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978-1-108-04133-1 - Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea, in the Years 1825-1827

John Franklin and John Richardson

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Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea, in the Years 1825-1827

Sir John Franklin (1786–1847) joined the Navy at the age of fourteen and saw action at Copenhagen and Trafalgar. Between those battles, he circumnavigated Australia with his uncle, Matthew Flinders; he became famous after his first major expedition to northern Canada in 1819–22, although it resulted in the deaths of over half of his men. (Accounts of both of these voyages are also reissued in this series.) Franklin returned to the Arctic in 1825, and this, his second book, describes that more successful endeavour. Published in 1828, it records the expedition's planning, route, scientific observations, and the mapping of over 1200 miles of Canada's northern coastline. The party included two artists, and their work is reproduced in over thirty engravings. Franklin was later posted to the Mediterranean and Tasmania, but in 1845 embarked on his disastrous third expedition to the North-West Passage, during which he and his entire crew were lost.

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NARRATIVE OF A SECOND EXPEDITION
TO THE SHORES OF
T H E P O L A R S E A,
IN THE YEARS
1825, 1826, AND 1827,

BY

JOHN FRANKLIN, CAPTAIN R. N., F. R. S., &c.
AND COMMANDER OF THE EXPEDITION.

INCLUDING AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRESS OF A DETACHMENT
TO THE EASTWARD,

BY

JOHN RICHARDSON, M. D., F. R. S., F. L. S., &c.
SURGEON AND NATURALIST TO THE EXPEDITION.

ILLUSTRATED BY NUMEROUS PLATES AND MAPS.

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE EARL BATHURST, K G.,

LORD PRESIDENT OF HIS MAJESTY'S COUNCIL,

&c. &c. &c.

THE FOLLOWING

NARRATIVE OF A SECOND JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY ALONG
THE NORTHERN COAST OF AMERICA,

UNDERTAKEN BY ORDER AND UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
HIS LORDSHIP,

IS, BY PERMISSION, INSCRIBED,

WITH GREAT RESPECT AND GRATITUDE,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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An Account of the objects of Natural History, collected on our journey, being too voluminous to be inserted in the Appendix, has been reserved for a separate Work, which will be published as soon as possible, by Dr. Richardson and Professor Hooker, under the sanction, and by the assistance, of His Majesty's Government.

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* See Appendix, Part V., page cxxx, for a notice respecting the longitude of Fort William. The Maps 1, 2, 3, contain the routes which are followed by the Fur Traders in going from Canada and Hudson's Bay to the Northern Departments. The two latter were constructed on the former Expedition, and are now used, as we pursued the course therein delineated from the Saskatchewan River to Slave Lake.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

HIS Majesty's Government having, towards the close of the year 1823, determined upon another attempt to effect a northern passage by sea between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and Captain Parry, the highly distinguished Commander of the two preceding Expeditions, having been again entrusted with its execution, success, as far as ability, enterprise, and experience could ensure it, appeared likely to be the result. Yet, as the object was one for which Great Britain had thought proper to contend for upwards of three centuries, it seemed to me that it might be desirable to pursue it by more ways than one; I therefore ventured to lay before His Majesty's Government a plan for an Expedition overland to the mouth of the Mackenzie River, and thence, by sea, to the north-western extremity of America, with the combined object, also, of surveying the coast between the Mackenzie and Coppermine Rivers.

I was well aware of the sympathy excited in the British public by the sufferings of those engaged in the former overland Expedition to the mouth of the Coppermine River, and

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of the humane repugnance of His Majesty's Government to expose others to a like fate; but I was enabled to show satisfactorily that, in the proposed course, similar dangers were not to be apprehended, while the objects to be attained were important at once to the naval character, scientific reputation, and commercial interests of Great Britain; and I received directions from the Right Honourable Earl Bathurst to make the necessary preparations for the equipment of the Expedition, to the command of which I had the honour to be nominated.

My much valued friend, Dr. Richardson, offered his services as Naturalist and Surgeon, and also volunteered to undertake the survey of the coast between the Mackenzie and Coppermine Rivers, while I should be occupied in endeavouring to reach Icy Cape.

