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# **THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE**

**1940-1942 and 1944**

**The Famous Voyages of the  
Royal Canadian Mounted  
Police Schooner  
"St. Roch"**

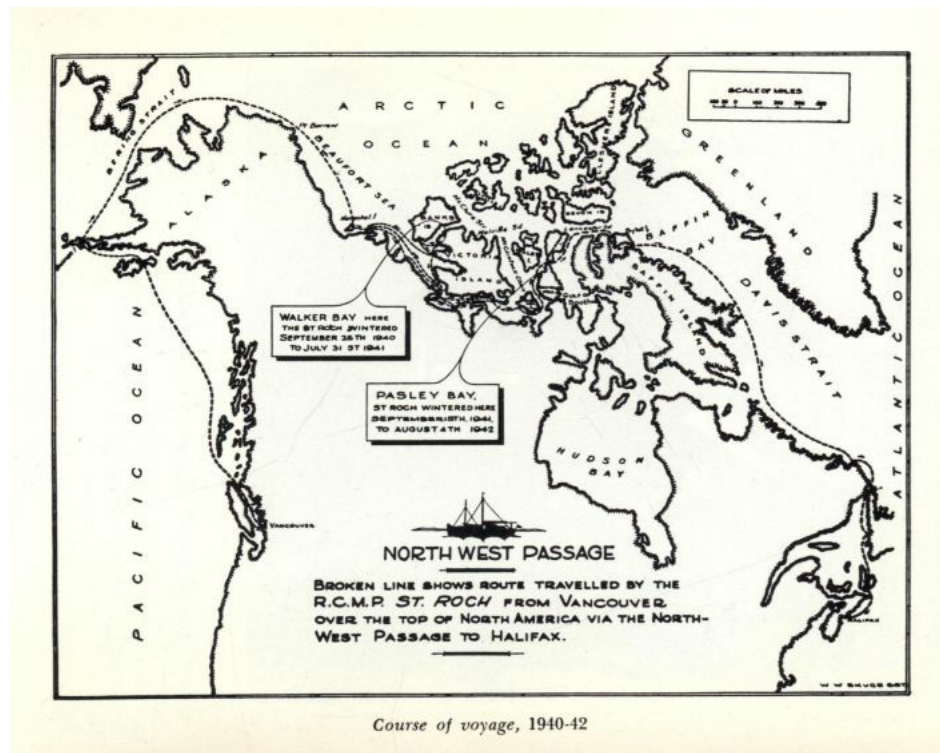
**SERGEANT HENRY LARSEN, F.R.G.S.,  
COMMANDER**



To My Friend Major J. S. Matthews, V.D.  
City Archivist Vancouver B.C.  
From Insp. Henry A. Larsen, R.C.M.P. "St. Roch"

H. A. Larsen.  
Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> 1948

To my Friend Major J. S. Matthews, V.D.  
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Course of voyage, 1940-42

**Course of voyage, 1940-42**

"H.M.S. Discovery, Nootka Sound,  
"October 2nd, 1794.

"We arrived here this day month all in high health and spirits, having truly determined the non-existence of any water communication between this and the opposite side of America within the bounds of our investigation beyond all doubt and disputation, hence I expect no further detention in this hemisphere.

"Yours with great truth and friendship,  
"GEO. VANCOUVER."

*From original letter in City Archives, Vancouver*

NOTE: The underlining of "truly determined" is Vancouver's



*Burrard Shipyard, North Vancouver, where the "St. Roch" was built, 1928 Aero Surveys Limited, Vancouver*

### ***Burrard Shipyard, North Vancouver, where the "St. Roch" was built, 1928***

## **THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE**

I will here endeavour to tell the story of the R.C.M.P. "St. Roch"; the little ship that twice made the North-West Passage—the first from Vancouver, B.C. to Halifax, N.S., 1940 to 1942, and also the return journey from Halifax, N.S., to Vancouver, B.C., during the summer of 1944.

The R.C.M.P. "St. Roch" has had an interesting career, having spent all her summers and eleven winters in the Arctic. Built in 1928 at the Burrard Shipyard, North Vancouver, B.C., especially for the R.C.M. Police, she has extra thick timbers of Douglas Fir, sheathed on the entire outside with Australian Gumwood, sometimes called Ironbark, to resist the grinding pressure of icefloes. This floating detachment of the R.C.M.P. is one hundred and four feet long, has a beam of twenty-five feet, and a draft of thirteen feet when fully loaded. Diesel-powered, she was assigned to patrol the Canadian Arctic and to convey supplies to our various land detachments along the Arctic Coast and Islands. Besides this she was meant to winter in remote places. The crew are all members of the R.C.M.P. and we generally carry nine men.

Our first winter in the North, 1928-29, was spent at Langton Bay at the foot of Franklin Bay, and the following spring we returned to Vancouver. In 1930 we again left for the North, remaining there four years, cruising in and around Coronation Gulf and westward as far as Herschel Island. After returning to Vancouver for a short period, we once more set sail for the Arctic in the spring of 1935, and the Cambridge Bay area became the "St. Roch's" field of operations for the next three winters, interrupted by a return voyage to Vancouver in 1937.

In 1939 we docked at the Naval Dockyard, Esquimalt, B.C., and the following spring we received one of our most important, and to my mind, most interesting, assignments. Our Commissioner, S. T. Wood, now informed us that when our regular duties along the Western Arctic Coast were completed, we were to proceed to Halifax, N.S., by way of the North-West Passage. On this trip we chose the Southern Passage; that is, eastward through Queen Maud Gulf, south of King William Island, then northward between Boothia Peninsula and the King Island Coast; or, in other words, we used the same route as taken by Amundsen in the "Gjoa" 1903-06, with the exception that we passed through Bellot Strait instead of Peel Sound. This gave us the opportunity to visit the remote Eskimo Tribes on Boothia Peninsula and the surrounding district. This voyage took us 28 months.

The summer of 1943 was spent in the Eastern Arctic, leaving Halifax, N.S., on July 17th with a full load for our Eastern Arctic Detachments. We returned on October 16th the same year after a patrol of about 8000 miles. We spent the winter of 1943-44 at Halifax undergoing repairs and having a 300-horsepower engine installed instead of our 150 so as to have more power for the coming voyage during the summer of 1944. Our instructions were to return to Vancouver via the Northern or Lancaster Sound Route. This had never before been completed

by any vessel, although many had tried in vain. The last one to try was the C.G.S. "Arctic" under Captain Bernier in 1910. Captain Bernier reached a point, a little beyond Winter Harbour on Melville Island, from where he was forced to return to Montreal.

After our overhaul in Halifax was completed, we left on July 22nd, making a 3-day stop at Sydney, N.S., for final checkups. We finally got under way, carried out our assigned work in the Arctic, and arrived in Vancouver, B.C., on October 16th, 1944. Thus, for the first time in history, we became the only vessel to complete the Northern Routes both ways, and the only vessel that had completed the Lancaster Sound Route, which is the better of the two. This route will no doubt be used in the future.

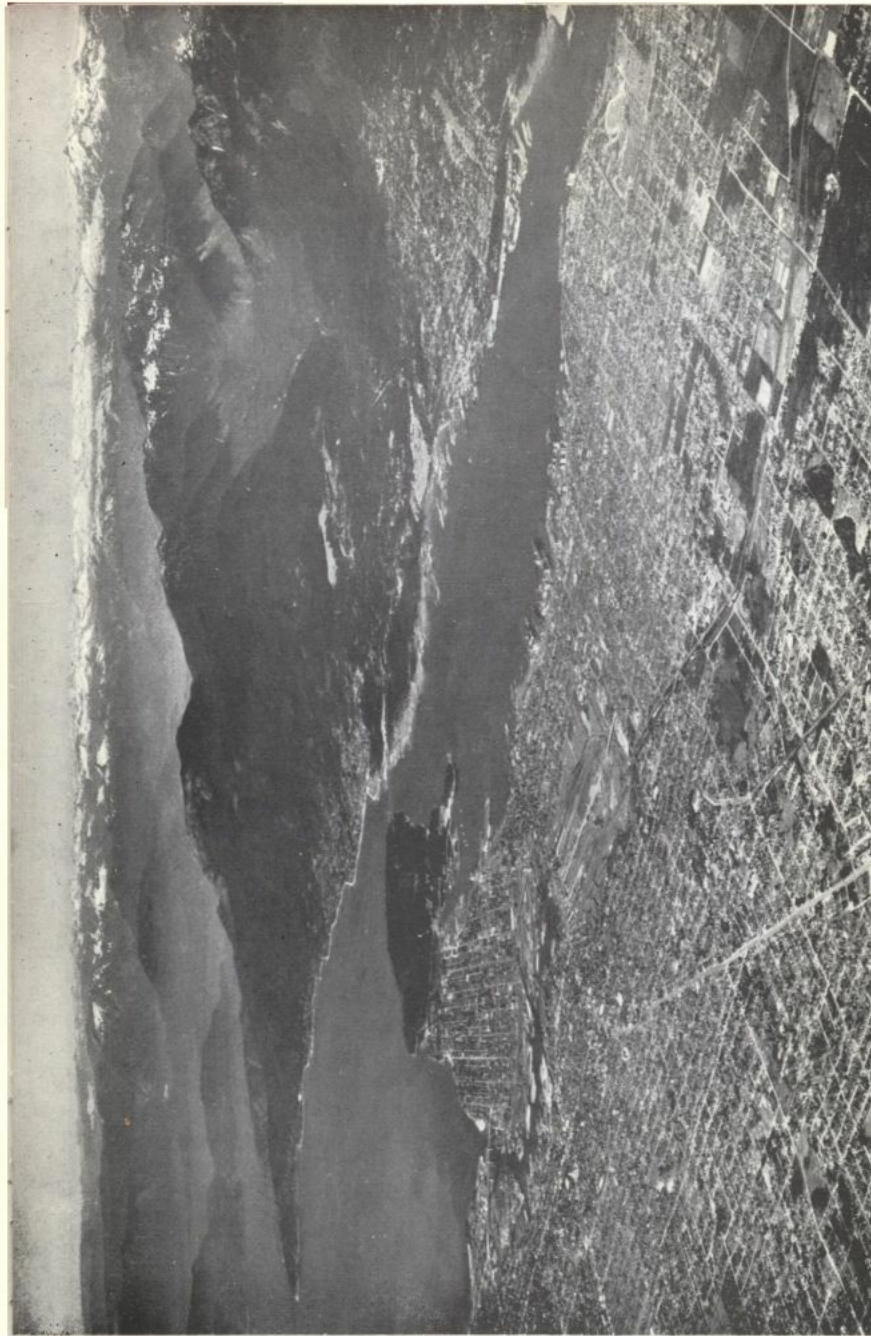
After laying up for a bit of overhaul in the Naval Dockyard, Esquimalt, B.C., during the winter, we again proceeded to the Arctic in the spring of 1945. We had instructions to winter at Cambridge Bay, where we arrived about the middle of September. Whilst there we acted as a wireless station and assisted the planes as a radio beacon supporting the Exercise Muskox. The men we met in connection with this force, both the moving force and the pilots, should be classed as among Canada's finest. We left Cambridge Bay August 11th, 1946, and arrived at Vancouver on September 26th, 1946, thus completing our eleventh winter.

