

A Most Inhospitable Coast: The Report of Lieutenant William Hobson's 1859 Search for the Franklin Expedition on King William Island

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ABSTRACT. Lieutenant William R. Hobson's 1859 search for traces of the Franklin expedition on the west coast of King William Island resulted in several major discoveries that include an official record containing the dates of Sir John Franklin's death, of the abandonment of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, and of the departure of the ship's company for the Back River. Information derived from Hobson's report appeared in McClintock's published account of the expedition, and it has been referenced in other works, but the report itself was never published. Recent investigations of Franklin archaeological sites on the Victoria Strait coast of King William Island by the Government of Nunavut, including sites first discovered by Hobson, served as a catalyst for locating Hobson's full descriptions of his findings. The report includes general observations on weather, ice conditions, and wildlife encountered, and his detailed descriptions of several Franklin expedition sites are potentially valuable sources of information for ongoing archaeological investigations.

Key words: Franklin Expedition, Hobson, McClintock, King William Island, expedition report

RÉSUMÉ. La recherche de traces de l'expédition de Franklin réalisée sur la côte ouest de l'île King William par le lieutenant William R. Hobson en 1859 a donné lieu à plusieurs découvertes d'envergure, dont un document officiel renfermant les dates du décès de Sir John Franklin, de l'abandon du HMS *Erebus* et du HMS *Terror* ainsi que du départ de l'équipage du navire pour la rivière Back. Des renseignements dérivés du rapport de William Hobson figurent dans le compte rendu publié par McClintock au sujet de l'expédition. Ces renseignements ont également été repris dans d'autres ouvrages, mais le rapport en soi n'a jamais été publié. Des enquêtes récentes effectuées par le gouvernement du Nunavut aux sites archéologiques de Franklin sur la côte du détroit de Victoria, à l'île King William, visant notamment des sites qui avaient d'abord été découverts par William Hobson, ont servi de catalyseur à la découverte des descriptions complètes des observations de William Hobson. Le rapport comprend des observations générales sur les conditions météorologiques, l'état des glaces et la faune rencontrée. Ses descriptions détaillées de plusieurs sites touchés par l'expédition de Franklin pourraient constituer de précieuses sources d'information pour les enquêtes archéologiques en cours.

Mots clés : expédition de Franklin, Hobson, McClintock, île King William, rapport d'expédition

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INTRODUCTION

Of the many expeditions mounted to learn the fate of the 1845 Franklin expedition, the 1857–59 search led by Francis Leopold McClintock is distinguished by the numerous discoveries it made on the west coast of King William Island in the spring of 1859 (McClintock, 1860). These discoveries include a tent camp at Cape Felix, a record cairn at Victory Point containing crucial information about the expedition, and a ship's boat in Erebus Bay, in which the first skeletal remains of members of the expedition were found. Collectively, these sites contained hundreds of artifacts from which large samples were taken and which continue to be the subjects of analysis.

A small sledge party led by Lieutenant William R. Hobson, McClintock's second-in-command, made all of these discoveries in May 1859. Born in 1831, Hobson joined the Navy in 1845, and his involvement in the Franklin search

effort began in 1852 at Point Barrow, Alaska, where he spent two winters as mate aboard *Plover* (Jones, 1979) and then aboard *Rattlesnake* overwintering at Port Clarence, Alaska, in 1853–54. In February 1854, Hobson led a small sledge party across Seward Peninsula to Kotzebue Sound to search for any signs that Franklin may have reached a rendezvous point at Chamisso Island. That journey, covering nearly 900 km in 47 days under very challenging conditions, established Hobson's credentials for Arctic service and was the reason that McClintock selected him as his second-in-command aboard the *Fox* (Barr, 1986). McClintock's confidence in Hobson was not misplaced. While feeling unwell, and under extremely poor weather conditions, Hobson led his men on a 74-day journey that resulted in major discoveries about the fate of the Franklin expedition. For his significant contributions, Hobson was promoted to Commander and subsequently to Captain (McClintock, 1860; Cyriax, 1939; Jones, 1979; Barr, 1986).

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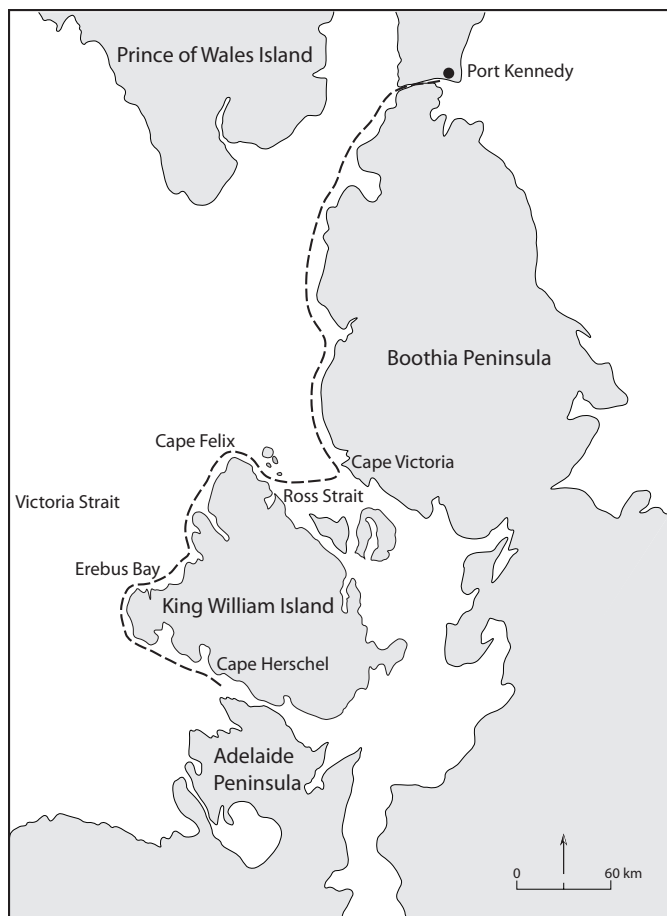


FIG. 1. Route of Hobson's sledge journey from Bellot Strait to King William Island between 2 April and 14 June 1859.

