

Correspondence

Thoughts on the 1935 Haig-Thomas/ Humphreys route on Ellesmere Island Lord Shackleton

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I recently read with great interest Mr R.J. Oszcewski's article 'The hunt for marine reptile fossils on western Ellesmere Island' (*Polar Record* 28 (165): 105–12), which included a lengthy discussion on the route taken by David Haig-Thomas and Noel Humphreys on the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition of 1935, of which I was the organiser.

I was interested to discover that the general belief seems to be that Humphreys was right, yet that the author has strong indications that Humphreys, as well as Haig-Thomas, was wrong, indicating that they had reached neither Troid Fiord nor Vendome Fiord, but Blind Fiord.

At the time, knowing them both, I was more inclined to believe that Haig-Thomas was correct. He was ingenious and full of initiative, although some thought him not an entirely reliable witness. To some extent, therefore, the question seemed to depend on the reliability of witnesses, including Nookapingwa. I would have thought that Nookapingwa was an entirely reliable witness, and I know that Harry Stallworthy, our Royal Canadian Mounted Police member, would have sworn by him. Of course, this perhaps weighs unfairly against Humphreys' arguments, because he was not popular with the Eskimos.

Unfortunately, there are no members of the expedition alive except myself. I was in touch with some of the members of our Eskimo team, but I am afraid that they died relatively recently.

If any *Polar Record* readers have further information or opinions about the Haig-Thomas/Humphreys journey, I should be interested to know them, and I would be equally delighted if I could be of help to any historian interested in this expedition.

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In her interesting article 'Edwin Jesse De Haven: the first US Arctic explorer,' Liz Cruwys quotes William Parker Snow's description of De Haven as given in his book *Voyage of the 'Prince Albert' in search of Sir John Franklin* (Snow 1851; Cruwys 1992). From the information concerning De Haven presented in her article, there seems no reason to cast doubt on the accuracy of the description, but

it should be borne in mind that Snow was certainly not a disinterested observer.

At the time when he met De Haven, on 23 August 1850, Snow was a member of the first of Lady Franklin's private expeditions in search of her husband and the crews of HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*. Snow's personal position was one of considerable difficulty; he seems to have been second-in-command of the expedition, but not second-in-command of the ship *Prince Albert*. In overall control was Commander C.C. Forsyth RN, who was one of the many naval officers who volunteered to help in the search (Stone 1985). Snow, a civilian whose career up to that time had been varied and undistinguished, had also volunteered and had been appointed by Lady Franklin herself in one of the quixotic gestures in which that lady so frequently indulged (Stone 1978). For Snow, this expedition represented the opportunity to secure the fame and advancement for which he craved. But Forsyth reached an early conclusion that the *Prince Albert* expedition would achieve little or nothing, and he found the situation on board, commanding a difficult civilian crew, stressful. He had determined to return to England shortly before the meeting with De Haven's ships.

Snow knew of this decision and, of course, it dashed all his hopes. It seems clear that he had already decided to ingratiate himself with Lady Franklin in order to secure a prominent place on board a fresh expedition should she determine on one. It would, therefore, be circumspect for him to ensure that there was nothing in his journal that would alienate her. He was quite well aware of the friendship between Lady Franklin and Henry Grinnell, the organiser of the De Haven expedition (Cruwys 1990), and it would not have been in his interest to be anything less than adulatory about it. Not only that, his journal was edited fairly ruthlessly before publication by Lady Franklin, and one can be sure that even if Snow had inserted any criticism, inadvertent or otherwise, of De Haven or his expedition, then she would have removed it. Hence, whether the glowing description of De Haven was deserved or not, it would surely have appeared as it did.

A full account of the 1850 *Prince Albert* expedition, and of the involvement in it of Lady Franklin, is to be published shortly (Stone in press).

