



ROBERT CARTER

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

A hardy Scot who boldly crossed an unmapped continent.

by Victor Suthren

If there is one brawny, clear-eyed lad amongst the shuffling ranks of those who would claim recognition as explorers of Canada, then in my opinion it is the tousled red hair of Alexander Mackenzie that should be visible above their heads. Mackenzie should be recognized as the greatest of Canadian explorers on the basis of his sheer nerve and courage. Ahead of anyone else in North America, he completed the great push westward and northward from the bases of European arrival in eastern North America to reach both the Arctic and Pacific oceans. And he completed the latter a good ten years before the much more

trumpeted but arguably less courageous or daring Lewis and Clark expedition to the south.

Mackenzie was born a hardy Scot — aren't they all? — in 1764 on the Isle of Lewis. He survived the dreadful infant mortality of the age, but the death of his mother when he was ten had him sent off perilously across the North Atlantic to New York, where his father had gone to attempt business. At the age of fourteen, with the American Revolution making things increasingly difficult and dangerous for Loyalists — his father and brother had enlisted in the King's Royal Regiment of New York — young Alexander was packed off to Montreal in 1778, where in the next year he became a junior clerk in the fur-trading company of Finlay, Gregory and Company. Applying himself to his work, he rose in both competence and the company's esteem, and when in 1787 it merged with the North West Company Alexander remained with the firm.

Then began his great period of westward and northward travel that would bring him to the Pacific coast and the Arctic Ocean. In 1788 he became one of the founders of Fort Chipewyan in present-day northern Alberta, when he travelled to Lake Athabasca to replace a noted colleague, Peter Pond. On arriving in the area, Mackenzie heard from the Dene and other peoples that the great river affecting the lake flowed northward. Wondering if this might reveal a freshwater Northwest Passage, Mackenzie set out by canoe to follow the river northward to its mouth, and on July 14, 1789, he reached the Arctic Ocean.

Mackenzie had hoped it would end at Cook Inlet on the Alaskan coast and admitted to being disappointed that it did not; that he had carried out a monumental river descent to the northern seacoast was less on his mind. It would not be so with those who learned of his feat, for the great river would eventually become known as the Mackenzie River.

Mackenzie had demonstrated both a remarkable boldness and courage in deep exploration but was aware that, when compared with others such as David Thompson, he lacked the scientific preparation necessary for recording and accurately depicting his discoveries. Accordingly, he returned to Britain. In 1791 and 1792 he familiarized himself with navigational skills, particularly the newly developed methods of determining longitude using timed chronometers, which had made possible the exactitude of Captain James Cook's Pacific explorations. He completed this study and returned to North America even as the long, grim struggle with republican and then Napoleonic France was beginning in Europe in earnest.

At this point Mackenzie had determined to do what no European north of Mexico had done — at least, had been recorded as doing — which was to cross the continent to get to the Pacific Ocean. It was a bold and risky plan, for no way seemed possible through the glistening icy ramparts of the mountain ranges that divided the Great Plains from the Pacific coast that Cook had charted a decade earlier. With the permission of the North West Company, Mackenzie assembled a sturdy team of First Nation and voyageur canoeists, added a dog (known throughout the expedition as simply "Our Dog")

at Fort Chipewyan, and set off westward.

Working up the Peace River, they came to the Great Divide and worked their way southward in a struggling portage pattern until they reached the headwaters of the Fraser River, which offered the prospect of a noisy, rushing descent to the far-off sea. A short way down the Fraser they met tribes who managed to communicate to them that dangerous peoples lived downriver, making any attempt to reach the sea impossible. Heeding their advice, Mackenzie's party turned westward again and struck out until they found the waters of the Bella Coola River. This they descended until they joyfully encountered salt water in what would later be known as Bentinck Arm of the Dean Channel. Unknown to them, Royal Navy Captain George Vancouver's ship and exploring longboats had passed by that point only forty-eight days earlier.

Mackenzie was determined to press on down the arm until he could see the open sea, but the expedition now encountered a flotilla of canoes bearing hostile warriors of the Heitsulk nation, who, possibly because of previous negative experiences with European visitors, would allow Mackenzie to descend no further. Faced with their menacing lances and drawn bows, Mackenzie landed to inscribe on a large rock with vermilion paint (a favourite trading commodity) the following inscription: "Alex Mackenzie from Canada by land 22nd July 1793."

