

## Book Reviews

**THE ARCTIC JOURNALS OF JOHN RAE.** Ken McGoogan (editor). Victoria BC: TouchWood Editions. 312 p, softcover. ISBN 978-1-927129-74-6. CA\$ 19.95. doi:[10.1017/S003224741500042X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S003224741500042X)

Anybody purchasing this book, expecting to find, on the basis of the title, a scholarly, annotated edition of John Rae's manuscript arctic journals, namely from his four Arctic expeditions of 1846–47, 1848, 1850–51 and 1853–55, will be very disappointed. In fact the book consists of three distinct sections, none of which is one of Rae's journals *sensu stricto*. The first, entitled *The lost autobiography* is a fairly lengthy excerpt from D. Murray Smith's book *Arctic expeditions from British and foreign shores from the earliest times to the expedition of 1875–76* (Smith 1877). The reference to a 'lost autobiography' is a reference to John Rae's incomplete holograph autobiography which is held by the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge (MS 787/1). The autobiography ends in mid-sentence during Rae's account of the events of 15 April 1854, about a week before he met the first Inuk near Pelly Bay who was able to tell him something of the fate of the missing Franklin expedition, an account which was significantly enhanced by information which he subsequently obtained from Inuit at his base at Repulse Bay over the subsequent summer. There has long been debate as to whether Rae ever completed the autobiography and if so, as to what might have happened to the remainder (which would have covered the remaining 49 years of Rae's life, and thus would have represented a substantial volume of material). The late Alan Cooke, former archivist at the Scott Polar Research Institute, has argued that it was completed, but has somehow gone missing (Cooke 1968). This clearly is a possibility.

McGoogan's rationale for republishing a lengthy section of Smith's book is that in it Smith relates that Rae had provided him with 'valuable notes . . . supplied by Dr. Rae for the present work' (page 34). McGoogan then makes the unsubstantiated claim that these notes were the substantial remaining section of Rae's autobiography covering half his life, which Smith had failed to return to Rae. A careful comparison of the coverage in the manuscript autobiography of the earlier stages of Rae's 1853–54 expedition, with that in his report to the Hudson's Bay Company's Committee in London (Rich 1953) and especially in his report of his wintering at Repulse Bay and of the first part of his explorations in the spring of 1854, reveals that the coverage in the autobiography is substantially more detailed than that in his reports to the Committee. By contrast the coverage in the 'notes' provided by Rae to Smith and quoted in full by McGoogan (page 35–36) is substantially less detailed than in Rae's report to the Committee. It seems likely that the 'notes' were written by Rae specifically for Smith, and do not represent a quotation from the missing half of the autobiography.

Supporting this argument is the fact that while the first edition of Smith's book was published in 1875, at three places in the extant section of the autobiography Rae mentions the dates of events occurring while he was writing, or shortly before: these dates are 1883, 1885 and 1887. If one makes the

reasonable assumption that Rae wrote his autobiography in a chronological sequence, clearly Smith could not have borrowed the missing section of the autobiography.

One possible explanation of the fact that the autobiography ends so abruptly is that Rae's narrative was then approaching the period when he would have to tackle the Inuit accounts of the fate of the Franklin expedition, a topic which was undoubtedly extremely painful to him, not because of the details of those accounts, but because of the opprobrium later aimed at Rae by the British public for having relayed those details, especially the references to cannibalism. One suspects that, realising this, he simply put the manuscript aside at this point, which must have been at some time after 1887. Unable to face the painful topics that he would next have to tackle, he never returned to the task, and he died in 1893.

The second section of McGoogan's book represents a new edition of Rae's only published book *Narrative of an expedition to the shores of the Arctic Sea in 1846 and 1847* (Rae 1850). This is his account of his first Arctic expedition, mounted on orders from George Simpson, the Hudson's Bay Company's Governor in North America. On this expedition in 1846 Rae travelled by boat from York Factory north to Repulse Bay; having wintered at Fort Hope, a stone house which he and his men built and which still stands, although deteriorating rapidly in recent years. Then in 1847 he and his men, travelling by sledge explored first the west shores of Committee Bay, Simpson Peninsula and Pelly Bay to within sight of Lord Mayor Bay, and thereafter the east shore of Committee Bay to within sight of the west end of Fury and Hecla Strait. A limited number of sections of this account are in journal format, but there is no guarantee that these are verbatim quotations from the manuscript journal. Rae later complained bitterly in his autobiography that '[t]he narrative also has been so remodeled that I did not know my own bantling [young child].' Therefore even this section of McGoogan's book cannot legitimately claim to be one of Rae's 'Arctic journals'.

The original edition included a fold-out map, by Arrow-smith, of Rae's explorations in 1847. This is reproduced in an earlier facsimile edition (Rae 1970). Unfortunately McGoogan has not included a facsimile of this map. While few publishers are now prepared to include fold-out maps, McGoogan might at least have included a new map specifically drafted for this book. Without such a map the value of the book is greatly reduced since few potential readers will have an adequate knowledge of the geography of this part of the world to be able to follow Rae's narrative without a detailed map.

The original 1850 edition of Rae's book is now quite rare (and, of course, expensive). Even an earlier facsimile edition (Canadiana House 1970) is now relatively rare. Thus despite not being what McGoogan's title claims it to be, and despite the lack of a map, McGoogan is therefore to be commended on making this important work readily available again.