I shall here take the opportunity to mention some of the duties of the R.C.M. Police in the Arctic Territories of our great Dominion. Firstly, to uphold and enforce Canada's sovereignty of her Arctic Islands; to act as administrators for the North-West Territories Council; maintaining game laws; making general checkups of Eskimos' living conditions; compiling Vital Statistics; authorizing the issuing of rations for the destitute aged and infirm Eskimos; taking of census; settling of any disputes which might arise; conveying children to and from the residential schools at Aklavik; and transferring sick Eskimos for treatment and hospitalization at Aklavik. Sometimes we assist in securing suitable Eskimos, with their families, who we transport from the Coronation Gulf area to the Mackenzie River Delta to learn to herd and look after the reindeer herd provided by the Canadian Government for the Eskimos in that area.

The Eskimos in the Mackenzie River Delta and its immediate surroundings are now quite civilized, many of them owning small power-schooners and small frame houses. Most of them do quite well in trapping fur-bearing animals and therefore do not take as much interest in the reindeer herding as their less fortunate brethren in the Coppermine and Coronation Gulf area. It is these latter people who, I think, will in the future receive the benefit from these herds; especially when the reindeer have multiplied to such an extent that they can be split into several smaller herds. They can then be transported eastward as far as the Coronation Gulf and Boothia Peninsula areas, where the Eskimos still live their primitive and nomadic existence in snowhouses during the winter, and tents during the summer months.

When I said that part of our duty is maintaining game laws, I did not mean that we make our Eskimos observe these rules strictly to the letter as far as obtaining animals for food and clothing, which are necessary for the well-being of the nomadic life these people live, is concerned. What we do, is to advise them not to kill caribou unnecessarily nor to waste the meat or skins, or use it exclusively for dogfeed. For this latter purpose, we advise them to obtain fish. The lakes and the small rivers are teeming with fish that are easily caught with nets. These nets are now obtainable at all the Hudson's Bay Company Trading Posts in the Arctic. I should mention here that only about twenty-five years ago, in the central part of the Arctic—that is, the area between Coppermine River and the eastern side of Boothia Peninsula—all the hunting was done with bows and arrows. This form of hunting did not deplete the game to any extent, although it provided the Eskimos with their requirements. With the introduction of modern firearms, it was but natural that a primitive, and in many ways, childlike people, would use these new weapons indiscriminately on any game they saw, whether they needed it or not. Therefore, in many areas, much big game such as muskoxen and caribou was sadly depleted, until such time as the R.C.M. Police had been firmly established, so they could visit these people regularly. We do stop them from killing muskoxen at the present time, and point out their mistakes in killing and possibly exterminating these animals. We also endeavour to explain that the policy of the Canadian Government in protecting these animals is for the welfare of their young sons and the coming generations of Eskimos. They are a very intelligent people and readily understand these points, besides, they are very fond of having things explained to them. We have found that these explanations have a much better effect than just forbidding them to do certain things. One game regulation we make them observe strictly is the season of taking fur-bearing animals. White fox, for instance, are plentiful along the Arctic mainland, also on the Islands. The white foxes concern the Eskimos mostly, so the North-West Territories Administration in Ottawa, after very careful study of the habits of the white fox, came to the conclusion that these animals should only be taken during the period of November 1st and April 1st in any one year. The pelts during this period were found to be prime, or in good condition for commercial use. The game regulations in this regard were therefore amended and drawn up accordingly. Nearly all the Eskimos now trap extensively in order to obtain the necessities to which civilization has made them accustomed; that is, such items as flour, sugar, tea, coal oil, rowboats, outboard motors, fishnets, tents, and most important, rifles and ammunition. They now receive good prices for their furs at many scattered Hudson's Bay Company Posts in the Arctic.





*Vancouver from the air*

*Aero Surveys Limited, Van*

### ***Vancouver from the air***

What I now would like to tell you concerns our two North-West Passages, the winters, and some of the people we came in contact with. After having loaded our little vessel to full capacity with fuel and provisions for our own need, and also for our Western Arctic Detachments, we left Vancouver at 2:50 a.m. June 23rd, 1940, and proceeded northward through the inside passage as far as the north end of Vancouver Island. From this point we headed "St. Roch's" blunt bow westward across the Pacific direct for Unimak Pass. Some bad weather was encountered, and at times our heavily laden vessel was almost completely submerged, causing large volumes of water to pour down into our living quarters, adding discomfort to the members who were off watch trying to get a little sleep. This is a hard thing to do when one constantly is on the verge of being tossed out of one's bunk with each roll of the ship. Sometimes the galley fire had to be put out owing to the back-draft, caused by the quick rolling motion of the ship, blowing down the smokestack. Some of our boys had never before been on a vessel or salt water, but to their everlasting credit they stood up well; and taking everything as a matter of fact, they soon found their sea legs.



*Sergeant Larsen of the North-West Passage*

### ***Sergeant Larsen of the North-West Passage***

On July 4th we passed through Unimak Pass from the Pacific into the Bering Sea. We took shelter for a while in Akun Cove in order to tidy the ship up a bit before proceeding to Dutch Harbour. Here we took the opportunity to catch a few cod and halibut and had a good feed, which we all needed. On July 6th we arrived in Dutch Harbour. Next day being Sunday, we were royally entertained by the officers and crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter "Shoshone" of the Bering Sea Patrol. Some of them were, I think, a bit amused at seeing our small vessel whose decks were completely hidden under hundreds of coal sacks, oil drums, and small rowboats, stacks of cases containing fresh potatoes, eggs and various vegetables that we couldn't store in our holds, and on top of all this deckload were, of course, our men in our Mounted Police uniforms, trying to act and walk in a dignified and military manner as laid down in our training. However, friendly relations were soon established between our men and the American sailors who began to swarm aboard the "St. Roch", and to entertain us with tales that they had heard or read about in the States, regarding some of the exploits of the R.C.M. Police. Some of the feats they mentioned, I believe, far surpassed those accomplished by Superman or Flash Gordon; anyway they were all fine boys, and we soon had enough volunteers to man ten ships like the "St. Roch".

On July 9th we said goodbye to our friends and headed northward. On July 15th we entered the harbour of Teller, sometimes called Port Clarence, a small settlement about 80 miles north of Nome. It was here that Amundsen landed with his airship, Norge, in 1926 after crossing over the Pole from Spitsbergen. We called here for the purpose of picking up dried fish previously ordered for dogfeed, also to give our engines a checkover before getting into the icepack. Leaving Teller on July 16th we ran into some very dirty weather in Bering Straits, which we passed through without seeing a glimpse of land. Thick weather and strong southerly winds prevailed and the next land we picked up and recognized was Cape Lisburne. We could expect the ice anytime now. As we all were in need of a bit of rest, and the weather was still bad with thick fogbanks, I decided to anchor at Point Hope for a while. This is a long sandspit projecting about 15 miles from the mainland into the sea. On the point itself there is a settlement of about 300 Eskimos, also a residential school teacher and his family. When we anchored, several large umiaks or skinboats loaded with Eskimos, the teacher, Mr. King, and his family, came out to visit us. However, the anchorage is exposed, and although the wind had died down, the long rolling swell made the "St. Roch" roll so violently that they all got seasick and had to go ashore after a visit of about half an hour. Shortly afterwards we were compelled to weigh our anchor and pull out to sea owing to increase and change in winds.

During the latter years the Smithsonian Institute and the University of Alaska have done a lot of work in the way of research and excavation on the sandspit of Point Hope. Many fine ivory carvings, ornamental and otherwise, were found, also tools and weapons and hunting implements, many made of green and black jade. It is estimated that people have been living there for well over a thousand years; they were a people who made their living from the sea, and even in that age hunted the whale and walrus. It is possible that they were the ancestors of the present people there, but in their days they must have been much further advanced, judging from the carvings and implements I have seen.

On July 22nd we arrived and anchored off Cape Smyth. This is a large settlement usually known as Point Barrow, although it is situated 10 miles to the southwest along the coast. The population consists of about 500 Eskimos. There is a large hospital, a church, and a large school which comes under the U.S. Bureau of Education. There is also a wireless station. We paid a short visit ashore, and were heartily welcomed by our Arctic neighbours in the traditional manner of American hospitality. The most colourful figure in this place was, of course, "Old Charlie



Brower", a resident of these parts for over fifty years. He was known all over Alaska as "King of the Arctic". Shortly before his death about three years ago he wrote a book called "Fifty Years Below Zero".

As the anchorage here was dangerous so early in the season we did not linger long, but pushed on in order to round Barrow Point itself. This is a long narrow point extending in the Arctic Ocean, with northerly and westerly winds causing the ice to jam up against it. It is dangerous for a vessel to remain in the west side of the point when the ice is close. Many vessels have, in previous years, been caught here, and have either been crushed or carried off with the ice. We were fortunate this time, as there was a little water between the grounded ice and we rounded the point at 3:30 p.m. on July 23rd. Once around the point the conditions became a bit better, owing to the fact that the land takes an East South East direction, and thereby allows a freer movement for the ice, except when there are north winds, which forces the ice in along the shallow coastline.

