

MysteryQuest43: Support Material (Activity Sheet 2) **Exploring the motivations behind Franklin's last voyage**

The British Naval Northwest Passage Expedition of 1845, better known as the fateful last voyage of Sir John Franklin, was proposed within the British Admiralty in late 1844 and decided upon in January 1845. Second Secretary Sir John Barrow had suggested another effort to find the fabled Northwest Passage: that elusive shipping route through the Arctic archipelago to the Pacific Ocean. Viscount Haddington, First Lord of the Admiralty, enlisted the opinions of several Arctic veterans before recommending that the expedition be approved. The two ships allocated to the expedition, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, left England on May 19, 1845 with veteran explorer Sir John Franklin in command.

By February 1845 preparations were well underway to refit the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, in order to strengthen them for Arctic ice conditions. These upgrades included a doubling of the hull, the heavy wooden reinforcement of the bows to a thickness of eight feet, and installation of a special protective sheet iron, not to mention the addition of auxiliary steam engines and screw propellers for churning through ice more effectively. While the Admiralty predicted a one-year voyage, each of the ships was equipped with enough provisions to sustain their crews for three years in case of ice-induced delays. They also carried 200 tin canisters designed to hold paper records reporting the ships' latitude and longitude to aid search vessels in finding them in the event of distress.

Why did the British government send this expedition? The Admiralty's sailing orders to Franklin provided an extensive list of objectives, some of which related to the discovery of the Northwest Passage, while others were oriented to science and specifically to geomagnetic observations. The Admiralty knew that science alone would be less likely to gain popular support as the rationale for the Expedition than the straightforward search for a Northwest Passage. Nevertheless, the Royal Society of London and several of the senior officers emphasized the potential for magnetic science alongside geographical discovery.

The question of the Admiralty's true motives and objectives might have had a bearing on the route and progress of the Expedition. If Franklin was focused primarily on attaining the Northwest Passage, he would likely have sought as direct a route to the Bering Strait as he could find. If, on the other hand, he was focusing on magnetic readings might he not have been more inclined to sail south through Peel Sound toward the North Magnetic Pole? In other words, did the Magnetic Pole lead Franklin's party to become mired in the ice-congested waters of the Victoria Strait?