A full ten years would elapse before the American Lewis and Clark expedition reached the Pacific farther south. The honour of first crossing the continent, in a voyage as bold as it was imaginative, would rest with Alexander Mackenzie, and he would be knighted for it in 1802, following the publication of his journals in 1801 that documented his extraordinary exploratory achievements.

Honoured and respected by colleagues and the public alike, Mackenzie's later years were happy ones. From 1804 to 1808 he served in the Lower Canada legislature, but he finally

Explorer Assessment	Our Ranking
Risk taken	4
Aboriginal relations	4
Area explored	5
Impact on Canada	3
Total / 16	

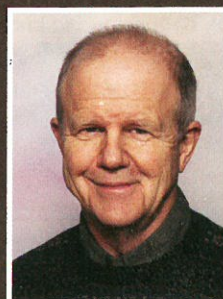
determined to return to Britain, where in 1812 he married a beautiful and

MACKENZIE DETERMINED TO DO WHAT NO EUROPEAN NORTH OF MEXICO HAD DONE, WHICH WAS TO CROSS THE CONTINENT TO GET TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN.

wealthy young heiress, Geddes Mackenzie. With a secure financial situation, the couple entered into a pleasant way of life that saw their time divided between homes in Scotland and London.

Mackenzie was taken by Bright's disease (a chronic kidney malfunction) in 1820, when he was fifty-six. It had been

not been a long life, but it had been an adventurous one full of rewards. In the achievements of reaching both the Arctic and the Pacific oceans in such a singular manner, it is my opinion that this red-haired Scot of pluck — and luck — deserves the title of Canada's greatest explorer.



VICTOR SUTHREN is a writer, seaman, and historian who specializes in North American colonial history. A former Canadian Parks Service historian, Suthren joined the Canadian War Museum in 1975 and served as its director general from 1986 to 1997. He has written thirteen books, including, most recently, *The Island of Canada*, a study of Canada's relationship with the sea. An experienced "tall ship" sailor, Suthren is presently a town councillor for the municipality of Merrickville-Wolford, Ontario, where he and his wife, Lindsay, are residents. His hobbies include sailing, kayaking, cross-country skiing, and amateur theatrical performance.



DAVID THOMPSON

The fur trader who mapped most of Canada.

by Bill Moreau

To champion David Thompson as Canada's greatest explorer appears an uphill climb. It was primarily as a fur trader that Thompson passed his long career in western Canada, from his arrival as a fourteen-year-old Hudson's Bay Company apprentice to his retirement to Montreal in 1812.

The demands of business afforded him little time for journeys of discovery. But explore he did, most notably between 1807 and 1812, while, as a wintering partner of the North West Company, he extended the trade across the Continental Divide.

Knitting together a network of routes through the Columbia Plateau in present-day Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, Thompson linked posts on the Upper Saskatchewan River with the Pacific Ocean by way of the Howse and Athabasca passes, determined the course of the entire Columbia River, and, in 1811, made a dash to Astoria, Oregon, at the mouth of that great waterway.

Thompson's realization of the dream of a transcontinental passage for commerce is a fine achievement; as for exploration, though, his every step (or dip of the paddle) traced a well-travelled Aboriginal route, and he did not so much forge a path through the land as proceed where tribal people permitted him to go.

Perhaps his one truly original piece of exploration was a harrowing 1796 journey for the Hudson's Bay Company, in which he traced the length of the Fond du Lac River, from Wollaston Lake to the east end of Lake Athabasca (in present-day northeast Saskatchewan), attempting to open a route to the fur riches of the subarctic; yet this was an utterly fruitless venture, the way so impractical that it would not be travelled again until almost a century had passed.

Is Thompson's modest claim enough to place him in the company of Samuel de Champlain, Samuel Hearne, Alexander Mackenzie, or John Franklin, who daringly ventured forth into lands entirely unknown to Europeans?

Perhaps not on these terms. And yet, this model of exploration may be too narrow; greatness as an explorer can be achieved on a more ample stage, when we remember that to *explore* means not only to traverse a place in order to make discoveries but also to *inquire, investigate* and *examine*.