The year 1940 was bad for ice, with prevailing northerly and northwesterly winds, and we were continually getting beset by heavy old ice. It took us from July 23rd to August 12th to make the 400 miles between Point Barrow and Herschel Island. Sometimes there was not a drop of water in sight as the ice packed itself tightly together around us. At other times we were free to move around in little pools from which there was no outlet or leads. At all times we had to be on the move to avoid damage, only moving sometimes a shiplength or two. At times black gunpowder was used to crack particularly nasty floes threatening our rudder and propeller.

At Herschel Island, long ago the winter rendezvous for the Arctic whalers, we were met by Inspector Bullard in the R.C.M.P. boat "Aklavik". He had arrived from the settlement named Aklavik, in order to receive the coal, etc., we had brought for them from Vancouver. Herschel Island at one time had a large population of Eskimos. There were several tradings posts and the wintering of the many whaling vessels with hundreds of men in the early days didn't do the native population much good. It was not until 1904, when the R.C.M. Police established there, that some of their activities were stopped, but as is often the case with primitive people, they were then already on the decline. Then to finish things off, in 1928 there was a severe epidemic of influenza, destroying most of the remaining natives. Herschel Island is for the present abandoned; the few families surviving the 1928 epidemic have moved to the Mackenzie Delta. The Hudson's Bay moved their post to a place called by the Eskimos "Tuktoyaktok"—"the place where deer cross"—now abbreviated to Tuk Tuk, or, as the Hudson's Bay Company call it, "Port Brabant". We called there on August 24th, picking up a native woman and child from Aklavik Hospital, for transportation to Cambridge Bay, also two boys from the Anglican School to be returned to their people in the East. We arrived at Coppermine on August 31st, where we remained until September 2nd, discharging supplies for our Detachment. Then we proceeded to Cambridge Bay on the eastern end of Victoria Island. It was September 10th before we were finished there.



*The "St. Roch" in the ice, Pt. Barrow*

### ***The "St. Roch" in the ice, Pt. Barrow***

I had hoped when leaving Vancouver that we would be able to proceed eastward, but the season was too far advanced for the narrow passages around King William Island and as we had no particular reason to winter in this vicinity we proceeded westward in order to winter at Banks Island or Walker Bay on the west side of Victoria Island. The season before freezeup is a bit longer in this area, also we had instructions to visit the Eskimos trapping the west side of Banks Island. These are Mackenzie Delta people and they have small power schooners in which they travel every year to Aklavik to sell their furs, and purchase fresh supplies. We didn't however, find a suitable harbour for our vessel on Banks Island so proceeded across Prince of Wales Strait to Walker Bay, arriving on September 25th. It was now nearly freeze-up time, so we had to get busy setting nets in the lakes already frozen, and hunting seals in order to get dogfeed. Our dogs, also a native family, we had picked up at Cambridge Bay.

Before the winter sets in, it is necessary to cover or build a canvas housing over the ship, otherwise the fine sifting snow finds its way into our living quarters. The snow is very fine, and during a heavy blow it penetrates the finest little cracks in the doors. When the ice on the lakes is about 12 inches thick, we cut our water supply for the winter. We generally locate a lake with deep water and with an approach fairly free from rocks so that we can use our dogs to haul the ice back to the ship. All hands get busy with large ice saws and we cut perhaps 40 tons of ice to ensure a sufficient water supply for the winter. Every drop of water used must be melted. In our living quarters we place 45 gallon drums that are filled with crushed ice. On the stoves there are constantly kettles of water, and when boiling we pour the water over the ice. This performance goes on every day. We then got busy preparing for our journeys to Banks Island. The dogs were broken in, the steel sled runners on our large 16 to 18-foot sleighs were given a covering of mud, which was later smoothed and polished, a piece of bearskin being used for applying a thin coat of ice outside of the mud. The sleds then pull with a minimum of friction; steel pulls too hard over the frosty snow. This is the Eskimo method which we adopted. When we leave on our patrol we have often 1,500 pounds on our sled pulled by 11 dogs. Of course there is not much riding as one constantly has to mind and watch the sleds. During fairly good going we can cover 30 to 40 miles per day. We also adopted the Eskimo way of clothing with caribou skin. Double outfits in real cold weather are used. The inside has the fur next to one's body, If the going gets tough the outside garment can be removed and what we call a snowshirt, made of cotton drill or grenfell cloth, can be put on. We never carry a tent during the winter as it is only extra weight; our camps every night are made of snow. For building our snowhouses we carry long snow or butcher knives, and these are among the necessary implements on a sled trip, as, without them, camps could not be built.



*Taking on fresh water from pools on the ice.*

### ***Taking on fresh water from pools on the ice.***

For cooking we use Swedish Primus stoves. A finer implement for Arctic travellers, I think, has never been invented. It burns coal oil, is very economical, and very seldom goes out of order, even with the abuse it gets. Our food we cook before leaving. We have so far never had the opportunity to try any of the special food packages put up for the Army, Air-force, or other parties going into the Arctic during the last few years. The food taken on our patrols was therefore prepared from the ordinary supplies issued to us, and it is prepared by the men themselves going on the patrols. For instance, beans are always in great demand. We generally cook up a five gallon pot; in them we put lots of fine cut bacon, canned meat (fresh if we have it), lots of canned tomatoes, onions, molasses, sugar, mustard, and salt; they are boiled until very thick, which requires constant stirring. When done they are ladled out in large pans and allowed to freeze, after which they are broken up with an axe into small chunks and placed in small canvas bags for easy carrying and handling. As a variation we also boiled rice, potatoes, other vegetables and meat; these items are all put through the meat grinder after being cooked, and worked together in a large breadpan or boiler. Instead of water for moisture, lots of canned soup or tomatoes are used, some spices added, and the whole thing made into little flat patties that are frozen and put away in canvas bags. When making camp one can then have a meal in a few minutes, by placing a few beans or some of the patties in a pot and adding a little water. Instead of the pilot bread or hardtack, which takes up a lot of room, and does not give great satisfaction to a hungry traveller, we cook up hundreds of doughnuts. They are also, of course, frozen and put in bags. Whilst making tea or coffee, a few are placed on top of the lid to thaw a bit so they can be chewed, although they are never soft. Rolled oats are light to carry, and a big pot is generally cooked for breakfast. Besides this, we take dried onions and carrots, also some rice, as there is always the opportunity to pick up game on our way, so a good stew can be made. We also saw frozen fish into slices of about an inch thick; a slice of this is generally eaten as soon as the camp is made, while we are waiting for the snow to melt for water. Strange as it seems, this raw frozen fish gives one a warm feeling of well-being after a few minutes. The Eskimos say that the frozen fish forces the warm blood from the inside out to the skin and makes one feel warm. This sounds reasonable to me as I have tried it many times. We also pack a small bag of flour and baking powder with us. When forced to lay over, as we sometimes do during bad weather, we have lots of time to make a few hot bannocks or pancakes; these we cook mostly in beef tallow, which we pack with us, and I find it better than the lard.



*Sergeant Larsen on patrol with sleigh*

***Sergeant Larsen on patrol with sleigh***

For our dogs we carry dried fish and seal blubber all cut up in squares ready to be swallowed. The blubber is stowed in cans so as not to make a mess of our gear. If short of blubber we pack beef tallow for them, as they have to have fat with the dried fish. Fresh fish, or what we call greenfish, is too heavy to pack on long patrols. For sleeping gear we use the Woods Arctic sleeping robe, sometimes we use caribou skin bags, if we can get them. They are light and less bulky than the robes. There are numerous other details in connection with a long dog patrol, taking anywhere from two to three months, during which time one practically has to pack everything.





*The "St. Roch" in the ice, McClintock Channel*

### ***The "St. Roch" in the ice, McClintock Channel***

To go on with the voyage, we remained frozen in at Walker Bay from September 25th, 1940, until July 31st, 1941, when the ice allowed us to move out. Proceeding southward, we called at Holman Island in order to pick up a young Eskimo boy accidentally shot through the cheeks by his brother with a 22-calibre rifle. This boy we took to Tuktoyaktok, where he could get transportation to Aklavik for medical attention. Whilst at Tuk, we picked up the supplies which arrived via the Mackenzie River, some for ourselves and some for the Coppermine and Cambridge Bay Detachments.

After our work in this connection was completed we left Cambridge Bay August 20th, 1941. We arrived at Gjoa Haven, King William Island, August 27th. That summer also proved bad with ice and violent snow squalls. When we reached Matty Island the ice was solid across from shore to shore, and more was driven down MacClintock Channel by prevailing North-West gales. There, we nearly lost the ship, as the waters were full of shoals, and the force of the wind and snow in our faces made it impossible to see. We dropped both anchors behind a reef and prayed that they would hold, which they did, although great floes kept crashing down on us all night. By September 3rd we had worked up to Pasley Bay, vicinity of the Magnetic Pole, and all progress was stopped by ice. We got caught there and drifted back and forth with the ice until September 11th, when we got jammed in close to the beach, and all ice in the bay became stationary until August 4th, 1942. We moved out of the bay about 15 miles, there we again got locked in, drifting back and forth in the vicinity where Sir John Franklin's ships, the "Erebus" and "Terror", were beset and abandoned nearly one hundred years before. On August 24th a small lead opened and we worked our way up to Tasmania Islands, where we remained until the 29th, close to the beach. There was a little open water between these islands and the loose ice moved back and forth with the change of the tides at terrific speed in the narrow channels, keeping us all awake. We had to be constantly on the move to avoid damage or getting pushed ashore. On the 29th we were able to proceed northward, by heading a bit for Prince of Wales Island, which we followed up until abeam of Bellot Strait. We cut across and entered this Strait the same night. The western end of the Strait was clear of ice, but in the middle there was a barrier right across, held there by some heavy grounded ice. This Strait is only half a mile wide and there is a terrific current. As the ice came pouring in behind us, there was nothing else to do but crash into it and attempt to drift through. This we did; the strong current causing large whirlpools in which large cakes of ice spun and gyrated. Many times we thought the ship would crack like a nut under the pressure. Sometimes we became stationary off projecting points of land—high, dark, inaccessible cliffs—the Strait is about 18 miles long.

We had two young Eskimos aboard, a man and his wife. One has to admire the quality of these people. At times when things looked really bad they would go up on the fore-castle head and sing at the top of their voices. They told me they were singing so the ship wouldn't get crushed, so I told them to keep on singing. They were quite pleased after we got through, when I told them their singing had no doubt helped us a great deal. Meanwhile, the people at the eastern end of the Strait, at the Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Ross, had anxiously watched our struggles, and they all came swarming aboard to welcome us.