Lieutenant Bushnan, who had served under Captains Ross and Parry on their voyages of discovery, was also appointed to accompany me; but, long before the party was to leave England, I had to lament the premature death of that excellent young officer, who was eminently qualified for the situation, by his skill in astronomical observations, surveying, and drawing. Many naval officers, distinguished for their talent and ability, were desirous of filling the vacancy; but my friend and former companion, Lieutenant Back, having returned from the West Indies, the appointment was offered to him, and accepted with his wonted zeal.

Mr. E. N. Kendall, Admiralty Mate, and recently Assistant

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Surveyor with Captain Lyon, was appointed to accompany Dr. Richardson in his voyage to the eastward, and to do the duty of Assistant-Surveyor to the Expedition at large, whilst it continued united. Lastly, Mr. Thomas Drummond, of Forfar, was appointed Assistant Naturalist, on the recommendation of Professor Hooker and other eminent scientific men.

A residence in the northern parts of America, where the party must necessarily depend for subsistence on the daily supply of fish, or on the still more precarious success of Indian hunters, involves many duties which require the superintendence of a person of long experience in the management of the fisheries, and in the arrangement of the Canadian voyagers and Indians: we had many opportunities, during the former voyage, of being acquainted with the qualifications of Mr. Peter Warren Dease, Chief Trader of the Hudson's Bay Company, for these services, and I therefore procured the sanction of His Majesty's Government for his being employed on the Expedition.

As soon as I had authority from Earl Bathurst, I entered into a correspondence with the Governor and Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company; and these Gentlemen, taking the most lively interest in the objects of the Expedition, promised their utmost support to it, and forthwith sent injunctions to their officers in the Fur Countries to provide the necessary depôts of provision at the places which I pointed out, and to give every other aid in their power. I also wrote to the different Chief Factors and Chief Traders of the Company, who

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resided on the route of the Expedition, explaining its objects, and requesting their co-operation.

Pemmican, the principal article of provision used in travelling, being made during the winter and spring, the orders for providing the extra quantity required for the Expedition, though sent out from England by the earliest conveyance, so as to reach the provision posts in the summer of 1824, could not be put into effect sooner than the spring of 1825; hence, it was not proper that the main body of the Expedition should reach the Fur Countries before the latter period. Some stores were forwarded from England, by way of New York, in March 1824, under charge of Mr. Robert M'Vicar, Chief Trader, for the purpose of relieving the Expedition as much as possible from the incumbrance of heavy baggage, and thus enabling it, by marching quickly, to reach its intended winter-quarters at Great Bear Lake, as well as to provide for its more comfortable reception at that place. These stores, with the addition of other articles obtained in Canada, sufficed to load three north canoes, manned by eighteen voyagers; and they were delivered by Mr. M'Vicar, before the winter set in, to Mr. Dease, at the Athabasca Lake. Mr. Dease was instructed to support his party by fishing at Great Slave Lake, during the winter of 1824-25; and, early in the spring of 1825, to proceed to Great Bear Lake, and commence the necessary buildings for the reception of the Expedition. I may here cursorily remark that, in selecting Great Bear Lake as our winter residence, I was influenced by the information I had obtained of its being the place nearest

to the mouth of the Mackenzie, known to the traders, where a sufficient supply of fish could be procured for the support of so large a party.

Three light boats, which I shall soon more particularly describe, were also sent out to York Factory, in June 1824, in the annual Hudson's Bay ship, together with a further supply of stores, two carpenters, and a party of men, with a view of their reaching Cumberland House, on the Saskatchewan River, the same season; and, starting from thence as soon as the navigation opened in the following spring, that they might be as far as possible advanced on their way to Bear Lake before they were overtaken by the Officers of the Expedition. The latter, proceeding by way of New York and Canada, would have the advantage of an earlier spring in travelling through the more southern districts; and, further to expedite their progress, I directed two *large* canoes (*canôts de maître*), with the necessary equipments and stores, to be deposited at Penetanguishene, the naval depôt of Lake Huron, in the autumn of 1824, to await our arrival in the following spring; having been informed that, in ordinary seasons, we should, by commencing our voyage at that place, arrive in the north-west country ten days earlier than by the usual way of proceeding up the Utawas River from Montreal.

