

Present state of the *Belgica* project

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ABSTRACT. Further progress is reported concerning the preservation of *Belgica*, currently a wreck in Norwegian waters.

Since the latest note on the *Belgica* project (Loy 2008), some new investigations have been made concerning the wreck of the ship (Fig. 1).

A mission to the wreck took place on 14 and 15 February 2009, the purpose of which was to produce a promotion film by a diving team, and to permit salvage and transport companies to estimate the feasibility and systems of raising the wreck. The methods and progress of the removal of the components (iron items, sand, ammunition) still on board of the wreck were discussed. Samples of the seawater near the wreck were taken and analysed.



Fig. 1. Photograph of the wreck with fishing nets alongside. Photo by N. Mouchart.

A symposium entitled Conservation of Historic Wrecks for Future Generations was organised in Hasselt University, Belgium, on 26 and 27 October 2009. The report noted that 'monitoring the explosives still on board ... could provide welcome information on the biodegradation and biochemical attenuation processes, data which can be useful for risk assessment of the widespread amount of ammunition still on ocean floors worldwide.' It recommended *in situ* preservation.

A photoreport on the wreck was made by D. Delbare on 13 and 14 September 2010.

On 25 October a fact finding mission was organised by the Norwegian and Belgian Ministries of Defence and this involved an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team. A technical report was prepared by P-Y. Rosoux assessing the quality and quantity of explosives still on board the wreck. His team determined three types of explosives:

TNT explosives (roll shape) in front of the main cargo room, guncotton (nitrocellulose) blocks in the middle and back of the main cargo room, a few booster explosives (nitrocellulose), type 'Dry field ounce MK2', found beside the wreck.

No detonators were found on the wreck. The quantity of ammunition is estimated by the EOD team as approximately 35 tonnes. All explosives, once dried, are still dangerous. Up to now, the British Navy has not been contacted.

From 18 to 21 October 2010, Dr. Stephen Wickler visited Belgium, accompanied by Kjell Kjaer, vice-chairman of the *Belgica* Society. Stephen Wickler is responsible for the management of submerged heritage in Tromsø University Museum district, Norway. The primary goal of his visit was to obtain an overview of the current status of activities related to the potential raising of *Belgica*. These were 'satisfied to a considerable extent'. A major issue that remains unresolved is the feasibility of raising the wreck and the impact of removing the explosives on the overall stability of the vessel.

In conclusion it can be reported that the good teamwork established between Norway and Belgium continues with a splendid target: the preservation of the historic vessel of A. de Gerlache de Gomery.

Reference

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Additional documents and survey on the Franklin sites of Beechey Island, Nunavut, Canada: addendum

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In addition to the visits to Beechey Island referenced in my recent article (Hansen 2010), M'Dougall also describes his visit to Beechey Island (in *Resolute* with De Bray) from Tuesday 10

August 1852 (mistakenly given as 11 August) to Sunday, 15 August (M'Dougall 1857: 78–87). He gives his version of the inscriptions of the three Franklin expedition headboards. While he follows the mistaken placement order as in Osborn and *The Illustrated London News* of 4 October 1851 (Osborn 1865: 90; *The Illustrated London News* 1851b), comparison of the inscriptions with both Kane (Kane 1854: 163) and the photo of the Torrington headboard in Powell (Powell 2006: 330, Fig. 10) now lead me to conclude that M'Dougall's rather than Kane's version of the Franklin headboards inscriptions are probably the most accurate of the contemporary accounts.

The account of Sutherland 1852 (Hansen 2010: 194–195) also has a foldout map at the front of volume 2 that includes a detail of Beechey Island (Sutherland 1852: vol. 2 front map). It is similar to that in *The Illustrated London News* of 20

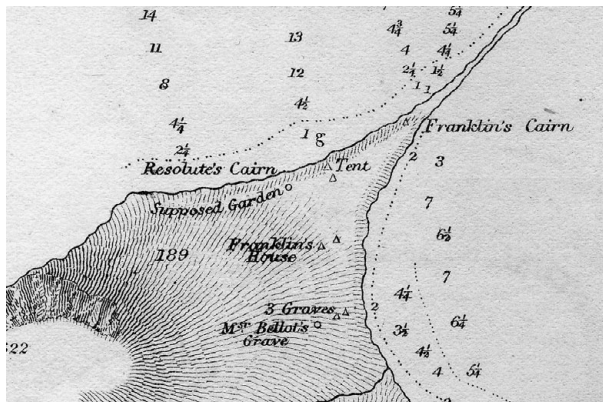


Fig. 1. Detail. Vicinity of the Beechey Island graves, tent, and supposed garden sites (Pullen 1855: opposite 794, in Powell 2006:194).

September 1851 and De Bray (*The Illustrated London News* 1851a; De Bray 1992: 42) in having a hatched oval symbol of the garden at Pullen's tent site (Fig. 1).

As it was a common practice to bury messages north of cairns, the unidentified disturbed area (Hansen 2010: 198) at the ridge termination just northeast of the Franklin can cairn was probably created by Franklin searchers hoping, unsuccessfully, to find a buried message.

A new reference adds insight into the tent site discussed as site 4 (Hansen 2010: 197). Commander Pullen's proceedings from 14 August 1852 to February 1853 are given in the Arctic Blue Book series (Pullen 1854: 103–136). On 24 January 1853 Pullen started another careful search for records, especially under the pile of tins at the Franklin can cairn. On page 128, he states:

On the 28th we had dug over all those places that had been before examined, without finding any record to the direction of the missing ships have taken. A few broken tent pegs, bones, pieces of glass, shavings, &c., was all we got. By-the-by, in that place so imaginatively designated the garden, and what I should say was the site of a tent, was discovered most of the broken tent pegs, also scraps of brown paper and a solitary piece of tallow candle (mould). The cairn on the top of the island we have not yet found, although frequent have been the searches for it; however, we have plenty of time before us yet (Pullen 1854: 128).

Pullen also notes that he has begun a survey of the bay (Pullen 1854: 133). Thus it appears that Pullen studied the garden/tent site based initially on similar information as that available to Kane and De Bray. Presumably therefore the disturbed ground on the crest noted as site 3 (Hansen 2010: 197; Fig. 1) was

located later, as well as the summit cairn. It is not unreasonable to believe that Pullen consulted with Osborn regarding the garden location, as the latter was back in the Arctic during the period Pullen was making his map.

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An historical document. Botanical observations on the Penny Highlands of Baffin Island

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History of the book

This book (Schwarzenbach 2011) has a strange and remarkable history, which explains the fact that it has now been published in 2011, 58 years after the fieldwork on the project that was undertaken in the summer of 1953.

In 1962 I completed the final version of my botanical report on the 1953 expedition, written in German. The original is now archived as a typewritten text along with the original aerial photos of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), in the library of the ETH Zürich. There was not the possibility of publishing the book with a large number of photographs at that time.