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LONG FORGOTTEN ARCTIC GRAVE OF FRANKLIN EXPEDITION SEARCH SHIP REVEALED

A team of documentary film making divers are releasing images of a forgotten shipwreck off the Arctic coast of Greenland that gained fame as the ship that returned from the Arctic in 1859 with definitive proof of the death of explorer Sir John Franklin and the tragic end of his expedition, which had vanished while searching for the Northwest Passage in 1845. The steamer *Fox*, sent into the Arctic by Franklin's wife, Lady Jane Franklin, in 1857, made international headlines when it returned two years later with relics of the lost explorers and the only written record to emerge from the catastrophe, a brief recounting of ice-trapped ships and a desperate abandonment and march south that ended in the death of the entire expedition.

In August of this year, the team traveled to the remote port of Qeqertarsuaq on Greenland's west coast as part of the National Geographic International and History Television series "The Sea Hunters," produced by Eco-Nova Productions of Halifax and hosted by best selling author Clive Cussler and the team's archaeologist, James Delgado. Delgado, who also serves as the executive director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum, home of the Arctic ship *St. Roch*, previously led an expedition to the north to dive and document the wreck of *Maud*, the last command of Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen.

The wreck of *Fox* has never before been investigated in its forgotten and isolated northern grave, covered by ice most of the year and submerged in -2° waters. Working with experienced divers Mike and Warren Fletcher of Port Dover, Ontario, who also star in "The Sea Hunters," Delgado and the team surveyed and filmed the wreck of *Fox* in a series of frigid dives. They have just now returned with images and the story of a ship that once commanded the world stage with the last words of the most famous Arctic expedition in history. "The wreck of *Fox* is badly broken up, shattered by decades of ice," noted Delgado. "She is slowly returning to the elements, a fitting fate for an explorer whose remains rest in the waters where she labored and gained fame." Mike Fletcher, dive coordinator for the series, notes "Far beyond her intended life as a yacht, *Fox* would become one of the most famous ships in Arctic exploration. I'm glad to see that she lived her days out in Greenland and now lies off the beautiful community of Qeqertarsuaq."



Fox sailed from England in 1857 on a private expedition to determine the fate of Lady Jane Franklin's husband and the 128 men under his command, more than a decade after they disappeared in the Canadian Arctic. In 1845, Sir John Franklin, in command of the ships HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, sailed from England to complete what most people at the time felt was the "last link" in the three century quest for an oceanic shortcut across the top of the world.

Instead of quickly transiting the Northwest Passage, Franklin, with a highly trained crew, many of them Arctic veterans, two well equipped ships, and all the best technology that Britain could assemble, vanished in the far north. Over the next decade, 31 separate expeditions ventured north into the Arctic to search for Franklin. In those searches, even more ships and men were lost, convincing the British government to give up the expensive and dangerous efforts to find out what had happened to Franklin. But Franklin's wife would never give up. After pressuring the British government to help her, writing to Lord Palmerston, Britain's Prime Minister, that "the final and exhaustive search is all I seek on behalf of the first and only martyrs to Arctic discovery in modern times, and it is all I ever intend to ask." Jane Franklin raised the funds to privately finance her own expedition.

In June 1857 Lady Franklin purchased the small steam yacht *Fox* from the estate of a deceased English Lord. Placing *Fox* under the command of Captain Francis Leopold McClintock, a veteran of two previous Arctic expeditions in search of Franklin, Lady Franklin instructed McClintock to rescue any survivors and then recover "the unspeakably precious documents of the expedition, public or private, and the personal relics of my dear husband and his companions."

Fox sailed for the Arctic in the summer of 1857, only to be trapped in the ice of Baffin Bay. The next year, they sailed from the Danish port of Gødhavn, today known as Qeqertarsuaq, and headed into the Canadian Arctic. Following Franklin's presumed trail, McClintock moored *Fox* in the ice off the Boothia Peninsula near Bellot Strait and headed south on foot with sledges to King William Island. Carl Peterson, a Greenland Inuit interpreter with McClintock had learned from the local Inuit that two ships had sunk near King William Island. Relics that McClintock bought from the Boothia Inuit were from the Franklin expedition, so he pushed on in the harsh winter to King William Island to link up with another sledging party from *Fox*, led by Lieutenant William Hobson.

On King William Island, the sledge parties from *Fox* discovered scattered skeletons, discarded equipment, a ship's boat filled with provisions and equipment and the bodies of two of Franklin's men. But Hobson made the single greatest discovery. A stone cairn on the shores of the island yielded a note sealed in a tin canister that told, in the briefest of notes, what had happened. *Erebus* and *Terror*, stuck in the ice for eighteen months, were abandoned by the Franklin expedition on April 25, 1848 after 24 of the crew had died – including Captain Sir John Franklin. The last note, from



Captain Francis R.M. Crozier, now the senior officer of the expedition, told how the 105 survivors had landed at the site of the cairn where Hobson found the note, and were heading south the next day, presumably to find food and make their way to safety. Instead they found death, leaving a trail of bodies and discarded equipment strewn across hundreds of miles of tundra and ice.

The harsh conditions of the Arctic weakened McClintock's crew, and *Fox* left the north with two men dead and others, including Hobson, stricken with scurvy. Fox returned to England with a number of "personal relics" of Franklin and his fellow explorers and the only written note from the doomed expedition at the end of its days. Lady Franklin at last abandoned her years of searching, as did the British government. McClintock and his men were rewarded for their valiant and difficult expedition, McClintock ending his days as a knight and an admiral.

Fox subsequently passed into Danish ownership and worked the west coast of Greenland for 55 years as a supply vessel until its final abandonment. Partially sunk in Gødhavn harbour in 1912, the vessel broke up in or around 1940, passing into obscurity as it disintegrated and finally sank nearly a century after its famous voyage in search of Franklin. Forgotten by the world, its broken remains are a reminder of the quest for the Northwest Passage, of a wife's unfailing devotion, and of a heroic sailor and his crew who spent two years under extreme circumstances at the top of the world to tell the world at last about the fate of Franklin.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND IMAGES CONTACT:

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Backgrounder

The *Fox* expedition retrieved a note, sealed in a tin canister buried in a rock cairn on the shores of King William Island that remains the only written account of what happened to the Franklin expedition:

25th April 1848. H.M. Ships *Terror* and *Erebus* were deserted on the 22nd April, 5 leagues NNW of this, having been beset since 12th Sept. 1846. The officers & crew consisting of 105 souls under the command of Captain F.R.M. Crozier, landed here.

Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June, 1847 and the total loss by deaths in the expedition has been to this date 9 officers & 15 men.

F.R.M. Crozier
Captain & Senior Officer

And start on tomorrow 26th for Back's Fish River

James Fitzjames
Captain H.M.S. *Erebus*