number of persons forming the expedition and the resources required.
- 3rdly. The object to be attained [Pim, 1851d:37].

He stressed that he was planning to cover no greater distance than Wrangel had, that his would be a small expedition consisting probably of just himself and an interpreter, and that an absolute maximum of 200 dogs would be ample for all the support sledges he might need. Finally he emphasized that his plan was not to search the arctic coast (which he recognized would already have been done in response to the tsar's instructions) but

to explore the belt of land supposed to run parallel to the coast at a distance of about 160 miles, of the existence of which Admiral Wrangell received accounts, and which English geographers believe to extend from the Parry Islands to those discovered by Her Britannic Majesty's Frigate "Herald" while exploring in Behring's Straits the year before last [Pim, 1851c].

By quoting Wrangell's arguments that, contrary to locally expressed concerns that his requests for dogs for his expedition would be detrimental to the local people, his hiring of dogs and drivers had in fact worked to the advantage of the

local economy, Pim rather neatly hoisted the Russians with their own petard.

### *Audience with the Tsar*

Two days later, on 22 December, Pim had his audience with the tsar; he himself surmised in his journal entry for the 21st that the delay "may be attributed to the despatch sent early this morning to Count Nesselrode — so far so well. I shall now have an opportunity of explaining myself thoroughly to him" (Pim, 1851d:37).

Writing later to Lady Franklin, Pim reported that Tsar Nicholas

said he had been made fully acquainted with the object of my visit to Russia and that however anxious he might be to assist, he knew that the difficulties to be overcome were insurmountable and dwelt much upon the injurious effect which furnishing stores for such an expedition as I wished to undertake would produce upon the tribes inhabiting the northern districts of Siberia. I ventured to express my conviction that His Majesty's fears on this subject were unfounded as the perusal of the narrative of Admiral Wrangell led to a very different supposition, and I used such other arguments as I imagined might influence his decision [Pim, 1851b].

From this letter one gets the impression that Pim's response to the tsar's statements was quite forthright, and one suspects that the "arguments as I imagined might influence his decision" were presented in a tone that the tsar was probably not accustomed to hearing from a junior lieutenant. Pim might have unwittingly thrown away whatever remaining chance he might have had of gaining the tsar's support. As it was, he was

dismissed with a request to draw up a report of his intentions for submission to a committee of experts.

By the next day Pim had completed the requested report and forwarded it to the tsar (Pim, 1851e). Having explained his assumptions with regard to Franklin's route and possible whereabouts, Pim attempted to neutralize any suggestion of criticism of earlier Russian efforts — i.e., those of Vrangl' or Matyushkin — on the basis that the experience gained in arctic travel in the intervening 30 years gave him an advantage (Pim, 1851e).

With regard to the concern expressed by the tsar about the strain his expedition might place on the local economy and about possible hardships to the local people, Pim argued that these concerns were not borne out by Vrangl's statements (as noted earlier) that the local people had derived significant benefit from his expedition (Pim, 1851e).

After a final assurance that "no risk will be incurred except to himself [Pim] and such persons as may volunteer to accompany him on his exploring journey" (Pim, 1851e), Pim made the suggestion that if the government were to mount a larger expedition than he had in mind, he would be very happy to join it "as a subordinate officer."

Writing to Lady Franklin a week later, Pim noted ruefully that little had happened and that

up to this time it is not even known who is the appointed President of the committee, so tardily is the business managed. In the meantime I have been presented in turn to the Empress and Imperial Family but without receiving any encouragement from them. My ultimate fate is, therefore as great a mystery as ever. . . . My position here is not a pleasant one. The Russians frown or smile just as the Emperor does, and I cannot obtain any countenance or accurate information until the Imperial intention to countenance the undertaking is made known [Pim, 1851b].