In McClintock's published account of the expedition, he paraphrased several sections of the report he received from Hobson. Cyriax (1939:132–133) also summarized an excerpt from the report, to which McClintock's son, Major Henry Foster McClintock, granted him access, and more recently, Trafton (1991) also referred to the document. But despite the publication of these few references, Hobson's major contributions to our understanding of the fate of the Franklin expedition, as noted by Jones (1979:168) and Barr (1986:185), have been largely overshadowed by McClintock's role and stature. It is surprising, nonetheless, that Hobson's report was never published, since it contains the earliest and most complete descriptions of these crucial finds.

Recent archaeological investigations of Franklin sites on the Victoria Strait coast of King William Island, sponsored by the Government of Nunavut, have included some of the sites discovered by Hobson, leading to interest in consulting his original accounts of his findings. Efforts to locate Hobson's original field journal, if it still exists, proved unsuccessful; however, with the assistance of the Government of Nunavut archivist, it was discovered that the holdings of Library and Archives Canada included a microfiche copy of Hobson's official report to McClintock (Hobson, 1859).

Hobson led one of three separate search parties organized by McClintock in the spring of 1859; the other two

were led by McClintock himself and by Allen Young. The parties led by Hobson and McClintock departed as a group on 2 April 1859 from the *Fox*, which was wintering at "Port Kenedy" in eastern Bellot Strait, and separated on 28 April at Cape Victoria, approximately 280 km to the south (Fig. 1). Over the next 48 days, Hobson's party searched the entire west coast of King William Island from Cape Felix south around Graham Gore Peninsula, and then east into Simpson Strait as far as Cape Herschel (Fig. 2). Accompanied by two members of his party, Hobson then crossed Simpson Strait and traveled a short distance along the north shore of Adelaide Peninsula. During this same period, McClintock had continued south from Cape Victoria to the mouth of the Back River, recrossed Simpson Strait to King William Island, and then sledged west, around Graham Gore Peninsula, and north along the west coast of the island. The latter part of McClintock's travels essentially retraced Hobson's route as far north as Wall Bay, at which point he crossed overland. While Hobson and McClintock were investigating the King William Island area, Young's party was conducting an extensive search of the coast of the southern half of Prince of Wales Island.

The transcription of the report that follows was made from a printed version of a microfiche copy obtained from Library and Archives Canada. The report is dated 1 August 1859, which was approximately seven weeks after Hobson's return to the *Fox* on 14 June 1859. The delay in preparing the report undoubtedly reflects the period of convalescence needed for Hobson to recover from a serious case of scurvy and, as his health improved, other responsibilities related to preparations for the return voyage to England.

The report is in the form of a narrative and not a daily journal or log. In some sentences, words or phrases could not be deciphered because of the quality of the printed version, Hobson's writing style, or a combination of both. In a number of cases, particularly in the descriptions of the relics, uncertainties were resolved by cross-referencing McClintock's published account of the expedition, which includes an itemized list of the relics. Deciphering of parts of the text was also aided immensely through access to an unpublished transcript of Hobson's report provided by William Barr. Words within square brackets are thought to be correct, but some doubt remains. The layout of the original report, including minor corrections made by Hobson, has been reproduced as closely as possible, and some punctuation has been changed for ease of reading.

WILLIAM HOBSON'S SEARCH REPORT

Arctic Searching Yacht *Fox*
Port Kenedy August 1, 1859

Sir:

As my having travelled in company with you from the 2nd of April (the day on which we left the ship) to the

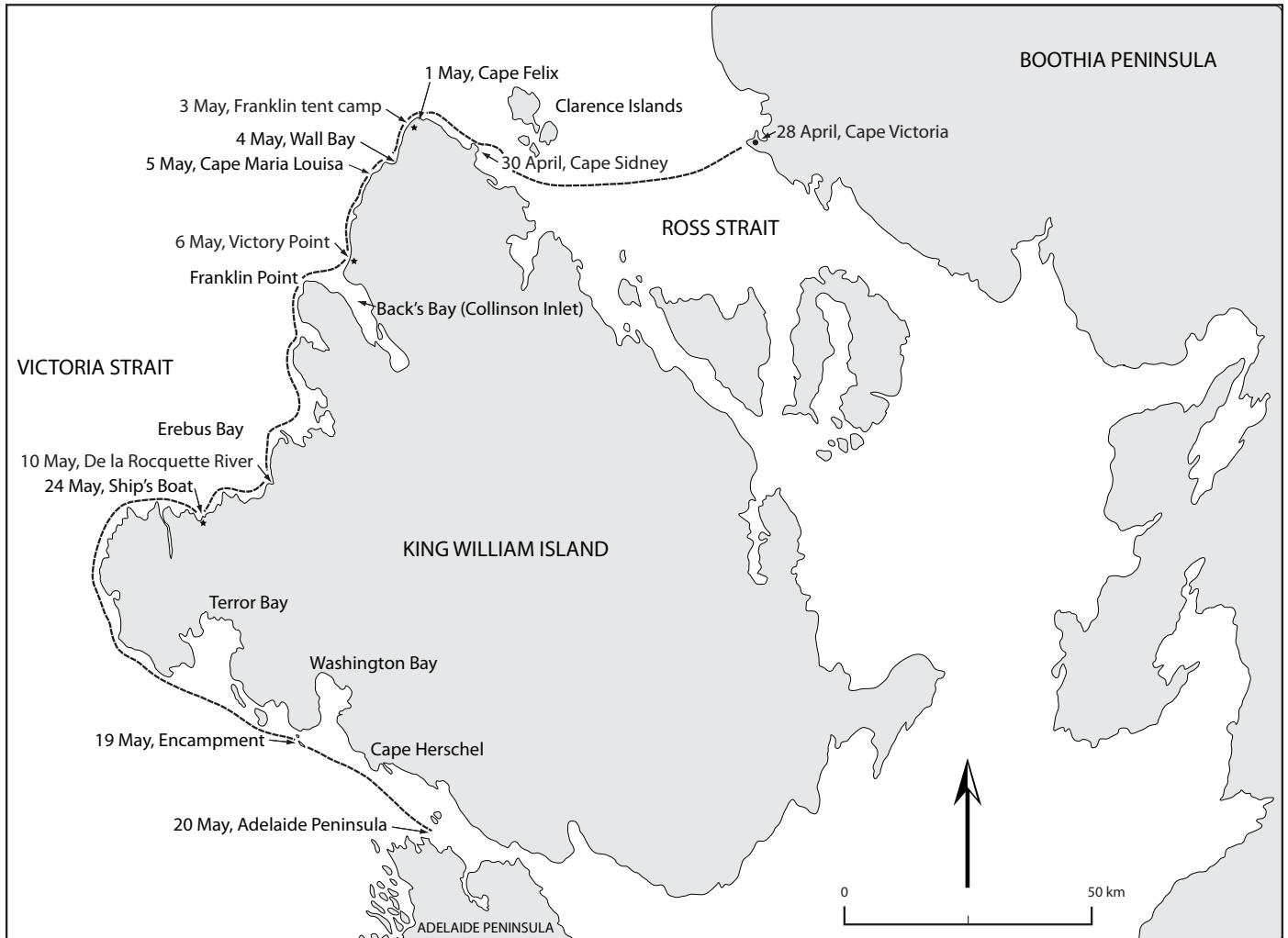


FIG. 2. Track of Hobson's survey along the coast of King William Island.

