TEACHING THE CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION

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ABSTRACT

The Canadian Arctic Expedition is a hidden jewel in Canada's buried history treasure chest, just waiting to be unearthed and shared within the country and with the very interested world.

The resources available to bring to light this great Expedition are second to none, with thousands of photos, film footage, personal diaries and scientific reports. The Expedition abounds in good true stories. It is a wonderful vehicle for teaching science, geography, culture and history. It is an educational treasure just waiting for new resources to allow it to be discovered and used.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918 was the first Canadian government expedition to the western Arctic and at the time, the largest multi-disciplinary scientific Arctic expedition ever mounted. It was an important event in Canada's history and the young country gave it appropriate enthusiastic support, anticipating what would prove to be true, that this expedition would have a profound impact on the world of science, and on the people of the north, an impact that continues to this day. As well, a world intrigued with Canada's mysterious and little known north, waited and watched with great interest for revelations about the land and its people.

The Canadian Arctic Expedition (CAE) has slipped out of the Canadian consciousness, overshadowed even on its return by World War One. Few people today know anything about the Expedition, though Stefansson, commander of the CAE, is a familiar name to some. Although the CAE was recognized as an event of national significance in 1925, the first arctic event to be so recognized, this designation was subsequently lost, and only restored in recent years.

BACK TO THE PAST

At the time of the CAE, world newspapers followed the progress of the Expedition in detail. In June 1913, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the *Titanic*'s sister ship, RMS *Olympic*, even reported the launch of the CAE in the onboard newspaper:

"Arctic Expedition. Victoria, British Columbia. The Canadian Arctic expedition, which is seeking an unknown continent in the north, sailed yesterday from Esquimalt. The Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Patterson, and the Premier, Sir Richard McBride, bade an official farewell to the party."

This was obviously a major Canadian event accompanied by great excitement in Victoria. Yet this Expedition dropped out of our history and remains unknown to most Canadians.

It's not as though there has been no information available about the Expedition. Many volumes of scientific reports were published. Expedition journals and private diaries are safely stored at Library and Archives Canada, along with thousands of Expedition photographs and amazing CAE film footage. Several books were published not long after the Expedition as well.

Stefansson's book, *The Friendly Arctic*, of 1921, was a popular account of the Expedition, though it featured little of the scientific exploration, and was mostly about Stefansson's own interests in geographical exploration. The CAE reports, published between 1919 and 1946, were popular among scientists with many hundreds of copies requested, but they only reached that academic audience.

Expedition anthropologist, Diamond Jenness, the most prolific writer among the Expedition scientists, also wrote two popular accounts of his experiences: *The People of the Twilight* 1928 and *Dawn in Arctic Alaska* 1957.

But except for arctic enthusiasts, and those engaged in arctic studies, these resources are not widely known or used. Most information on the CAE for the general public, and especially for children, has focused on the sinking of the Expedition flagship, the *Karluk* and the loss of eleven men. Disasters always receive more attention than the more substantial but less exciting events.

Other more recent academic and popular books have focused on Stefansson's life and accomplishments, and neglected the CAE scientists.

CAE member William McKinley's book; *Karluk, The Great Untold Story of Arctic Exploration* (1976) re-raised the issues and the controversies over leadership that dogged the CAE.

Today we finally have resources that tell more of the CAE story. Stuart Jenness, son of Diamond Jenness, first published his father's expedition diary (*Arctic Odyssey*) in 1991, then the story of Expedition photographer, Sir Hubert Wilkins (*The Making of an Explorer*) in 2004, and in 2011 the first comprehensive account of the entire CAE (*Stefansson, D^{r} Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition*).

In the last ten years, the CAE has become more widely known through other newer and increasingly popular media.

In 2003 I worked with the Canadian Museum of Civilization to develop an online virtual museum exhibition called *Northern People, Northern Knowledge: the Story of the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918*, for the Virtual Museum of Canada. This virtual exhibition continues to attract visitors and is being promoted again in this anniversary year. www.civilization.ca/hist/cae

In 2009 the International Polar Year funded my proposal to research and produce a 1-hour documentary film on D^{r} R. M. Anderson, Head of the Southern Party of the Canadian Arctic Expedition. The film; *Arctic Shadows: the Arctic Journeys of D^{r} R. M. Anderson*, was screened at the IPY Film Festival in Ottawa in 2009 and Inuvik in 2011, and at the *Arctic Film Festival* in Minnesota, USA in 2012. Sales at the Canadian Museum of Civilization made it their most popular DVD. www.arcticshadows.ca

In 2008 I proposed an exhibit on the Canadian Arctic Expedition to the Canadian Museum of Civilization, originally as an International Polar Year project. Approval and funding came several years later and the major exhibition: *Expedition Arctic 1913-1918*, opened at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in April 2011.

