

## Obituaries



Fig. 1. Rear Admiral M.J. Ross presents the jackstaff planted at the North Magnetic Pole by his ancestor James Clark Ross to Rear Admiral Sir Edmund Irving, Hydrographer of the Royal Navy and a trustee of the National Maritime Museum, on 22 January 1986 at the re-opening of the Arctic gallery at the Museum. To the left is Dr Neil Cossons, then the director of the Museum. Admiral Ross died 27 October 1996 at the age of 87 (see *Polar Record* 33 (185): 166; April 1997).

**Norman Leslie Falcon**, who died on 31 May 1996, was arguably the greatest petroleum geologist this country has ever produced. His particular forte was exploration, and, in addition to being an outstanding field geologist, he had a wide range of geographical skills. He is very probably the last in the line of Earth scientists awarded both the Geological Society's Murchison Medal and the Royal Geographical Society's Founder's Medal.

He was born in Devon in 1904 and educated at Exeter School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he earned First Class Honours in both parts of the Natural Science Tripos in 1927. Falcon has his first taste of Arctic exploration as a member of Gino Watkins' Svalbard expedition. It was to be almost 30 years before he again turned his attention to the Arctic. On coming down from Cambridge, he joined British Petroleum (or the Anglo Persian Oil

Company as it was known at the time), where, except for war service, he spent his entire career.

Falcon was posted to Persia as a well-site geologist on the giant Gach Saran oil field, and when, in 1930, having served his apprenticeship, he had the chance to escape from the somewhat confining work of a resident geologist, he postponed his leave and accepted J.V. Harrison's invitation to join the Bakhtiari Mountains survey. For the next eight years he was in the field, working in rugged, roadless, deeply dissected, mountainous terrain accessible only on foot or by animal transport. The area was largely unknown other than to the indigenous tribes, and it was not just a matter of mapping the geology — there were no topographic maps, and the geologists had to be expert in plane-table surveying in order to compile base maps on which to record the geology. Some 90,000 square miles were

mapped at 1:250,000 scale, and, although later surveys with the advantage of detailed topographic control and aerial photo coverage have refined the works of Falcon and his colleagues, they have not significantly altered their findings. This work is widely held to be one of the greatest feats of geological and geographical exploration this century.

By the time Falcon returned to the UK, it was evident that advances in aerial photography and photogrammetry had great potential for geological exploration, and, after a brief involvement with the early on-land exploration for oil in the UK, Falcon was posted to The Hague to study the latest developments in air photo interpretation. When the Germans invaded Holland in 1940, he escaped to England, joined the army, and was posted to the Intelligence Corps. Throughout the war, he served in the Air Photographic Intelligence Branch at the War Office, and by 1945 he was a Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the Photographic Intelligence Unit. He was awarded the US Bronze Star in recognition of his contribution to the Allied war effort.

On demobilization in 1945, he rejoined what had been renamed the Anglo Iranian Oil Company as a senior geologist. His wartime experience was put to good use, and in addition to developing the company's photogeological expertise, he was involved with the expansion of onshore exploration in the UK, following the wartime discovery and development of the East Midlands oil fields. He was appointed geological manager in 1953, and was promoted to chief geologist in 1955 at a crisis in the company's affairs consequent upon Dr Mussadiq's nationalization and BP's expulsion from Iran. After more than 50 years of near-total dependence on Iran's crude oil, its stock was cut off at source, and in order to survive the lost reserves had to be replaced. To do so, BP embarked on a major world-wide exploration programme, and in his decade as chief geologist (1955–1965) Falcon's influence on and contribution to this expansion was profound. Falcon was in effect BP's exploration director, and he planned and directed the entire operation. The result was a triumph that produced a series of major discoveries, and, by the time he retired, it is conservatively estimated that BP controlled 22% of the world's known hydrocarbon reserves. All this was achieved with resources that, by today's standards, were slender and seldom involved more than 80 or 90 geologists.

As part of the world-wide drive to replace the lost Iranian reserves, Falcon decided to have a look at Alaska. After the shock of the Japanese invasion of the Aleutians, the United States was forcefully reminded of the existence and strategic importance of Alaska, and in 1944 mounted a major exploration programme that embraced a large part of the western Arctic coastal plain, as far south as the foothills of the Brooks Range. Several small oil and gas fields were discovered, but, with the exception of the gas fields that supplied the Inuit settlement at Point Barrow, these were uneconomic. In the course of a geological reconnaissance visit, Falcon was struck by the resem-

blance between the folded rocks north of the Brooks Range and the foothills of the Zagros Mountains in Iran. He decided this must be investigated and set up BP Exploration (Alaska) to do the job. At this time, the US oil industry was preoccupied with the Cook Inlet basin in southern Alaska, following substantial discoveries onshore and offshore, and when BP ignored the rest and headed for the Arctic, the state petroleum geologist opined that BP had stolen a march on the rest of the industry, and he was absolutely right!

Falcon's contributions to geology and his outstanding professional record were recognized by the Royal Society, which elected him to fellowship in 1965, and he received many other honours nationally and internationally. Falcon claimed no personal credit for the achievements under his leadership, and, though modest, he was certainly not a quiet man. His epic struggles when his famous stutter temporarily interrupted the flow of his rhetoric ensured that his views were widely disseminated. Travelling with him on the bus from BP to Burlington House for a Geological Society meeting was an experience not to be missed, and nobody on the top of the bus could be in ignorance of his views on the passing scene.