28th of the same month when our parties separated at Cape Victoria, renders my furnishing you with any detailed account of my proceedings between those dates superfluous and unnecessary, I will commence my report from the time of our separation.

My orders being to go round the north end of King William Island, I steered after leaving you to the WNW, intending to strike the land about ten miles to the South of Cape Felix. I found, however, that the leads of smooth ice took me somewhat to the southd. of our intended course and, the wind being fair and fresh, did not when I could avoid it attempt crossing rough ice. No difficulty was experienced in crossing Ross's Straits. The ice appeared to be of but one year's growth and although it was in many places much crushed up we easily found smooth leads through the lines of hummocks. Many very heavy masses of ice, evidently of foreign formation have been here arrested in their drift; so large are they that in the gloomy weather we experienced they were often mistaken for islands.

On the 30th at noon we were abreast and about 3 miles to the southd. of the southeastern of 4 small

islands, which I supposed to be the Beaufort Islands. As they are very low and would be difficult to find in thick weather, I did not place the depot on these as I had intended.

At 4:30 PM we encamped close outside the line of heavy grounded ice near Cape Sidney. After skirting the heavy ice for a mile, we found an easy passage through; inside the line of hummocks, but for lately fallen snow which somewhat spoiled it, the road would have been very good. The coast line as elsewhere on King William Island is extremely low; it is a mere shingle bank thrown up by the sea. A very great number of fox tracks were seen on this part of the shore. I made a short journey on this day, stopping at 2 PM to shift the sledges, prepare a depot, and make some necessary repairs.

The depot, consisting of 9 days' provision, was planted at Cape Felix on the following evening.

Much snow fell between the 29th of April and the 2nd of May, the wind holding to the Northd. and Westd. with varying force; it blew hard on the morning of the second.

The pressure of the ice on the Northern end of the island is severe, but the ice itself is not remarkably heavy in character. The shoalness of the coast keeps the heavy line of pressure at a considerable distance from the beach. To seaward, to the Northd. of the island the ice as far as I could see is very rough and crushed into large masses. The morning of the 3rd of May was dark and gloomy with much snow falling. Before we started I caused a small cairn to be built as a leading mark for our depot, which was about three quarters of a mile distant from our encampment. Fearing a visit from Esquimaux we had so secreted it that without some guide we might not have found it readily. At 9:15 AM a large cairn was seen. A glance at the spot assured me that it was no Esquimaux encampment. I therefore ordered the tent to be pitched, that we might search it at our leisure. Our first proceeding was to take down the cairn, which was carefully removed stone by stone, the stones being carried to a sufficient distance for search being made in its vicinity. I was much disappointed at finding nothing in this cairn but a piece of blank paper folded in a triangular shape and a fragment of rope yarn. I have little doubt that this paper had contained some information and that the writing (possibly pencil) had been effaced by exposure; it was utterly unprotected from the weather except by the stones of the cairn. Many of those at the top had fallen off and among them lay the fragments of two bottles in which papers may very probably had [sic] once been deposited.

The paper found was about two feet down from the top of the cairn as it stood when we found it. Originally, it could not have been less than 8 feet high and was 9 feet in diameter at its base. The lower tiers of stones were very heavy, and its construction must have been a work of some little labour and time.

After satisfying myself that nothing was buried true North of the cairn, and the compass being useless in pointing out the Magnetic North, I caused a circular trench to be dug at the distance of ten feet from the centre of the cairn, where the nature of the ground would permit its being done. This trench was made about five feet broad, but in many places the ground was so hard frozen that the pickaxe would make little impression and we could not get down more than a foot from the surface. We also dug under the cairn without success.

Some scraps of canvas showing through the snow revealed three tent places and on searching them we found many evidences of a visit of a party belonging to the Erebus or Terror. I selected a few relics which seemed best worth bringing away. The greater part of what remains is old canvass, clothes, and other rubbish.

These tents were found left apparently as they had been last slept in except that the poles were withdrawn. Under the fallen tents, bear skins and blanket coverlets were left spread out, to all appearances precisely as their last occupants had used them. A variety of small articles

were found in and about these tents. In the smallest of the three (which I suppose to have been an officers' tent), a packet of needles, the fragments of a small red ensign, a good deal of shot, two eye pieces of small telescopes, and fragments of stockings, mitts, &c. were found. In the others, besides the sleeping gear, the remains of blanket packs, box and common cloth trousers, mitts, stockings, &c., also a large hank of twine. A good deal of old clothing was strewed about the place.

The tents were pitched on a level shingle ridge directly inshore of the cairn, the nearest being about 9 feet distant from it. Near them were three fire places about which we found several brimstone matches (some of them had been used), a quantity of Ptarmigan feathers, some salt meat bones, the jaw of a fox, and some very small fragments of partially consumed wood. I think that a small party must have been encamped here for some time. It may probably have been an observatory or a shooting station. The tents were very small and would not have accommodated more than ten or twelve persons. They were so rotten and frozen that I could not measure them, but judged of their size from the spaces they occupied. For whatever purpose this station may have been established I have little doubt it was hastily abandoned and should think that the party must have been returning to their ship. Under no other circumstance can I imagine that people would leave their tents, sleeping gear and cooking apparatus. Fuel seems to have been scarce with them. Not a scrap of wood was found about the place save the bung stave of a Marine's water bottle and the half consumed scraps about the fire places. The tent poles had probably been burnt to cook their last meal. Pike heads from which the poles had been wrenched were found near the tents, and I suppose the pikes had been their tent poles.