In this broader sense, Thompson's pre-eminence is clear. No other Canadian explorer travelled with the same spirit of inquiry and sense of wonder, or, crucially, combined these qualities with the ability to communicate his vision to others. Thompson didn't merely travel; he also surveyed, measuring the land as he proceeded through it and staying up deep into the night to observe the heavens (his slumbering companions often suspected him of divination).

He then used these surveys to create the finest Canadian maps of his generation, ones that would be in use for decades. His greatest achievement in cartography, his "great map" of 1815, provides an expansive view of the lands from Hudson Bay to the Pacific Ocean and from the Missouri River basin to the Athabasca region. In central and eastern Canada, his surveys and map-making extended to the Great Lakes, Muskoka, and the Eastern Townships. He knew our nation deeply, because he spent years literally plotting it out.

Even greater and more lasting achievements, and the fitting companions to his maps, are the volumes of writings he left behind, most notably the *Travels* narrative.

In prose that balances scientific precision and a poetic imagination, Thompson explored an encyclopedic range of topics, from the formation of basalt and the habits of the Northern Pacific rattlesnake to the vocabulary of the Salish language and the voracious appetite of the French-Canadian voyageur. Thompson's writing reveal a profound understand-

ing of the geography, natural history, and people of this land to an extent unmatched by his peers. Gathering thousands of discrete observations, he wrote an appreciation of the great regions of the West: the Great Plains, the Canadian Shield, the Hudson Bay Lowlands, and the Cordillera, each seen as a providential system of landforms.

He also wrote about the frustrations of taking measurements without proper instruments: "To ascertain the height of the Rocky Mountains above the level of the ocean had long occupied my attention, but without any satisfaction to myself." He asked the North West Company to provide a mountain barometer. After a rough journey by canoe, the barometer finally arrived, "broken to pieces." A second one Thompson ordered met the same fate.

His investigation of the natural world operated on the microscopic scale, too — he observed a mosquito biting his arm with enough care to discern that its proboscis is "composed of two distinct pieces; the upper is three sided, of a black color, and sharp pointed, under which is a round white tube, like clear glass, the mouth inverted inwards."

A lesser explorer would have slapped.

Thompson was an explorer of First Nations traditions, and he regarded the Native peoples among whom he travelled and worked as members of distinct and rich cultures. With the help of his wife, Charlotte Small, herself born of a Cree mother, Thompson came to know and value Algonquian cosmology. He wrote with sympathy of Native ways of understanding natural phenomena such as goose migration: "The question arises, by what means do the wild geese make such long journeys with such precision of place; the wise, and learned, civilized man answers, by Instinct, but what is Instinct: a property of mind that has never been defined. The Indian believes the geese are directed by the *Manito*, who has the care of them. Which of the two is right?"

Thompson was also humble enough to fall silent before the reproach of a tribal companion: "You white people, you look like wise men and talk like fools."

Even the mysteries of his own psyche provided a field for Thompson's exploration. He famously described his passage to

Explorer Assessment	Our Ranking
Risk taken	4 fish icons
Aboriginal relations	5 fish icons
Area explored	4 fish icons
Impact on Canada	4 fish icons
Total / 17	

HE USED HIS SURVEYS TO CREATE THE FINEST CANADIAN MAPS OF HIS GENERATION, ONES THAT WOULD BE IN USE FOR DECADES.

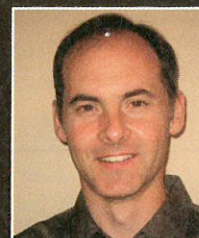
adulthood and its responsibilities as a game of draughts with the Devil, in which he repeatedly bested Satan on the checkerboard: "My eyes were open," he wrote, "it was broad day light, I looked around all was silence and solitude:

Was it a dream, or was it a reality? I could not decide." This explorer had the courage to journey inward, even as he journeyed forth.

Thompson's greatness is not to be measured in miles alone, though these are many. Rather, he is great because he explored as much with his mind and pen as with his feet. And he still has something to say to us today, for his readings

of our country and its people are as fresh and topical now as when they were made.

While his tracks are no more, he continues to guide us through this land.



BILL MOREAU is the editor of the three-volume *Writings of David Thompson* (The Champlain Society and McGill Queen's University Press). The first volume was published in 2009 and the second will appear next year. Moreau teaches Grade 5 at Dunlace Public School in North York, Ontario, and has worked as a sessional lecturer at the University of Toronto Scarborough. In 2011 he was a contestant on *Jeopardy*, amassing a total of one dollar. He lives in Woodbridge, Ontario, with his wife, Daiana, and their children.