#### *Matyushkin's Assessment*

Unknown to Pim, events were taking their course. On 27 December Count Nesselrode wrote to Sir Hamilton Seymour (Nesselrode, 1851b) with, as an enclosure, a commentary by Rear-Admiral F.F. Matyushkin (Matyushkin, 1851) on presumably both Pim's original plan and on his later submission to the tsar. Matyushkin thirty years earlier had played a key role in Vrangl's expedition. Apart from participating in several of the sledge trips out across the sea ice of the East Siberian Sea, Matyushkin had led his own auxiliary expeditions to explore the basins of the Bol'shoy and Malyy Anyuy rivers in the spring and summer of 1821 (Belov, 1956) and the basin of the Chaun River in August 1822. Thus, whether he was the president of the committee to whom the problem was referred by the tsar or he was simply a committee of one, he was certainly well qualified to make a valid judgement.

That judgement was quite unequivocal: "The researches made by Lieut. Wrangel do not in any way confirm the supposition that there would be to the west of Wellington Channel down to the mouth of the Kolyma a range of islands at a distance of 160 miles from the continent and that above these islands there would extend an open sea" (Matyushkin, 1851). Having summarized Vrangl's and Anzhu's penetrations out across the sea ice from either the mainland coast or the Novosibirskiye Ostrova (to distances of 229 km and 273.6 km respectively on Vrangl's second and third attempts), Matyushkin concluded that the hypothetical land masses did not exist, that if there were an open polar sea, Franklin could have reached

the Siberian coast without obstruction, and that if his ships had been wrecked there, some word of that event would have reached the authorities (Matyushkin, 1851).

In his covering letter, while not offering support, Nesselrode did not rule out the possibility that Pim might proceed on his own:

If however, in spite of all representations which have been made to him here this officer should persevere in his intention to explore the northern coast of Siberia, it is certainly not the Imperial Government that would wish to place any obstacle in his way. He may be persuaded that our most fervent wishes will accompany him on his adventurous enterprise. It will depend on himself to go to Siberia, only the solicitude of the Emperor for the natives cannot permit His Majesty to impose upon them by means of compulsion oppressions that would be ruinous. If having gone to those parts Mr. Pim can succeed to procure for himself by an arrangement of mutual consent the number of teams necessary for his researches we shall be charmed [Nesselrode, 1851b].

#### *Conceding Defeat*

Sir Hamilton Seymour's assessment of this attitude, as expressed in his covering letter (Seymour, 1852), effectively ended any hopes of Pim's travelling beyond St. Petersburg:

As you know my opinion (formed upon that of much wiser men than myself) has always been that to be successful your journey must be supported by all the *moral aid* which it could receive from the Imperial Government and when in lieu of that nothing is promised but *an abstention from opposition* — to proceed would be — as I hold — little short of madness.

Shortly after this Pim returned to London, baffled and no doubt disappointed. In point of fact, he really had good grounds for feeling quite proud of what he had achieved. Few foreign officers of his rank and youth (he was only 25) can have had audiences with the tsar and the entire imperial family. And certainly no other British naval officer had the enormous good fortune to have protracted discussions about problems of arctic travel with such experts as Matyushkin or Middendorf or about matters of science with such giants as Humboldt and Erman.

But although the British ambassador might have given up hope, Lady Franklin had not. In his letter of 31 December Pim had suggested that he might have had better luck if he had arrived in St. Petersburg as a private individual, "as the bearer of a petition from your Ladyship to His Majesty" (Pim, 1851b). Acting on this remark, as a last resort Lady Franklin did indeed write directly to the tsar:

not with the presumptuous intention of moving you to reverse any adverse decision to which in the exercise of the most beneficent as well as the most enlightened judgment you may have arrived, but only to entreat that if any measures not fraught with insuperable difficulties nor necessarily endangering the precious lives of those to be engaged in the expedition, be submitted to you, such measures may meet with your patient and gracious consideration [Franklin, 1852].

It is not clear whether Lady Franklin had some new initiative in mind, but if so nothing ever came of it.

#### ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is extremely difficult to assess the reasons for the official Russian refusal to support Pim's proposal. Undoubtedly the growing tensions between Britain and Russia, which would



flare up into open hostilities only three years later, played an important role in influencing Russian sensitivities concerning their Arctic, and Pim was certainly on the right track when he remarked to Lady Franklin, "I am quite sure there must be some political motive for the impediments which have detained me here so long" (Pim, 1851b). And no doubt he was also correct in his assessment that "had I appeared in St. Petersburg as Mr. instead of Lieut. Pim R.N. and without any assistance from the Government, . . . that I should much more easily have obtained assistance from the Emperor" (Pim, 1851b).

However, there appears to be a real possibility that confusion as to the identification of Mys Severo-Vostochnyy (which Pim names as being the end point of the stretch of coast he wished to search) may have led the Russian authorities to conclude that he wished to search most of the Siberian arctic coast. Following from this, the deduction that he would need substantial numbers of dogs becomes quite logical, and almost certainly the prospect of a British naval officer wandering unaccompanied across Siberia, with practically *carte blanche* as to where he went, must have made the tsar and the Russian military authorities nervous. Pasetkiy (1984:253) was undoubtedly correct in suggesting that Keyzerling "saw behind the proposed humanitarian goals of Pim's journey far-reaching reconnaissance plans, implementation of which might be detrimental to the interests of Russia." Admiral Fedor Litke, vice president of the Russian Geographical Society and himself an arctic traveller of considerable experience, voiced the same idea even more pointedly, namely, that such an extravagant plan "could arise in the mind of an Englishman only with a view to serving as a cover for some other 'arrière-pensée' — less naive, but more natural" (Narochnitskiy, 1956:73).

But undoubtedly, too, Pim was correct in his suggestion, made in his letter to Lady Franklin, that through poor timing he may have ruffled Russian feathers. As we have seen, his proposal had been forwarded to St. Petersburg immediately after the tsar had undertaken to maintain a careful watch along the arctic coast of Siberia for any traces of survivors of the Franklin expedition. Even Pim himself conceded that "he was naturally irritated at the insinuations that his word was worthless" (Pim, 1851b).

### *The Mystery of Beatson's Proposal*

Particularly baffling is the fact that a simultaneous proposal for a parallel search expedition aimed at searching the same ground as Pim had in mind but by sea rather than overland was received very warmly by the Russians. This was a proposal by a private citizen, Donald Beatson, who proposed pushing north through Bering Strait by sea and searching the Siberian coast to the west. Like Pim, he believed that a chain of icebound islands extended westwards from the Parry Islands to the general area of Ostrov Vrangeliya, that an open polar sea lay to the north of this barrier and that *Erebus* and *Terror* had become entangled in that chain of islands while trying to work their way south to Bering Strait (Beatson, 1852; Great Britain, 1852). In a letter to Sir Roderick Murchison that Murchison read at the meeting of the Royal Geographical Society on 12 January 1852, Beatson reported that the previous October he had approached Lady Franklin with his ideas and with a proposal to search the area in question; not surprisingly she had given him every encouragement.

On that basis he had purchased a schooner, *Isabel*, of just under 200 tons and was planning to equip it with steam power.

With a crew of 15 and provisions for 5 years, he planned to sail from England by the end of February 1852. Calling at Hawaii, he hoped to reach Bering Strait by mid- or late July. From there, depending on ice conditions, he planned to push due north, northeast or northwest. If forced to winter on the Chukotka coast:

I might employ the spring (before the breaking up of the ice) in an attempt to reach that land seen by Captain Kellett from Herald Island, and thus be enabled to perform one part of the scheme proposed by Lieutenant Pim. I would next in the spring push away to the north and east, in which direction I believe I shall eventually find some traces of our missing ships [Beatson, 1852].

