

**THE OFFICIAL REPORT  
OF THE RECENT ARCTIC  
EXPEDITION PP. 1-95**

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The Official Report of the Recent Arctic Expedition pp. 1-95 by Captain Nares

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THE  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
OF THE  
RECENT ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

By CAPTAIN NARES, R.N.,  
COMMANDER OF THE EXPEDITION.

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1876.

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## ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

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H.M.S. "ALERT," at VALENTIA,  
27th October, 1876.

SIR,—I have the honour to report in detail the proceedings of the Expedition since leaving Upernivick on the 22nd of July, 1875, as follows :—

### *Expedition leaves Upernivick.*

The "Alert" and "Discovery," one ship in tow of the other, left Upernivick, from which port I last had the honour of addressing you, on the 22nd July, 1875.

A dense fog prevailing at sea I steamed to the northward between the islands and the main land; experiencing clear and calm weather until arriving near Kangitok Island, when the fog, stealing in from the sea, gradually obtained the mastery, and completely enveloped us. The numerous picturesque rocky islands and reefs in this sheltered labyrinthine passage are so incorrectly represented in the published charts that a pilot is at present a necessity. The one who accompanied us, an Esquimaux, informed me that many of the likely-looking channels are bridged across with sunken reefs; and from the many rocks we saw lying just awash directly in our passage I have reason to believe his statement.

The large discharging Upernivick Glacier having only one outlet, leading direct to the sea, its numerous icebergs of all sizes are collected in great numbers by the eddy tides and currents among the islets situated to the southward, and tend to keep the channels completely closed until late in the season; but when once open in July by some of the bergs

grounding on rocks, and others, by their height above the flotation line, affording certain evidence of deep water, they assist rather than impede navigation during calm weather.

On the morning of the 23rd, after an anxious night, passed with a dense fog, and a strong tidal current, in a narrow channel, in which we could obtain no bottom with 100 fathoms of line at a cable's length of the shore, and with the "Discovery" in tow; during a momentary clearance of the atmosphere two Esquimaux in their kyacks were observed close to us. After consulting with them through Christian Petersen, Danish and Esquimaux interpreter, they volunteered to conduct us to an anchorage. On following them to the position they denoted, and obtaining no bottom with the hand-lead line at the main chains, I felt the bow of the ship glide slowly up on the ground. Through the fog we could then see that the land was within fifty yards of us. The Esquimaux had evidently not considered that our ships required a greater depth of water to float in than their own frail canoes. As it was nearly low water, and the tide still falling, I allowed the ship to remain quiet where she was; the "Discovery" still hanging to us by her towing hawser: and took advantage of the enforced delay by landing the ships' companies to wash their clothes.

The fog lifted slightly as the day advanced; and as the tide rose the ship floated without having incurred any strain or damage whatever. I then proceeded to sea; discharging the pilot, who was not to blame for our mishap, off the north shore of Kangitok, the outlying island of the group; after passing which the channel presents no difficulties.

Thinking that probably a distorted account of our getting on shore might reach Europe, at the last moment I wrote a hasty pencil letter to Captain Evans, Hydrographer, merely to point out how very unimportant the slight detention had been.

*Crossing through the "Middle Ice," Baffin's Bay.*

By 4 p.m. we had passed the Brown Islands, with a sea perfectly clear of ice before and around us.

Having given much study and consideration to the question; and a high and very steady barometer following a south-east wind, denoting that the calm settled weather we had lately enjoyed was likely to continue, I decided to force my way through the middle ice of Baffin's Bay instead of proceeding by the ordinary route round Melville Bay. Accordingly both ships proceeded at full speed to the westward, racing in company for Cape York, with only about a dozen icebergs in sight ahead, floating quietly on a calmly mirrored sea, to dispute our passage. As we passed out from the land the fog gradually dissolved and revealed a magnificent and unique panorama of the ice-capped mountains of Greenland, which give birth to the Upernivick Glacier, fronted by innumerable icebergs, and, at a long distance in advance, by the group of scattered black islets among which we had passed the previous night, and of which Kangitok is the northernmost.

#### *Middle Pack.*

At 1.30 a.m. of the 24th we ran into the pack at a distance of 70 miles from Kangitok. It consisted of open-sailing ice, from one to three feet, and occasionally four feet, in thickness. The floes were at first not larger than 250 yards in diameter, and very rotten, dividing readily, and opening a channel when accidentally struck by the ship. The reflection in the sky near the horizon denoted that while the ice was very open to the southward of us, it was apparently closer packed to the northward. About 6 a.m., when we had run 30 miles through the ice, it gradually became closer, and the floes larger, estimated as measuring one mile in diameter, and necessitated a discriminating choice to be made of the best channels. For 14 hours, during which time we ran 60 miles, the ice continued in much the same state, never close enough to suggest the probability of a barrier occurring, and yet keeping the look-out in the "Crow's Nest" fully employed. After 8 p.m. the channels of water became decidedly broader and more numerous, so I



gradually altered course to the northward, steering directly for Cape York, the ice becoming more and more open as we advanced.

