

# NORTHERN NEWS

## Expedition to the new islands in Foxe Basin

The Geographical Bureau of the Department of Mines and Resources has sent a party to investigate the islands which lie in the northeast of Foxe Basin.

Mr. T. H. Manning, the leader of the expedition, is accompanied by three other geographers, a botanist, a geologist and a cook. The expedition's boat *Nauja*, a 45-foot Peterhead with a 12½-foot beam, was built at Upper LaHavre, Nova Scotia. It is powered with a 64 h.p. diesel motor and equipped with radio and depth recorder. The boat was successfully shipped by rail to Moosonee.

The expedition left Moosonee in mid July to work on the islands and coasts of James Bay. As soon as ice conditions permitted they were planning to make a start up the east coast of Hudson Bay.

## Naming of Arctic Islands

The Canadian Board on Geographical Names has recently adopted names for two islands in the Canadian Arctic.

On 7 April 1949 the largest of the newly-found islands in Foxe Basin was officially named Prince Charles Island for Prince Charles of Edinburgh. The discovery of two large islands in Foxe Basin on 21 July 1948 by the R.C.A.F. was mentioned in *Arctic*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 142. Prince Charles Island is low-lying and some 85 miles from north to south and 75 miles from east to west. The position in which it has tentatively been mapped is 67°10' to 68°27'N., 74°50' to 77°30'W. The expedition to these islands this summer forms the subject of another note in this number.

On 7 July 1949 the Board adopted the name Mackenzie King Island for the southern part of Borden Island, after the former Liberal Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Mackenzie King. Borden Island was discovered in 1915 by Stefansson, who returned and investigated the island further in 1916 and 1917. Stefansson did not penetrate to the full depth of the sound on the west coast and was working in foggy weather, so it was not

surprising that he did not realize that Wilkins Sound was in fact a channel. A Canadian navigator who thought he saw a channel across Borden Island in 1946 confirmed this on 24 April 1947, flying in a U.S.A.A.F. plane based on Edmonton. The northern island retains the name Borden Island, after Sir Robert Borden, Conservative Prime Minister at the time of Dr. Stefansson's expedition.

## Naming of northern Weather Stations

On 9 June 1948 the Canadian Board on Geographical Names adopted names for the four post-war Weather Stations established jointly by the Canadian and United States Governments in the Canadian Arctic. These are:

Eureka: Eureka Sound, Ellesmere Id. 79°59'N., 85°56'W.

Resolute: Resolute Bay, Cornwallis Id. 74°41'N., 94°05'W.

Isachsen: Isachsen Pen., Ellef Ringnes Id. 78°50'N., 103°50'W.

Mould Bay: Prince Patrick Id. 76°14'N., 119°50'W.

## Firth River Gold

Late in 1947 reports that placer gold had been "discovered" that summer on the Firth River, Yukon, attracted widespread attention. This river, entering the Arctic Ocean near Herschel Island, lies in a little known area and few data were readily available to combat what were probably, in part, over-coloured accounts. Thus, by mid-winter, predictions of a 1948 gold rush to the area, from such points as Fairbanks, Dawson, Fort Nelson, and Aklavik, began to appear in the less responsible press. Although no such rush materialized the area did see a little activity as recorded below.

Contrary to some recent reports, the gold placers of Firth River have been known for many years, probably since 1899 when whaling crews are reported<sup>5</sup> to have panned the river bars. The deposits were examined about 1930 by a prospecting organization known as Dominion Explorers. Rumours that gold had been found in quartz veins led

others, including R. W. Sandy of Fort Nelson and E. M. Maxwell of Yellowknife, to visit the area in 1947. Early in 1948 A. A. Gillespie<sup>1</sup> reported prospectors en route to Firth River. A reconnaissance geological survey of the lower 50 miles of the river was made by J. J. O'Neill<sup>4</sup>, and other geological data were gathered by the United States Geological Survey<sup>2</sup> along the Alaska-Yukon boundary, 10 to 25 miles to the west. The river and adjacent territory have been photographed from the air.

Brief accounts of the 1947 season have been published<sup>3,5</sup> and these will not be summarized here. They are supplemented by the following notes, based mainly on a conversation with N. S. Edgar, a mining engineer of Yellowknife who, with two companions, visited Firth River during the summer of 1948.