ROBERT CARTER

JANE FRANKLIN

The travel-hungry woman who orchestrated the exploration of the Arctic.

by Ken McGoogan

It is a commonplace in the history of polar exploration," the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson wrote, "that the greatest advance in our knowledge of the region to the north of Canada resulted not from the life work of Sir John Franklin, but from his mysterious disappearance and the long series of expeditions that went out in search of him."

Few contemporary experts would challenge that assessment, which Stefansson offered in 1921 in *The Friendly Arctic: The Story of Five Years in Polar Regions*. But what exploration aficionados fail to appreciate, even today, is how completely that

search depended on Franklin's widow.

Jane, Lady Franklin, as she is properly called, never set foot in the Canadian Arctic. But by orchestrating an unprecedented twelve-year search for her husband, she contributed more to the discovery and mapping of northern North America than any male explorer.

In the beginning, I found this hard to accept. In *Fatal Passage: The Untold Story of John Rae, the Arctic Explorer Who Discovered the Fate of Franklin*, I depicted Jane Franklin as a devious, dislikeable woman who destroyed the reputation of the explorer I most admired. Yet, even as I wrote, I found myself wanting to know more about this Victorian who, having seemingly stepped out of a Jane Austen novel, could enlist the aid of Charles Dickens, lay waste to the careers of extraordinary men, and create a mythical hero out of a mediocrity.

With more research, and as I began to understand the barriers women faced in nineteenth-century England, I found my attitude changing. At that time, a woman's place was in the home. Men could attend Oxford or Cambridge and go on to build careers and reputations, but the respectable options for women were limited to marriage and motherhood.

Born in 1791, the spirited, travel-hungry Jane Griffin refused to marry until, in Sir John Franklin, she discerned a figure whose title would open doors for her in the great wide world. In the early 1830s, when Franklin took charge of a naval ship in the Mediterranean, she went briefly to visit him ... and then, as Lady Franklin, kept travelling.

Everywhere a woman could possibly go, there Jane Franklin went. The Nile River, Egyptian pyramids, the Greek ruins of Delphi, the sacred rivers of India, the recently ravaged Crimea, the Hawaiian harbour in which James Cook met his end — no Victorian, male or female, and precious few people of any time or place, had ever visited so many sites of historical significance.

Lady Franklin rode a donkey into Nazareth. She climbed mountains in Europe, North America, Africa, and Australia. She became the first European woman to journey overland from Melbourne to Sydney and the first to beat her way through the Tasmanian bush to Macquarie Harbour. She rode elephants in Rajasthan, scrambled up volcanoes in Hawaii, and, at age seventy, circumnavigated the globe in steamers and rough sailing ships. Acutely aware that her travelling challenged Victorian notions of respectability, Jane Franklin kept it quiet. But mile for mile, country for country, she was certainly one of the greatest woman travellers of the nineteenth century.

She was also a woman of influence. In 1837, Jane Franklin pulled strings to get her husband appointed lieutenant-governor of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), the penal colony south of the Australian mainland. He failed to cope effectively and got recalled. In a bid to redeem their joint reputation, Lady Franklin secured for Sir John the opportunity of a lifetime — leadership of a Royal Navy expedition destined, supposedly, to solve the centuries-old riddle of the Northwest Passage.

In 1845, with two state-of-the-art ships and 128 men, John Franklin disappeared into the frozen North. Now Lady Franklin showed what she was made of. Driven by guilt and ambition, she badgered the Admiralty into dispatching ships to locate him. She financed voyages through public subscrip-

tion and paid for others out of her own pocket. She convinced American shipping magnates to sponsor expeditions.

In *Lady Franklin's Revenge*, I tell the story of how, denied a role in a sexist society, Jane Franklin took revenge by seizing control of that most masculine of enterprises, Arctic exploration, and shaping it to her own ends.

Over the course of a dozen years, thirty-five expeditions sailed in search of Franklin, most of them British, a few American. While exerting an indirect influence on all, Jane Franklin personally originated eleven expeditions. And of the eleven she organized, financed, or instigated, five made singular contributions to the charting of the Canadian Arctic: one each led by John Rae, William Kennedy, Edward Inglefield, Elisha Kent Kane, and Francis Leopold McClintock.