At 9.30 A.M. of the 25th of July we sighted the high land north of Cape York, and at 11 o'clock, much to the astonishment of the Ice Quartermasters, who continually declared "It will ne'er be credited in Peterhead," we were fairly in the "north water," and able again to think about economising coal, having come through the middle ice in 34 hours without a check: but it is my duty to add, with not a few deep scratches along the water-line.

*Middle Passage through Baffin's Bay.*

In consequence of our having made a successful voyage through the middle ice, it should not be too hastily concluded that a similar passage can always be commanded. The middle pack is justly dreaded by the most experienced ice navigators.

Large icebergs and surface-ice, floating in water at various depths, when affected either by wind or an ocean current, move at different rates; hence, when in motion, as one passes the other, the lighter surface-ice, incapable of controlling its course, is readily torn in pieces by the heavy massive ice-berg; therefore, a ship once entrapped in pack ice among icebergs, unless she has water space to allow her to move out of the way, is constantly in danger of being carried forcibly against a berg. On such occasions man is powerless, for he can take no possible means to save his vessel. Before steam vessels were used for ice navigation the masters of sailing ships, being unable to take full advantage of a favourable calm, very wisely seldom ventured to force their way through the middle ice, and chose, in preference, the chance of delay in making the safer passage through Melville Bay, where, by securing their vessel in dock in the fixed land ice, they ran less danger of being nipped while forcibly detained by the channels through the ice remaining closed.

At the latter end of July with an open season, indicated by the main pack not being met with nearer than fifty miles from the land, in about latitude  $73^{\circ} 20'$  and a continuous calm, to allow the northerly running current on the Greenland shore and the southerly running one on the western side of Baffin's Bay to open up the ice, I believe a passage can always be made by a steam vessel, but, unless this favourable combination of circumstances is met with, so far as the scanty knowledge we at present possess enables us to judge, the passage must still be said to be doubtful.

Soon after sighting land, and getting clear of the drift ice, the "Discovery" parted company to communicate with the natives at Cape York, while the "Alert" proceeded towards the Carey Islands.

#### *Icebergs off Cape York.*

A vast collection of icebergs, many of them aground, were thickly crowded together off the Cape; and in lines parallel with the coast trending towards Conical Rock and Cape Atholl. In the offing they were less numerous: which I attribute to the southerly current, which we experienced the following day on our passage to the Carey Islands, catching up and carrying with it to the southward those that drift out from the main body to the westward beyond the influence of the north-running current on the Greenland coast.

#### *Cape York Natives.*

During the stay of the "Discovery" at Cape York, the natives were communicated with through Christian Petersen, Interpreter, and Hans the Esquimaux, but as the brother of the latter was absent on a hunting excursion for an uncertain period, Captain Stephenson wisely gave up the hope of obtaining his services for the benefit of the Expedition, and pushed on for the Carey Islands, where he joined company with the "Alert"; the two ships arriving there at midnight of the 26th July.

*Carey Islands, Depot and Notice.*

A depot of 3,600 rations and a boat were landed on the S.E. point of the S.E. island, and a record deposited in a conspicuous cairn on the summit. The "Expedition" then proceeded, steaming, with as much economy of coal as possible, northward through a calm sea, with bright clear weather. With the exception of the many scattered icebergs there was no ice in sight from the summit of the Carey Islands.

Passing between Hakluyt and Northumberland Islands, the ships were abeam of Cape Robertson by 8 p.m. of the 27th July. Ice apparently fast to the shore completely closed Ingfield Gulf east of Cape Aeland but both entrances to the gulf were clear.

At 8 a.m. of the 28th July, five days and a half from leaving the anchorage of Upernivick, I had the satisfaction of seeing the "Expedition" at anchor near Port Foulke; with the entrance of Smith's Sound perfectly clear of ice and none coming to the southward with a fresh northerly wind.

*"Polaris" Winter Quarters, 1872-73.*

While Captain Stephenson explored the head of Foulke Fjord to ascertain its suitability as a station for winter quarters for any relief vessel coming to our assistance, Commander Markham and myself proceeded in a boat to Littleton Island and Lifeboat Cove, the scene of the wreck of the "Polaris." The cache mentioned by Dr. Emil Bessels and Mr. Bryant of the "United States North Pole Expedition" as the depository of certain instruments and boxes of books, was very readily discovered, but contained nothing. Articles of clothing and numerous small caches containing seal and walrus meat were scattered about the small peninsula in the neighbourhood of the late winter quarters; and near the ruins of the house, apart from each other, and without any protection, were found four or five boxes, each covered with heavy stones to prevent the winds moving them, and having the lids secured on by a rope. Besides one thermometer,