The return of the Hudson's Bay ship towards the close of the year 1824, brought me satisfactory intelligence of the progress of the above-mentioned parties, together with the most pleasing assurances from the Gentlemen of the Company

to whom I had written, of their zeal in our cause; and here I must express the deep sense I have of the kindness of the late Honourable William M'Gillivray, of Montreal, whose experience enabled him to give me many valuable suggestions relating to the clothing and subsistence of the party, and to the supplies proper for the Indians.

In connexion with the above sketch of the preparatory steps taken in the course of the year 1824, it may be proper to give, in this place, a short account of the general equipments of the Expedition.

And first, with regard to the vessels intended for the navigation of the Arctic Sea: birch-bark canoes, uniting lightness and facility of repair with speed, are certainly well adapted for navigating the rivers of America, but they are much too slight to bear the concussion of waves in a rough sea, and they are still less fitted, from the tenderness of the bark, for coming in contact with ice. I therefore requested of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty that *three* boats might be constructed under my superintendence; and they were immediately ordered and promptly finished under the directions of the Commissioners of the Navy. To fit them for the ascent and descent of the many rapids between York Factory and Mackenzie River; and to render their transport over the numerous portages more easy, it was necessary to have them as small, and of as light a construction as possible; and, in fact, as much like a north canoe as was consistent with the stability and capacity required for their voyage at sea. They were built of mahogany, with

timbers of ash, both ends exactly alike, and fitted to be steered either with a sweep-oar or a rudder. The largest, twenty-six feet long, and five feet four inches broad, was adapted for six rowers, a steersman, and an officer; it could be borne on the shoulders of six men, and was found, on trial, to be capable of carrying three tons weight in addition to the crew. The two others were each twenty-four feet long, four feet ten inches broad, and were capable of receiving a crew of five men, a steersman, and an officer, with an additional weight of two and a half tons. The greatest care was paid to their construction by Mr. Cow, boat-builder of Woolwich Yard; and, as I could not often be present, my friend Captain Buchan, R.N., kindly undertook to report their progress; and I am further indebted to him for many valuable suggestions which were acted upon.

When the boats were finished, they were tried at Woolwich, in the presence of many naval and military officers, as to their qualities of sailing, rowing, and paddling, and found to answer fully the expectations that had been formed of them. At the same time we tried another little vessel belonging to the Expedition, named the Walnut-Shell, the invention and construction of which I owe to my friend Lieutenant-Colonel Pasley, of the Royal Engineers. Its length was nine feet, its breadth four feet four inches, and it was framed of well-seasoned ash, fastened with thongs, covered with Mr. Mackintosh's prepared canvas, and shaped like one valve of a walnut-shell, whence its appellation. It weighed only eighty-five pounds, could, when taken to pieces, be made up in five or six parcels, and was capable of

being put together in less than twenty minutes. So secure was this little vessel, that several ladies, who had honoured the trial of the boats with their presence, fearlessly embarked in it, and were paddled across the Thames in a fresh breeze. It was intended to provide against a similar detention in crossing rivers to that which proved so fatal to our party on the former journey; and it was also thought, that this little bark would be found useful in procuring water-fowl on the small lakes, to which the boats could not be conveyed.

In the choice of astronomical instruments I was necessarily guided by their portability. Our stock consisted of two small sextants, two artificial horizons, two altitude instruments, a repeating circle for lunar observations, and a small transit telescope for ascertaining the rates of the chronometers. We had a dipping-needle mounted on Meyer's plan, a plain needle very delicately fitted for observing the diurnal variation; two of Kater's azimuth compasses, and a pocket compass for each officer. The atmospherical instruments were two electrometers, two of Daniel's hygrometers, Leslie's photometer and hygrometer, besides a good supply of mercurial and spirit thermometers of different sizes. The magnetic instruments were examined in concert with my friend Captain Sabine, previous to my departure from London; and the observations that were obtained for dip and intensity, served as points of comparison for our future results.