We considered our voyage practically over at this time as the Hudson's Bay Company ship "Nascopie" has called here regularly every year since 1937. But it so happened that in 1942 it didn't reach Fort Ross owing to the ice pouring into Prince Regent Inlet after we left. On September 2nd we proceeded to Ponds Inlet, northern part of Baffin Island, where we have a Detachment, picked up one of our men there due to go out, then proceeded southward on September 10th. In Davis Strait we ran into a strong south-east gale with snow squalls and no visibility. The sea was studded with small icebergs and growlers, as the small, almost submerged, icebergs are called, some disappearing in the swell, then bobbing up again like gigantic sea-monsters. With our low power it was hard to dodge them as the suction seemed to drag us towards them. One struck us and knocked a piece off our hardwood guard rail. Had it struck us lower down it would have gone right through the bottom. We finally arrived at

Halifax, N.S., on October the 11th, and our voyage was over.

Whilst frozen in at Pasley Bay we made many patrols in order to get acquainted with the country and to visit and take census of the Eskimos scattered in small groups along the coast of Boothia Peninsula and North Somerset Island. One of our trips took us to Victoria Harbour in Thorn Bay on the east side of Boothia Isthmus. It is the largest Eskimo settlement on that coast. The people live almost as they did in 1829, when Sir John Ross arrived there in his ship "Victory" in search of the North-West Passage. After three winters, during which time Sir John was unable to extricate his vessel from the ice, he abandoned it in the spring of 1831. We visited the place where he left the ship and found large pieces of iron plates and bolts from his little steam boiler and engine, also coils of old hemp rope. There was an old bronze cannon there which almost broke my heart to leave behind, as it was too heavy to pull on our sled. The Eskimos all had implements and seal oil lamps made from the iron plates from the boiler. The older people still vividly describe the men on the "Victory" from the tales handed down to them by their forefathers; the ship itself, they said, had finally drifted out of the harbour, and smashed up and sunk near one of the many islands in Lord Mayor Bay.

The Eskimos in these regions are very talkative. Once their natural shyness is over, they readily answer all questions about the country. They talk about the people who lived there before them; these they call the Tunit People and describe them as being very big. They lived in houses constructed of stones, whalebones and earth. The Eskimo legends are that when they (the Eskimos) arrived they had great fights with these people and finally killed them all, mostly when they slept. They can still point to the spot where they say the last of the Tunits were killed. When old implements are found they can tell with certainty whether they are from their own or from Tunit origin. Most of these legends are no doubt true. At many places along the east coast of North Somerset Island, and the coast of Boothia, we saw remains of these Tunit villages. At one point I must have counted at least 40 large mounds, the remains of old houses. From these there were sticking out from the ground the large whale ribs used for construction, also many whale skulls. Even at the present time the Eskimos make trips to these ancient building sites for whalebone, which they split and use for sleigh-shoeing. How long ago since the Tunit people disappeared no one knows. Some day in the future I hope the Canadian Government will send competent men in there to excavate some of these old settlements, which might date back thousands of years. One thing is certain, the people who lived there must have been further advanced than the Eskimos, since they lived in houses and hunted such large mammals as the whale.



*Eskimos live a very hard life. A photograph taken on the ice in James Ross Strait.*

***Eskimos live a very hard life.  
A photograph taken on the ice in James Ross Strait.***

From whence the Eskimos came no one perhaps will ever know with certainty. Their legends, old beliefs and customs are dying out fast; the bringers of civilization have been too busy teaching them our history, beliefs and ways of living to find out anything about these people first. They are one of the most remarkable people in the world today. Their small number covers perhaps more territory than any other race on earth. The ones we have come in contact with, in the localities from Bering Strait to Hudson's Bay, seem to differ somewhat in appearance in different localities, although their language is universally the same, with the exception of local dialects. The ones nearest in physical appearance, it seems to me, are the ones farthest apart geographically. For example, the Eskimos from the Alaskan Coast look very much the same as the ones from Baffin Island, and their dialects are nearly the same. An Eskimo family we took with us from Baffin Island to Herschel Island expressed surprise over the fact that it was much easier for them to converse with the western or Mackenzie Eskimos than with their immediate neighbours across Prince Regent Inlet and King William Island. The Eskimos living in the Coronation Gulf area, in Bathurst Inlet, and Victoria Island, as far east as Cambridge Bay, appear to be taller, with better features, some very ruddy, and of a generally more handsome appearance than either the Alaskans or Baffinlanders.





*Eskimo snow huts—a camp. Dog team resting.*

***Eskimo snow huts—a camp. Dog team resting.***

The Eskimos who have the hardest life are probably the few scattered groups living around Boothia and Adelaide Peninsulas, and in the King William Island regions; they are also the most primitive. Owing to the lack of caribou, on which they depend for clothing, they nearly always seem to be ragged and dirty. In the spring and summer they mostly go inland in search of deer, returning again to the sea-ice in the fall in order to hunt seals, which are their main source of food and fuel during the long winter. Some years when they have failed in the deer hunt, one can find them huddled together in miserable little snow huts, just eking out an existence, waiting for spring. The best of the clothing, in many cases the sleeping skins, have to be made over for the men, in order that they may stay out on the ice to spear seals at the breathing holes, or jig for torn cods, small specie of codfish, hardly more than a head with a tail attached to it. The women and children have to stay around the snowhouses, sometimes clothed only in dirty old deerskin rags, many times with parts of their bodies exposed. Under such conditions they cannot travel very far in search of better hunting. Whatever game is secured is divided by the wife of the lucky hunter and given to the other women in camp. They all share alike; no one seems to keep anything extra for themselves; everybody is free to visit each other's snowhouse and to help themselves to any food or meat laying around. Sometimes they all congregate in one snowhouse and eat the food; the precious seal blubber used to cook the meat is conserved that way. It sometimes happens under these circumstances that some of the very old and infirm commit suicide, as is their custom, in order not to impose on the younger and able hunters. I have never heard of anyone being deliberately "put out of the way", although there have been many rumours that it is done; but these, I think, come mostly from people who have never come in close contact with the various Eskimos, or seen the conditions under which some of them exist. I know one old Eskimo who committed suicide. This man, a great hunter in his day, strangled himself—which seems to be the most popular way—just a few days before my arrival. It was during one of the bad winters I have mentioned, and took place in 1937, at a place on the ice a few miles eastward from King William Island. Upon inquiry of his wife and relatives I found that he had been ailing for nearly a year and had lost the use of his legs. The other men used to pull him out to the seal holes by sled, where he would sit for hours poised over the hole, waiting to strike a seal. Sometimes he succeeded, but finally he got worse and could no longer be taken out, and had to remain laying down in his snowhouse, which was shared by his son-in-law and his married sister. Many times during the winter, his wife and son-in-law said, he had asked for his rifle so that he could shoot himself, but all Eskimos now had heard about the police and knew that some other people who had committed murder for other reasons had been taken away. They were scared that they would be blamed and would not help him, as was sometimes done before when men were too sick to help themselves to die. However, after many arguments from the old man, all the men left camp for the seal hunt, as it is not customary that they be present when someone kills himself. The old man now only had the women to deal with, and it was their custom to obey the head of the house. His wife said he asked her to fasten the line of his seal spear through the roof of the snowhouse so he could strangle himself. This she refused to do and he got so angry she said she cried and cried, and finally ran outside where they could hear her husband calling. They finally went in again and her husband kept begging them. His daughter, a girl 15 or 16 years old, then went out and fastened the line, but did not return. Her husband now made a loop, then got on his knees and called for his women folks to come. As his daughter had not returned he told his wife to get her, and when they had come back and stood around him he put his head in the loop, looked at them all, then leaned forward and died right away. After a while they cut him down, wrapped him in the skin he had been laying on, and dragged him outside. When the men came home that evening they pulled the body to a little rocky island and left it there, as no Eskimo likes to be left on the ice after they are dead. Then the whole group had to move camp perhaps ten miles or so. I went to the little island to look at the dead man so as to confirm their story that he had died from strangulation, although I believed the story. It so happened that before my return a strong snowstorm came up, lasting for several days. No one could go out hunting and they had to sit in their snowhouses, cold and miserable. On my return to camp a few days later they said the blow must have been sent by the dead man because I had disturbed him.

One cannot help but like and admire the Eskimos; especially so the more primitive groups among them, whom we have contacted; their helpfulness to one another, their resourcefulness in hard times, and their fondness for children. As far as I have seen there is no such thing as the unwanted step-child. If a child's parents die or are unable to care for it, the child is immediately adopted by some one who can, and he fares the same as their own children. In their primitive way of life they need one another in order to hunt, live and exist. Some of their customs perhaps do not agree with our way of thinking, but they are no worse than many among civilized people.

The only sad happening which took place during the second winter of our first patrol through the North-West Passage was when one of our comrades, Constable Chartrand, died suddenly of a heart attack. As Chartrand was an ardent Catholic, and the only member of that denomination on the "St. Roch", we thought it but right that, if possible, he should be buried with the ritual of his Church. At Pelly Bay, about 400 miles from us, we knew there was a priest, Father Henry, living among the Eskimos, almost as one of them. Corporal Hunt and myself set out to locate him

and if possible to have him come and perform the ceremony. On this journey we came in contact with many of the Eskimos scattered in small groups southward along the east side of Boothia. Wherever we arrived we were most heartily welcomed. They gave us the choicest tidbits of seal meat, fish, or any other things that might happen to be simmering in their pots, always hanging over the blubber lamps. The ladies of the house almost continuously tend these lamps and pots, some of which contained heads of large bearded seals with long drooping moustaches and large mournful eyes staring at us from the pot. Some times an old wrinkled woman would put her hand in a pot, search around for a while, then pull out a choice piece of meat and squeeze it between her fingers, then give it a few licks with her tongue; then, with a gracious smile, she would hand it to us. Not to ignore this friendly gesture we would pull out our knives, cut off a few pieces of meat, then toss the remainder back in the pot.

