

Land from the mainland. In all probability through this strait is the only navigable route for the voyage round the north coast of America. This is the only passage which is free from destructive pack ice.'

But now we find Barr arguing that Rae Strait was NOT the last link to be discovered. And this is where we enter the spectacle. By insisting that certain sections of the passage remained 'undiscovered' even after 1854, Barr repudiates the claim he set out to defend. I refer to the assertion etched in stone in Westminster Abbey, which hails Franklin for 'completing the discovery of the Northwest Passage.'

Those who have done their homework know that I am not champion of Franklin. But I do acknowledge that in 1846, the good Sir John sailed south down Peel Strait from Lancaster Sound to the northwest corner of King William Island. I reject the corollary to this claim – that his men 'forged the last link with their lives' – because those ill-fated sailors slogged south along a coastline where no passage existed, and where none would become navigable for a century.

But again, yes: Franklin did sail south to King William Island. Of that achievement, he left tangible proof. He established a navigable northwest passage all the way south to where he got trapped in the ice. Unlike Barr and his friends, I accept that in 1846, Franklin discovered much of the north-south part of the first navigable northwest passage. Who cares about an uncharted stretch of coastline that he sailed past?

Certainly not Rae, who extended the work of Franklin. The good Sir John discovered the second-last link in the northwest passage. In 1854, eight years after Franklin got trapped in the ice off King William Island, Rae gleaned from Inuit hunters what Sir John had accomplished. On that same expedition, Rae discovered the final link in the passage, the one Amundsen used, the short waterway, Rae Strait, linking the north-south channel established by Franklin (and James Clark Ross) with the coastal channel previously determined by Thomas Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Rae built a cairn to mark his discovery of Rae Strait. In 1999, with two fellow adventurers, I went north and placed a plaque beside the remains of that cairn, a homage to Rae and his companions, an Inuk and an Ojibway. I tell that story in the epilogue to *Fatal passage*.

Getting John Rae into Westminster Abbey stands as a notable victory. Hats off to Alistair Carmichael and his fellow Orcadians for having the courage, resolve, and political muscle to make it happen. Yet clearly, though now the nay-sayers stand exposed, flailing in self-contradiction, we can expect more denial, more waffling, more nit-picking and prevarication.

With *Fatal passage* (McGoogan 2001), *Lady Franklin's revenge* (McGoogan 2005), the forewords to new editions of *John Rae's Arctic journals* and *John Rae's Arctic correspondence* (2012, 2014), I will have done what I can. For complete vindication of John Rae, I look to posterity.

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## Misinterpretation and obfuscation William Barr

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The thrust of my note (Barr 2014), to which Ken McGoogan was responding (McGoogan 2014), was that in discovering Rae Strait in the spring of 1854 John Rae did not discover the final link in the northwest passage, since a substantial section of that particular variant of the passage some 240 km in length (namely Franklin Strait and Larsen Sound) lying further north, had not yet been discovered. McGoogan has wrongly concluded that I must therefore support the notion that Sir John Franklin discovered the passage. This is an unwarranted assumption. I do not subscribe to this belief; in this, at least McGoogan and I are in agreement. As David Buisseret, the editor of the *The Oxford companion to world exploration* has elegantly defined it, geographical discovery is 'the process by which one or more people leave their society and venture to another part of the world [...] then return in order to explain what they have

seen' (Buisseret 2007, I: xxiii). Neither Franklin nor any of his officers and men returned.

The quotation by Rae, to which McGoogan refers, but the thrust of which he deliberately misinterprets, was to the effect that Franklin Strait and Larsen Sound, the section of the mainland coast from Bellot Strait south to where James Ross had discovered the north magnetic pole in 1831, was unexplored until travelled twice in each direction by Captain Francis Leopold McClintock as he surveyed its east coast in 1859 (McClintock 1859). Clearly, contrary to McGoogan's remarks, a surveyor mapping a coastline by travelling by sledge on the sea ice (as McClintock did) along a previously unexplored strait or channel, must *a priori* also be the discoverer of that strait or channel, just as if he had taken a vessel through it. Buttressing the fact that McClintock's expedition had discovered this section of the passage is the fact that later in 1859 Sir Allen Young (McClintock's sailing master) had also explored the west side of the strait. Moreover McGoogan appears to have overlooked the fact that Rae's stated objective for his 1853–1854 expedition was a coastal survey, namely 'the completion of the survey of the northern shores of America' and not a search for a northwest passage (Rich 1953:222). By his own argument, therefore, McGoogan has made the case that Rae cannot even have discovered Rae Strait!