We worked until about 6 PM by which time the men were tired. Very little was found in the latter part of the day. At half-past five on the following morning, the search was recommenced and continued until half-past ten, with the interval of an hour at breakfast time. Finding we were doing but little good, I then ordered a start. At the distance of 150 yards SW from the large cairn a few stones had been piled up but nothing was found in, under or round them. The principal items found at this cairn are as follows.

In the cairn, a small piece of blank paper made up in a triangular shape and a fragment of rope yarn. Round the cairn, fragments of two broken bottles, a quantity of wire shot cartridges, several pieces of broken cups or basins, blue and white (china) the bung stave and [hoops] of a Marine's canteen (painted blue), several small iron hoops, fragments of white line, spun yarn and canvass, the [device] from the [front] of a Marine's shako (with the globe, Gibraltar & per mare per terram, on it).

Under the smallest tent, which I suppose to have been occupied by officers, a bear skin, a blanket coverlet,

several old mitts and stockings, fragments of a small red ensign, a parcel containing seven or eight packages of needles, two eye pieces of small telescopes, the remains of a pair of spectacles, a quantity of large shot, some rifle patches, and a large bullet; also a small piece of blank paper made up like a note. In the two larger tents, blanket tent bottoms, fragments of blankets & blanket packs, box and pilot cloth jackets & trousers, mitts, gloves, and blanket wrappers, several pieces of tobacco and broken pipes, a hank of twine, three blue beads and a light coloured powder made up in a small piece of paper. Strewed about the place we found some remains of clothing. The lid, lock and key of a powder case with the Board of Ordinance mark, a small copper stove, apparently ship made, an old pannikin pierced in several places by small shot, the top of a canister with cheese scratched on it, a small duck bag, (empty), a small bag containing gunpowder, some fragments of iron, staples, &c., three broken bottles, a potato tin [doubled] up for carriage, three pike heads, three partially burnt Lucifer matches tied together with a piece of cotton, and a quantity of fragments of rope, canvass, white line, spun yarn and rope yarn.

Round and in the fire places several brimstone matches, some of which had been lighted, some charcoal and very small pieces of wood partially consumed by fire, Ptarmigan's feathers, salt meat bones, and the jaw bone of a fox.

The position of the cairn is Lat. 69° 55' N, Long. 98° 00' W, a very short distance to the SWd. of Cape Felix.

An hour's travelling brought us to another small cairn in, round or under which nothing whatever could be found. In the afternoon we went round Walls' Bay and encamped on its southern point.

On the 5th, when near Cape Maria Louisa, we found part of a moderate sized white spruce tree 18 feet long by ten inches through; it had been cut longitudinally through the centre with a whipsaw, one half remaining. It is my opinion that it must have been sawn upon the spot and the other half used for fuel, or carried away by a party from the lost ships. The tooth marks of the saw were so plain and the edges of the cut so clean as to convince me it had not been drifted or knocked about since it was sawn.

Two hours travelling on the morning of the 6th brought us to a small cairn, in which we found a pickaxe with the helve broken and an empty tea or coffee cannister. I brought the pickaxe away with me and left the cannister, piling a few stones around it. An hour was spent in fruitless search for documents. After marching from three and a half to four miles in a southerly direction from this place, a large cairn was seen close to which we pitched our tent at 11:15 AM. A great quantity of gear was strewn about the cairn, which is a large one and had been built, as we learnt from a paper found alongside it, by the crews of the Terror and Erebus when

they landed ~~from their ships~~ after abandoning their ships, on the site of the pillar erected by Sir James Ross in 1839-1830.

The cairn was of course the first object of our search. A small cylinder was soon discovered among some loose stones that had evidently fallen from the top of the cairn. It contained a brief statement of the movements of the lost expedition. From it we learned that the ships, after ascending Wellington Channel to Lat. 77° N, had returned by the west side of Cornwallis Island and passed their first winter at Beechey Island; that they were beset on the 12th of September 1846 in Lat. 70° 05' N, Long. 95° 33' W; deserted their ships on the 22nd of April 1848, five leagues to the NNW; and landed at this place on the 25th. The survivors, 105 in number, were under the command of Captain Crozier and were to start on the following day for Back's Fish River. Sir John Franklin died on the 11th of June 1847, and the total loss of the expedition up to the date of their landing had been 9 officers and 15 men. It was further stated that the paper had been found by Lieut. Irving under a cairn about 4 miles to the North, supposed to have been built by Sir James Ross (the same, I fancy, in which I found the pickaxe and cannister) where it had been deposited by the late Commander Gore in June 1847.

The paper when originally deposited was merely the ordinary tide paper supplied to her Majesty's ships and appeared to have been filled in and soldered down on board the ship. There is an evident mistake in the date of the winter passed at Beechey Island, which is said to be that of [18]46-47. The information respecting the abandonment of the ships and the line of their intended retreat had been written around the margins apparently by Captain Fitzjames, the writing agreeing with his signature. The paper is countersigned by Captain Crozier. The words "and start tomorrow for Back's Fish River" appear to have been added by him. The brevity of the note, and the weak, tremulous hand in which both that and his signature are written, incline me to the belief that he must have been in ill health at that early period. I of course brought away the original and left a copy of the document. From the numerous articles that were strewn about in the vicinity of the cairn I selected many interesting relics, among the chief of which are a small dip circle, a small pillar sextant with Frederick Hornby R. N. engraved on it, a boat's medicine chest, and the brass plate and ring from the top of a mahogany gun case on which is engraved C. F. Osmer, R. N.

It appears to me that on landing at this place an accumulation of what had been brought from the ships took place and all that was considered superfluous rejected, as here we found a vast quantity of clothing, 4 sets of heavy boats' coppers, pickaxes, shovels, fragments of oars, boat hook, stoves, &c.

I remained at the cairn until 11 AM on the 7th when, having satisfied myself that no other documents were to be found and searched the vicinity as much as the deep

coating of snow which covered the ground would admit, I deposited in the cairn a copy of the record, a notice of my visit, and a note for you, and started to travel the coast of King William Island to the Southd.

It is much to be regretted that the snow lay as deep and heavy on the ground as if it were mid winter as there may still be, and probably are, many relics here which have escaped our search. I do not think that any papers of importance could have been left, or they would certainly have been noticed in the record.