On arrival at one of these snow villages near Lord Mayor Bay one evening we heard quite a commotion issuing from the largest house. After securing our dogs we crawled in through the passage leading into the house, and much to our surprise found a great big man dressed in an enormous pair of white bearskin pants and a white parka standing in the middle of the house playing a concertina. All around him stood or squatted about 40 Eskimo men, women and children singing "Shall We Gather at the River" in their own tongue. After our mutual surprise they recognized us as white men. The big man shook hands with us and introduced himself as Canon Turner, the Anglican Missionary from Pond Inlet, Baffin Island. He had arrived a day earlier on his annual visit from Baffin Island. After we had shaken hands with everyone, including the small babies, still on their mothers' backs, where they are carried so as to keep them warm, they continued on with the service, mostly singing, in which we joined. This kept up for about five hours or more, until a large section of the snowhouse roof caved in from the heat of such a large gathering. As the weather was mild outside, it was not worth while building a new roof in the dark. Instead, we all commenced eating, everybody contributing something to the feast. Some of the Eskimos brought in armfuls of frozen fish, while Canon Turner cooked a large pot of rolled oats. We contributed some tea and sugar, also the use of our primus stoves. By the time everyone was through eating, and all the news was swapped between Canon Turner and ourselves, it was after three in the morning. As many of us as possible stretched out on the sleeping platform for a bit of rest; Canon Turner, Corporal Hunt and myself in the center. On each side of us slept an Eskimo family, complete with little children. Between the small babies, which cried at times, and the snoring of the grown-ups, we did not get a great deal of sleep before they started getting up. Corporal Hunt and myself had scarcely dozed off when we were awakened by the tunes from Canon Turner's concertina. He was standing in the middle of the snowhouse holding morning service, with a number of Eskimos standing around singing. The chanting voices of the Eskimos lulled us to sleep again, and we did not waken until a plate of porridge was put into our hands by Canon Turner, who was about ready to leave on his homeward journey. At this spot the North-West Passage was again completed. Canon Turner came from England and had arrived from an east coast port of Canada, coming to Baffin Island on the Hudson's Bay Company steamer "Nascopie", and crossed over to Boothia by dogs. We had arrived from Vancouver to the west side of Boothia, then travelled around it by dogs. Our meeting with Canon Turner was purely one of chance, neither of us knew of the other's movements.

From here we hired an Eskimo to guide us to Pelly Bay in order to locate Father Henry. We arrived at his place late on the night before Good Friday. We found the Father living in a stone house, probably about 16 feet by 24 feet long, that he had built entirely by himself. It was really a masterly piece of work, as he had fitted all these hundreds of stones of various shapes and sizes together with clay taken from the ground, about two feet down from the surface soil. We found him to be a most charming and genial man. He lived practically on the country's natural resources, mostly seal meat and fish, at times eating raw frozen fish. This is no doubt what kept him in such wonderful health. In one part of the house, which he had partitioned off with skins and pieces of wood, he had a little heater in which he burned chunks of seal blubber and moss. Here he also ate and slept. He turned this room over to us, insisting on sleeping on the floor himself. He offered us a glass of wine, but when the little keg was brought in, it was frozen solid. It was a while before it thawed out enough to give us each a glass. The wine and the fact that we had travelled 55 miles that day made us fall asleep while the Father was saying his midnight Mass. Next morning when we awoke the Father had already held his morning service and was busy preparing breakfast for us. When we tried to excuse ourselves for sleeping through his services, the Father just laughed in his kind, humorous way and said that it was but right that we should sleep like good Protestants while he prayed for us. The Eskimos now began to arrive from the surrounding district, and in a little while about 25 snowhouses had been built. Everyone was coming to attend Easter Service. On Easter morning we joined in the service, attended by about 80 Eskimos of all ages, packed into the little stone building. There was no room and nothing for them to sit on, so they were nearly all standing up, except for a few old ones who squatted on the floor. The Father had taught hymns and prayers to these people, and the service was held in the Eskimo language. The Father looked wonderful in his robes. He is a fine big man with a long flaming red beard, and the Eskimos just love him.

While the service was going on, a great pile of fish was thawing in one corner, and a large pot of meat was simmering over a seal oil lamp, so as to be ready for feasting immediately the service was over. A young woman next to me fainted twice, but nobody paid any attention to her as they were too busy singing. Each time I dragged her outside into the fresh air, and when she came to she just smiled and shuffled in again. I found out afterwards that she had just come about 100 miles and had given birth to a baby a few hours before the service.

After the service they immediately began to rejoice, which took the form of eating. The Father introduced us to them as King George's men who had come especially to visit them, and told them to give us a hearty Eskimo welcome. This they did with great shouts between each mouthful. We were the first policemen to visit these people, so to give a good impression we contributed a case of beef tallow that we carried along as emergency dogfeed. The Eskimos are exceedingly fond of this kind of tallow. It is just pure edible beef tallow which we use ourselves on the trail instead of lard. At once the Eskimos began to cut the tallow up in pieces and they crunched large chunks of it as dessert. After the feast they had games outside for the men; this consisted mainly of throwing a harpoon at a snowblock, and shooting with bow and arrow. They all have rifles now, but the Father encourages them to keep up practice with bow and arrow, which I think is a good thing. I was selected to be the judge, and as such it was my duty to hand out the prizes to the winners. The Father had some small prizes, and Corporal Hunt and I donated some of our tobacco and cigarette papers, and a pair of snow glasses, which I intended as first prize. Every man was to shoot three arrows each. Some of the older men were quite good, but there was a handsome young fellow that I thought should have first prize. He therefore got the snow glasses. We soon found out that we didn't have enough prizes to go around as each man came up for a prize whether he had made a good score or not. No Eskimo considers himself inferior to another; for had he not tried just as hard to hit the target? He had just had bad luck with his shooting,

that was all. Sometimes it was the same way with the hunting. Some days certain Eskimos got game, then some other days other Eskimos got the game. They all received the benefits from it, so why should they not all get a prize, which is perhaps a good way of reasoning. We therefore had to resort to a few more pounds of tallow, which we cut in halves, thus each man received a prize. Strangely enough the ones who got the real prizes would rather have had the tallow.



*Grandmother and grandchild, King William Island. She recalls the "Gjoa" expedition, under Amundsen, wintering there.*

***Grandmother and grandchild, King William Island.  
She recalls the "Gjoa" expedition,  
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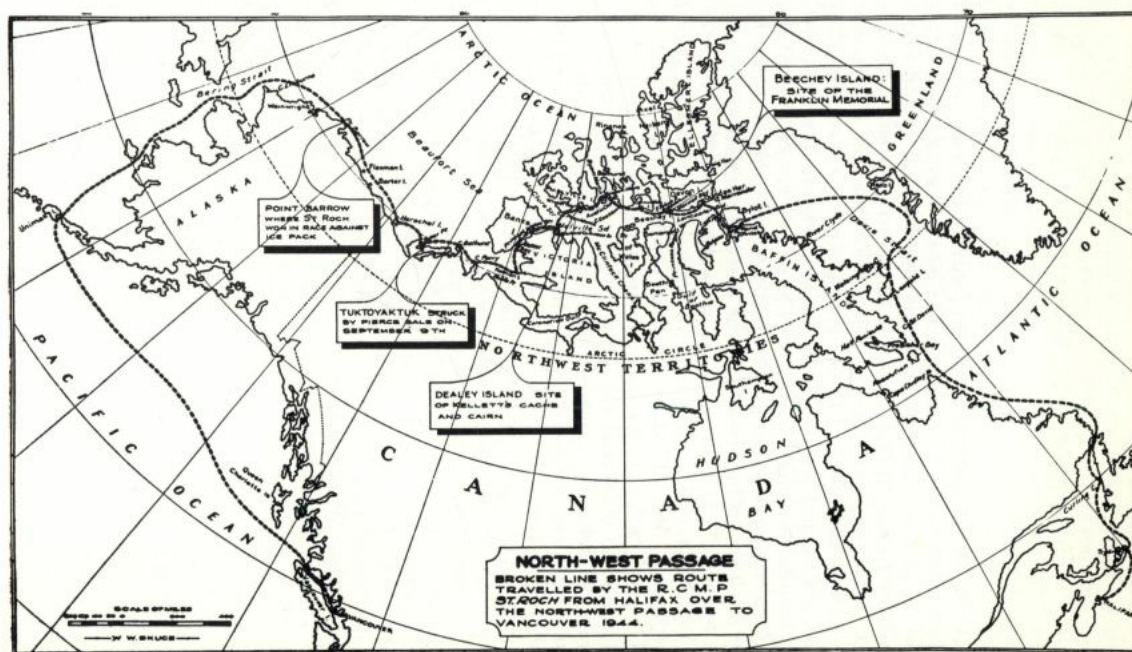
We stayed six days with Father Henry; then we asked if he could come and perform the funeral service. He said he would be pleased to come later in the spring when the seals began to come up to sleep on the ice. It would then be easier to procure dogfeed from day to day as one travelled. This was what we had expected anyway, so we prepared to continue our journey to King William Island. The Father obtained a fine young Eskimo to guide us over the overland journey. After we left, Corporal Hunt and I developed terrible colds with headaches and fever, but we finally arrived at Gjoa Haven, King William Island. Here we were warmly greeted by Mr. Learmonth, the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company Post. Whilst there we learned of another tragedy—the death of Mr. William Gibson, the district inspector for the Hudson's Bay Post in the Western Arctic. Mr. Gibson, ex-Mounted Policeman, with many years of Arctic service, both with the Force and with the Hudson's Bay, had burned to death in an airplane crash whilst on his way to Coppermine from Edmonton. With the death of Mr. Gibson and Constable Chartrand the Arctic lost two great travellers; and Eskimos and whites in the Arctic, two good friends.

