

A.H. Joy (1887-1932)

Inspector Alfred Herbert Joy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is best known for a remarkable 1800-mile (2900-km) patrol by dogsled across the heart of the Queen Elizabeth Islands in 1929. He had a keen interest in and extensive knowledge of the Arctic, its wildlife and people, and was dedicated to upholding the law and jurisdiction of Canada in isolated arctic regions.

A.H. Joy was born in Maulden, eight miles south of Bedford, England on 26 June 1887, where he attended school, leaving the classroom in 1899 for work as a farm labourer. He then travelled to Canada, enlisting in the Royal North-West Mounted Police on 19 June 1909 after a short period of homesteading on the prairies. He rose rapidly through the ranks: corporal in 1912, sergeant in 1916, staff-sergeant in 1921, and inspector in 1927. He thrived on the challenge of life on the northern frontiers of Canada — from 1914 to 1931, he had never spent a summer in civilization.

After gaining valuable experience in the Mackenzie and Liard River regions, in 1920 he accompanied Inspector J.W. Phillips on a patrol by canoe, sailboat, and motor launch to investigate a complex murder case on the Belcher Islands. In 1921, following Canada's decision to extend jurisdiction into the Arctic Islands, Joy was selected to represent the government at Pond Inlet, northern Baffin Island. Soon after his arrival he undertook investigation of the Janes murder case. Joy travelled to Cape Crauford in December, where he found and exhumed Janes's body and conducted an autopsy. Later, in his capacity as coroner, he held an inquest and gathered a jury, the accused, and witnesses from as far away as Igloolik, in addition to presiding as Justice of the Peace at the trial. Following the trial he received a notable tribute from Mr. Justice Rivet for his outstanding work on this case — particularly for his thoroughness and fairness. He had enforced the law in the Arctic Islands for the first time.

In 1924, Joy made a hair-raising attempt to cross Lancaster Sound by dogsled from northern Baffin Island to test the practicability of communicating with the R.C.M.P. detachment on Ellesmere Island. Wide leads, fast-moving ice, buckling pressure ice, and polar bears were among the hazards Joy and his two native assistants encountered. With characteristic determination and understatement, Joy concluded that the trip to Ellesmere Island could be made in any kind of winter season — providing a return trip was not necessary!

After 1925, when Joy took over detachments on eastern Ellesmere Island (Craig Harbour, Bache Peninsula) and Devon Island (Dundas Harbour), he began a series of long exploratory patrols across the Queen Elizabeth Islands which would do credit to any great polar explorer. During these trips he was able to correct errors on maps, explore new sled routes, make notes on wildlife, vegetation, coal

outcrops, archaeological sites, sites of historic interest, weather, and sea-ice conditions. His detailed remarks on the numbers and migration of Peary caribou among the Queen Elizabeth Islands and the long distances arctic hares can travel on their hind legs are of great biological interest. He also foresaw new ways of patrolling the High Arctic, stating: "It would be possible, if necessary, I believe, to carry on an extensive survey of the islands west of Eureka sound by aeroplane." He made important biological and archaeological collections for what is now the National Museums of Canada. His collection of 700 specimens from a Palaeo-Eskimo site was acknowledged by the Chief of the Division of Anthropology to be . . . "one of the most valuable accessions that the Division has received since I took charge of it in 1910."

In 1926, Joy travelled with his assistant, Nookapeungwak, some 975 miles (1570 km) from Craig Harbour via Jones Sound to Axel Heiberg Island in 40 days. As a preliminary to this trip, Joy, Constable Dersch and Nookapeungwak explored a new, and at times dangerous, route from Craig Harbour to Dundas Harbour and back, across the Devon Island Ice Cap. In 1927, Joy, Nookapeungwak and Ahkeoo made a 1300-mile (2090-km), 54-day patrol from Bache Peninsula to King Christian Island and back. Once they travelled steadily for 29 hours. Joy's longest and most famous patrol involved a circuit of approximately 1800 miles (2900 km) in 81 days from Dundas Harbour on Devon Island to Bache Peninsula, Ellesmere Island by way of the following islands: Cornwallis, Bathurst, Melville, Edmund Walker, Lougheed, King Christian, Ellef Ringnes, Amund Ringnes, Cornwall, and Axel Heiberg. He was accompanied by Constable Taggart and the ever-reliable Nookapeungwak. The first part of this journey along the southern coast of Devon Island was extremely difficult.

Joy was a big, well-built man, who towered over his Inuit comrades. He was quiet and self-contained with a gift for making friends and commanding the respect of his fellows. He led by example, and was careful in giving proper credit to those who had helped him. In addition to his skill as a horseman, marksman, and boxer, Joy was fond of the dogs that aided him on his epic trips, and he was an accomplished dogsled driver.

Several geographical features have been named after Inspector Joy: Cape Joy (northern Baffin Island), Mount Joy and Joy River (southern Baffin Island), Joy Island (Belcher Islands), and Joy Range (Axel Heiberg Island).

Joy's end was tragic. He died at the age of 43, apparently of a stroke, on the morning of the day he was to be married in Ottawa. Major-General J.H. MacBrien, Commissioner of the R.C.M.P., wrote his epitaph: "Inspector Joy was a particularly fine officer, a magnificent Arctic traveller and his death was greatly regretted."



Sgt. A.H. Joy with Eskimos, 1920

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