The principal articles found at this place are as follows: a small cylinder enclosing a record; 4 sets of boats coppers; small dip circle in case, with magnet and 2 needles; a small double framed pillar sextant, Frederick Hornby R. N. engraved on it, maker's name E. & E. Emanuel, Portsmouth; small medicine chest, the bottles either quite or partially full; the brass plate and ring from the top of a mahogany gun case with the name of C. F. Osmer engraved on it; three Marines' canteens, one marked 88 Compy. W. Heather, one marked Jn. Hedges, 89 Compy., the third not marked. Three pannikins, one marked Wm. [Ack] (or Mark), another No. 15 Mess, the third not marked; a small deal box that had contained gun wadding; 2 pieces of small hollow brass rod (like curtain rod); an iron shod ash shaft about 4 feet long; a quantity of iron loops; iron work from a large boat; a powder cannister turned into a water bottle; a corner of large canvass tent; three pickaxes and a shovel; a pair of waterproof leggings; an oar sawn down the centre with a blanket nailed to its flat side; three boat hooks or ensign staves; a very large quantity of old clothing, principally heavy, amongst which a stocking marked W. Orren was found; another bore the initials W. S.; several strips of copper; a nine inch block (stropped); two joints of a cleaning rod for a gun; two small copper spindles (probably for vanes); a quantity of fragments of rope, canvass, spun yarn and rope yarn.

From the position assigned to the ships at the time of their abandonment I concluded that if, as the Esquimaux told us, there was a wreck on the West coast of King William Island, it should probably be found at no great distance from us, as any ships drifting to the Southd. from that position would probably be brought up by the western shoulder of the land. I made up my mind, however, that in the event of not finding a wreck where I thought she should be, to trace the coast line to the Southd. as by following on the track of the retreating crews there was a great chance of finding further traces. After what I had learnt at Ross's cairn, it seemed useless to cross Victoria Strait. Our journey on the 7th was a very short one. We were not away from the cairn before 11:30 AM, and the indisposition of one of my men compelled me to encamp at 2 PM. On the 8th we went around Back's Bay, the ice in which seemed too rough to be easily crossed with the weights we had on our sledges. There is a deep arm at its South eastern angle,

the bottom of which I could not see. I did not enter this, intending at the time to drive around it with the dog sledge when we returned.

From the 9th to the 16th of May, it blew an almost continuous gale from the NW, confining us to our tents during the whole of the 11th and the 15th and part of the 9th, 10th, 12th and 13th. On these broken days I moved, more for the sake of shifting our quarters and keeping the men from being cramped by long confinement than with any hope of making much progress. We soon got embarrassed among the heavy hummocks, or found unexpectedly that we had wandered a mile or two inshore. There is literally no coastline for a guide. During the whole of this week, in addition to the snow drift which of course accompanied the gale we were honored with a heavy snow fall which was nearly as continuous as the wind. On the evening of the 13th when we encamped it was discovered that instead of being, as I supposed, on sea ice, we were on a lake—and as I found next morning, nearly 4 miles from the coastline, to which we were led by a frozen water course through which in summer a considerable stream must flow. On the 14th a bear was killed, affording some 9 days' fuel and dogs' food.

Nothing worthy of notice occurred until the 19th. The intervening days were windy and gloomy and much snow fell. The sun was scarcely seen during these days. The wind holding to the NW on the 17th, I lodged my men in a snow house on the southern of two small islands in Lat. 68° [54'] N, Long. 99° 36' W and took the dog sledge with Toms and Christian to run down a few more miles of coast. A wolf that had followed us on the 19th accompanied the sledge and gave us much trouble, as the dogs when they got in his track followed it at great speed, and it took all the persuasive powers of Christian's whip to induce them to turn their heads the right way. He kept playing about us during the whole day but was far too knowing to trust himself within reach of a rifle. He left us at night when we encamped.

At one PM a large cairn was seen, which at the time I supposed might be Simpson's cairn at Cape Herschel. I had not been able to get sights since leaving Ross's cairn. Searching the cairn we found in it many feathers of Ptarmigan and snow owls, the latter quite fresh. In its vicinity we found many circles of stones marking Esquimaux summer tent places, while comparatively fresh seal bones show that they are quite recent. The cairn itself, which I suppose must be of Esquimaux construction, did not appear to be of great age (the lower stones only were moss grown), nor could it have been a cache as there was no considerable hollow space. By whoever or for whatever purpose it was built, the builders were not a party traveling in a hurry. The lower stones were very massive and carefully laid together, and the cairn itself [was] of great size. I piled a few stones on the remains of it to draw your attention and traveled on until 5 PM, when we pitched on a long low

island lying off a very prominent headland. At 5 on the following morning we were again under weigh, crossed to the mainland, and followed it for a short distance. Under the impression that we had passed Cape Herschel I stopped and pitched at 7, my object being to get sights if possible, and leave a cairn which you would not be likely to miss, with an account of my doings in it. The day unfortunately became overcast and I failed in getting my sights. A rough latitude at noon placed us in Lat. 68° 48' N, but although I waited until evening I could get no sights for time. I was led to hope I might secure my position by the fineness of the early morning, which was a striking contrast to the weather we have experienced for many days before.

No indication of a ship having been stranded was met with along this coast, not a spar or a fragment of wood. Not anything that could be considered part of the debris of a wrecked ship was seen. If by any combination of chances a ship could have driven from the position in which the Terror and Erebus were left, and remained, as one of them must certainly have done, fixed for a number of years so far south as this, she must, I think, have been brought up by some of the off-lying islands. That the Esquimaux have not visited the cairns found by my party to the North is, I think, placed beyond doubt by many articles that would have been of great value to them, being left there. For the same reason I conclude they have never been to the boat found on our return journey. Added to this we saw no traces of winter huts or summer encampments to the Northd. of the boat's position. Inside the islands along the southern coast, the ice is so smooth that no one could doubt its being but one season old. There, I think, the ships could not have remained.

I started to rejoin my men at 7 PM and reached their encampment at 1:30 AM of the following morning. The dogs, with nothing to drag but the sleeping gear of 3 men and the men themselves when, out of breath with running, they jumped on the sledge, travelled very fast, having their old track to follow. On this night, for the first time during our journey I found myself unable to keep up with the sledge, for many days I had been practically lame and the pace was now too great for me. From this date my illness, which turned out to be an attack of scurvy, rapidly increased and before we reached the ship I was unable to stand without assistance.