## THE RETURN VOYAGE

1944

While at Halifax during the winter 1943-44 we again received instructions to navigate the North-West Passage. This time we were to use the Lancaster Sound Route. On the way we were to call at Frobisher Bay and bring supplies to our Detachment at Pond Inlet. During the winter we had several alterations carried out to the living quarters so as to be more comfortable and we had a large diesel engine installed. We left Halifax Harbour, July 22nd. The next day we noticed the deck around the exhaust pipe had become very hot, causing the pitch to boil and run; it was therefore necessary to head for Sydney, N.S., to have the exhaust pipe altered. This took us three days, and it was July 29th before we eventually headed northward. We called at Curling Cove, Newfoundland, to fill our oil tanks, as this was the last place on our trip where oil could be obtained. On July 29th we passed through the Strait of Belle Isle. From there the icebergs became very numerous, and we were greatly hampered by fog along the Labrador Coast. No observation could be obtained, and on August 2nd we got a short glimpse of Cape Chidley. Shortly afterwards we obtained a radio bearing from Resolution Island. The weather continued thick and foggy and drift ice now made its appearance. As we could not afford to lose any more time we decided to pass up the call at Frobisher Bay and continue northward. By August

4th we had worked up to Leopold Island, the north side of Cumberland Sound. As we proceeded toward Cape Walshingham, the ice became heavier and we could make no progress. I therefore proceeded across to the Greenland coast, which we sighted on August 6th. On this side there was fine clear weather and open water except for giant icebergs. Off the Great Halibut Bank conditions looked good to westward, so we again crossed over to Baffin Island, and picked up the land around Clyde River. There again was fog and floe ice which slowed us down considerably. It was August 12th before we finally anchored in front of our Pond Inlet Detachment. Had our instructions not included this call we would have continued on Northward along the Greenland coast until a little past Lancaster Sound, where we would have cut across, and thus saved much time from working ice. During the early part of summer there is much less ice on the Greenland side than the Baffin Island side. Our time was spent in unloading supplies and taking on previously cached "St. Roch" equipment. We took on board a native, his wife and family and 17 dogs. They were all quite willing to venture forth with us. There were seven of them all told. They made themselves comfortable in a tent on top of our deckhouse, where they lived until we reached Herschel Island. We got away from Pond Inlet on August 17th; proceeding up Navy Board Inlet, we made a short stop at Low Point to pick up some articles, belonging to our family. While crossing Lancaster Sound we ran into a strong south-easterly gale with snow and sleet. Due to the absence of floe ice a nasty choppy sea came up and finally we found shelter in the lee of a huge flat-topped iceberg near Cape Warrender. We cruised back and forth in the lee of this iceberg for six hours while the whole vessel became covered with a sheet of ice from the spray and sleet. Our poor dogs on top of the deckload were suffering most from the freezing spray until we finally got them all bundled into a little cargo scow that we somehow covered with bits of canvas. When the gale abated we proceeded to, and anchored at, Dundas Harbour, North Devon Island. We had a Detachment there, and as it had been closed for some time it was desirable that we should call and ascertain the condition of the buildings for future occupation.

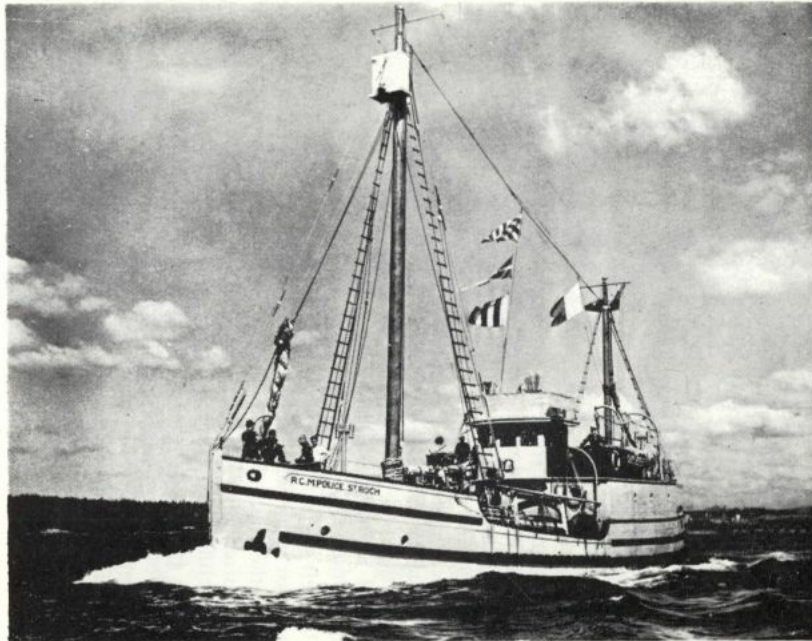


Course of voyage, 1944

### Course of voyage, 1944

We left there again on August 19th. There was still a fresh south-east wind with sleet and no visibility to speak of, so we skirted the high cliff-like shore. At noon we came abreast of a good sized inlet, which at first appeared as a small opening in the cliffs. We entered here and after proceeding up this inlet we found anchorage close to shore in a little cove with a depth of 18 fathoms of water. We went ashore and built a cairn, into which we placed a brass cylinder containing a record of our visit. We saw numerous bear tracks but no other game. On the bank of a stream running from the hills into the cove we discovered the ruins of three ancient dwellings made of stones and bones. Poor weather prevented me from determining our exact position, but as far as I could judge it was either Stratton or Burnett Creek. A heavy snow fell during the night, but we could not afford to linger long, so proceeded westward along the coast. The tailing snow at times shut off all visibility. The weather cleared after we crossed Maxwell Bay, Devon Island, which seemed suitable for shipping, and before us lay a remarkable stretch of high, flat-topped tableland. The steep walls rose directly from the water's edge leaving no beach. To the southward we could see Prince Leopold Island and some icebergs. We neared Cape Hurd at noon, August 20th. Late that afternoon at Beechey Island we anchored in six fathoms of water in Erebus Bay, named after one of Sir John Franklin's ships that spent its first winter here. On the island we went immediately to the cenotaph erected in memory of those who perished in the British Naval Expedition in 1852 under Sir Edward Belcher while in search of the Franklin party. On the beach we examined the remains of a cache known as Northumberland House, established in 1854 by Commander W. S. Pullen of H.M.S. "North Star". All that was left were thousands of oak barrel staves and pieces of coal. Nearby we came across pieces, of the keel, stem and planking of the yacht "Mary", a small vessel of 12 tons left at Cape Spencer, Devon Island, in 1850 by Sir John Ross, who hoped it would save chance survivors of the Franklin Expedition. Two years later Commander Pullen moved it to Beechey Island, where it has remained throughout the years. Captain Bernier visited this place in 1906 and we found his records in a cairn on an elevated plateau, and supplemented them with an account of our own doings. Our brief tour revealed nothing more of historic interest. The island is desolate and barren and without fresh water. We did not venture far inland because snow fell continuously during our stay and the country-side was buried under a deep mantle.





*The "St. Roch" leaving Halifax, N.S., for Vancouver, B.C., 1944*

***The "St. Roch" leaving Halifax, N.S., for Vancouver, B.C., 1944***

We left Beechey Island on August 22nd, passed Cape Hotham, Cornwallis Island and Wellington Channel, which was clear of ice to the northward; but soon the weather changed and ice drifting eastward made its appearance. Our course took us north of Griffiths, Somerville and Brown Islands through floes which, though of one year's formation, kept getting heavier and more tightly packed. Here we bagged four walrus that provided a welcome change in food for us, and especially for our Eskimos and our dogs. Owing to heavy packed ice along the Cornwallis Island shore we were unable to land. During the morning of August 23rd we reached a point about 8 miles eastward of Cape Cockburn on Bathurst Island, but were unable to penetrate farther as the thickly packed ice moved eastward at great speed, carrying us along with it for about 20 miles, until abeam of Ackland Bay, where we managed to get loose. We then worked our way inshore and anchored behind some shoals on which heavy ice was grounded, breaking the flow of drift ice. It sheltered us until the morning of the 24th, when the wind changed and cleared the ice from the shores. We followed up the lead and anchored off Cape Cockburn. We immediately went ashore to look for the cairn built by Captain Bernier, but failed to locate it. Perhaps it had been destroyed by bears, because we saw many of their tracks in the snow.



*Franklin's Monument on Beechey Island.*

***Franklin's Monument on Beechey Island.***





*Sergeant Larsen, and some of the crew of the "St. Roch". Relics of the yacht "Mary" left at Beechey Island by Sir John Ross. Also some relics picked up at Dealey Island.*

***Sergeant Larsen, and some of the crew of the "St. Roch".  
Relics of the yacht "Mary" left at Beechey Island by Sir John Ross.  
Also some relics picked up at Dealey Island.***

In a conspicuous place close to jutting rock about 300 feet high we built a cairn for our records, and from this vantage point we saw that the ice in Viscount Melville Sound was tightly packed to the West and south. The whole countryside here was packed in deep new fallen snow. Ice pressure from Austin Channel made it imperative that we move without delay, so we at once started working northward. Though the ice was not heavy, and the surface broken, the constant westerly winds, assisted by the heavy snowfall, held it together. We alternately steamed and shut down and drifted until late p.m., when we had reached a point off Schomberg Point.

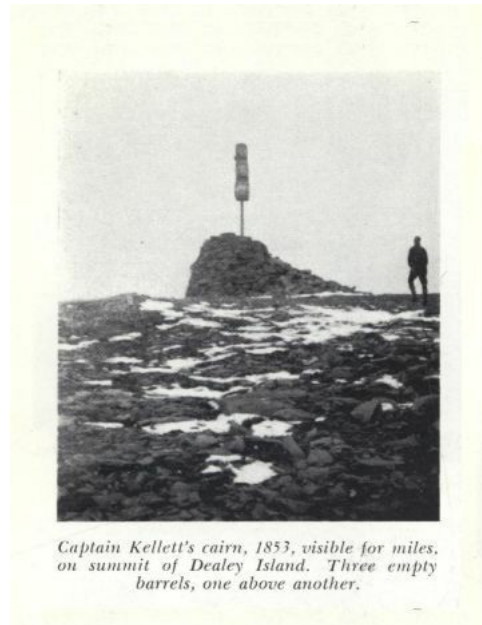


*Fine old Eskimo who knew where one of Franklin's ships sank, and, as a small boy, made visits to get pieces of iron from her.*

***Fine Old Eskimo who knew where one of Franklin's ships sank,  
and, as a small boy, made visits to get pieces of iron from her.***

From here we found a good lead westward to the north end of Byam Martin Island, where we anchored, went ashore to build a cairn and deposit a cylinder with a record. Only a small cairn could be built, owing to snow covering the land, and it was hard to find stones and rocks. We saw several caribou tracks in the new snow. In the early morning of August 26th we got under way again and headed westward for the

