

dangerous. We should all remember those who died doing fieldwork in Arctic North America in those days. They were usually young and in their prime, and they laid the foundations for the polar science of today.

Ives says that his memoir and its time frame (1950–70) form a mirror for today. The memoir speaks of a time when there was a surge of interest in polar affairs, which focused interest and resources into the International Geophysical Year (IGY). In recent times, there has been another such surge of interest channeling energies into the International Polar Year. He notes that government and other interest in the North waned markedly in the decades after the IGY. Perhaps we should look into his mirror?

This book, with its index, glossary, endnotes, and “Research results 1954–64” and “Wider impacts” sections, will be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in polar science. For those with memories of the times and places described, even second- or third-hand memories, this memoir is a gem.

*Peter Adams, Professor Emeritus  
Department of Geography  
Trent University  
Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7B8, Canada  
peteradams@trentu.ca*

**JAMES FITZJAMES: THE MYSTERY MAN OF THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION.** By WILLIAM BATTERSBY. London: The History Press and Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010. ISBN 978-1-55488-781-1. 224 p., appendices, b&w illus., maps, bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$35.00.

The name James Fitzjames is well known to anyone with more than a passing interest in Sir John Franklin’s last expedition, if only because it was he, as captain of HMS *Erebus*, who co-signed the message scrawled around the margins of the only note ever found to reveal the fate of that expedition, to the effect that the ships had been abandoned and that Franklin had died on 11 June 1847 (McClintock, 1859:286). Why, then, should Battersby describe him as “the mystery man of the Franklin expedition”? In fact, as the author carefully explains, there are two major mysteries about the man. First of all, there is the fact that almost nothing has ever been published about his antecedents. Sir Clements Markham, for example, confined his description of Fitzjames to the somewhat vague positive descriptors: “among the most promising officers in the navy at that time ... strong, self-reliant, a perfect sailor, imaginative, enthusiastic, full of sympathy for others, a born leader of men, he was the beau ideal of an Arctic commander” (p. 17). Undoubtedly on the basis of these remarks (plus expansion of them in his work of creative non-fiction), Cookman (2000:55) described him as “young (thirty-three), well-educated, aristocratic, wealthy, of good family, Church of England, fast-rising in the service—and thumpingly, lispily English to the core.” On consulting an obvious possible

source, O’Byrne’s (1849) *A Naval Biographical Dictionary*, Battersby was puzzled to find no information as to Fitzjames’s date or place of birth. O’Byrne’s work was based on questionnaires that he had sent to all naval officers, now held in the manuscripts section of the British Library. Being an impressively thorough researcher, Battersby then consulted Fitzjames’s questionnaire, to discover the puzzling fact that Fitzjames had left the spaces for answers to the questions on those topics blank.

Among Fitzjames’s papers at the National Maritime Museum, Battersby found the certificate of his baptism at the church of St Mary-le-Bone in London; his parents are listed as James Fitzjames, gentleman, and his mother, Ann Fitzjames, his date of birth as 27 July 1813, and that of his christening, 24 February 1815. But all Battersby’s efforts to find any further information on Fitzjames’s parents were to no avail. However, as the Franklin expedition was heading into the Arctic, Fitzjames took the opportunity to send letters back to England from the Whalefish Islands with the transport *Baretto Jr.*, to, among others, Elizabeth Coningham (Fitzjames, 1845). A.H. Markham reported that her father, the Reverend Robert Coningham, was Fitzjames’s uncle and guardian, but also, confusingly, that Elizabeth was his sister. Battersby had little difficulty in tracking down the Coningham family (Elizabeth was, in fact, the wife of the Reverend’s son, William), but could find no connection, by blood or marriage, with any Fitzjames family. He began to wonder if the Fitzjames name was false, and whether James had been illegitimate, as the prefix “Fitz” hinted. By this point Battersby must have thought he had reached a dead end.

Success in historical research, however, is often a matter of pure luck. In the Admiralty files in the National Archives at Kew, Battersby stumbled across a letter from Captain Fleming Stenhouse (Fitzjames’s captain) of HMS *Asia* to Captain George Elliot, First Secretary at the Admiralty, in which he mentions, as an aside, that Fitzjames was the son of Sir James Gambier. The latter, who was married, was British consul-general in Brazil from 1809 until 1814. Thus, since James Fitzjames was born in 1813, he must have been born in Rio de Janeiro, the product of an affair that Sir James had been conducting the previous November. James and Ann Fitzjames, listed on the baptismal certificate may well have been Sir James Gambier and his wife, Jemima. The Coninghams were probably chosen as foster parents because Lady Gambier’s family, the Snells, were relatively close neighbours, and perhaps friends, of the Coningham family in Hertfordshire. A further pointer to Brazil having been James Fitzjames’s birthplace is that quite early in his career in the Navy, he is described as being fluent in Portuguese; Battersby suggests that James may have been in the charge of a Portuguese-speaking nursemaid, who accompanied the family (and the infant James) back to England from Brazil. It is scarcely to be wondered that Fitzjames was not at all keen to reveal his age and place of birth on O’Byrne’s questionnaire.