• John Rae: Overland and small boats expedition (August 2, 1850, to September 26, 1851). Having failed in a first attempt to reach Victoria Island in an Admiralty-sponsored search (1847–49), Rae was on the Mackenzie River heading for London when the Hudson's Bay Company ordered him to turn around and resume searching. This order came as a direct result of pressure from Lady Franklin, who also sent a flattering letter of advice and encouragement to the explorer himself. Rae charted the southern and eastern coasts of Victoria Island, then unknown to map-makers, trekking 1,740 kilometres on snowshoes and sailing 2,220 kilometres in small boats.

• William Kennedy: *Prince Albert* (May 22, 1851, to October 7, 1852). Kennedy's expedition was organized by Jane Franklin and financed through public subscription. Kennedy disobeyed Lady Franklin's instructions to search the area where Franklin perished. But with Joseph René Bellot, he did discover Bellot Strait, which runs between Boothia and Somerset Island and marks the northernmost extremity of continental North America.

• Edward Inglefield: *Isabel* (July 10 to November 4, 1852). Inglefield's effort was also organized by Jane Franklin and financed through public subscription. Inglefield sailed farther up Smith Sound than any previous explorer. He charted over 1,600 kilometres of coastline and opened up a new area for exploration.

• Elisha Kent Kane: *Advance* (May 30, 1853, to October 1855). This American expedition was financed by Henry Grinnell as a result of lobbying by Lady Franklin. Kane sailed into Smith

Explorer Assessment	Our Ranking
Risk taken	2
Aboriginal relations	2
Area explored	5
Impact on Canada	4
Total / 13	

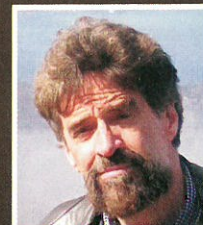
Sound beyond Inglefield's farthest point and visited "the northernmost land ever trodden by a white man." He mapped Kane Basin, discovered Kennedy Channel, and pointed the way for the subsequent race to the North Pole.

• Francis Leopold McClintock: *Fox* (July 2, 1857, to September 21, 1859). Organized by Jane Franklin and financed through public subscription, McClintock's voyage confirmed the news John Rae had brought of the fate of the lost Franklin expedition and also Rae's 1854 discovery of what is

now called Rae Strait. He charted over thirteen hundred kilometres of coastline and so completed the mapping of the northern coast of North America.

Jane Franklin was compelled to act by proxy, and through surrogate males. In this way she contributed more to the discovery of northern North America than any celebrated explorer. Of all individual contributions to Arctic exploration, the greatest was that of Jane, Lady Franklin.

SHE CONTRIBUTED MORE TO THE DISCOVERY OF NORTHERN NORTH AMERICA THAN ANY CELEBRATED EXPLORER.



KEN MCGOOGAN recently crossed Canada by VIA Rail while promoting his eleventh book, *50 Canadians Who Changed the World*. His previous works include four about Arctic exploration, among them *Fatal Passage* and *Lady Franklin's Revenge*. In 2013, to mark the bicentenary of explorer John Rae, Ken gave presentations in Calgary, Hamilton, Edinburgh, and Stromness, Orkney, where he served as writer-in-residence. McGoogan teaches creative non-fiction at the University of Toronto (online) and also at the University of King's College, Halifax.



ROBERT CARTER

ROBERT BYLOT

An early explorer of the Northwest Passage, Bylot received little credit for his achievements.

by Douglas Hunter

Explorers often became famous by carefully grooming their own celebrity. In contrast, my contender for Canada's greatest explorer, Robert Bylot, was one of the worst self-promoters in the annals of discovery. Where other adventurers published weighty, self-congratulatory accounts of their exploits, we know virtually nothing about Bylot's life and the barest details of his voyages. His voice endures only through the dubious distinction of his having been interrogated about (and tried for) the Henry Hudson

mutiny of 1611, in which his complicity has never been clear.

What little we do know about Bylot's explorations of the Canadian Arctic and subarctic in the early seventeenth century makes him almost peerless in the sheer expanse of territory he covered. And, unlike numerous more celebrated explorers, Bylot wasn't led around by indigenous guides. He sailed from Davis Strait along Hudson Strait, west to Foxe Inlet, into Hudson and James bays, and south to Rupert's Bay at 52° north latitude. He surveyed the circumference of Baffin Bay, north to Smith's Sound above 77° north latitude.

