

DISCOVERIES IN EASTERN FOXE BASIN, 1948 AND 1949

[Based on notes in *Arctic Circular*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 1948, p. 23–25; Vol. 3, No. 3, 1950, p. 26–31; *Arctic. Journal of the Arctic Institute of North America*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1949, p. 125; Vol. 3, No. 2, 1950, p. 108–12; and *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 115, Nos. 4–6, 1950, p. 262–63.]

In July 1948 the Royal Canadian Air Force announced that a Lancaster aircraft, piloted by Flight-Lieutenant C. D. Barnett and navigated by Flying Officer A. E. Tomkinson of No. 413 Photo Squadron, based at Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island, had discovered 5000 square miles of hitherto unknown territory in Foxe Basin. The discovery, made on 21 July, was stated to consist of two large islands lying between the Foxe Basin coast of Baffin Island and the Spicer Islands. Next month the area was photographed with tri-camera coverage from a height of 20,000 ft., and the islands were approximately located on the Canadian 8-mile aeronautical charts. In addition, the Aeronautical Charting Section of the Department of Mines and Resources made a preliminary sketch-map of the islands on a scale of 1 inch to 3.95 miles. The position of the larger island, which is rectangular in shape, was plotted between lats. 67° 10' and 68° 27' N. and long. 74° 50' and 77° 30' W. The second island, also rectangular, was plotted between lats. 67° 53' and 68° 15' N. and longs. 73° 31' and 74° 38' W.

The announcement of the discovery did not come as a complete surprise to Canadian geographers. In 1897 the American whaling captain John O. Spicer had stated that:

In Fox Channel I saw no reefs, other than the ones I named [Spicer Islands], but north of King's Cape the shoal water extends a long ways off...¹

In 1922 Donald B. MacMillan mapped a shoal 5 miles north of the larger island, but his ship's track, as given to the Canadian Hydrographic Service, cuts across the area now shown to be land. Moreover, as a result of his work on the Foxe Basin coast of Baffin Island in 1938–39, T. H. Manning concluded that the behaviour of ice and tides in Wordie Bay suggested the possibility of islands further south than the Tweedsmuir Islands, and he was almost certain that he had himself seen land some 30 miles west of Parry Point.² Again, in August 1946 N. J. Polunin had made a flight over the Spicer Islands in Foxe Basin, and stated his belief that there were low islands in the shallow eastern waters of Foxe Basin.³

On 7 April 1949 the Canadian Board on Geographical Names named the largest island Prince Charles Island, after H.R.H. Prince Charles; on 1 September 1949 the second island was named Air Force Island, and a third large island to the north received the name of Foley Island, after J. H. Foley, the navigator of the aircraft which had photographed the islands in August 1948, and who had since been killed in a flying accident.

¹ "Statement of Captain John Spicer, of Groton. 23rd December, 1897". *Report of the expedition to Hudson Bay and Cumberland Gulf in the steamship "Diana" under the command of William Wakeham*. . . 1897. Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1898, p. 61.

² See the *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 101, Nos. 5, 6, 1943, p. 240.

³ Nicholas Polunin, *Arctic unfolding*. London, 1949, p. 252.

Meanwhile, an exploring expedition had been sent out by the Geographical Bureau of the Department of Mines and Resources in the summer of 1949.¹ The expedition found that the three islands lay between lats. 67° 10' and 68° 45' N. and longs. 73° 20' and 77° 25' W., covering a total area of some 6000 square miles. Prince Charles Island is 80 miles from north to south by 60 miles from east to west; the island, which is low-lying, rises only to some 50 ft. above sea-level, and consists of disintegrated limestone, with many shallow lakes and swamps. Air Force Island, 20 miles from north to south by 36 miles from east to west, is similar in structure and appearance, but has three areas of granite hills in the north rising to 120 ft. above sea-level. The southern and western areas of Foley Island, 28 miles from north to south by 14 miles from east to west, are low-lying but the land rises to the north-east and forms a ridge some 8 miles from north to south, terminating at its northern end in a bluff some 300 ft. above sea-level.

As a result of these investigations, T. H. Manning, the leader of the expedition, announced that Prince Charles Island had in fact been discovered in 1932 by W. A. Poole, captain of the tug *Ocean Eagle*, of the Department of Railways and Canals. On 3 September 1932 Poole had written in his log book:

3.35 a.m., half speed ahead steering south by compass, east true toward land, sighted last night. 6.30 a.m., came to anchor in 10 fathoms about 4 miles off shore, the land appears low with many boulders on the hills and shore. The coast line was nearly straight extending about 15 miles both to the NNE. and SSW. our position at the middle part of the island lat. 67. 47 N., long. 77. 28 W.²

The island was afterwards named Poole Island in a report dated 4 February 1932³ from C. P. Edwards, Director of Radio, to the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department of Marine; but its position was not shown on any published map.

Manning also showed that the group of three islands previously supposed by him to lie south of the Tweedsmuir Islands was in fact the high ground in the northern part of Air Force Island.⁴ Similarly, Anderson Island, sighted north-west of the Tweedsmuir Islands by the British Canadian Arctic Expedition in 1938–39 and named in honour of R. M. Anderson of the National Museum of Canada, now proved to be the ridge at the north-eastern end of Foley Island.

Accordingly, on 6 April 1950 the Canadian Board on Geographical Names approved the name of Poole Point for the westernmost headland of Prince Charles Island, and that of Anderson Bluff for the northernmost point of Foley Island.

¹ For a note on the expedition and map see p. 256–57.

² *Navigation conditions in Hudson Bay and Strait during season of navigation 1932*. Department of Marine, Ottawa, 1933, p. 36.

³ *Ibid.* p. 8.

⁴ See map illustrating T. H. Manning, "The Foxe Basin coasts of Baffin Island", *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 101, Nos. 5, 6, 1943.