

Minutes of the 896th Meeting of the Brodie Club, Sept. 20, 1994 in the Faunal Laboratory, U. of T.

Speaker, Barry Ranford, Title: What a terrible place to die.

Attendance, 12 members and 19 guests (see attached).

Chair, Ann Falls

Secretary, Jim Bendell

Minutes. Those of the last meeting were accepted. Two members recently deceased were A. Boissoneau and W. Swinton. Swinton was present at the discovery of the skull of Piltdown man. There will be a memorial service for him on Oct. 14 at Hart House. Many members attended the memorial service for Boissoneau and Riley spoke about him on behalf of the club.

Norm Martin reported on: An exhibit of the impact of man on the St. Lawrence River Valley at ROM, Project Feeder Watch Ont. of LPBO, special rates at Day's Inn near the Maple Leaf Gardens for Brodie members, and the special issue (spring) of Review Magazine on sustainable development.

Election of Officers. For 1994-5 they are: Treasurer, Speakman; Corresponding Secretary, Savage; FON Representative, Lumsden backed up by Riley; Membership, Carrick, Ann Falls, Riley and Young; Program Committee, Aird, Bendell, Bodsworth, Bruce Falls, Huff and Savage.

Introduction of the Speaker. Savage said Barry Ranford is a Torontonian with a passion for and a expertise in the Arctic, especially the Franklin expedition. His vocation is graphic design and photography. He is also an accomplished archeologist. His photographs and articles have appeared in many important publications in North America and abroad. He is currently a teacher in a secondary school in Orangeville, Ontario.

The talk. The story of the Franklin expedition grips us with its accounts of heroism, exploration, horrific hardship, stupidity, death, and cannibalism. But what is the truth? What exactly happened to the 135 men who sailed into and died in the Canadian Arctic is still much of a mystery. In the spring of 1845, Sir John Franklin and crew in 2 ships set out from England to find the fabled north-west passage. Franklin and many of his men had experience in the Arctic and they were well fitted-out. In July they were sighted by a whaler in Lancaster Sound off Greenland and then vanished. In 1848 and later the British Admiralty and many others began a planned search for the expedition. The first word of its fate was in 1854 from John Rae, a fur trader and explorer, who obtained information and artifacts from the Inuit. Supposedly the ships were trapped in ice in Victoria Strait off the NW coast

of King William Island. An escape was attempted by man-hauling boats on sledges down the west side of the island to open water. Later discoveries about the expedition put the destination to the Back River on the mainland and thence to a British post at Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake - a distance of over 1,000 km. At least 35 men with a boat made it to the mouth of the river where they died. Over the years additional pieces of the puzzle have been found and put into place. They reveal a journey starting with a cairn and a brief note and then a trail littered with boats, bodies, supplies, single and groups of skeletons on the ground, burials, scraps and pieces, and cut marks on bones made with a steel knife that supposedly prove cannibalism.

In August 1992, the speaker and his friend Mike Yarascavich, after review of present knowledge of the Franklin saga, walked what they thought was the route taken by Franklin's men on KWI. They hoped to find more clues to the mystery, and, more than this, live as much as possible something of the last journey of the doomed explorers. As the title declares: What a terrible place to die.

Inuit from the hamlet of Gjoa Haven at the SE corner of KWI took them by ATVs across the island to the SW corner of Erebus Bay. From here the two began a walk and search of some 120 km. back towards Gjoa Haven. They had about 100 kilos of supplies and equipment for one month which they back-packed and pulled on a small two wheeled cart.

By word and coloured slide, Ranford described what Franklin's men must have experienced; fog, wind and cold, featureless and barren land, rough terrain and travel further slowed or blocked by bogs and lakes. Despite modern gear and supplies the spent much time eating and resting. Yarascavich became ill and this increased the hardship, perhaps a coincidence with the men they searched for.

On a day when his companion was too ill to travel, Ranford searched about their camp along the coast line. Across a muddy lagoon and on a small island he spotted what looked like a white plastic bottle. Closer examination revealed 3 skulls and later more bones and other artifacts including pieces of a boat. The skulls were caucasian, and remains included an RN brass button and the leather sole of a square-toed boot as worn by Victorian matelots. Thus Ranford had discovered a new site that adds significant new information to the fate of the Franklin expedition - the Ranford Erebus Bay Boat Site. His find is made the more remarkable by the fact that of all the search for the expedition but 9 sites have so far been found.

In 1993, Ranford assisted by 6 others returned to the site, now outfitted in comparative style. He was backed by Equinox, the Polar Shelf Project, the Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, the territorial government and the C.B.C. The site was studied using correct archaeological protocol, much new material was found, and the analyses and writing up are under way. Just before the expedition left the Ranford Site, Ranford found another site with a grave containing 4 individuals and 3 skulls about one km from his first site.

It is a problem to find or separate new sites from those discovered by other much earlier searchers, notably L. McClintock, and F. Schwatka. Also, the Inuit have well worked over most

remains. At the Ranford Site natives had apparently busily beaten boat bolts on a balded boulder. This was shown by scraps of bolts and cleared depressions in the ground made by kneeling at the edge of the stone. Artifacts attract attention by making distinctive irregularities in the ground and growth of lichens.

Some of the findings from the Ranford Site to date are: The men perished in the spring of 1848, the average age was 27 with the youngest about 12, of 400 bones more than 90 had cut marks made with a steel knife, and some show lead poisoning and leprosy. A sole of a boot contained copper nails driven through the heel to function as crampons. Other items included bits of: boat parts, tow rope, belt buckle, clay pipe, sunglasses, copper nails, buttons, a bone comb, and English broad-cloth.

At the end of the summer of 1993 Ranford erected a cairn and tablet dedicated to the men who died there. Eventually, all remains will be buried at the site. Someday we may be able to account for all 105 explorers who left their ships to escape the grip of the ice.

References. Get the straight goods from Ranford from his articles in Equinox in 1993 and 1992.

Questions and Comments.

1. Bendell-What killed them? Ans. starvation, malnutrition, mental breakdown, terrible weather. There is evidence of lead poisoning from the lead solder used to seal cans of food. This may have caused irrational behaviour and other debilities. The Inuit describe the men as thin with black teeth and gums suggesting scurvy.
2. Norma Martin commented James Ross lived healthfully in the Arctic for 5 Years.
3. Bruce Falls asked what animals might disturb and scatter remains. Ans. Foxes. Other animals seen were: Lemmings, snow geese, barren-ground caribou, and red-throated loon.
4. Savage-Limes and lemons for the prevention of scurvy were known long before 1845. Ans. Perhaps there were inadequate amounts and/or the supplies had gone bad.
5. Comment-Perhaps the men themselves modified things he attributes to the Inuit.
6. Bodsworth-This assault on the NW passage was made in a bad series of years. In 1848 the Niagra Falls and River froze. Even the Inuit said it was a dreadful time.

Thanker. Tasker thanked the speaker. He had read of the expedition in the Globe and Mail and found it fascinating. He had looked forward to tonight's talk. The presentation justified his excitement and more than fulfilled his expectations. Long and loud applause.

Members notes and observations.

1. Bendell observed an opossum at 454 Apple Lane in Mississauga. It hid under a juniper bush and growled at his dog. Opossums were reported as early as 1858 in SW Ontario. By 1987 they were recorded

in Fergus and Toronto. A female births 25 young at a time but has only 13 teats.

2. Bruce Falls had observed a hawk migration and a buff-breasted sandpiper at Port Burwell.

Adjournment was at 2230 followed by refreshments and further discussion.