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The Arctic Ocean from Kara Sea to Bering Strait is very little known, for not much study has been given to the coast waters, ice, wind, and tidal conditions. There is usually some open water between the pack ice and the coast even in winter, as winds move the ice offshore, occasionally making openings of large extent. Nordenskjöld found the greatest difficulties near the eastern end of this stretch, between the Kara Sea and Bering Strait. He followed the narrow, shallow and winding channel near the coast, making very slow progress till his vessel was finally frozen in a short distance from Bering Strait. In summer there is a great deal of fog both in the Kara Sea and farther east along the Asiatic coast.

The route through Bering Strait is well known, the charts are adequate, and a handbook in English gives detailed information as to the ice, wind, and tidal conditions.

The voyages thus far made between the Atlantic and the large Siberian rivers have not provided conclusive testimony as to the practicability of more or less regular steamship connection between these rivers and the Atlantic ports of Europe; and it is certain that the route can be of very little practical importance either for military or commercial purposes as long as there are no telegraphs, harbours, coaling stations, soundings, lighthouses, or sailing directions for great distances along the coasts.

AMUNDSEN'S NORTH WEST PASSAGE.

A telegram published in the newspapers on Dec. 5 from Captain Roald Amundsen announced his arrival at the mining camp of Eagle in Alaska, to which place he had travelled by dog sledge from Herschel Island west of the Mackenzie delta. He had left the *Gjøa* and his comrades on Aug. 13 in winter quarters at Kay Point near Herschel Island. The party had made their way in the *Gjøa* from King William Land through the channels between the mainland and the islands. They had thus actually made the North West Passage, as their vessel is now in waters frequented every summer by San Francisco whalers. She will resume her voyage when navigation opens, and will pass through Bering Strait on her way home.

Amundsen sailed from Christiania in June, 1903, for the neighbourhood of Boothia, where, on the western coast, Sir James C. Ross, in 1831, determined the position of the North Magnetic Pole. It

was Amundsen's purpose to relocate the position of the pole and to make a magnetic survey of that region. After the completion of his magnetic work it was his intention to try to make the North West Passage. His vessel is of 47 tons register, 70 feet long and 20 feet broad, and has a small petroleum motor, by means of which she can make about four knots an hour. Amundsen purposely chose a small vessel as the sounds and straits through which he would have to pass are narrow and likely to be encumbered with drift ice, and a larger craft would be hard to handle.

The weekly edition of the London *Times* printed on Nov. 17 two letters from Amundsen which Eskimos had carried from King William Land, Amundsen's headquarters, to Fullerton on the north-west side of Hudson Bay, where they were delivered to Major Moody of the Canadian Government vessel *Arctic*. These letters give an outline of the work and fortunes of Amundsen's party from the time it left Godhavn until shortly before the start was made through the North West Passage.

Writing on Nov. 24, 1904, from "Gjøa Harbour, King William Land, about 68° 37' L. N., 95° 45' L. W. Gr.," Amundsen says they left Godhavn, West Greenland, July 31, 1903, reached the ice in Melville Bay, near "Devil's Thumb," on Aug. 8, and on the 16th and 17th took on board the stores deposited for them on Dalrymple Island. They then entered Lancaster Sound and reached Beechey Island Aug. 22, where they made magnetic observations to determine the direction of the North Magnetic Pole. The results showed that the Pole was to the south, and accordingly they pushed southward down Peel Sound, their compass failing to aid them after reaching Prescotte Island in that Sound. Without compass and in thick fog navigation was uncertain, but they advanced, avoiding the heavy ice floe, and steamed down the west coast of Boothia through a good opening along the land. Simpson Strait was ice free, and on Sept. 9 they anchored under King William Land, and on the 12th reached their winter harbour—Gjøa Harbour (Pettersen's Bay, McClintock). Though small, it was an excellent harbour:

On Sept. 17th the provisions were landed by the means of a suspension track, and deposited in a house erected for that purpose. In the course of October the house of magnetic variations was built, the meteorological institute with dwelling for two of the party, astronomical observatory, house for the absolute magnetic observations, house for the observations of the inclinations, house for the keeping of the magnetical instruments. The two former are built of cases and very strong. The others are built of snow and sail-cloth. On November 2 all the observations were commenced, and they have been continued without interruption ever since.

Eskimos from the mainland visited the camp on Oct. 29, 1903, and later the party met Eskimos from both the west and east coasts

of Boothia. In October 100 reindeer were killed. The winter passed well, though seven of the best dogs died. February was the coldest month, with an average temperature of -40.5° C.:

Commenced on March 1, 1904, putting down the stores for the coming spring voyage to the vicinity of the pole. Observed during this tour—in the interior of the country—our lowest temperature— -61.7° C. The travel by sledge to the polar region itself was commenced by Ristvedt and myself on April 3 with two sledges and ten dogs, several of which were whelps. I dare not say anything about the result of this tour. Had five stations in all along the west coast of Boothia up to the Tasmania islands. Had to return earlier than originally intended, the Itchuachtorvik Eskimo having plundered our depot. Came back at the end of May. The summer I have spent in magnetical observations around the station. The ice went at the beginning of August, came in October, 1903, and several times was out of sight. The summer was cold and rainy—according to the Eskimo the worst summer they ever had. Lieutenant Hansen and Helmer Hansen, on the breaking up of the ice, 1904, went westward through the Simpson Strait in a boat. The object was to explore the most narrow part of the strait about the Eta Island, and to put down stores for the intended sledge travel to the west coast of Victoria Land in the spring of 1905. They met with much ice on their westward voyage, but it was accessible for a vessel of the size of *Gjøa*. The sea was rather shallow.

The second winter passed with all in good health. The magnetic observations were a large part of the work. Besides the variation instruments which were in constant use, there were daily absolute observations. Observations of the aurora borealis were made in connection with the meteorological work. The variation at headquarters was between N. 10 W. and N. 10 E. They found even greater deviations. Most frequently the variation was about 5 W. The inclination was about $89^{\circ} 20'$. Amundsen added that they had made ample collections of ornithological, ethnographical, and botanical material, and some fossils.

The second letter is dated from headquarters on King William Land May 22, 1905. Amundsen wrote:

This winter has not by far been so hard as the former. The sea ice, which last year about this time measured about 380 cm., now is no more than about 170 cm. The lowest temperature we had in February -45° . A great number of Netchilli Eskimo stayed here during the darkest part of the winter. The spring made signs of its coming as early as the end of March. The temperature now already has been above zero several times. The health has been excellent all the time. I commenced in February to circle the magnetic station, and have just finished this task. Lieutenant Hansen and Sergeant Ristvedt left here on April 2 to draw a map of the east coast of Victoria Land. They were equipped for 70 days—two sledges with six dogs at each. Fresh meat we have had the whole time—reindeer and salmon.

The magnetic variation house has been in uninterrupted activity. Wiik has managed this work, and done it excellently. On the whole, I must add that all and each of the party have done their duty to the utmost. Absolute magnetic observations have been made daily, and at all temperatures. The meteorological registering instruments have been in function all the time. The zoological and ethnographical collections are constantly increasing. The magnetic variation house will be pulled down in the beginning of June after 10 months of uninterrupted activity. As regards the results I cannot say anything.

Amundsen reports from Eagle that he has forwarded the data for his magnetic observations to Dr. Nansen in Norway. It is probable that the results of his work will not be ready to be published for some time.