

Note: audio sounds are depicted in square brackets in italics.

*[gentle birdsong and soft breeze]*. “The light yellow of the fading poplars formed a fine contrast to the dark evergreen of the spruce”, Sir John Franklin wrote partway through his 1819 expedition from the western shore of Hudson Bay to the Arctic Ocean. And a contrast that journey was to everything he had been used to thus far.

One of twelve children born to a successful greengrocer in Spilsby, *[loud family chattering sounds]* Franklin joined the navy as a volunteer at 14, where he had a particular aptitude for seafaring. *[ship’s horn leaving port]*.

But this particular expedition saw him amongst different terrains: rapids and frozen ice; snow and rocky passages. *[sounds of rapids, switching to snow and rock crunch]*. It was a voyage that would take three years to complete, dipping into -40 degree weather in the Canadian Tundra, and resulting in his famous title as ‘The Man Who Ate His Boots’, when he was forced to eat the lichen from his shoes in a bid to survive.

Please enjoy a fictionalised account of his journey from Cumberland House in Saskatchewan, a trek started on January 18th, 1820, the year after his expedition began.

*[Snow crunching underfoot]* “I will never accustom myself to packing light,” John said as he tied up his three-foot-long snowshoes, feet blistered from days of wear. Fellow traveller, George Back, was ready ahead of him, and was checking on the dogs that would be leading their sleds. “I’m used to ships with two years worth of meat and dried stock. Not pitiful supplies we will have to dump when the terrain changes once more.”

“We will need to move quickly,” George reminded John. “We need to keep up with the light.” But more than that, moving quickly was the only way to stop them and their party from freezing over. *[dogs rustling/breathing in the background]*.

More than once George had questioned his choice to join the expedition. He could speak French, and the voyageurs on their trail were French too, so he was to act as a bridge between John and the others. “And,” George continued, speaking in English only to John. “What does it matter what food we carry? Our jaws are so hardened by the dried meat we have eaten our next meal could be made of limestone, or granite, for all I would notice.”

John laughed, grudgingly, at this comment. Even his humour had hardened during the course of his travels. But his determination was harder still, and he would not give up his ambition. *[sounds of winter winds end fictionalised account]*.

It was the weather and terrain that was against John and his party, like all the other white men who attempted to make the journey. The distinction is important because the indigenous peoples lived and survived in these climates, learning to adapt to the landscape and work with

it. It was the indigenous peoples John relied on to hunt for him; and it was the indigenous peoples who paid the price when diseases like whooping cough and measles (none of which they had natural immunity to) were brought in by Europeans encroaching on their land.

John Franklin and his party eventually reached the sea on 18th July 1821. His expedition was the first to map large sections of the Arctic seaboard, leading to a successful return to the region some years later. He eventually died on 11th June 1847 on the HMS Erebus, on a voyage to seek out the Northwest Passage.

*Source: The Man Who Ate His Boots by Anthony Brandt*