The stores consisted of bedding and clothing, including two suits of water-proof dresses for each person, prepared by Mr.

Mackintosh, of Glasgow; our guns had the same bore with the fowling-pieces, supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Indian hunters, that is, twenty-eight balls to the pound; their locks were tempered to withstand the cold of the winter; and a broad Indian dagger, which could also be used as a knife, was fitted to them, like a bayonet. Ammunition of the best quality was provided by the Ordnance, the powder being secured in small field or boat magazines. A quantity of wheaten-flour, arrow-root, macaroni, portable-soup, chocolate, essence of coffee, sugar, and tea, calculated to last two years, was also supplied, made up into packages of eighty-five pounds, and covered with three layers of prepared waterproof canvas, of which material coverings for the cargo of each boat were also made.

There was likewise an ample stock of tobacco, a small quantity of wine and spirits, marquees and tents for the men and officers, some books, writing and drawing paper, a considerable quantity of cartridge-paper, to be used in preserving specimens of plants; nets, twine, fishing-lines and hooks, together with many articles to be used at winter-quarters, for the service of the post, and for the supply of our Indian hunters, such as cloth, blankets, shirts, coloured belts, chiefs' dresses, combs, looking-glasses, beads, tapes, gartering, knives, guns and daggers, hatchets, awls, gun-worms, flints, fire-steels, files, whip and hand saws, ice-chisels and trenching-irons, the latter to break open the beaver lodges.

As the mode of travelling through the Hudson's Bay territories, with all its difficulties and hazards, is now well known to the

public, I think it better to give in this Introductory Chapter a slight outline of our route through the United States, Upper Canada, and Southern part of the Fur Countries, and to commence the detailed Narrative of the proceedings of the Expedition with its arrival in Methye River, where the officers joined the boats that had been sent out from England in the preceding year.

On the 16th of February, 1825, I embarked with Lieutenant Back, Dr. Richardson, Mr. Kendall, Mr. Drummond, and four marines, at Liverpool, on board the American packet-ship, Columbia, Captain Lee; and, on quitting the pier, we were honoured by a salute of three animating cheers, from a crowd of the principal inhabitants, who had assembled to witness our departure. The passage across the Atlantic was favourable and pleasant, and our reception at New York kind in the extreme. We landed at that city on the 15th of March, and our baggage and stores were instantly passed through the Custom-House without inspection. Cards of admission to the Public Scientific Institutions were forwarded to us the same evening, and, during our stay every other mark of attention was shown by the civil and naval authorities, as well as by private individuals, indicating the lively interest which they took in our enterprise.

James Buchanan, Esq., the British Consul, in addition to many other attentions, kindly undertook to accommodate a journey he had to make to Upper Canada, so as to accompany us through the State of New York. After a stay of eight days in the city, for the purpose of obtaining the rates of the

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chronometers, and for making some other observations with Meyer's dipping needle, we embarked, under the Consul's guidance, in the steam-boat Olive Branch, and ascended the Hudson River, to Albany, where we experienced similar civilities to those we had received at New York. Every body seemed to desire our success, and a fervent prayer for our preservation and welfare was offered up by the Reverend Dr. Christie, the minister of the church that we attended. The Honourable De Witt Clinton, the Governor of the State, assured me, that had we not been accompanied by a gentleman so conversant in the different routes and modes of travelling as Mr. Buchanan, he would have sent his son with us, or would himself have conducted us to the confines of the State.