While nineteenth-century explorers like Edward William Parry also saw a considerable amount of the Arctic Archipelago, Bylot did so over the course of five often-harrowing voyages in just seven years between 1610 and 1616. Moreover, scientific navigation was in its infancy, and the chances of perishing were much higher.

Bylot's background is a mystery. We first meet him as a crew member on Hudson's fateful *Discovery* voyage of 1610–11, which was commissioned by England's East India Company. Hudson thought enough of Bylot's skills to send him ashore at East Digges Island at the northern end of Hudson Bay to observe tidal currents, which were thought to be an important clue to the direction of the Northwest Passage. After the *Discovery* endured a winter in southern James Bay, the increasingly erratic and secretive Hudson chose Bylot as his new master's mate, only to replace him with an illiterate crew member as Hudson began a promised return to England. A few weeks later, mutiny erupted. While Bylot seems not to have been a ringleader, he certainly went along with it and shared a fractious command in getting the *Discovery* home.

Bylot and other survivors probably avoided trial because they were considered invaluable to the continued search for the passage. In 1612, he and two other members of Hudson's voyage joined the expedition of Sir Thomas Button to Hudson Bay. The *Discovery* and another ship, the *Resolution*, spent a miserable winter at the mouth of the Nelson River on the western shore of the bay. The *Resolution* was destroyed by ice, and an untold number of men perished. Button would recall that he had only eight able men to bring the *Discovery* home; Bylot was one of them.

The *Discovery* was back seeking the passage in 1614 under the command of Button's cousin, William Gibbons. Little is known about this voyage, but Bylot apparently participated. The Gibbons expedition was a failure; the *Discovery* limped home after being trapped in Labrador Sea ice for several weeks.

In 1615, Bylot was promoted to master of the *Discovery* and commander of the passage search. He formed a working partnership with his mate and pilot, William Baffin, a former chief pilot in the English whale fishery around Svalbard (an archipelago above the Arctic Circle north of mainland Norway) who also had experience in Greenland. They made a careful survey of Hudson Strait along the south coast of Baffin Island and probed the waters to the west that would be known as Foxe Strait and Foxe Inlet. Baffin correctly concluded that there was no way through to Asia by that route.

In 1616, Bylot and Baffin were sent out again. This time,

they were to sail up Davis Strait and then turn west, a strategy that was supposed to take them to Japan. No such passage awaited them, but in carrying out their orders they circumnavigated Baffin Bay. Their northernmost progress, into Smith's Sound between Ellesmere Island and Greenland, reached around 77°5' north latitude, a feat that would not be repeated until 1852.

The only surviving records from the 1615 and 1616 voyages involve Baffin, and the ample evidence of his exceptional navigational skills earned him the admiration of nineteenth-century passage-seekers. Not surprisingly, Baffin's name, not Bylot's, would resonate from those voyages. Baffin got his name on two major features, Baffin Island and Baffin Bay, whereas Bylot was memorialized only by a small island on the northeast side of Baffin Island, at the entrance to Lancaster Sound, and by Cape Bylot, a headland on Southampton Island named in his honour by Parry in 1821. When the British Admiralty launched a fresh passage search in 1818, it was Baffin's observations and reputation that were foremost in consideration. Bylot was all but forgotten.

Bylot's exploration career ended just as it was on the brink of a major breakthrough. He and Baffin skirted the mouth of Lancaster Sound in 1616, but Baffin concluded that it was another dead end. For all we know, Bylot agreed, and they declined to probe it. Baffin was terribly wrong: Lancaster Sound would prove to be the elusive eastern passage entrance.

Back home, Baffin pronounced the passage search hopeless. The investors concurred, and Bylot evidently lost the protection he had enjoyed from prosecution for the Hudson mutiny. Interrogated in 1617, Bylot hotly denied (among other things) that shots had been fired at Hudson and his fellow castaways to keep them from following the *Discovery*, or that "he took any ring out of Hudson's pocket, neither ever saw it except on his finger, nor knows what became of it." In 1618, Bylot and three other survivors stood trial for murder, as mutiny at the time was a crime limited to navy vessels (the *Discovery* was owned by the East India Company). All four were found not guilty and walked free, never to be heard from again.