Furthermore McGoogan states that William Kennedy and Joseph René Bellot (among other unidentified explorers) had determined that the section of the passage at issue 'was at least 30 km wide and free of islands.' When Kennedy and Bellot had crossed Peel Sound from the west end of Bellot Strait, over the period 8–10 April 1852, Kennedy noted 'We had not been able, owing to the thickness of the weather, to make any extensive examination of the channel over which we had passed' (Kennedy 1853: 135). Clearly, therefore, he could not have elucidated any details of the channel extending some 240 km to the south, and certainly he could not have known that that it was '30 km wide and free of islands'. Nor is there any such description in Bellot's account (Bellot 1854: 273–278, 1855 II: 178–180). Indeed it is almost impossible to determine from Bellot's account, replete with references to a reef, inlets and gaps in coastlines, that they were even crossing a strait. Kennedy, however noted that 'The Western Sea, into which the channel [Bellot Strait] opens, we have ascertained since our return to be the northern extremity of Victoria Strait, partially explored [at its southern end] by Dr. Rae [in the spring of 1851], from another direction' (Kennedy 1853: 132). But, since the details of the intervening channel were totally unknown, Kennedy, quite properly shows it on his map by dotted lines. That this representation is entirely speculative is proved by the total absence of McClintock Channel branching off to the northwest. And this is the map which Arrowsmith copied faithfully to produce the map which McGoogan has reproduced, and which he insists is 'so accurate.'

Later McGoogan argues that Franklin had discovered Franklin Strait, the section of the passage leading south from Bellot Strait, in the summer of 1846, when heading south in *Erebus* and *Terror* from Beechey Island, to where his ships became beset in the pack off the northwest coast of King William Island. Almost certainly this was the route followed by Franklin's ships, but this probability was not relayed to the world, whereby it might be conceived to have provided a surrogate for the requirements of the concept of 'discovery', until McClintock, or more correctly his second-in-command, Lt. William Hobson, found the only message providing frustratingly meagre details as to the fate of the expedition at Victory Point, King William Island in the spring of 1859, and until McClintock's expedition returned to England in September 1859. Thus the fact of Franklin's ships having passed along Franklin Strait and Larsen Sound, was still unknown at the time of Rae's discovery of Rae Strait in the spring of 1854.

Finally there is the matter of the perception of Rae Strait as being the 'final link' in a *navigable* northwest passage, as McGoogan argues on the basis of what Rae and his Cree companion Thomas Mustegan had seen of the ice in Rae Strait. In his letter to the HBC Committee in London on his findings, Rae reported that Rae Strait was 'full of rough ice' (Rich 1953: 281). In his *Fatal passage* McGoogan (2001:189) correctly relays this piece of information on one page, but on the next page he quite unwarrantedly interprets this as 'young ice'. Since the definition of 'young ice' is: 'Ice in the transition stage between *nilas* and *first-year ice*, 10 to 30 cm in thickness' (World Meteorological Organization 1970: 14), that is less than a year old, McGoogan is claiming that Rae believed that Rae Strait had been open water in the summer of 1853, for which conclusion he had absolutely no basis. In fact 'rough ice' may be of any age. Considerable areas of the oldest sea-ice, namely the multi-year ice of the Central Arctic Basin, are extremely rough, with a maze of new pressure-ridges. McGoogan then

proceeds to attempt to support this claim that Rae Strait had been free of ice in 1853, and hence 'the final link in a navigable Northwest Passage' on the basis that Roald Amundsen sailed through it in *Gjøa* in the summer of 1903 (Amundsen 1908), that is half a century later, during what may have been a totally different ice-year. This clearly is a seriously flawed argument.

Furthermore McGoogan is not quite correct when he says that 'In his book *The north west passage*, Amundsen explicitly credits Rae with having shown him where to sail.' Amundsen did indeed give Rae credit, but it was to McClintock that he says he owed the direction on 'where to sail'. The remainder of the paragraph which McGoogan quotes in part reads as follows: 'The distinguished Arctic explorer, Admiral Sir Leopold M'Clintock, pointed out this passage [Rae Strait] in his report on the *Fox* Expedition in 1857–59, and proved that if the North West Passage were ever to be accomplished, it would be through this channel. I followed the advice of this experienced sailor and had no reason to regret it' (Amundsen 1908, II: 109).

In conclusion it is appropriate to examine the concept of 'discovering' a sea passage. The various Acts of Parliament (1745, 1776, 1818) offering a reward for discovering a north-west passage all stipulated that it must be navigable for ships. Although no Act was in force after 1828, the core stipulation that to qualify a ship had to sail right through the passage still applied, and means that Roald Amundsen must be recognised as the first discoverer of the northwest passage on the basis of his voyage in the *Gjøa* in 1903–1907. Not Franklin, not M'Clure, and certainly not John Rae, for all their merits.

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