Beatson received the support of the Royal Geographical Society and a subscription list was opened to help fund the project. It is more surprising that, in marked contrast to Pim's plan, he received the blessing of the Admiralty, even to the extent of assistance in provisioning his ship (Stafford, 1852; Hamilton, 1852). And in even greater contrast to Pim's frustrating experience is the fact that Tsar Nicholas offered his assistance to Beatson, providing him with

sealed letters to the Commandant of the port of Petropavlovsk and to the Director of the Russian American Colonies at Sitka, and an open letter to the Russian authorities in the neighbourhood of Behring's Straits, which, at the request of Her Majesty's Government, the Emperor of Russia has been pleased to allow to be written, enjoining the parties to whom they are addressed to exert their good offices in favour of Captain Beatson's expedition. The Russian Government has, moreover, sent directly to the Russian authorities on the east coast of Siberia and on the north-west coast of America, instructions to afford Captain Beatson all the assistance which it may be in the power of those authorities to render him [Addington, 1852].

What makes the tsar's reaction to Beatson's proposal all the more baffling is that Petropavlovsk was Russia's main Pacific naval base, which would be the scene of a brief, bungled, but bloody siege by an Anglo-French squadron in the summer of 1854, during the Crimean War (Gough, 1971; Stone and Crampton, 1985). However, it should be noted that *Herald* had called at Petropavlovsk several times during her cruises north to Bering Strait in search of Franklin (Seemann, 1853). One would have thought, nonetheless, that this would have been a much more sensitive area than the arctic coasts Pim proposed to search.

Nevertheless Beatson's expedition did not take place. Lack of funds and what Sir Roderick Murchison later described as "the unexpected personal embarrassments of the ingenious commander, to which it is unnecessary here to refer" (Murchison, 1852:lxvii) forced the abandonment of the project.

### *Ironic Postscripts*

On his return to England Pim refunded the £300 that Lady Franklin had provided to finance his trip (Pim, 1852). He immediately volunteered to join Sir Edward Belcher's squadron about to depart for the Arctic and was aboard *Resolute*, Captain Henry Kellett, when she sailed with the rest of the squadron from the Thames on 22 April 1852 (Belcher, 1855; McDougall, 1857). It is particularly ironic, in view of Pim's prediction in his first letter to the Admiralty (27 September 1851) that the expeditions then in the field (including M'Clure's) "can only follow in the path and consequently incur a similar

risk as Sir John Franklin" (Great Britain, 1852), that the following spring Pim played a key role in averting what came very close to a second major disaster. In fall 1852 a party from Kellett's ships *Resolute* and *Intrepid*, wintering at Dealy Island, had found a note left by Captain Robert M'Clure of *Investigator* to the effect that he was wintering at Mercy Bay on the north coast of Banks Island, this being the ship's third arctic wintering in a row. In March 1853 Pim was selected to lead a sledge party across M'Clure Strait to make contact with M'Clure at Mercy Bay. He arrived there just in time, on 6 April (Osborn, 1857; Neatby, 1967). M'Clure intended to dispatch most of his men overland within the next few days, one party heading south via Prince of Wales Strait to the Mackenzie River, the other eastwards to Port Leopold on the northeast coast of Somerset Island. Some idea of what the almost inevitable result of this plan must have been may be gathered from the fact that the first death from scurvy among M'Clure's men occurred the very day after the rescue party arrived. So, although Pim's scheme to rescue Franklin to the north of Chukotka came to naught, a year later he was instrumental in averting a second arctic disaster, since it is extremely unlikely that many of *Investigator's* crew would have survived the man-hauling journeys M'Clure was contemplating.

Perhaps the greatest irony of the entire business of Pim's proposal to mount a search for Franklin from Chukotka is that in January 1854 he was appointed to the command of the gunboat *Magpie* (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 1921-22), which the following year was attached to Rear-Admiral Dundas's squadron in the Baltic campaign of the Crimean War. Hence Pim took part in the bombardment of the fortress of Suomenlinna (Sveaborg), which protects Helsinki harbour, on 9 and 10 August 1855 (Bonner Smith, 1944) and was wounded in the process (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 1921-22). A month later (12 September) he commanded *Magpie* during a successful cutting-out operation in the Straits of Biorko in the Gulf of Finland (Bonner Smith, 1944). Thus he made a minor contribution to the ultimate defeat of Russia in the Crimean War.

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