The term 'Arctic journal' is even less applicable to the third section of Rae's book. The background to this section is that following Rae's return to England and the publication of his report to the Admiralty in *The Times*, complete with the information which Rae relayed from the Inuit that the

survivors of Franklin's expedition had engaged in cannibalism, Lady Franklin took grave exception to this revelation and recruited Charles Dickens to counter Rae's report. Dickens jumped at the chance to discuss such a 'juicy' topic in his weekly publication *Household Words* (Dickens 1854a). Over two issues he published a discussion of Rae's report. While not blaming Rae, as having been obliged to submit a full report to the Admiralty, he proceeded to vent a vicious diatribe against the Inuit, both as to the reliability of their oral reports in general and to the probability that it was they who had been engaging in cannibalism, or even murder of the Franklin survivors. To give him his due, in a subsequent issue of *Household Words*, Dickens gave John Rae an opportunity to respond (Dickens 1854b). The contrast between Dickens's wordy, convoluted discussion and Rae's clear, well-argued, dignified and restrained response is very striking. Despite Dickens's disclaimer that it was the Admiralty and not Rae who forwarded Rae's letter to *The Times*, the British public was not prepared to make such a fine distinction, and Rae was generally vilified – which, of course, was Lady Franklin's intention.

It should be noted that while McGoogan has made a further useful contribution in making this important exchange of views, first published in what is now quite an obscure publication, available to a wide readership, it cannot, by any stretch of imagination be described as one of John Rae's 'Arctic journals'.

Twice (page 5, page 311) McGoogan has stated that John Rae discovered the 'final link in the Northwest Passage' when he discovered Rae Strait between King William Island and Boothia Peninsula in 1854. This is to ignore the fact that at that date a substantial section of what has subsequently become the most frequently used variant of the Northwest Passage further north was still undiscovered. This section, some 240 km in length, lying between Bellot Strait and the spot where James Ross discovered the north magnetic pole in 1831, has since been named Franklin Strait and Larsen Sound. This section of the passage was discovered and mapped by Sir Francis

Leopold McClintock and Sir Allen Young in the spring of 1859 (McClintock 1859), and thus became the 'final link' in the Northwest Passage (see Barr 2015a and 2015b).

In short, while there is some merit in the republication of Rae's account of his first Arctic expedition and of the exchange of opinions between John Rae and Charles Dickens in *Household Words*, McGoogan's argument as to why Rae's manuscript autobiography is incomplete is seriously flawed, and, incidentally the title of this book is totally inappropriate and misleading. (William Barr, Arctic Institute of North America, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary AB T2N 1N4, Canada ([wbarr@ucalgary.ca](mailto:wbarr@ucalgary.ca))).

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**JOHN RAE'S ARCTIC CORRESPONDENCE 1844–1855.** Ken McGoogan (editor). 2014. Victoria B.C.: TouchWood Editions. xii + 494 p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 978-1-77151-084-4. CA\$21.95.  
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This volume represents a reprint of *John Rae's correspondence with the Hudson's Bay Company on arctic exploration 1844–1855*, edited by E.E. Rich with the assistance of A.M. Johnson, with an introduction by J.M. Wordie and R.J. Cyriax, and published by the Hudson's Bay Record Society. The correspondence, which is quite heavily annotated, consists almost entirely of letters from John Rae to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, to its secretary, Archibald Barclay, and especially to Sir George Simpson, the Company's Governor in North America (these latter being both official and private).

The correspondence pertains to all five of John Rae's Arctic expeditions, whose purpose was either to survey the remaining unmapped sections of the Arctic mainland coast of North America, or to search for the missing Franklin expedition, missing since 1845. During the first of these, in 1846–47, working from a base at Repulse Bay Rae, with a small party of men surveyed both shores of Committee Bay, Simpson Peninsula

and Pelly Bay as far north as Lord Mayor's Bay. This expedition is described in detail in Rae's book *Narrative of an expedition to the shores of the Arctic sea in 1846 and 1847*, the only book he ever published (Rae 1850).

His next expedition was aimed at searching for the missing Franklin expedition. Travelling by boat with Sir John Richardson, he searched the mainland coast from the Mackenzie Delta east to the mouth of the Coppermine River in the summer of 1848. After wintering at Fort Confidence at the head of the Dease Arm of great Bear Lake, in the summer of 1849 Rae tried to cross by boat from the mouth of the Coppermine to Victoria Island, but this attempt was foiled by ice, and he returned to Fort Confidence and headed south to Fort Simpson. Then in the early spring of 1851, travelling by dog sledge, he reached the mouth of the Coppermine again from Fort Confidence, then crossed to Victoria Island and searched its coast for some distance east, and subsequently west to Cape Back at the mouth of Prince Albert Sound, before returning to Fort Confidence.

Finally, in 1853, following his own suggestion to Sir George and the Committee, that he should fill the remaining gap in the map of the Arctic mainland coast, namely most of the west coast of Boothia Peninsula, having returned to his base at Repulse Bay in the spring of 1854, he again crossed to Committee Bay, and from Pelly Bay crossed to the mouth of the Castor and