About seven white men and twelve Eskimo entered the district last summer. The natives have recovered a little gold there annually for a number of years. Nearly all gold has come from a point on Firth River about 40 miles from its mouth. Mr. Edgar's party travelled by schooner from Aklavik to the R.C.M.P. post on Herschel Island. Light aircraft (Waco and similar types) are available for charter at Aklavik and one of these, operating on wheels, moved the party from Herschel Island to a gravel bar about 40 miles up Firth River. No nearby lakes suitable for pontoon equipped aircraft are known. The coastal plain is devoid of timber and estimated to be about 15 miles wide; inland from this, including the placer gold district, are unglaciated mountains rising to heights of 5,000 feet or more. Walking from the coast would be difficult because of "niggerheads". The river is not navigable and, after leaving the aircraft, the party resorted to back-packing as the only practicable means of transport. Pack dogs might be used provided food is available. An alternative route of access is by the valley of Malcolm River, 10 miles to the west, and thence through a low pass to Firth River. Timber is sparse but sufficient for a few cabins, sluice boxes, and fuel. Game was scarce (only two caribou killed), weather

severe (snow blizzard in August), and air service unreliable.

A shallow mantle of gravel of 10 feet or so in thickness forms broad benches resting on bedrock. The river has cut through the gravel and bedrock to form a gorge as much as 80 feet deep. The rocks are mainly steeply dipping black slates and limestone without quartz veins. Neither granitic nor volcanic rocks were seen, either in place or in gravels. Only a little gravel occurs in the river bed in the productive area, and most of the placer gold recovered to date lay in natural riffles of slate slabs that lie transverse to the stream flow. Gold can be recovered by removing and scraping these slabs. No gold has been found upstream from the productive area. Efforts to test (by panning) the high level gravels that flank the river gorge were found to be slow and tedious because no water was available there and each sample of gravel had to be carried down to the river, in the bottom of the gorge. Bench gravels along Firth River have been reported<sup>5</sup> to contain gold but, as far as known, no systematic sampling has been done and their average gold content is unknown.

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup>Gillespie, A. A.: "The Firth River gold strike"; *Western Miner*, Vol. 21, No. 5, May 1948, p. 78.
- <sup>2</sup>Maddren, A. G.: "Geologic Investigations along the Canada-Alaska Boundary"; *U.S.G.S., Bull.* 520 (1912).
- <sup>3</sup>Maxwell, E. M.: "Eskimo gold stories start search for Firth River lode deposits"; *Northern Miner*, 18 September 1947.
- <sup>4</sup>O'Neill, J. J.: "The geology of the Arctic Coast of Canada west of the Kent Peninsula", (1924); Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-18, vol. XI (Geology and Topography), pt. A, pp. 12-15.
- <sup>5</sup>Sandy, R. W.: "Placer Gold on the Firth River—routes to the area"; *Western Miner*, Vol. 21, No. 6, June 1948, pp. 85-86.
- <sup>6</sup>Surveys and Mapping Bureau: Herschel (Aeronautical Edition), Alaska-Yukon, 8 miles to 1 inch: Mines, Forests, and Scientific Services Branch (1946).  
(From the *Arctic Circular*, Vol. II (1949) pp. 29-30).  
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### **Possible meteorite fall in the George River area**

Mr. B. M. May, Hudson's Bay Company's Post Manager at George River, Ungava has reported what appears to be the fall of a meteorite, some 50 to 100 miles inland from his post, between the George and Whale Rivers.

"On the evening of December the second just at dusk I was outside feeding the dogs when a loud roaring thunderlike noise commenced and lasted about a minute's duration. It ended up in a very loud hissing roar and then there were several minor explosions and rumbles before it finally died out. The ground shook considerably and there appeared to be a pronounced thud at the end.

Natives at Port Burwell heard this as well as all the camps along the coast as far down as Mukalik near Whale River. Two natives saw this and described it as a large ball of fire which had a trail of fire, with glowing embers shooting off behind it . . . it would seem that this was a quite large meteorite which came to earth about 50 to 100 miles inland between the George and Whale River, and I am inclined to think that it landed in a lake and this is what caused the hissing and minor explosions at the end of the display."

Owing to some confusion in interpreting the stories told by some Eskimo visiting Chimo, it was believed that they had found a rocket about 8 feet long. Mr. May however spoke with these natives and learned that they had only heard and seen the meteorite and had not in fact found anything.