From Albany, we travelled through Utica, Rochester, and Geneva, to Leweston, in coaches, with more or less rapidity, according to the condition of the roads; and, crossing the river Niagara, entered Canada, and visited the Falls so justly celebrated as the first in the world for grandeur. We next crossed Lake Ontario in a sailing boat, and came to York, the capital of Upper Canada, where we were kindly received by the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland, and by Colonel Cockburn and the Commissioners then employed on an inquiry respecting the value of the Crown Lands. From York we passed on to Lake Simcoe, in carts and other conveyances, halting for a night at the hospitable house of Mr. Robinson of Newmarket. We crossed Lake Simcoe in canoes and boats, and landed near the upper part of Kempenfeldt Bay, but not without being

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obliged to break our way through the ice for a short distance. A journey of nine miles, performed on foot, brought us to the River Nattawassaga, which we descended in a boat; and passing through a part of Lake Huron, arrived at Penetanguishene. At this place, we were hospitably entertained by Lieutenant, now Captain Douglass, during eight days that we waited for the arrival of our Canadian voyagers from Montreal.

We left Penetanguishene on St. George's day (23d April) in the two large canoes, which had been deposited at that place in the preceding autumn, our party, by the accession of the voyagers, now amounting to thirty-three; and after a few days, detention by ice, and bad weather, we reached Sault de St. Marie on the 1st of May, being ten days or a fortnight earlier than the oldest resident remembered a canoe from Canada to have arrived. From the Sault de St. Marie, we coasted the northern shore of Lake Superior to Fort William, formerly the great depôt of the N.W. Company, where we arrived on the 10th of May. We now exchanged our two *canôts de maître* for four small north canoes, in one of which, more lightly laden, Dr. Richardson and I embarked, with the view of proceeding as rapidly as possible to arrange supplies of provision at the different posts, while Lieutenant Back was left to bring up the three remaining and more deeply laden canoes.

We proceeded by the route delineated in the maps through Rainy Lake, the Lake of the Woods, Lake Winipeg, and the Saskatchewan River to Cumberland House, where we arrived on the 15th of June, and learned that our boats had left that place

on the 2d of the same month. We found, also, with deep regret, that Thomas Mathews, the principal carpenter, who had accompanied the boats from England, had had the misfortune to break his leg the evening before their departure. But, fortunately, an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company then present, had sufficient skill to set it, and Dr. Richardson now pronounced that in two months he would be able to come on in one of the Company's canoes, and join us at the Bear Lake, which he was very desirous of doing. I therefore made arrangements to this effect, and also concerning supplies for Mr. Drummond the Assistant Naturalist, who was to be employed, during our stay in the north, in making collections in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains.

Having remained one night at Cumberland House, we resumed our voyage, and passing through Pine Island Lake, Beaver Lake, crossing the Frog Portage, and ascending the English River, with its dilatations, named Bear Island, Sandfly, Serpent, Primeau, and Isle à la Crosse Lakes, we came to the post situated on, and named from the latter sheet of water, at four P.M. on the 25th June. In the course of this voyage, we met the Gentlemen of the Hudson's Bay Company proceeding from the interior with various brigades of canoes, carrying the returns of trade for the year to York Factory, and I had not only the satisfaction of hearing frequent news of the progress of our boats, but that the deposits of provisions I had requested, and the other arrangements I had made, were all punctually carried into effect. Mr. Spencer, the gentleman in charge at

Isle à la Crosse, informed us, that the boats had gone off a few hours previous to our arrival, with the addition of a batteau laden with pemmican, under the charge of Mr. Fraser, a clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company.

I waited at this establishment one night to obtain astronomical observations, and to bespeak an additional quantity of provisions, &c., which being satisfactorily done, we resumed our voyage on the 27th, and, passing through Deep River, Clear and Buffalo Lakes, overtook the boats in Methye River, at sunrise on the 29th of June.