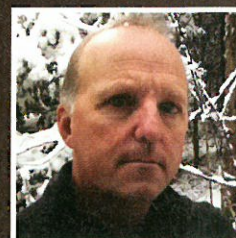
Bylot's achievements extend beyond the extraordinary

Explorer Assessment	Our Ranking
Risk taken	★★★★★
Aboriginal relations	★★★
Area explored	★★★
Impact on Canada	★★★
Total / 14	

amount of territory he explored. He never lost a single man on his two voyages with Baffin, which was an exceptional performance. In his 1615 journal, Baffin praised Bylot "as a man well experienced" in Arctic navigation, and he deferred to Bylot on assessing ice hazards.

Bylot also demonstrated an uncharacteristically benign attitude towards the Inuit, seeking contact with them and treating them well. Despite fatal clashes with the Inuit at East Digges Island during the 1610–11 Hudson and 1612 Button voyages, Bylot (who was along on both) apparently never faulted the Inuit for the losses of English lives. Nor was Bylot a colonizer or a merchant's employee determined to extend a commercial empire. Bylot had no interest in subjugating the people he met or the lands they occupied: His goal was a sea route to Asia's riches. In a history of exploration rife with the exploitation of indigenous people, that should count for something.

BYLOT'S EXPLORATION CAREER ENDED JUST AS IT WAS ON THE BRINK OF A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH.



DOUGLAS HUNTER has written three books about North American exploration. *God's Mercies* revealed the traumatic intersection of the careers of Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain and was a finalist for the Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Prize and the Governor-General's Award for Literary Non-Fiction. In *Half Moon*, Hunter wrote about Henry Hudson's 1609 voyage. And *The Race to the New World* looks at the parallel lives of Christopher Columbus and John Cabot. Hunter is a doctoral candidate in history at York University, a Vanier Scholar, and Canada's 2012 William E. Taylor fellow.



SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN

This early French explorer made a huge impact in shaping Canada.

by Jacques Lacoursière

Samuel de Champlain — the Father of New France — explored a vast portion of eastern North America. He sailed part of the Atlantic seaboard, travelled up the Richelieu River, and discovered the lake that now bears his name. He also navigated the Ottawa River, reaching the Great Lakes region, and the country then known as Huronia.

Champlain first sailed to New France in 1603 as a geographer and cartographer. He chronicled this initial voyage in the first of his writings, *On Savages, or the Voyage of Samuel Champlain, of Brouage*.

After a brief stay near Tadoussac (at the confluence of the Saint Lawrence and Saguenay rivers) Champlain made his first major exploration inland, travelling some distance up the Saguenay, a river Jacques Cartier had seen in 1535 but had not tried to navigate. Owing to information provided by the Aborigines, Champlain had an idea of the vastness of the Saguenay before he set out.

Indeed, like explorers who came before and after him, Champlain relied heavily on Native knowledge. During his first voyage, he learned to appreciate the advantages of the birchbark canoe. When faced with negotiating the Lachine Rapids (also called the Saint-Louis Rapids), Champlain wrote, in *On Savages*: “To imagine that any boat can traverse these rapids is in vain. But whosoever might wish to pass them should be equipped with the canoes of the savages, which one man can easily carry...”

In the first volume of his *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, historian Marcel Trudel sums up the 1603 voyage as follows: “The entire upper St. Lawrence waterway was mapped, with measurements quite closely approximating actual distances.”

Champlain would not return to the St. Lawrence Valley for several years. In the meantime, his services were retained in Acadia by Pierre Dugua de Mons’ company. A new settlement was established at Saint Croix Island, now part of the state of Maine. From there, Champlain felt compelled to explore the Atlantic coast.

He wrote: “I set out from Saint Croix on September 2 with a *patache* [sailing vessel] of seventeen or eighteen tons, twelve sailors, and two savages, to serve us as guides to the places with which they were acquainted.” The group sailed partway up what their guides called the “river of Pentegoüet” (the current-day Penobscot River). Champlain’s party returned to Saint Croix to spend a harsh winter. Many lives were lost to scurvy.

A decision was made to relocate the small colony to somewhere more habitable. The site chosen was Port Royal, now Annapolis Royal, in Nova Scotia. De Mons eventually returned to France, while Champlain remained in the new settlement.