### **Polar bear cubs at Coral Harbour, Southampton Island**

In the spring of 1949 eight polar bear cubs were captured alive by the Eskimo on Southampton Island (see cover photograph). These were intended for export to a circus. Since strict conservation of game is necessary to ensure an adequate supply for the Eskimo, the Northwest Territories Administration forbids polar bears to be taken out of the Territory, or killed by persons other

than natives. These eight cubs were therefore ordered to be released.

### **French Expedition to Greenland**

The French Arctic Research Expedition spent the summer of 1948 in Greenland preparing for the main expedition of 1949. This preliminary expedition was planned to save valuable time in 1949 by taking all the heavy equipment up on to the ice cap. In addition some of the members gained experience and were able to initiate their research studies. A brief note about the 1948 work was given in *Arctic* Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 143, and it is hoped that a full account will be published shortly.

M. Paul-Emile Victor, the leader of the expedition, has sent the Institute the following cable: "From location future central Grönland ice cap research station 70 degrees 54N, 40 degrees 42W same as Wegener Eismitte 1931 attained by us 17 July 1949 at 12.00 with five weasels, twenty men and equipment."

It was also in the month of July, in 1930, that members of Wegener's expedition established the Eismitte Station, at an altitude of 10,000 feet. They too travelled inland from the West Coast, but by a rather shorter route up the Kamarujuk Glacier, Umanak Fjord some distance to the north of the French base at the Ege Glacier opposite Disko Island. It is interesting to recall that in 1931 members of the Wegener expedition covered the 250 miles to the Eismitte Station by propeller sledge, the first time propeller sledges had been used in Greenland.

It has recently been announced in the press that supplies have been parachuted to the French Ice Cap Research Station from planes based on Iceland. A meteorological officer, M. Bouché, will remain at this station for at least thirteen months.

### **Navigation of the North East Passage by the German Cruiser *Komet***

On 3 July 1940, the auxiliary cruiser *Komet*, a German raider of some 3,300 tons, left Hamburg for a voyage through the North East Passage, disguised as the

merchant ship *Donau*. A short description of this voyage is given in the *Polarforschung* for June 1943 (vol. 13, pp. 5-7). We are indebted to Miss Felizia Seyd, of the research staff of Dr. Stefansson's *Encyclopedia Arctica*, for a translation of this account.

The *Komet*, under the command of Konteradmiral Eyssen, was the first German ship to make the North East Passage. The voyage was planned in full agreement with the Soviet Government who gave the *Komet* icebreaker escort and every assistance.

On 7 July 1940 the *Komet* put in to Bergen to refuel, intending to continue to Novaya Zemlya. It was not however until August 13 that the *Komet* was advised by the Russians to enter Matochkin Shar Strait, having been delayed by reports of heavy ice. The passage, which was exceptionally free from ice, was accomplished in 4½ hours, under the direction of two Soviet ice pilots, taken on board some 3 nautical miles from the entrance to the strait.

Continuing alone the ship met an impenetrable ice barrier of 9 balls, i.e. 9/10ths. of the sea surface covered with heavy pack ice, at Long. 65°E. As no icebreaker was available the *Komet* had to return to Matochkin Shar Strait. On August 19, after receiving detailed instructions, the cruiser reached Tyrto Island (76°30N., 97°30E.), passing safely through some fairly heavy ice on the way. As arranged, the Soviet icebreaker *Lenin* arrived on August 25 and escorted the *Komet* through the difficult Vil'kit-ski Strait.

By August 26 both ships were off Cape Chelyuskin. On entering the Laptev Sea, the icebreaker *Stalin*, which patrolled this area, took charge of the *Komet*. Owing to a large ice field the cruiser, in the wake of the *Stalin*, followed the ice edge as far north as 78°. About 108°E., a sudden fog made contact very difficult though the oil track of the icebreaker, which was leaking the residue of burnt up fuel, proved some assistance. After getting clear of the icefield the *Stalin* turned back and the *Komet* continued at speed to Sannikov Strait, through the New Siberian

Islands. The icebreaker *Malygin* patrolled this area but assistance was declined as there was little ice.