The exhibition received an Honourable Mention in the 2011 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Museums – History Alive! Award. After a year at the CMC, the traveling version of the exhibition is now being shown across Canada. www.civilization.ca/arctic/blog

THE ANNIVERSARY YEAR 2013

Now, in 2013, Canada is commemorating the 100th anniversary of the launch of this great Expedition. In the nation's capital, colourful CAE banners fly along the ceremonial route along Parliament Hill and into Gatineau, Quebec. Other quiet celebrations include the production of commemorative CAE coins by the Royal Canadian Mint. But what is so far lacking in this centennial year is new research and new teaching about this awesome piece of Canadian heritage.

The Department of Canadian Heritage identified the "Centennial of the start of Canadian Arctic Expedition" as one of the "Key Milestone Anniversaries on the Road to 2017," the year of Canada's 150th Birthday.

In announcing a Virtual Museum of Canada grant to the Kitikmeot Heritage Society, of Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, the Minister of Health, Leona Aglukkaq noted that the new investment would help ensure that "information on the Canadian Arctic Expedition, one of Canada's significant historical events, [is] accessible to all Canadians." The funding is to "help preserve the history of the Copper Inuit (Inuinnait) and commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Canadian Arctic Expedition." Though it is a significant acknowledgement of the celebration of the CAE's anniversary by Heritage Canada, the forthcoming VMC exhibition is more about the Copper Inuit than the CAE.

Heritage Canada has also provided a supporting grant to *Students on Ice* for their educational Arctic expeditions with a focus and teaching on the CAE for the next three years. Through this program, we will be teaching the 75 students who will travel north each year, the basics of the CAE through the on-board lecture program and increasing their awareness through special workshops introducing cultural and scientific objects linked to the CAE.

My own independent proposal for original field research, a documentary film, and a new website on the CAE received no financial support from the federal government, and it appears that no new federal funding was designated specifically for the CAE commemoration.

Therefore, we turned to a crowd-funding campaign to raise the necessary funds for a commemorative expedition to Banks Island, to begin the re-tracing and documenting, for the first time, of the routes of the CAE and their established camps.

The 2013 CAE campaign was called "The White North has thy Bones," a quote from Lord Tennyson's tribute to Sir John Franklin, and a reference to our quest to find the remains of Captain Peter Bernard of the CAE, who was lost in the winter of 1916, and never found. This catchy title was necessary to grab people's attention from the thousands of other competing film proposals on the Indiegogo site. We worked hard to get the multimedia coverage rolling. Fortunately an independent writer for Canadian Press picked up our new CAE story, and his article appeared in newspapers across the country. So the crowd-funding campaign actually did more to raise the CAE profile than we could have imagined. Not only did newspapers pick up the story, but national radio and television covered it as well. This is when the real public education element of the Expedition began.

CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION 2013

Our 2013 expedition was planned to locate, map, film, and officially document sites where the CAE established camps and caches along the west coast of Banks Island. None of these sites have ever before been properly mapped or documented by historians. Coastal erosion due to decreased ice has put these sites at risk as artifacts and structural elements are being washed away. Filming at these sites would be a key component of our planned documentary film on the Canadian Arctic Expedition.

We spent most of our time at the site of the major camp of the Northern Party of the CAE used between 1914 and 1917. The site is located at Mary Sachs Creek, just west of the community of Sachs Harbour. Here we measured, documented and filmed the foundations of the CAE huts built in 1914, the scattered remnants of the Expedition's schooner *Mary Sachs*, and many artifacts exposed on the surface of the large site.

Unfortunately, 2013 featured the worst ice conditions for the past seven years. Most of coastal Banks Island remained ice-choked through August. Even the ship we were to sail up the coast in, the *Bernard Explorer*, couldn't cross the Northwest Passage to meet us at Sachs harbor because of ice. Only by traveling overland by ATV was it possible to reach four of the ten CAE sites we had hoped to document. Yet the summer's expedition was very worthwhile, both in terms of research and teaching.