On reaching the island, I found that the men I had left there had, according to my orders, built a conspicuous cairn on its top. In this I deposited a record of our visit and a note for you. Many Esquimaux remains were found here. We started from the islands about noon of the 22nd, the 51st day of our absence. The weather was exceedingly bad, but with the assistance of a strong SE wind and our sail we made about 9 miles during the afternoon. On the 23rd, the wind remaining fair and fresh, we made a long journey, the sails helping the dogs

amazingly. On the 24th, the trend of the coast taking us far offshore, I sent Toms and Edwards to walk the coast line (I was too lame to be able to do it myself). At three PM, seeing Toms giving us chase, I turned to meet him and found that he had discovered a large boat upon the beach. I therefore ordered the tent to be pitched, and taking the small sledge and dogs, drove to the place, leaving orders for the men to follow when the tent was up.

On reaching the spot, I found a large boat entirely embedded in snow, above which nothing of her was visible but a portion of her port gunwale, elevated above the other by the boat's heeling considerably to starboard. Fortunately, two high wooden awning stanchions had been left shipped. Had it not been for this she would in all probability have been passed unnoticed. Digging her out was, of course, a work of time, but on throwing out a few shovels full of snow, wooden paddles were found which answered the purpose of shovels and all hands were able to work at it. We continued at work until nearly 7 P.M. when, the men having had a fagging day's work, we returned to the tent.

I spent the whole of the following day in digging out and examining this boat. She proved to be large and lightly built for transport over ice, sharp alike at bow and stern with mahogany floor and fir upper works. The four upper streaks only are of fir. The planking is exceedingly light (she was clinker-built). She appeared to be in good repair but has a hole through the upper works on the starbd. side about 12 feet from the stern, probably the work of a bear. She appeared to have been lightened in every possible way. All iron and wood work that could be dispensed with had been removed, but she rested on a sledge of great weight and strength. There were some markings on her stem, but I could not decipher them. Around the gunwale, secured by a light batten, was a canvass weather cloth, which seems to have answered the double purpose of wash streaks and to exclude the wind from between the boat's gunwale and the rain awning or housing with which she appears to have been fitted. The gunwale had plates and sockets for the reception of small iron stanchions, several of which were found in the boat. Through these a ridge rope rove to lace the weather cloth to. Paddles had been substituted for oars. No masts, sail, boat hooks, rudder, awnings or other boat's gear was found in her. A long coil of lead line lay in the bottom of the boat, probably intended for tracking her along a beach.

Much gear was found in the boat in the stern sheets. Right aft stood two double barrel guns, one on each side; both had one barrel discharged, the other loaded and capped. They stood on their butts, resting against the upper rail. One of the chronometers, the three watches, most of the silver forks and spoons, and all the ammunition found were in the stern sheets. A few pieces of silver were picked up in the fore part of the boat.

In the stern sheets, just abaft the after thwart on the port side, was a human jaw bone of great size. Other bones of corresponding magnitude lay near. The leg bones were more forward on the starboard side. The man appeared to have been lying transversely across the boat with his head under the after thwart at the time of his death, parts of a bear skin and pieces of blanketing were found about him; also a large quantity of remains of clothing. These latter were so frozen together that they had to be dug out with the pickaxe and were consequently torn to pieces. I cannot say what clothing he wore. The small bones of the hands and feet remained in the mitts and stockings. The mass of clothing that lay about the bones must have belonged to several men. A chronometer bearing the name of Parkinson and Frodsham &c. was found near his remains, and much in the position it would have been had he worn it in the waistband of his trousers in a watch pocket. From this I think it likely the deceased may have been an officer, but I cannot pretend to say that there was anything else to lead to that conclusion. Under the second thwart from forward, a second jaw bone was found. It, as well as the bones near it, was of much smaller size than the other. The remains appear to be those of a young man, the teeth being remarkably sound. These bones appear to have been disturbed. They were considerably scattered, probably by foxes.

The boat's head when found was pointing to the North Eastd. as was that of the sledge she had been dragged upon. She heeled a good deal to the starboard and had been partially lifted from the scores cut for her reception in the chocks. I did not observe that she was in any way secured to the sledge.

The length of the sledge was about 23 feet and its breadth about two feet. The runners were of three inch oak reduced at the top to two inches, 8 inches deep, and heavily shod with iron. There were five oak cross bars of great weight and five fir chocks for the boat to rest on. These were neatly leathered. The whole was very strongly bolted and fastened. The drag ropes, which still remained fast, were of three inch whale line and had the Chatham mark. The boat's dimensions are: length overall 28 feet, extreme beam 7 feet 6 inches, depth 2 feet 6 inches. The principal articles found in her are as follows: six paddles, about 60 fathoms of lead line, two double barreled guns, a considerable quantity of powder & shot, several double charges of shot tied up in the fingers of kid gloves, two chronometers, three pocket watches, 11 desert forks, 11 desert spoons, and 4 tea spoons (bearing the crests of officers belonging to both the Terror and the Erebus), several seaman's knives, a great many pairs of scissors, 5 shot flasks, several small religious books, a copy of the Vicar of Wakefield, a small Bible with many marginal notes, remains of three cakes of ship's chocolate, a small bead purse, a Victoria sixpence, a shoemaker's box with [tools], bristles, cobbler's [works], several small lots of tobacco,

a small pair of stout shooting boots, a very heavy iron shod knee boot of peculiar make, several empty cannisters, a small pemmican tin marked E, several empty cannisters, one cannister partly full, contents unknown, two human lower jaw bones and other human bones, two rolls of sheet lead, a quantity of tingles, three small axes or tomahawks, several Naval buttons with the crown and anchor and crown and [engine], two wooden awning stanchions having jaws like a gaff on their tops for the reception of a ridge rope or spar, a number of small iron stanchions belonging to the boat, three small axes or tomahawks, a great many remains of blankets, bear skins, boxcloth jackets, trousers, mitts, gloves, stockings, carpet and leather boots and clothing of all sorts, several small parcels of tobacco, pieces of a Meerscham and several clay pipes, several pairs of spectacles and substitutes for them made apparently on board, a good many fragments of rope, canvass, white line, &c.