Navigation in the East Siberian Sea demanded special care as the depth measurements were patchy. The approach to the Bear Islands, where the icebreaker *Kaganovich* was awaiting their arrival, was facilitated by clear weather and detailed ice information wirelessly from the icebreaker. The passage through Medvezh'i Strait proved difficult as depth measurements of 8m. or even 7.3m. were recorded instead of the expected 10 to 11m. To the east the ice became heavier and on August 31 the cruiser damaged her rudder, but repairs could be made, and on September 1 open water was reached. Owing to reports of enemy activity in Bering Strait the Russians refused to accompany the *Komet* farther than Aion-Shelagski. In spite of this the voyage was completed and on September 3 the *Komet* alone entered Long Sound, between Wrangel Island and the mainland, passing Cape Schmidt at speed. The Chuktchi Sea was found to be free from ice and during the night of September 4 the *Komet*, with dimmed lights, entered Bering Strait, following the Siberian side.

This voyage through the North East Passage lasted only 23 days of which 9 were spent at anchor. In fact the 2,000 odd miles of the passage, of which 720 had some ice hazard, took only 14 days.

#### Recent finds of Russian historical documents

A number of documents bearing on the life and work of Russian sailors in the 18th and 19th centuries has recently been received by the Institute of the History of Natural Sciences, part of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences. The more important of these documents, mentioned in *Soviet News* for 8 April 1949, are given below.

The earliest relates to the life and work of Alexei Chirikov. Chirikov accompanied both the Bering Expeditions, which left St. Petersburg in 1725 and 1733 respectively. On the second expedi-

tion Chirikov, in the *St. Paul*, and Bering, in the *St. Peter*, lost touch with each other and independently landed on the mainland of North America and discovered the Aleutian Islands.

One of the more valuable of the finds is a collection of 22 hand-drawn maps of the voyage of the first Russian circum-navigators. Krusenstern, the leader of the expedition, in the *Nadesha* and Lisiansky in the *Neva* left Russia in 1803, returning safely in 1806. On this voyage Lisiansky spent over a year on Kodiak Island and produced detailed maps of the island, Sitka Sound, and parts of the mainland of North America.

Bellingshausen, who had accompanied Krusenstern, led his own expedition to the Antarctic in 1819-21. Two of the recently found manuscripts were written by Professor Ivan Simonov, Bellingshausen's astronomer, and describe in detail the expedition and its discoveries.

Another of the finds mentioned is the Logbook of the Kolyma merchant Berezhoj, who accompanied Wrangell in March 1821 on his "Second expedition to the Polar Ice" to the north of the Bear Islands "on his own account, and in two of his sledges". Throughout the text of von Wrangell's expedition ("Narrative of an Expedition to the Polar Sea, in the years 1820, 21, 22, and 23", edited by Edward Sabine, 1840), there are many references to Berezhoj, who seems to have been a successful trader in the district around the Kolyma river and to have been most helpful to the expedition. For instance p. 272: "The weather was warm, and the clouds of mosquitoes tormented us so much, that we were glad to take refuge in an out-house filled with smoke, on arriving at the village of Pantelejewa", to the east of the Kolyma. "We met here our former travelling companion, the active merchant, Bereshnoi, who helped us out

of a great perplexity. I had not been able to obtain the number of horses which we required, and the short summer might easily have been lost in fruitless endeavours to procure them, if M. Bereshnoi had not most kindly offered us the use of ten of his; at the same time entirely refusing any payment".

While Berezhoj's account might perhaps give some interesting information about the Wrangell expedition it should be of value on its own. Many of his journeys for trading purposes and to collect mammoth tusks were in fact also journeys of exploration.

### Commercial Fishery, Great Slave Lake

#### Summer 1948

Two separate commercial fishing operations were carried out at Great Slave Lake in the summer of 1948, one at Gros Cap and the other at Hay River. Though the season opened officially on June 15 the first lift at Gros Cap was not till June 23 while at Hay River operations were delayed until August 27 as the Grimshaw-Hay River Road was not passable till then. The season closed on September 15. Of the limit for trout and whitefish of 2,500,000 lbs. dressed weight, nearly 1,950,000 lbs. were taken leaving a carry-over of some 550,000 lbs. for the winter season. 1,140,000 lbs. were trout and 810,000 lbs. whitefish while 66,000 lbs. of inconnu and 3,700 lbs. of pickerel were also caught. At Gros Cap the McInnes Products Corporation obtained about 1,086,000 lbs. of trout and 703,000 lbs. of whitefish; this was rather less than the previous year probably owing to stormy weather. At Hay River the W. R. Menzies Fish Company obtained 52,000 lbs. of trout and 105,000 lbs. of whitefish. The effect of the completion of the Grimshaw-Hay River Road will probably be to increase commercial fishing in the Hay River area.

(From the *Arctic Circular*, Vol. II (1949) pp. 84-85).