Melville Island. We enjoyed the first clear weather for days and saw very little ice while crossing over to Melville. As we approached the beach of Consett Head we sighted a dozen musk-oxen grazing on the grassy lowland close to the beach, and as we proceeded southward we saw several small herds. At 1:30 p.m., perceiving what in the distance appeared to be a large cabin, we anchored in a shallow bay north of Griffith Point. A party set out to investigate, but the object of our attention proved to be a lone bull musk-ox, motionless as the land on which he stood. A mile and a half inland a small cairn was built and a record placed in it. Getting under way again, we reached Palmer Point at midnight and anchored close to shore in 25 fathoms of water. The navigation had been difficult the last few days owing to constant snowfall and thick weather, which obscured the sun and the land most of the time. The magnetic compasses had been bafflingly unresponsive for several days, many times with its North point fixed on the ship's head, irrespective of our direction. During the night and forenoon of August 27th we again had heavy snowfall and no visibility. We ventured ashore, however, and deposited a record on a pyramid-like rock. Rock piles of this kind made by Eskimo hunters signified that in the remote past this land had been inhabited. Green vegetation could be seen protruding through the snow which was covering the ground fast, and discouraged us from going very far inland. During the afternoon of August 27th the weather cleared and we pulled out for Dealey Island. The cairn on top of the island, consisting of a huge pile of stones, on which a large spar, surmounted by three barrels, could be seen for a long way. We anchored close inshore and at once set out to examine the massive cache which, like the cairn, had been built in the spring of 1853 by Captain Henry Kellett, who had spent the winter there, in H.M.S. "Resolute". The cache, partially destroyed and its contents scattered everywhere by marauding bears, had been erected in the shape of a house. Although most of its sturdy stone walls still stood, the roof had long since fallen in. At one end were iron tanks of hard tack, the tanks were rusted through and the hard tack was wet and soggy. Canned meats and vegetables stacked up and covered with sod formed part of one wall. The centre of the building was a conglomeration of broken barrels of flour, clothing, coal, rope and broken hardwood pulleys for ships blocks. Everything was still frozen in ice, which covered the interior of the cache. Outside were scattered leather seaboots, broken barrels of chocolates, peas and beans, all wet and soggy. On the beach were two broken Ross rifles and boxes of ammunition nearly buried in the sand. The rifles had been left by Captain Bernier in 1909, whose records we found in the cairn. We picked out a few good tins, some of which contained ox cheek soup made in 1850 by a manufacturer situated opposite East India House, London. Directions for opening were, take a hammer and chisel and cut out one end, being careful not to let flakes of the paint which cover the cans to get into the soup.



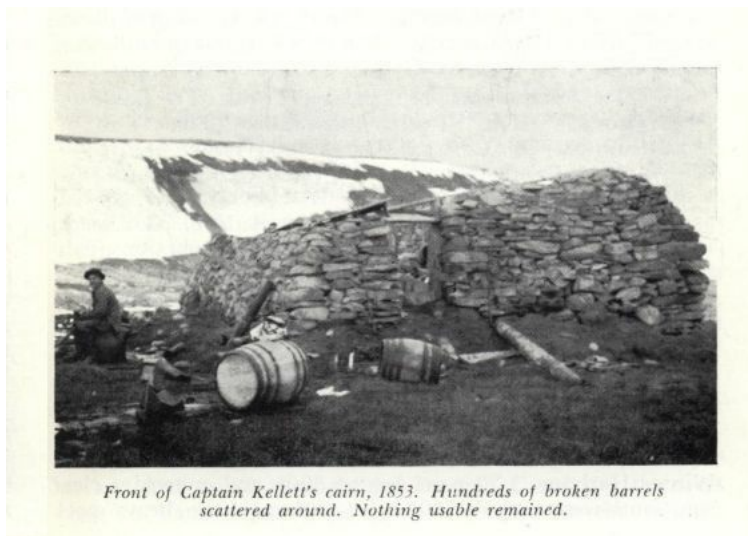
*Captain Kellett's cairn, 1853, visible for miles,  
on summit of Dealey Island. Three empty  
barrels, one above another.*

***Captain Kellett's cairn, 1853, visible for miles,  
on summit of Dealey Island.  
Three empty barrels, one above another.***

As the season was getting on we could not afford to remain long, so in the morning of August 28th we pulled for Winter Harbour about 30 miles to the westward. The weather was very thick when we arrived there, so had to anchor outside for a few hours, waiting for the weather to clear. Finally we got inside and anchored in about five fathoms of water. In the harbour itself there were many large pieces of heavy ice aground. We immediately went ashore to visit Parry Rock, which could be clearly seen. On the rock was carved the names of H.M. ships "Hecla" and "Griper", also the names of several seamen from these ships. These two vessels were the two first vessels to arrive and winter here and were under the command of William Edward Parry, Royal Navy, who was, I think, the most outstanding of all the Arctic explorers of those days. On the rock was also a large copper plate inscribed with the Union Jack and the Canadian Coat of Arms, and the following inscription:

"THIS MEMORIAL IS ERECTED TODAY TO COMMEMORATE THE TAKING POSSESSION FOR THE DOMINION OF CANADA, OF THE WHOLE ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO, LAYING TO THE NORTH OF AMERICA. FROM LONG. 60 W. TO 141 W., UP TO LAT. 90 NORTH, WINTER HRB., MELVILLE ISLAND, C.G.S. ARCTIC. JULY 1ST, 1909, J. E. BERNIER, COMMANDER, J. V. KOENIG, SCULPTOR."

Whilst in Winter Harbour we also found a bottle containing a notice deposited in 1929 by the late Inspector Joy, R.C.M.P., who had then visited this spot, making perhaps the longest and most famous patrol in Arctic history. While there we were still hampered by heavy snowfall, which prevented us from venturing very far behind.

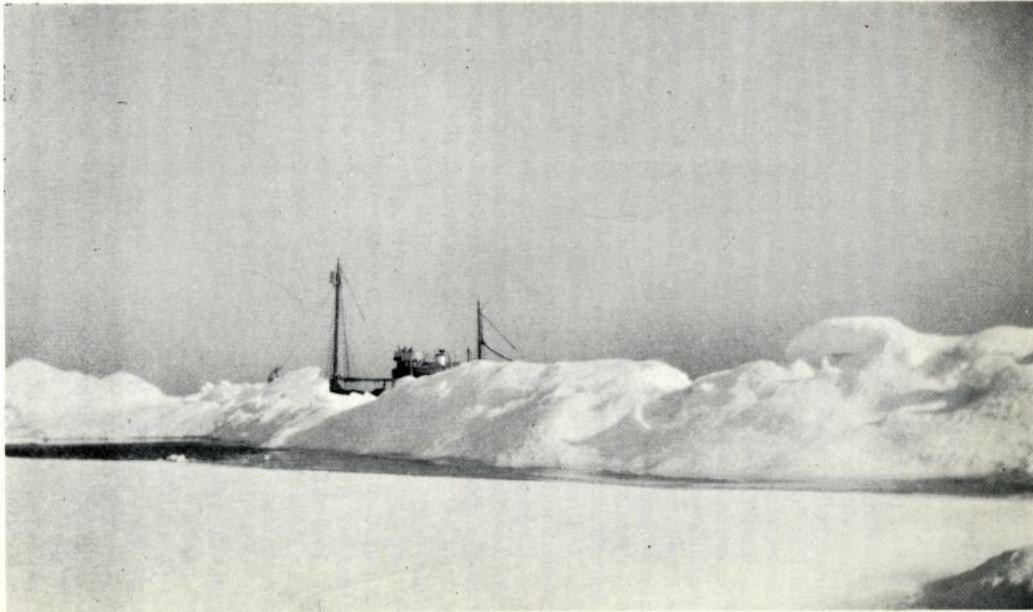


*Front of Captain Kellett's cairn, 1853. Hundreds of broken barrels scattered around. Nothing usable remained.*

***Front of Captain Kellett's cairn, 1853.  
Hundreds of broken barrels scattered around.  
Nothing usable remained.***

After placing a record of our visit on Parry Rock, we left Winter Harbour, 1:20 p.m. August 30th, and enjoyed a clear run south-westward for 30 miles, although the heavy pack could be seen to the south of us. We were now in waters never before traversed by any vessel, the eastern entrance to McClure Strait. We encountered the heaviest ice of the voyage here, of large unbroken floes. We were soon forced to moor to the ice, and so took the opportunity to fill our fresh water tanks from the fresh water pools on the ice. We were hampered a great deal by thick fog and sleet, but taking advantage of every little opportunity we gradually worked southward, alternately tying up to the ice and drifting. Fortunately the weather now was almost calm, with only a slight draft of wind from the north. The floes to which we moored appeared to revolve in a clockwise motion, as we always found ourselves on the north side of the floe, after being tied up to it for a few hours. Late p.m. September 2nd land suddenly loomed up ahead through the fog and we were again forced to moor to a grounded floe close to shore and await better weather, for, because of our merry-go-round drift, I couldn't decide whether we were near Russell Point on Banks Island or Peel Point on Victoria Island. Daylight, September 3rd, we continued up what proved to be Richard Collinson's Inlet. We soon found out our mistake, so turning around we followed the coast back and soon were in Prince of Wales Strait. There were only a few small pieces of ice, and wonderful clear weather and sunshine greeted us. It was really the only fine day we had during the entire passage; that night we were off the southern end of the Strait, and shutting down our engine drifted until daylight, when we were close to Ramsay Island. Shortly afterwards we passed the entrance to Walker Bay, our winter quarters of 1940-41. Shortly after noon, September 4th, we anchored at Holman Island. I thought it strange that no one came to meet us, as there is a R.C. Mission, a Hudson's Bay Post and several natives there. A blast from our whistle brought no life whatever. When we went ashore we learned that the people had been up all night unloading supplies from the H.B.C. vessel "Fort Ross", which had left only a few hours before our arrival, and, tired out, they had been in bed. When awakened by our whistle they thought the "Fort Ross" had returned for some reason.

There more history was made, there two Canadian vessels had completely circumnavigated the North American Continent, the "Fort Ross" had left Halifax three months before us and had sailed through the Panama Canal, up the west coast to Vancouver, where she had loaded for the western Arctic. On September 5th we left the island and before midnight were in a field of heavy ice, 20 miles north of the mainland off Keats Point. Next day, buffeted by strong winds, we crawled through tightly packed ice along the shore to Cape Parry, then cut across Franklin Bay and followed the shore-line to Cape Bathurst. We were now in what we might call home waters, but it did not give us a very warm welcome, as we ran into a blinding snowstorm, and all day and the next we bucked heavy ice which gradually forced us closer to shore, and late at night on September 7th we were forced to tie up to grounded ice near Toker Point.