This boat's head was found pointing to the N.Ed. as if she had been returning to the ships; whether this was the case or whether she had been turned by accident, or by her crew to afford them a better shelter from wind, I have no means of judging. Her position is Lat. 69° 09' N, Long. 99° 28' W.

We left our encampment on the morning of the 26th retracing our steps towards Ross' cairn. At 11 AM of the 28th we found in a small cairn at the southern entrance of Back's Bay another of Commander Gore's records. It was simply a tide paper like the first but was facing down and had not apparently been opened. It bore no date except May 1847. This paper like the former one was deposited by Graham Gore (Lieutenant) and Charles F. Des Vœux (Mate), and had the discrepancy as to the date of the winter passed at Beechey Island.

We reached the cairn at Ross' furthest at about 2 PM and spent the remainder of the 28th in making further search. I was disappointed in finding that the thaw had not made the slightest progress; indeed the pile of rubbish we had left exposed was covered with snow which had fallen in the interval. I remained at the place until 9 AM of the 29th with the hope of getting sights for a [rate]. The sun not appearing we then started and reached the site of the Northern cairn at 11 AM on the 30th. I remained there until 1:30 PM, rebuilt the cairn, and deposited a notice in it. Nothing more was found. At 8 PM we picked up our depot and encamped as it was my intention to cross to the Boothian shore from this point.

We left King William Island on the 31st of May, after having been a month on its most inhospitable coast. In no part of the world have I ever experienced such a continuation of bad weather. From the 8th, the day we left Cape Franklin, to this date I scarcely saw the sun. It snowed almost incessantly. The wind held almost continuously from the NW varying in force from a strong breeze to a hard gale. The force of the wind was generally sufficient to raise snow drift.

My observations on the part of the coast of King William Island which I have traversed are as follows: it is a low, barren limestone shore, with a good many large masses of granite on its northern, and granite boulders along the whole of its coast. These appear foreign to the place and have been probably brought there by the ice. I saw no sandstone south of Sir James Ross' cairn.

Where the land has a Northern aspect the pressure on the shore is severe, and at all the salient points heavy masses of ice are forced upon the beach. Where the [coast] takes a southerly or easterly trend, the shoalness of the water keeps the line of grounded ice far to seaward, leaving a fine smooth space inside. Thence to seaward the ice appears much broken and piled up and there are heavy masses among it. The general character of the ice is, however, not particularly heavy; I can only remember one place where there was ice which bore the appearance of age.

On the north end of the island, I saw no traces, however old, of Esquimaux, until we had passed the boat in Lat. 68° 54' N. A little to the south of this, some circles of stone were seen indicating their summer tent places, and to the Southd. the traces of caches and summer encampments became numerous. I doubt much if they have any knowledge of the Northern shore of the island. They certainly have not been as far North on the shore as the abandoned boat, since she was left there: if they go up that way at all, it must be on the sea ice.

Of animals, we saw only bears and foxes; there seem to be a good many of both. The latter are very tame; on several occasions, we had one within arm's length of different members of the party. One was killed by the harnessed dogs after playing round them for some time. There is not the slightest chance of a party subsisting by hunting on this shore, we saw no traces of deer or musk oxen. The only birds seen were a few willow grouse and some snow buntings. In speaking of animals I should have mentioned lemmings, many of which were seen, and one wolf that followed our sledge for a considerable distance.

There is a good deal of dry seaweed on the land which would serve for fuel in case of necessity. When traveling this coast in thick weather, it is a matter of no small difficulty to tell whether you are or are not on the sea coast. The shore is so flat and level with the sea that a stone or shingle ridge far to seaward would often apprise us that we had wandered on to the shore. There is no such chance of getting too far to seaward, as the hummocks are sure guides. To the Southward the shore is better defined but is still low; in fact, the whole West side of the island is little more than a shingle bank thrown up by the sea, the beach being a succession of ridges or steps, as though the ice were constantly forcing up fresh masses of stone and forming each year a new coast line.

I left Cape Felix on the morning of the 31st of May, intending to cross straight for the Magnetic pole of Sir James Ross, but the weather became very unfavourable, and without sun or compass for a guide, we got considerably to the Southd. of our course and struck the Boothian shore to the Southd. of Cape Victoria on the afternoon of the second of June. We had thus been three days crossing the strait, on the first two of which the weather was very bad and the ice extremely rough. It is all of one winter's formation, much broken up with deep and loose snow between the ridges. On the afternoon of the 31st, I crossed a flat limestone island of about two miles in breadth and on the following forenoon passed close to the Southd. of a second and small island about four and half miles to the Eastd. of the first. These I suppose to be two of the Beaufort Group. The weather was so thick that nothing beyond the objects immediately surrounding us could be distinguished. The islands were not seen until we were nearly upon them. On the 4th of June for the first time glaucous gulls were seen. Some of these birds were observed on all the remaining days of our journey.

I picked up my southern depot at 9:30 AM of the 7th and left a note for you. We encamped that evening inside the granite islands since called Sir Roderick Murchison's Islands, and having now reached the granite country, found plenty of fresh water in the holes in the rocks.

The greater part of the following day was spent in examining the off lying islands. They are nine in number. We found neither driftwood, traces of Esquimaux, or animals upon them.

I picked up my depot at Bear Point on the 9th and slept at Archdeacon Island the night of the 11th. Finding no record deposited there by either of the other parties, I went in the morning to Pemmican Rock and picked up the boat. Our strength was insufficient to get her and the sledges along together. I therefore moved on to the location of False Inlet, encamped, and sent the men and dogs out in the evening to bring her back. As the traveling had become very heavy, and I had reason to believe that the long lake would afford even worse road, I made no attempt to bring her further.

The men having been at work until 1 AM, I did not start until 9:30 AM of the 13th. It was my intention to have gone to the ship that march, but the day proved to be so hot and the lake road so heavy that we were forced to encamp at noon, having made very little progress. We were again under weigh at 10 PM and, the night being cold, made better progress. The lake, however, was much overflowed and the snow on it converted into a tenacious, pasty sludge, which rendered the traveling very heavy. We found water at the Eastern extreme of the lake but were able to get around it on the snow bank at its side.

We reached the ship at 5:30 AM of the 14th, the 74th day of our absence.

The only animals seen by us are bears, foxes, 1 wolf, 1 deer, and a few lemmings.

A very few Willow grouse, a good many snow buntings and, during the last few days of the journey, several glaucous gulls were the only birds seen.

