The Franklin Expedition

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What was the Franklin expedition?

- A British voyage of Arctic exploration led by Captain Sir John Franklin sets off from England on May 19th, 1845 with 129 men. The ships are Terror and Erebus.
- The vessels are seen for the last time by Europeans in Baffin Bay July 28th, 1845
- Search missions are carried out starting 1848, involving 13 ships at peak effort
- There are no survivors. The ships are never found. Only a few tantalizing clues are discovered over the years.
Franklin Expedition in Canadian Culture

“In every culture many stories are told, (but) only some are told and retold, and these stories bear examining ... in Canadian literature, one such story is the Franklin expedition”

- Margaret Atwood
£20,000
REWARD

will be given by
Her Majesty's Government

to any party or parties of any country, who shall render efficient assistance to the crews of the discovery ships under the command of

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN,

1. To any Party or Parties who, in the judgment of the Board of Admiralty, shall discover and effectually relieve the crews of Her Majesty's Ships "Erebus" and "Terror," the

£20,000.

or

2. To any Party or Parties who, in the judgment of the Board of Admiralty, shall discover and effectually relieve any of the crews of Her Majesty's Ships "Erebus" and "Terror," or shall convey such intelligence as shall lead to the relief of such crews or any of them, the Sum of

£10,000.

or

3. To any Party or Parties who, in the judgment of the Board of Admiralty, shall by virtue of his or their efforts first succeed in ascertaining their fate,

£10,000.

W. A. B. HAMILTON,
Finding a ship in the arctic is hard
What happened?

• Without survivors, our only clues come from discovering artifacts and Inuit oral tradition
• Only one document is ever discovered. The note is found in 1859 on King William Island
H. M. ships 'Erebus' and 'Terror' wintered in the ice in 28 of May, 1847 lat. 70° 05' N. long. 98° 23' W. Having wintered in 1846–7 at Beechey Island in lat. 74° 43' 28" N.; long. 91° 39' 15" W., after having ascended Wellington Channel to lat. 77° and returned by the west side of Cornwallis Island. Sir John Franklin commanding the expedition. All well.

Party consisting of 2 officers and 6 men left the ships on Monday, 24 May 1847. Gm. Gore, Lieut. Chas. F. Des Voeus, Mate.
April 25, 1848 – H. M. ships 'Terror' and 'Erebus' were deserted on the 22d April, 5 leagues N. N. W. of this, having been beset since 12th September 1846. The officers and crews, consisting of 105 souls, under the command of Captain F. R. M. Crozier, landed here in lat. 69° 37' 42" N., long 98° 41' W. Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June, 1847; and the total loss by deaths in the expedition has been to this date 9 officers and 15 men.
The Graves
Lead poisoning

- Bone samples reveal high concentrations of lead in 1981
- Graves are exhumed for tissue / hair samples in 1984 confirming results
- Lead poisoning leads to severe mental and physical problems
- Badly soldered cans prepared in a hurry for the voyage?
- Poorly designed water systems?
Cannibalism

• The voyage had food supplies for 5 years
• "from the mutilated state of many of the bodies and the contents of the kettles, it is evident that our wretched Countrymen had been driven to the last dread alternative — cannibalism — as a means of prolonging existence"
Inuit encounters

• 1850: Inuit board an abandoned ship. Later, 40 men are seen walking south.
• 1851: Inuit hunters see four men heading south
• 1852-1858: Possible sighting of two survivors heading south
• 1854: Inuit interviews: items from expedition, tells that men starved to death after resorting to cannibalism
HMS Investigator

- Set out in 1848 to search for Franklin
- Abandoned in 1853 after becoming trapped in the ice.
- Inuit use the ship’s hull for copper and iron. One year the ship is “Gone without a trace”
- Discovered in 2010
THE HUNT
Parks Canada's search for Franklin's lost ships

- Search Area 2014
- Possible drift paths of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror
- Possible path of survivors by boat and by foot
- Reported location of Franklin Expedition artifacts, graves and skeletons found during subsequent explorations

- Search Area 2013
- Enlarged area

- O'Reilly Island

- HMS Investigator
- Found 2010

- HMS Erebus & HMS Terror

- Royal Geographical Society Islands
- Jenny Lind Island
- Taylor Island
- M'Clintock Island

- King William Island
- Ramsussen Basin
- Baillie Island
- Adelaide Peninsula
- Sherman Basin

- Enlarged area

- Search Areas 2013
- 0
- 30 km
- 100 m
Ship discovery video
Parks Canada has retrieved a bronze bell from the wreck of HMS Erebus, one of two ships lost during Sir John Franklin’s doomed expedition in search of the Northwest Passage.

The bell was found resting on the upper deck of the ship, surrounded by underwater plant life but in good condition. An arrow, used to signify property of the British Royal Navy, is still visible on the exterior along with 1845 — the year the Franklin expedition began.
Man Proposes, God disposes