

## *Solving the Franklin mystery*

# *Expedition up to the Arctic looks to unlock frozen clues*

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In 1845 two British ships embarked on a voyage through uncharted islands in Canada's Arctic to find the Northwest Passage to the Pacific.

Led by Sir John Franklin, the seamen found the passage but never lived to tell the story.

Almost 150 years later, a Mississauga man is leading a discovery mission to the Arctic for a fifth year to find out what really happened during the infamous Franklin Expedition.

John Harrington, a retired high school vice principal, left with his crew Thursday, set to discover the past.

"It's like history is standing still up there," Harrington said. "You see the remains left behind from 150 years ago untouched. It's been a big mystery as to what happened to those men."

Harrington, 55, photographer Derek Smith and archaeologist John MacDonald will embark on the two-week adventure to King William Island, just off the northern coast of Canada's mainland.

His team expects to explore 60 miles of coastline along the desolate island's Graham Gore Peninsula, through exhausting shale terrain, hoping to find more clues to fit the pieces together.

So far, Harrington's annual summer treks across the island have turned up over 200 artifacts, including fabric, shoe leather, copper and iron nails, buttons and a broken clay pipe. His group has also found pieces of wood, probably from Franklin lifeboats, scattered in areas.

But possibly the most important find Harrington's group discovered were human bones and bone fragments with cut-marks, fueling the theory that Franklin's starving men resorted to cannibalism.

"It has provided the first tangible evidence of cannibalism," Harrington said.

Of the 400 bones he found, 92 had knife marks that indicate flesh or muscle had been cut off.

"It really is a search...looking for pieces of a puzzle and putting it together," said Smith, who grew up in Malton. "It's also a sense of adventure, and being a Boy Scout again."

But the trek isn't all fun and games. The weather on King Edward Island is some of the worst in the Arctic,



Photographer Derek Smith, archeologist John MacDonald and Mississauga's John Harrington (above, from left) departed Thursday on their voyage to King William Island to find remnants from the doomed Franklin Expedition of 1845. Above, the crew prepare for the flight from the Arctic's Cambridge Bay to King William Island before last summer's trip.

Harrington said. And, according to his wife, Fran, it's pretty harsh.

"When they come back their lips are bleeding, they lose their toenails, and they lose about 25 pounds each. They look like a bunch of derelicts when they come back," she said.

So why do these men put themselves through it?

Harrington calls it "the last frontier." The mystery of how the Franklin expedition met its demise has never been solved, he said, despite 30 to 40 British expeditions following the crew's disappearance.

"There's only one note, one piece of paper that has ever been found," he said, in 1859 by a British expedition.

The note was left in a canister in 1847 by Franklin crewmen, and said all was well. But the crewmen went back to the same note the following year and scrawled another message indicating their captain died suddenly, and 24 others were dead. The remaining 105 men were abandoning the ships — frozen in ice — to walk to safety, Harrington said.

The note was the only written evi-

dence that any search team has been able to find.

Harrington's team is hoping to discover buried log books and manuscripts, the grave of Sir John Franklin himself, and wreckage from the British ships Erebus and Terror.

It was five years ago when Barry Ranford, a friend of Harrington's, asked if Harrington would want to go on the trip to the Arctic the following year. Being an artist, Harrington couldn't refuse.

"I do extensive sketching of things I've found," said Harrington, who keeps a journal of what the group has seen and found.

He's produced 129 log books in memory of the crewman thus far, each with hand-colored sketches.

Harrington said he's had interest from all over the world in the log books, which he sells to help pay for the \$12-15,000 sponsored voyage.

During the expedition, Harrington will update his web page on the Internet. The address is [www.franklin-trail.com](http://www.franklin-trail.com).