Apart from his exceptional ability as a geologist, his abiding interests were archaeology and the geographic history of the Mesopotamian plains and the Persian Gulf. His published work on the influence of recent tectonic activity on present-day topography greatly influenced subsequent geographical and archaeological work in the area. After he retired in 1965, he continued to advise BP until 1972 and also acted as a consultant in the City, but he never lost the wanderlust or his fascination with the Middle East. At the age of 70, he masterminded and led the Royal Geographical Society's expedition to the Musandam Peninsula in Oman. For this and his earlier work, he was awarded the RGS' Founder's Medal.

He served the Geological Society as Council member and foreign secretary and the RGS as Council member and vice president, and he was a notably convivial companion at Arctic, Geological, and Geographical Club dinners, which he graced until well into his eighties. A fine scientist, true scholar, demanding leader, wise counselor, and above all an explorer who had an open mind and a very progressive attitude to new tools and techniques, this was the man we knew, and all of us who worked for and learned from Norman Falcon owe him a great debt and were very privileged.

*Geoffrey Larminie*

**Barry Ranford**, teacher, traveller, photographer, ornithologist, artist, and Arctic enthusiast, died in early September 1996. Of English ancestry, Ranford was born in Toronto in 1941. He had degrees in advertising design from Ontario College of Art and, more recently, in fine arts from York University. At the time of his death he was teaching visual arts and design at North Park School, Ontario. He had joined the staff in 1989 and soon made an

impact by directing the painting of two huge murals, each more than 20 feet high. The spectacular scenery in these reflected his extensive travels in North and South America.

Ranford became interested in the last expedition of Sir John Franklin (1845–1848) about a decade ago, when his son had to write an essay on the subject for his homework. He read and collected many of the nineteenth century narratives of exploring expeditions to the Canadian Arctic. He first visited King William Island in 1992, returning there in 1993 and 1994. His accounts of these expeditions in search of traces of Franklin's men appeared in the *Geographical Magazine*, *Equinox* (Toronto), and *National Geographic*, while the Canadian Broadcasting Company produced a half-hour documentary film about his travels.

Public interest in the Franklin expedition had been renewed in the 1980s by the exhumation of three bodies on Beechey Island by Owen Beattie, and by Beattie's pronouncements that lead poisoning was a factor in the deaths of the ships' companies. Ranford described his own first discovery of the remains of some of these men in the summer of 1992, on a small island among the tidal flats of Erebus Bay:

Well into the trip...I saw from a distance what appeared to be a bleach bottle. A bleach bottle on the western side of King William Island made little sense, and as I moved forward...the bottle resolved into a human skull bleached white by time. Then suddenly, I became aware of another skull close by. And then another. I

was surrounded by bones. Femurs, a pelvis, two jawbones, and part of a vertebra lay white on the rocky limestone or, half buried, protruded through a carpet of dark green moss. (*Equinox* 69: June 1993)

Sponsored by the Friends of *Equinox* and others, Ranford returned the following summer with a small party, which included a physical anthropologist and an archaeologist, under whose direction the site was mapped and the bones and artefacts recorded. Two days before their departure, Ranford discovered another site, which he thought could have been a grave.

Analysis of the bones at McMaster University during the following winter appeared to confirm Beattie's conclusions that lead levels were unusually high and 'cut marks' suggested that cannibalism may have taken place. Inuit tent rings were examined during the summer of 1994, revealing bolts and other items used by the native people, who must have travelled from the eastern part of King William Island to find the boats and other treasure trove discovered by Francis Leopold McClintock during his search expedition of 1857–1859, sent by Lady Franklin.

Ranford lectured to the Royal Geographical Society about his expeditions on 13 March 1995. He became almost completely absorbed in the Franklin story, and one regrets not only his death, but the fact that his book on the search for the Franklin expedition and about his own discoveries will not now be published.

*Ann Savours (Mrs Shirley)*

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## In Brief

**A NEW PICTURE LIBRARY FOR SPRI.** As part of the work being implemented for the Scott Polar Research Institute's new Shackleton Memorial Library, an area has been dedicated to the housing of SPRI's photographic collection. The new SPRI Picture Library, under the management of Philippa Hogg, has recently gained membership in the British Association of Picture Libraries and Agencies. Among the initial aims of the Picture Library are integrating the collection onto the SPRILIB database and digitising a large proportion of the photographs to enable them to be viewed on the Internet.

The Library has long had a large and popular collection of photographs, including many from the 'Heroic Age' of polar exploration. But it has recently increased its holdings of more contemporary images with the donation of the late Terence Armstrong's slide collection; it also received a large gift of slides from Charles Swithinbank.

If anyone wishes to donate slides or photographs to the Picture Library, or if publishers, researchers, or other individuals want to inquire about obtaining copies of any images, please contact Philippa Hogg at the Scott Polar Research Institute.

**US RATIFIES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTOCOL.** In April 1997, the United States finally joined the list of Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties to have ratified the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty. Twenty-four of the 26 nations that must ratify the Protocol before it enters into force have now done so, with only Russia and Japan remaining. In 1996 President Clinton had already signed the 'Antarctic Science, Tourism, and Conservation Act of 1996,' implementing the US obligations under the Protocol.

**BICENTENNIAL OF IOANN VENIAMINOV.** This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Ioann Veniaminov, the distinguished Russian Orthodox missionary, teacher, ethnographer, and linguist, who was canonized as St Innocent, Apostle to North America and Siberia. From 1825 to 1852, St Innocent was the first priest at Unalaska and the first Orthodox bishop in Alaska. He is still honored for his dedication to preserving native languages in Alaska, for his development of the Aleut orthography, for his translations into Aleut, and for his pioneering development of a Tlingit alphabet.