In July 1825, James Fitzjames entered as a second-class volunteer on board H.M.S. *Pyramus*, commanded by Captain Robert Gambier, in fact James's second cousin. His father had almost certainly pulled strings in the background to make this happen. But in July 1826, on the death of his wife, Captain Gambier resigned from the Navy. Thus, while Fitzjames had been able to call on family influence to enter the Navy initially, from now on he would have to rely on native wit. He soon demonstrated that this was an area where he was not lacking. He was promoted to Volunteer First Class on 1 July 1828, but was paid off on 15 September 1828, when *Pyramus* was decommissioned. Although he was able to rejoin the Navy on 15 December 1830, it was again as a second-class volunteer, on board HMS *St. Vincent*. But promotion to midshipman required that one spend a full year as a first-class volunteer—and Fitzjames had served only two and a half months. On 8 February 1831, he was promoted to Midshipman on the recommendation of his new captain, Captain Stenhouse of HMS *Asia*, whom Fitzjames had hoodwinked by omitting to tell him that he had been a first-class volunteer for only two and a half months, and that his service on board *St. Vincent* had been as a second-class volunteer.

Fitzjames's career in the Navy thereafter was varied, and he saw plenty of excitement (as well as a busy social life), in the Mediterranean, the Near East, Indian waters, and the Far East. He was one of the crew of midshipmen who rowed Prince Otto ashore at Nauplia from HMS *Madagascar* on 6 February 1833 to assume the throne of Greece. In November 1833, Fitzjames passed his examination to become Lieutenant, having again managed to obscure the matter of how long he had served as a first-class volunteer. From October 1835 until March 1837, he was an integral member of Colonel Francis Chesney's ambitious project to haul two iron steamships (in pieces) overland from the Mediterranean to the headwaters of the Euphrates, and to steam down the river to the Persian Gulf with a view to establishing a relatively fast mail route from Britain to India. Fitzjames was a junior officer on one of the steamships, *Euphrates*. Although her sister-ship, *Tigris*, was wrecked, and despite the hostility of the local people (in present-day Iraq), *Euphrates* reached the Persian Gulf. But on the way back upriver with the Indian mails, she was brought to a halt by low water in the river. Fitzjames, with a small party, then carried the mails overland across the desert via Damascus to Beirut, a distance of some 1500 km, in just under two months. In July 1841, he sailed for China as Gunnery Lieutenant on board HMS *Ganges*, as part of the squadron whose aim was to persuade the Chinese to permit the import of opium into their country. Fitzjames saw a great deal of action and was shot in the abdomen while storming the walls of Zhenjiang, the bullet lodging against his backbone. Fortunately he managed to avoid infection and made a remarkably rapid recovery. On 29 August 1842, he was present on board HMS *Cornwallis* at the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, which ended the Opium War. Soon thereafter, he was promoted to captain of HMS *Clio*; however, it took him some time to

locate his new command, finally tracking her down at Bombay on 27 August 1843. On 2 October 1844, *Clio* dropped anchor at Spithead. The previous spring Fitzjames had written to Sir John Barrow expressing interest in participating in the anticipated Northwest Passage expedition, of which rumours were circulating in the Navy. On 4 March 1845, he was appointed to the command of HMS *Erebus* under Sir John Franklin, looking forward eagerly to heading for the Arctic in search of the Northwest Passage. This was one voyage from which he would not return to England.

This brings us to the other mystery concerning James Fitzjames. Why was he appointed to the command of HMS *Clio* at the relatively young age of 30, and why was he given command of HMS *Erebus*, when he had no polar experience, unlike many other officers, such as those who had served on Sir Willam Parry's four expeditions, or on Sir James Clark Ross's Antarctic expedition of 1839–43? Battersby suggests that the explanation lies in an incident that occurred when Fitzjames was in Singapore, on board HMS *Ganges*, en route to China in November 1841. There he had encountered George Barrow, son of Sir John Barrow, Second Secretary at the Admiralty, and was able to lend him a hand "when he was rather adrift" (p. 135–136). Fitzjames was able to lend him some money and makes a point of stressing in a letter to John Barrow Junior (George's brother), that he had lost the memo on which he had noted the amount involved. In other words, he was emphasizing that this loan was untraceable. Battersby argues that Fitzjames was helping to cover up a potentially serious scandal (the details of which must remain unknown). But most importantly, Fitzjames's intervention had put Sir John Barrow in his debt. His early appointment to his first command, HMS *Clio*, and his appointment to command of HMS *Erebus* for the Northwest Passage expedition represented Sir John's repayment of that debt.