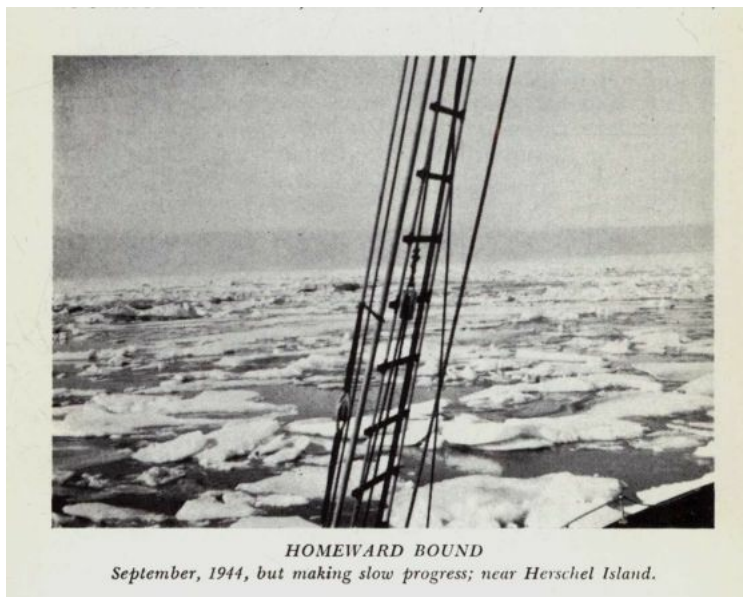


*Progress stopped, September, 1944. In McClure Strait.*

***Progress stopped, September 1944. In McClure Strait.***

Next morning we were able to make very little progress for fog had settled down and joined with the ice as though to deliberately impede us. At noon, however, it lifted, and visibility improved sufficiently for us to see that the way to the west was closed completely, and as fresh north winds were driving more ice upon us, I decided to bear toward Tuktoyaktuk. The shallow water and the strong current from the Mackenzie River kept a large stretch of open water there. When we reached the harbour's mouth at 6 p.m. the entrance markers were indistinguishable in the darkness, and we grounded on the mud flat. Fortunately we had very little headway on, so backed off again. We anchored in three fathoms of water, although we hated to do so, as we knew a gale was on its way, and it came. Daylight of September 9th brought a gale and pouring rain. Before we got under way the entrance markers had blown down. The entrance is very tricky, but the only thing we could do was to attempt to enter. In no time the sea and water was nothing but churned-tip mud, the vessel rolled so violently one of our dories rolled right on to the boat deck from the davits. How we got over the shallows is a miracle. It was only the swell which lifted us over. Once inside we dropped both anchors and let out all our cable. The gale reached hurricane proportions and the water rose ten feet, flooding the Hudson's Bay Company buildings, washing away goods and equipment, and drowning several native-owned dogs. Small islands of peat land embedded with willows and cranberry bushes drifted by. It was the worst storm that ever had struck the settlement, but the "St. Roch" rode it out. However, we had entered the harbour only in time to save ourselves and the ship from certain destruction. P.M. September 10th we managed to get ashore, and the sandspit was completely changed. Huge chunks of soil had been torn from the banks of the island, revealing old blue ice. Mackenzie Bay was turned into a solid mass of packed ice. Though the gale had subsided, unfavourable weather continued for several days, with alternate snow squalls and pouring rain, and when a cruising plane from Aklavik reported that unbroken ice lay between Pullen and Herschel Islands, it looked as though we were fated to winter at Tuktoyaktuk. So we set our nets and began storing up dog feed. On September 17th, as fresh winds blew from the east, the weather improved, and I decided to attempt the crossing at least to Herschel. The storm had made the entrance of the harbour shallower still, and we again grounded for a few minutes. We passed Pullen Island that night, and had exceedingly fine weather, of which we took advantage, steaming in leads, appearing as if just made for us. At dawn very heavy ice slowed us down, but there was a single lead towards Herschel Island. Some floes were easily ten miles long. One we steamed past had seven bears on it, but there was no time for hunting. As we drew near Herschel, fog again settled down, but finally we entered the harbour, and immediately moored to the beach, where we unloaded some fuel drums, gasoline and kerosene. The bay was choked with heavy old ice, all aground, and the island was snowed under. That night a blow came so severe it confined us to the ship all day of the 19th, but fortunately the great slabs of grounded ice acted as a natural breakwater.





**HOMEWARD BOUND**  
*September, 1944, but making slow progress; near Herschel Island.*

Next morning our prospects brightened. There was a possibility that we could get through and not have to winter. We immediately got to work, installed our Eskimo family in one of the empty houses, unloaded eleven tons of coal and some of our excess stores. Fortunately we could hitch our dogs and drive the sled right along the shipside. We had been in radio communication with Point Barrow, and they said the ice pack was solid to the shore, also that the season was the worst in years. The harbour at Herschel was freezing over fast, but a slight draft of easterly wind now made its appearance. Right away we ceased unloading and made preparation to leave, and were underway by 2:30 p.m. September 21st. We made good time to Barter Island. From there we were forced to hug the shoreline and next afternoon steamed past Flaxman Island. Then, still hugging the shore, we groped our way through thick fog off the North Coast. We couldn't see the sun and were dependent entirely on our hand lead line. We moved along slowly and took frequent soundings. Suddenly at 1:45 a.m. September 24th the leadsman shouted, "We've lost the bottom", and I knew then we had passed the point. Shortly afterwards we saw the welcome lights of the settlement, but there was no stopping here. The ice was setting in on the shore again very rapidly, it was pitch dark, and we were still bucking ice. About noon that day we reached the settlement of Wainwright, and were clear of the ice. On September 27th we passed through Bering Strait, and that evening anchored under the steep rocky shore of King Island. There is a village there, built almost like birds' nests, on the sloping south side of the island. We had our Blue Ensign flying, and I thought it strange that we saw no sign of life. We signalled, but no one appeared. We then thought of hoisting the Stars and Stripes. Right away the village came to life, natives appeared from the cliffs, kayaks were put in the water, and soon we had a dozen or more men aboard, eager to trade ivory carvings. We asked why they hadn't come out before, and they said they were kind of scared of our Blue Ensign, as they thought we might be enemies, but when they saw the Stars and Stripes as well, they knew we must be friends, and as they were eager to trade with us, decided to take the chance.

We made good time down the Bering Sea and arrived within sight of Akutan Island on October 1st. Early that morning our old enemy returned—fog and dirty weather—but we finally entered Akutan Harbour, and after proper identifications were made to the United States naval officers, were permitted to moor alongside the fueling wharf. Commander Lee and his staff came aboard and heartily greeted us. The officers and sailors, true to American hospitality, as on our previous passage, welcomed us ashore, opened wide their messes, and treated us to a special showing of a movie and a dinner. What pleased us most, though, was that we were able to take a bath. I had not been able to sleep without my clothes on ever since we left Sydney, N.S. It was therefore a treat to be able to relax for a few days. We remained as guests of our good neighbours in this friendly haven until October 4th, when we proceeded to sea for the home run. After an uneventful passage across the Pacific the "St. Roch" entered the inside passage and anchored for the night in Shushartie Bay, October 12th. 6:00 p.m. October 16th we arrived and moored alongside Evans-Coleman-Evans Wharf, Vancouver. Our North-West Passage was over. In 86 days we had travelled 7295 miles. During this time we had only steamed 1031 hours and 34 minutes.

This account of our latest and most successful voyage would not be complete if I did not pay tribute to all members of my crew. Tribute must also be paid to those early explorers whose sacrifices and exploits blazed most of the trail we took; whose successes and failures became a pattern of lessons from which we learned much. It is true that many pioneers were defeated by the North; but I think it was because of the snow and cumbersome ships of those days, rather than the ice and inhospitableness of the land. Ships at that time were powered mostly by sails, or inadequate steam engines, and when winter held them in a frozen berth, there was often a crew of over a hundred to be fed. These men lived in cramped quarters for long tiresome months, with little means of diversion and practically no opportunity to travel. Yet a few of the more intrepid set out on foot to explore and chart the country and claim it for the Empire. This is the spirit we must not let die in Canada. In their own way the Mounted Police are endeavouring to do their part. They have made long patrols which frequently surpassed those of many explorers. I have in mind the long overland journeys of ex-Assistant Commissioner C. D. LaNauze, then Inspector; Inspector French, ex-Assistant Commissioner T. B. Caulkin, then Sergeant Major, who covered by sled in the early days the territory recently covered by the famous "Musk-Ox" Expedition. Also I have in mind outstanding patrols made by the late Inspector Joy, ex-Sergeant Major H. W. Stallworthy, the presently serving Sergeant R. W. Hamilton, and many others. I believe that before long the Arctic will become better known. Large powerful steel ice-breakers driven by diesel motors will ply its waters, and during the summer carry supplies to the northern inhabitants; while planes will maintain regular flights over this



area, summer and winter. As for the North-West Passage, the ice-breakers will be able to navigate it, probably by the route we took.

But the Arctic Sea will always be the Arctic. On occasions planned voyages will run behind schedule, delayed by the heavy ice in Melville Sound and along the Alaska Coast. Some ships will find it easy, others difficult, and still others will meet disaster. But one thing is certain: modern ships will have the advantage in power and strength, and if held up, will merely have to wait until a little later in the season. To future Arctic vessels, the young ice that forms even in open calm water and which stopped us many times will present no obstacle. They will plough right through it. The main thing is to watch the ice movements and be in the right spot at the right time, for the ice does not wait for anyone.

But getting back to the early explorers, when I reached places which had known the footsteps of such men as Sir Edward Parry, Sir John Ross, Captain Henry Kellett, Captain Francis L. McClintock, Captain Robert McClure, Sir John Franklin and many others, I felt that I was on hallowed ground. I pictured them and their crews wintering in isolation and discomfort in crowded ships, optimistically waiting for spring and better ice conditions. Some of them perished, all risked death, to carry the proud flag of Britain into new territory. Some times during our passage I fancied I could see the tall majestic ships that had preceded us in most of these waters, over a hundred years ago.

[End of *The North-West Passage, 1940-1942 and 1944*, by Henry Larsen]