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The cultural impact of AIDS in the circumpolar north

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One of the most pressing contemporary concerns regarding the future health of northern communities is the spread of AIDS. Unlike Europe, the United States, and Africa, the introduction of HIV and AIDS in circumpolar regions is relatively recent. The first HIV-positive cases were diagnosed in Greenland in 1984, and, so far, there have been three deaths from AIDS-related diseases in Greenland, and several cases of AIDS in indigenous populations in Alaska and Canada. In 1991, 13 people were newly diagnosed HIV-positive in Greenland, including seven women. Currently, there are 37 people who are HIV-positive in Greenland, and five cases of AIDS. Most of these people contracted the virus by heterosexual transmission (Greenland Medical Council 1991). Although these figures may seem relatively insignificant compared to statistics from, for example, Africa, the total population of Greenland in 1991 was 55,533 (Grønlands Statistiske Kontor 1990), which gives a ratio of one HIV-positive case to every 1,500 individuals.

Evidence from historical accounts of early encounters with northern peoples suggests that venereal diseases already existed in indigenous populations prior to western contact, but there is no documentary evidence to give an indication of the extent or frequency of outbreaks. Currently, native peoples who inhabit the circumpolar north from Siberia to East Greenland already have a high incidence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Corresponding to this is potential for rapid transmission of HIV and the possibility of an AIDS epidemic in the north. This situation was discussed at the Circumpolar Meeting on AIDS Prevention in Ilulissat, Greenland, in September 1989. Reports were given on norms in sexual behaviour, the prevention of HIV infection, and the incidence of other STDs. The initial success of anti-AIDS campaigns, such as the STOP-AIDS campaign in Greenland in 1986 and 1987, was also noted.

There is growing recognition that anthropological expertise and research is needed to supplement medical research in order to contribute to an awareness of the cultural factors and sexual norms that increase the risk of spreading HIV in the Arctic. As in other parts of the world,

there is a problem with the effectiveness of campaigns that do not address themselves to specific cultural contexts. But AIDS-related diseases do not only threaten life itself, they engender a cultural response that has severe implications for how people with the illness perceive themselves and are perceived by others within their society.

In the United States, AIDS has become a pejorative metaphor that tends to victimise those who have developed the illness. In this way, the wider society generally places the responsibility for the cause of AIDS on the individuals themselves. The moral implications used to label AIDS sufferers give rise to social and economic discrimination and isolation of the individual. Discussion of AIDS and other STDs occurring in the Arctic tends to lead to the labelling of indigenous peoples, such as the Inuit, as promiscuous. The irresponsibility of the individual is moralistically judged as the cause, and the external perceptions of promiscuity tend to obscure cultural meanings regarding sexual behaviour. While the threat from AIDS is not to be ignored, the effect of moralistic AIDS discourse could result in social and cultural conflict, prejudice, and social fragmentation in small northern communities.

In order to resist the deleterious effects of this process, it is necessary to embark on a programme of re-education. It is widely accepted that AIDS sufferers require counselling as well as medical treatment in order to come to terms with their illness. It is important that such counselling should be culturally sensitive, both to the AIDS sufferers and their carers. Likewise, planned anti-AIDS and STD campaigns are more effective if the social and behavioural norms of the people at which they are aimed are borne in mind. Essentially, the messages of AIDS campaigns have usually urged changes in sexual behaviour, such as having fewer sexual partners. However, this carries a negative moralistic message that is inappropriate to the sexual norms of some communities, despite its success in other cultures.

In any small community, a person suffering from a potentially fatal and potentially contagious disease can produce a conflict of interests, particularly where external messages have led to stigmatisation being attached to the illness. It is clear that campaigns and counselling should be aimed at the community as a whole, not only at AIDS sufferers and their immediate carers; tolerance and compassion become particularly meaningful in small, isolated groups, where social barriers may cause the destruction of the cultural integrity of a community.

The spread of HIV and the development of AIDS in the circumpolar north illustrate how the recent past, and certainly the future, of native peoples is inextricably bound up in a wider world context. There has been a considerable increase in social research focusing on the ideological and economic assimilation of native peoples into the mainstream of nation states, and the study of health and disease reveals the deleterious effects of this assimilation. The introduction of new diseases and the severity of epidemics has undermined the social and spiritual fabric of native