

# The Franklin Expedition

## An Arctic Mystery

### The Ships Set Sail

In the spring of 1845, Sir John Franklin set sail from England to solve a mystery; did the Northwest Passage really exist? While trying to solve this mystery, Franklin's expedition itself became one of the most puzzling mysteries of the Canadian Arctic.

Franklin set out with a crew of 128 men. None of them ever returned. What happened to these men and to their two ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*? Why did so many men disappear, when the crews of other ships sailing through the same area returned safely? Some people have suggested that the men starved to death, yet the ships carried plenty of food. The crew could have also traded for food with Inuit they met on their journey.

### Searching for Clues

Many search missions were sent out. In 1854, the first signs of the expedition were found. Some Inuit living at Repulse Bay and Pelly Bay showed searchers items they had that had once belonged to the Franklin Expedition.

Then in 1859, two written messages were discovered in a cairn at Victory Point. One message said that Franklin had died in June of 1847, on or near King William Island. When he died, his ships were trapped in ice about 25 kilometers away.

### Bodies Discovered

Over the years, bodies of about 80 crew members have been found in various places – some of them preserved in ice! Samples from some of the bodies suggest that those men had died as a result of lead poisoning. It seems they were poisoned by food that came from cans made with a dangerously high amount of lead. Others believe that the food in the cans had spoiled, making at least some the men sick.

### The Mystery Continues

What happened to the rest of the men, and where are the wrecks of the *Erebus* and *Terror*? Over 160 years later, these mysteries remain unsolved.