



The British explorer John Franklin led three expeditions into the arctic. On the first two, he and his men mapped the arctic coast from Point Barrow, Alaska to Point Turnagain on the Kent Peninsula. On the third expedition, in 1845, Franklin's two ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, entered through Lancaster Sound. They wintered at Beechey Island, leaving there in the summer of 1846, and vanished – and with only a couple of exceptions, their boats and their bodies have not been found since. Had he completed this expedition, he would have mapped the entire Northwest Passage. But, neither he nor his entire crew completed the trip. They were lost in the Arctic, along the shores of King William Island.

Through the efforts of the Royal Navy, and Lady Jane Franklin, John Franklin's wife, at least 29 expeditions were launched to seek Franklin and his men, or evidence of their fate. These endeavours resulted in the mapping of much of the eastern portion and some of the western portion of the archipelago, and go down in history as one of the greatest mysteries and sea stories of all time.

But, the first ship through the Northwest Passage was not a British ship at all; it was the tiny single-masted Norwegian herring boat, the *Gjoa*, captained by Roald Amundsen. Amundsen and his crew were experienced; he took advantage of everything he was able to learn from Inuit along the way, and he was lucky. As the winter of 1903 closed in, they discovered a protected small bay, which Amundsen labeled, "The best little harbour in the world", and called it Gjoa Haven. They spent the winters of 1904 and 1905 locked into this harbour by unrelenting ice. During this time, Amundsen located the North Magnetic Pole, and recorded huge amounts of data about the arctic climate and magnetic fields. In August of 1905, they made their way west through shallow and narrow channels and dangerous ice to where the passage widened into the Queen Maud Gulf. Here, they met an American ship out of San Francisco, and learned they had indeed conquered the Northwest Passage. His successful navigation of the Northwest Passage occurred because of the cumulative knowledge of various expeditions and because he was the first to adopt a major part of the hunting, fishing and tool-making techniques of the Netsilik people of King William Island.

WANDER THROUGH HISTORY

At the Northwest Passage Trail in the community of Gjoa Haven, visitors can, through illustrations and text on interpretive signs, "journey" on a historical route to learn about the land that was home to Amundsen and his six crewmen from 1903 until 1906, and about the people who still are very much at home in this land. Signs along the trail describe the observations taken by Amundsen and his crew to collect data that allowed them to locate the exact position of the North Magnetic Pole at that time. Other signage overlooks the former moorage of the *Gjoa* in the harbour. Stand on the hill above the little bay and imagine the hardships of the six men of this expedition who spent two years here, learning from the local people, a bit more than a hundred years ago. Other stops are at a gravesite, and near the site of the old Hudson Bay trading post. A visit to the Northwest Passage Information Centre in the hamlet building allows the visitor to enjoy displays about the various discoveries of the remains of the Franklin expedition, theories as to the fate of Franklin's ships, and some of the text of Amundsen's journal. Also on display are some artifacts from the expedition and from old campsites around the area.

TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

Dog team or snowmobile tours are frequently available from the community of Gjoa Haven, especially in spring, when the days are long and the temperatures mild. It's an unforgettable experience to discover this land from a dog team, traveling as Inuit used to travel and learning about the powerful and adaptable Inuit dog that accompanied the Inuit across the Bering Land Bridge so long ago. Travelling by snowmobile allows

you to go further, faster, and explore more country, perhaps some of the very areas where members of the Franklin expedition starved to death almost 160 years ago. From May to August, you can experience the midnight sun – Gjoa Haven is above the Arctic Circle – and its unending daylight in summer. Travel out from the community onto the trackless tundra by all-terrain vehicle, to see ancient campsites and hunting areas.

On the land, you may see caribou, muskox, or arctic foxes or hares. Occasionally, arctic

wolves or even a polar bear may be spotted. In late springtime or in summer, you may see snowy owls, snow geese, white-fronted geese, tundra swans, peregrine falcons or gyrfalcons, and king or common eider ducks.

For more information on the **Northwest Passage Trail**, check the Nunavut Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com, or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations and services. ■



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