

## Francis Leopold McClintock (1819-1907)

The Royal Navy's tradition of arctic exploration by means of man-hauled sledges, initiated by William Edward Parry during his 1827 attempt to reach the North Pole and climaxed in Robert Scott's astounding display of masochism during his journey to the South Pole in 1911-1912, is a remarkable example of what the military mind can achieve despite itself. Even such hardened naval officers as Henry Kellett and Erasmus Ommanney were stunned at the brutal effort involved on their first encounters with this excruciatingly slow method of travel. What makes the stubborn retention of the technique so baffling is that such naval explorers as Parry and even James Clark Ross, who introduced man-hauling as an integral part of the search for Franklin, had frequently observed the superior speed and ease of travel by Inuit dog sledge. Both officers, in fact, had extensively used dog sledges themselves. Yet in spite of this inexplicable resistance to adopt superior methods, the enormous distances logged by man-hauled sledge parties during the Franklin search and the vast area of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago that was first mapped using this brutal technique are impressive. And if anyone raised sledge hauling to its peak of efficiency, Francis Leopold McClintock was that man.

Born in County Louth, Ireland, on 8 July 1819, the son of the head of the customs office at Dundalk, Leopold McClintock

first went to sea aboard HMS *Samarang* as a first-class volunteer at the age of 12. Over the next 14 years, he slowly made his way up through the system, seeing service in such diverse places as the Gulf of California, Brazil, the Irish Sea, the Channel, the Caribbean, Newfoundland, Bermuda, and the Rio de la Plata. He was made lieutenant on 29 July 1845.

In 1847, McClintock was recommended to Sir James Clark Ross, who was fitting out *Investigator* and *Enterprise* for the first of the Navy's seaborne searches for the missing Franklin expedition. McClintock was appointed second lieutenant aboard *Enterprise* under Ross's command. The two ships wintered at Port Leopold on northeastern Somerset Island, and from there in the spring of 1849, Ross and McClintock made the expedition's major sledging trip. Travelling west along the north coast of Somerset Island, they searched the west coast as far south as 72°38'N; the round trip of some 800 km took 40 days.

The summer of 1850 found McClintock back in the Arctic again as first lieutenant aboard HMS *Assistance* under Captain Erasmus Ommanney, this ship being one of Captain Horatio Austin's four-ship squadron that wintered in the strait between Griffiths and Cornwallis islands. In the spring of 1851, McClintock led one of the many sledge parties that fanned out from the ships. Leaving the ships on 15 April, he headed west along the south coasts of Cornwallis, Bathurst, Byam Martin, and Melville islands and reached Cape James Ross, situated on the southwest tip of Melville Island. Rounding the shores of Dundas Peninsula, he then cut back across that peninsula to the south coast before he headed for home, reaching the ships on 4 July. He had covered a distance of 1,240 km in 80 days.

Largely as a result of this achievement, McClintock was given his first command during the following Franklin search expedition, that led by Captain Edward Belcher in 1852-1854. McClintock commanded the steam tender *Intrepid*, which was to support HMS *Resolute*, under Captain Henry Kellett. The two ships wintered at Dealy Island, off the south coast of Melville Island. In the spring of 1853, McClintock led a party that achieved the distinction of making one of the two longest man-hauled sledge trips accomplished in the Canadian Arctic. McClintock crossed the "waist" of Melville Island to Hecla and Griper Bay, then coasted west to the island's northwest tip. Crossing Fitzwilliam Strait, he discovered and explored Prince Patrick Island, as well as the north coasts of Eglinton Island and the west and south coasts of Emerald Isle. In total he covered 2,125 km in 105 days. This record would be surpassed only by Lieutenant George Meham's journey of 2,138 km in 84 days in the spring of 1854.

Subsequently, after a second wintering in the pack off Cape Cockburn, Kellett and McClintock, on direct orders from Belcher, were forced reluctantly to abandon their ships, which were still in excellent condition. McClintock was fully exonerated by the inevitable court martial on their return to England, and, indeed, on 11 October 1854 he was promoted to the rank of post-captain.

In the spring of 1857, Jane Franklin was fitting out a private expedition to investigate the stories that John Rae had recently heard from the Pelly Bay Inuit of white men having been seen on King William Island. She chose Captain Leopold McClintock to command the yacht *Fox*, which sailed from Aberdeen that



Captain McClintock, 1856.

summer. Beset in the ice of Melville Bay, the *Fox* drifted south for the full length of Baffin Bay and Davis Strait over the winter of 1857-58. Once his ship was freed, McClintock headed north once again and entered Lancaster Sound; the expedition spent its second winter at the east end of Bellot Strait.

During a sledge journey in February 1859 McClintock met a group of Inuit at Cape Victoria on the west coast of Boothia Peninsula who possessed a variety of silverware and other relics from the missing ships. They reported that one ship had been crushed by the ice to the west of King William Island. McClintock planned his spring sledge trips on the basis of this report. On 2 April he and his second-in-command, Lieutenant William Hobson, set off westward, each with a man-hauled sledge and a dog sledge. Meeting the same group of Inuit, they now learned that two ships had been seen west of King William Island.

On reaching Cape Victoria, McClintock and Hobson separated. In what was clearly a magnanimous gesture to his junior officer in view of the Inuit reports, Hobson was ordered to search the west coast of King William Island. McClintock's party, meantime, was to proceed clockwise around the coast of King William Island. At two Inuit camps on the east coast of the island, McClintock recovered silverware that clearly had come from *Erebus* and *Terror*, as well as various articles made from wood salvaged from the missing ships. On the south coast he found a skeleton later identified as that of Harry Peglar, captain of the foretop aboard *Terror*.

A short distance west of Cape Herschel, McClintock found a message left by Hobson in a cairn six days earlier with the exciting news that in a cairn at Point Victory he had found a record left by Lieutenant Graham Gore on 25 April 1848, outlining in frustratingly meagre detail the final outcome of the Franklin expedition, including the information that Franklin had died on 11 June 1847 and concluding with the stunning information that the officers and men of *Erebus* and *Terror* had abandoned their ships and were about to start south by sledge and boat via the Back River.

Encouraged by this message, McClintock continued his search. On 29 May he reached the western tip of King William Island, which he named Cape Crozier; on the 30th he discovered a ship's boat mounted on a heavy sledge (earlier found by Hobson on his way back north); it contained two skeletons as well as a strange assortment of abandoned equipment and clothing.

By 19 June, McClintock was back at Bellot Strait, and *Fox* reached London on 23 September 1859. For having led the expedition that solved the baffling mystery of Franklin's fate, McClintock was knighted, granted the freedom of the City of London, awarded honorary degrees by the universities of Oxford, Glasgow, and Dublin, and elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Society.

Sir Leopold's later career was very distinguished. He reached the rank of admiral in 1884, just before retirement, and was created KCB in 1891. During his retirement, he took a keen interest in Antarctic exploration and was a leading member of the committee responsible for the design of Scott's ship *Discovery*, used on his National Antarctic Expedition of 1901-1904. Sir Leopold died on 17 November 1907 at the age of 88 and is buried in Kensington Cemetery, Hanwell. He will be remembered by history as the man who refined the technique of arctic exploration by man-hauling to an amazingly high degree, despite the staggering inherent limitations of the technique, and as the man who solved — as far as it ever has been — the mystery of the fate of the Franklin expedition.



Admiral McClintock in later life.

#### FURTHER READINGS

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