The new technology of communicating via satellites, using a donated inReach device and i-phone allowed us to show our location and movements on a map seen on our website. A daily blog allowed us to teach as we explored. We could show photos of artifacts we found and explain their use in the context of the CAE camp of 100 years ago. Our followers became involved with the hunt and celebrated our discoveries. Thanks to this medium, our contributors and followers became part of the expedition team.

When we attempted to navigate through the ice by outboard motor boats when our sail boat couldn't reach us, our followers could see the packed ice and understand the impossibility of navigation. When we then went overland in ATVs, our followers came too, following our progress on the website map, seeing photos and reading the daily blogs.

Limited by the need to carry our own gas, we were not able to reach the most northerly camps, and we had no hope of reaching the island camps, were we just might have found the "bones" of Captain Bernard. Never-the-less, with the kind of immediate communication that the new media devices allow, educating about the CAE really came alive. Real excitement was being generated about the Canadian Arctic Expedition as we travelled the same land, and camped alongside their old camp sites.

Working with the people of Sachs Harbour, many of whom have direct connections with the CAE, was part of the teaching experience. We gave tours of the Mary Sachs site and shared stories and photos of the early history of the island from our knowledge of the CAE. In turn we learned more of individual and family histories and how they too relate to the CAE. This sort of sharing of information brought a great feeling of cooperation and working together to research and teach the CAE.

The 2013 expedition has also led to a new teaching project which involves working with NWT Tourism and the Sachs Harbour Hunters and Trappers Committee to produce a booklet on the history of Sachs Harbour and Banks Island, focusing on the CAE and its legacy. This project will increase tourism potential by teaching the story of the CAE and its legacy to general public, and demonstrate how tourists can experience this amazing history for themselves.

FUTURE PROJECTS

We have not done well in the past at teaching the CAE to the Canadian students. School curricula across Canada provide some encouragement to consider Arctic and Inuit history, but none specifically mention the CAE

The production of an Educational Guide to the CAE to help teachers would be an important addition to our website. Teachers appreciate such guides, which offer a time-line, major accomplishments, photos, links, and project ideas. A guide will encourage teachers to include a unit on the CAE in their teaching.

Recent studies confirm what seems apparent, that young people looking for information on history use the internet first and books a distant second. Older people use the two sources about the same. Newspapers, TV and magazines are far less used as sources.

TEACHING IN THE NORTH USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

In Canada's north, though Elders may still use single side band radios and the trappers' frequency to communicate while out on the land, satellite phones and other new satellite-based technologies are becoming more common. In the same way, how information is acquired in the North is changing too. Many northern people rely largely on Facebook, not only for chat and social communication, but also as a way of discovering and sharing information on history in the form of updates, comments, and photographs.

Twitter is also an impacting level of communication which not only alerts people to events as they unfold, but also directs them to more in-depth sources of information. Though perhaps used more by institutions than by individuals, Twitter is becoming an important tool for teaching the North.

In order to teach the north and specifically to teach about the Canadian Arctic Expedition, we have had to make use of these new technologies. We can no longer depend on our stories being published in books and magazines, but must reach the younger audiences with Twitter and Facebook linking to significant websites.

Though websites are incredibly useful sources of information, there are difficulties associated. These include the discerning assessment of website content, the need for regular updating, and the problem of directing people to the website.

The most successful teaching programs will be those that include more traditional teaching and on-the-land experiences, along with the new technologies.

Some examples of programs making these combinations are:

Nunavut Tungavik Inc. which is putting their Nunavut oral history database online.

The Hay River Transport company is using on-site tours of actual boats along with classroom teaching and website information to train new employees.

Parks Canada sponsors on the land programs with Elders and youth sharing experiences in National Parks, as well as online Park experiences.

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CAE Websites

www.canadianarcticexpedition.ca Features a summary of the CAE of 1913 to 1918, and the 2013 Expedition including photographs and the Expedition blog.

Northern People, Northern Knowledge: The Story of the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918. By David R. Gray, 2003. Ottawa: Virtual Museum of Canada, www.virtual museum.ca or www.civilization.ca/hist/cae.

Expedition Arctic 1913-1918 at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Guest Curator David R. Gray. See short videos on the exhibition and David introducing some featured artifacts from the exhibition at Expedition Arctic 1913-1918 on the Canadian Museum of Civilization's website: www.civilization.ca/arctic.

Also visit David's CAE Blog on the same website: www.civilization.ca/arctic/blog.