Having brought this preliminary sketch up to the date at which the ensuing Narrative of the proceedings of the Expedition commences, I turn to the pleasing duty of rendering my best thanks to the many gentlemen who have assisted me in forwarding its progress. To the Right Honourable Earl Bathurst, I am greatly indebted for the readiness with which he attended to every suggestion I had to make regarding the equipment of the Expedition, and to the Right Honourable Wilmot Horton, the Under Colonial Secretary, for his kindness and promptitude in facilitating all my views. Nor can I feel less grateful to Lord Viscount Melville, and to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for their patronage and support, as well as to Sir Byam Martin, the Comptroller, and to the Commissioners of the Navy and Victualling Offices, for the arrangements depending on their boards. Mr. Pelly, the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, and Mr. Garry, the Deputy-Governor, as well as every Member of its Com-

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

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mittee, claim my most sincere thanks for their unremitting endeavours to promote the welfare of the Expedition through its whole progress; and I feel truly obliged to Mr. Simpson, the Governor in the Fur Countries; to Mr. M'Tavish, Mr. Haldane, Mr. M'Donald, Mr. Leith, Mr. Stuart, and Messrs. James and George Keith, Chief Factors, who, acting in the spirit of their instructions, were very assiduous in collecting provisions and stores for the use of my party, and in forwarding all our supplies. There were other gentlemen resident in the more northern parts of the country, to whom I am no less obliged for advice and assistance; but the brevity requisite in this place necessarily compels me to refer to the Narrative, where their names, and the services they rendered, are mentioned.

I cannot, however, close this Introductory Chapter, without expressing the deepest obligation to those kind friends and excellent officers with whom I had the happiness of being associated, who constantly aided me by their most cordial co-operation, and whose best efforts were devotedly applied to every pursuit which could be interesting to science. Nor can I omit to mention the gratitude I owe to each of the seamen, marines, British and Canadian voyagers who composed our party at the winter-quarters, for their steady obedience and truly good conduct, whether in the days of relaxation during the winter, or in the more arduous exertions of our summer occupations.

The Views with which the ensuing Narrative is illustrated, have been chosen from a large collection of drawings, made by Captain Back and Lieutenant Kendall. Of the interesting nature of the scenes which have been selected, the reader will be the best judge; but for their fidelity, I pledge myself in the most unreserved manner.

OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS.

Downing-street, 31st Jan., 1825.

SIR,

His Majesty's Government having decided that an Expedition should be set forth, for the purpose of exploring the Northern Coast of America, between the Mouth of Mackenzie's River, and the Strait of Behring; and confiding in your zeal and experience for the due execution of this service, I have recommended you as a proper person to be charged with the same. You are, therefore, to proceed with your party (a list of whom is annexed) by the Packet from Liverpool to New York, and from thence make the best of your way to Lake Huron, where the stores necessary for your journey have already been sent. Embarking in Canoes, you are from thence to follow the water communication to the western side of the Great Bear Lake, where you are to establish your winter-quarters; and having so done, your first care should be to endeavour to open a friendly communication with the Esquimaux.

Early in the Spring of 1826, you are to proceed down the Mackenzie River with all the necessary stores and provisions, in order to be prepared to take advantage of the first opening of

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the ice on the Polar Sea, so as to enable you to prosecute your voyage along the coast to Icy Cape, round which you are to proceed to Kotzebue's Inlet, where you may expect to find His Majesty's Ship, Blossom, which the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty will order to proceed to that rendezvous, in the Summer of 1826. But if, on your arrival at Icy Cape, or the northern point of Behring's Strait, you should be of opinion that you could, with safety, return the same season to the established winter-quarters, you are at liberty to do so, instead of proceeding to join the Blossom. You will, therefore, without loss of time, settle with Captain Beechey, her commander, such a plan as may appear to you, both, best adapted for ensuring your meeting together, and establish a code of signals, or devise such other means as may tend to give you information, if possible, previous to your reaching the longitude of Icy Cape.

On your arrival at the mouth of Mackenzie River, you are to despatch Dr. Richardson with Mr. Kendall and five or six men, in one of the boats, to examine the intermediate coast between the Mackenzie and Coppermine Rivers; but if you should find that the stores and provisions you have been able to accumulate are not sufficient for your own and Dr. Richardson's party, you are, in that case, to direct Dr. Richardson to employ himself and party on shore, in examining the country contiguous to the Mackenzie River, the Rocky Mountains, the shores of the Great Bear Lake, the Copper Mountains, and as far round as he can with safety, collecting specimens of the animals, plants