My sledge crew returned to the ship perfectly well and enjoyed good health throughout the journey. I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to their uniform good conduct and exertions. I would not wish for a better sledge crew. To Henry Toms, the captain of my sledge, I am much indebted for his care of the provisions and the general assistance he rendered me. The carpenter, George Edwards, also proved himself an invaluable man. Although where all did their best it may seem invidious to particularize, from their leading position these men were able to afford me more help than could be expected from the younger members of my party. With Christian's conduct I was much pleased. He certainly deserves well of the expedition.

The relics and papers found by us are already in your possession. I add to my letter a list of them, classified as to the places at which they were found. I found my provisions, with the exception of fuel, more than sufficient. We could not use our full allowance of Pemmican, Bread or Pork and my petty officer somehow managed to have surplus tea, sugar and cocoa. This we used on our homeward journey. We were fortunate in getting driftwood and Bear's fat, which helped our fuel greatly. We must have picked up, one way and another, quite twenty day's fuel.

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your very obedient servant
William R. Hobson, Lieut. R.N.

To
Captain F. L. McClintock, R. N.
Arctic Discovery Yacht *Fox*

List of articles ~~found at~~ brought from the Cairn near Cape Felix:

The fragments of a small red ensign. Metal lid, screw and hinge of a powder case. Brass ornament from a Marine's shako. A few patent cartridges. Part of a pair of steel framed spectacles, glass replaced by wood with a slit for the eye. A parcel containing 6 or 8 packets of needles. A small copper cooking apparatus. A small bag of powder. 2 Pike heads and a fragment of iron work of a pike. The bung stave of a Marine's water bottle. A [worsted] knitted glove. 2 eye pieces of small telescopes (probably belonging to a sextant). Several brimstone matches. A piece of blank paper folded up in a triangular form. A smaller piece of blank paper folded like a common note.

From Point Victory

A small tin record case & record. A 6 inch dip circle, Robinson-I-22. A six inch double framed pillar sextant by E. & E. Emanuel, Portsmouth, with Frederick Hornby, R. N. engraved upon it. A small medicine chest. A carpenter's rule. 2 small copper spindles. Circular brass plate and handle broken out of a mahogany gun case, C. H. Osmer engraved on it. The field glass and German silver end of a small telescope. 2 joints of cleaning rod. A tea or coffee cannister.

From the Boat

A small bead purse. One of the glasses of a telescope. A small tin cylinder. A small bag containing percussion caps of three different sizes. A pair of blue spectacles with wire sides (in a tin case). A small pemmican tin marked E. Two double guns. A small Bible with marginal notes. A copy of the Vicar of Wakefield. Several small religious [books]. 11 silver desert spoons. 11 silver desert forks and 4 tea spoons bearing crests and initials of officers of the Terror and Erebus. A musket bullet. Charges of shot tied up in the fingers of kid gloves. A silk housewife. Two pair of spectacles made out of stout leather wire gauze substituted for glass. Two small pocket compasses. 1 shot flask. Three spring hooks of sword belts. A gold lace cap band and a small piece of gold twist. A pair of leather spectacles with crepe substituting for glass. Two small stoppered bottles (full). 3 glasses of spectacles. Remains of a pair of silver mounted spectacles. A small pair of silver forceps. A brass shot charger. 2 silver pocket chronometers. Three silver watches.

From a small cairn on the south side of Back's Bay

A small tin record case with a record.

William R. Hobson. Lieut. R.N.

DISCUSSION

Hobson's survey was conducted under very poor weather conditions and during a period in which he became progressively incapacitated by scurvy, to the extent that near the end of the trip he could not stand or walk without assistance (McClintock, 1860:231, 286). Despite these impediments, he completed a search of approximately 225 km of the coastline of King William Island, and his efforts produced some of the most important discoveries ever made about the fate of the Franklin expedition (Fig. 3). His narrative is also a reminder of the role often played by chance. On several occasions his search party found themselves well off their intended course, and the boat in Erebus Bay, which was not seen on the southward leg of the survey, probably because



FIG. 3. Examples of Franklin expedition relics recovered by William R. Hobson on King William Island. Left – from Cape Felix: Royal Marine shako plate (top); naval ensign (bottom). Centre – from Victory Point: dip circle (top); record tin (bottom). Right – from Erebus Bay: pocket chronometer (top); oak chock (bottom). Images © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

of blizzard conditions, was discovered on the return trip only because Hobson recognized, at what proved to be an opportune time, that they were sledging too far from shore and sent two members of his party to walk the coastline.

From the perspective of ongoing archaeological research, the report provides additional details about previously undisturbed Franklin sites created both before and after the abandonment of the ships. The availability of descriptions of the sites in situ can provide important baseline information both for contemporary analyses and interpretations and for understanding the processes of site transformation over time. Examples include the tent camp at Cape Felix, which has not been the subject of a detailed archaeological investigation, and of which very little now remains intact. Hobson's report explains that his examination of the cairn involved dismantling it, carrying the rocks away from the feature, digging a five-foot wide circular trench around it at a distance of 10 feet from its centre, and digging up the ground beneath the cairn. We also learn that approximately four weeks later, on May 30th, he rebuilt the cairn. Nothing of it remains standing today (Fig. 4). Similarly, Hobson's description of the removal of the contents from the boat he found in Erebus Bay contains details that contribute to our understanding of the condition of the site and of the surrounding area as found by later search expeditions. Hobson's use of a pickaxe to remove the large quantity of frozen



FIG. 4. August 2011 photograph of stone feature at site NILf-7, Cape Felix, possibly the cairn discovered by Hobson in May 1859.

clothing items from the boat, which in his words were “torn to pieces” as a result, provides a fuller context for interpreting later discoveries of clothing fragments scattered widely along the shoreline of southern Erebus Bay (Stackpole, 1965; Klutschak, 1987). Also of interest is Hobson's perspective about the orientation of the ship's boat and sledge (pointing northeast, toward the abandoned ships), interpreted by McClintock (1860:269) as evidence of a failed attempt by an unknown number of officers and crew to

return to the ships. The meaning ascribed by McClintock to the position of the boat and sledge appears not to have been seriously questioned (Cyriax, 1939), despite the fact that there are a number of other plausible reasons for the orientation of the boat and sledge when found by Hobson, some of which are reflected in his more circumspect assessment.

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