

Correspondence

Thoughts on the 1935 Haig-Thomas/ Humphreys route on Ellesmere Island Lord Shackleton

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I recently read with great interest Mr R.J. Oszcewski's article 'The hunt for marine reptile fossils on western Ellesmere Island' (*Polar Record* 28 (165): 105–12), which included a lengthy discussion on the route taken by David Haig-Thomas and Noel Humphreys on the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition of 1935, of which I was the organiser.

I was interested to discover that the general belief seems to be that Humphreys was right, yet that the author has strong indications that Humphreys, as well as Haig-Thomas, was wrong, indicating that they had reached neither Troid Fiord nor Vendome Fiord, but Blind Fiord.

At the time, knowing them both, I was more inclined to believe that Haig-Thomas was correct. He was ingenious and full of initiative, although some thought him not an entirely reliable witness. To some extent, therefore, the question seemed to depend on the reliability of witnesses, including Nookapingwa. I would have thought that Nookapingwa was an entirely reliable witness, and I know that Harry Stallworthy, our Royal Canadian Mounted Police member, would have sworn by him. Of course, this perhaps weighs unfairly against Humphreys' arguments, because he was not popular with the Eskimos.

Unfortunately, there are no members of the expedition alive except myself. I was in touch with some of the members of our Eskimo team, but I am afraid that they died relatively recently.

If any *Polar Record* readers have further information or opinions about the Haig-Thomas/Humphreys journey, I should be interested to know them, and I would be equally delighted if I could be of help to any historian interested in this expedition.

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In her interesting article 'Edwin Jesse De Haven: the first US Arctic explorer,' Liz Cruwys quotes William Parker Snow's description of De Haven as given in his book *Voyage of the 'Prince Albert' in search of Sir John Franklin* (Snow 1851; Cruwys 1992). From the information concerning De Haven presented in her article, there seems no reason to cast doubt on the accuracy of the description, but

it should be borne in mind that Snow was certainly not a disinterested observer.

At the time when he met De Haven, on 23 August 1850, Snow was a member of the first of Lady Franklin's private expeditions in search of her husband and the crews of HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*. Snow's personal position was one of considerable difficulty; he seems to have been second-in-command of the expedition, but not second-in-command of the ship *Prince Albert*. In overall control was Commander C.C. Forsyth RN, who was one of the many naval officers who volunteered to help in the search (Stone 1985). Snow, a civilian whose career up to that time had been varied and undistinguished, had also volunteered and had been appointed by Lady Franklin herself in one of the quixotic gestures in which that lady so frequently indulged (Stone 1978). For Snow, this expedition represented the opportunity to secure the fame and advancement for which he craved. But Forsyth reached an early conclusion that the *Prince Albert* expedition would achieve little or nothing, and he found the situation on board, commanding a difficult civilian crew, stressful. He had determined to return to England shortly before the meeting with De Haven's ships.

Snow knew of this decision and, of course, it dashed all his hopes. It seems clear that he had already decided to ingratiate himself with Lady Franklin in order to secure a prominent place on board a fresh expedition should she determine on one. It would, therefore, be circumspect for him to ensure that there was nothing in his journal that would alienate her. He was quite well aware of the friendship between Lady Franklin and Henry Grinnell, the organiser of the De Haven expedition (Cruwys 1990), and it would not have been in his interest to be anything less than adulatory about it. Not only that, his journal was edited fairly ruthlessly before publication by Lady Franklin, and one can be sure that even if Snow had inserted any criticism, inadvertent or otherwise, of De Haven or his expedition, then she would have removed it. Hence, whether the glowing description of De Haven was deserved or not, it would surely have appeared as it did.

A full account of the 1850 *Prince Albert* expedition, and of the involvement in it of Lady Franklin, is to be published shortly (Stone in press).

References

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