In 1608, Champlain set off to found a new trading post at present-day Quebec City — thus making his mark as the founder of New France. From Quebec City, he went on several expeditions. In 1609, he travelled south to help New France’s Native allies in their war against the Iroquois.

He travelled up the Iroquois River (which was renamed the Richelieu River shortly after the death of Cardinal Richelieu in 1642) and discovered a lake in present-day New York state that was later named in his honour. The expedition against the Iroquois marked the beginning of a war that would ravage the St. Lawrence colony for several decades.

In 1613, Champlain set out to find the “northern sea” — the hoped-for Northwest Passage that was to provide a quick route to the riches of the Orient. His journey up the Ottawa River was based on accounts he had heard from Nicolas de Vignau, who had spent time with the Algonquin to learn their language and customs. De Vignau told Champlain that the sea was located at the upper end of the Ottawa River.

However, when the party met up with Tessouat, an Algon-

quin chief, the chief challenged Vignau’s story. Champlain called Vignau a liar, and that was the end of Champlain’s journey to the northern sea. (However, historian Marcel Trudel believes Vignau’s story of reaching present-day Hudson Bay is not only plausible but highly likely.)

Champlain’s final major journey was to Huronia in 1615. He travelled up the St. Lawrence to Quebec City, then took the Rivière des Prairies and continued up the Ottawa River, which he called the “River of the Algonquins.” From there, he entered Lake Nipissing and the French River, and finally he reached Lake Huron, which was then called “Lake of the Attigouautans.”

In his writings, he described what drove him to make his journeys of exploration: “The extreme affection in which I have always held the discoveries in New France made me increasingly keen to traverse the lands to finally acquire a complete knowledge of the country, by means of the rivers and lakes that abound in great numbers, and also to become familiar with the tribes who live on these lands, for the purpose of bringing to them knowledge of God.”

Champlain named present-day Lake Huron “Mer douce,” or Freshwater Sea, and he was surprised to find that there were many people living along its shores. He visited five of the more important villages, which were each enclosed with palisades of wood.

“The small tract of country which I visited is thickly settled with a countless number of human beings, not to speak of the other districts where I did not go, and which, according to general report, are as thickly settled or more so than those mentioned above.” While Champlain was keen to convert the Native

people, he was also interested in learning from them. He spent the winter of 1615–16 among the Hurons, observing and recording the details of their everyday lives. Champlain’s attitude towards Aboriginal people was relatively enlightened for his time — he proposed French-Native intermarriage so that the two races could become “one people.” Young French men were sent to live among the Natives — the result was the beginning of a Métis population.

Champlain was a prolific writer and cartographer — a map completed just before his death in 1635 gives a detailed picture of North America from the northern regions south to



Virginia and from Newfoundland as far west as Lake Superior. The

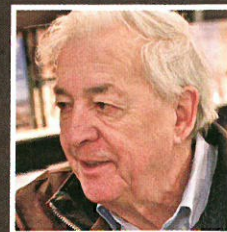
WHILE CHAMPLAIN WAS KEEN TO CONVERT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, HE WAS ALSO INTERESTED IN LEARNING FROM THEM.

records he left behind hold a wealth of information and are relevant to this day. He was also a tireless transoceanic traveller at a time when sea voyages were perilous. In addition to the extensive journeying he did in the West Indies and South America as a young man, Champlain completed a dozen round-trip voyages between France and the New World. While in France, he lobbied incessantly for the cause of New France.

And in founding a distinct French nation that held out against English domination for more than two centuries, Champlain helped ensure that Canada remained distinct from its American neighbour to the south.

There is no doubt that Champlain was an explorer of great significance, certainly the most important explorer in the history of Canada.

Go to CanadasHistory.ca/RankExplorer to rate your favourite explorer.



JACQUES LACOURSIÈRE is recognized as Canada’s best popularizer of Quebec history. He is a recipient of the Pierre Berton Award, has consulted on history education and curriculum reform in Quebec, and is co-author of *Boreal Express*, a journal of the history of Canada and Canada-Quebec. But he is perhaps best known for his many contributions to radio and television as well as his remarkable series *A Popular History of Quebec*. He was made a Knight of the National Order of Quebec in 2002 and in 2006 he became a Member of the Order of Canada.