Battersby's book is clearly based on a vast amount of dogged archival research. Undoubtedly many leads were dead ends, but his persistence paid off in what must have been a stroke of luck—his finding of the letter from Captain Stenhouse, identifying James Fitzjames's father. But the end product is more than just the result of luck: the book is a well-crafted, highly readable biography. It will appeal not only to those intrigued by the fate of the Franklin expedition, but also to naval historians with a focus on the Royal Navy in the first half of the 19th century, and to members of the general public with a taste for mysteries.

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*William Barr*  
*Arctic Institute of North America*  
*University of Calgary*  
*2500 University Drive NW*  
*Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada*  
*wbarr@ucalgary.ca*

PEOPLE OF THE LAKES: STORIES OF OUR VAN TAT GWICH'IN ELDERS/GOOGWANDAK NAKH-WACH'ÀNJÒO VAN TAT GWICH'IN. By VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION and SHIRLEEN SMITH. Foreword by JOSEPH LINKLATER. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-88864-505-0. Ixii + 391 p., maps, colour + b&w illus., glossary (Gwich'in-English, English-Gwich'in), bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$34.95.

A black and white photograph, taken in 1946, dominates the cover of this publication based on the Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Collection. Margaret Blackfox looks thoughtfully at the photographer. Her face is weathered and marked by a long life out on the land. The photo invites the reader to learn more about this old woman, her life, and the history of her people. *People of the Lakes* indeed recounts the story of four generations of Van Tat Gwich'in, aboriginal people living in the northern Yukon Territory, Canada. These four generations cover more than a century of firsthand experiences. The authors, the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation and Shirleen Smith, provide a written record of the aboriginal perspective on historical events and “how Van Tat Gwich'in approached the changes—and continuities—in life over the past two or more centuries” (p. xxxv–xxxvi), but especially since the mid 1800s onwards. In doing so, they want to secure language, oral history, and knowledge of the land for future Van Tat Gwich'in generations. Recurrent themes are childhood experiences, seasonal activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, and trapping), and historical places (e.g., harvesting areas like the Old Crow Flats, trading posts like La-Pierre House or Rampart House, and social gathering places like Bear Cave Mountain), as well as kinship, relations with Inuit, and the changes that began with the entry of European and Canadian fur traders and missionaries. The vast majority of information is obtained from the Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Collection, which includes interviews with the four generations recorded by local researchers in collaboration with Canadian academics.

The book is divided into an introduction and four parts. Each segment deals with a particular historical era and generation. In the introduction, the authors give the context of the interviews and elaborate on the process of writing a book based on oral history. They deliberately leave out

a thorough theoretical anthropological discussion. Instead, the authors expand on the practical issues concerning the transcription of interviews from more than 300 audio tapes and the editing of those transcriptions to turn oral accounts into written ones.

In the first part, the authors discuss “long-ago stories” dealing with the era prior to European arrival in the mid 1800s. The elders of the “first” and “second” generation describe how the present world came into being. This part includes several old stories about animals, Gwich'in cultural heroes, the importance of Gwich'in women, and the relation between Gwich'in and their neighbours.

In the second part, eight “first-generation” elders (born at the end of the 19th century) vividly describe the 19th century and touch upon the early 20th century. They show how they, their parents, and their grandparents relied on the land for food, shelter, clothing, and material for producing tools. They further illustrate how newcomers, like the Hudson's Bay Company and the Christian missionaries, were incorporated into the existing nexus of relations between Gwich'in, Inuit, and other aboriginal people.

In the third part, 20 “second-generation” elders describe in detail their upbringing and the changes they endured in the first half of the 20th century. These elders form the largest group of interviewees and have been the most influential in the development of the Oral History project. The elders tell of their travels, social cohesion, important places, and the incorporation of new technologies (e.g., radios, store food). They further explain how the international boundary between Alaska and the Yukon Territory, non-local trappers, wage labour, and residential schools, have led to a gradual shift from a life out on the land to a more settled life in Old Crow.

In the relatively short fourth part, the “young elders” and the “youth” (presumably, the third and fourth generations) have a final say. Eight middle-aged Van Tat Gwich'in discuss the teachings of their parents and grandparents. They refer to important historical places, the animals hunted, and the importance of living life out on the land. They discuss the decline of muskrats since the mid 1970s and the definitive move to Old Crow. Nine young people address the importance of visiting historical places and listening to stories of their elders. Like the previous generations, the youth stress the pivotal role of the land. The authors conclude with a brief summary and emphasize the unique perspective this book offers on Van Tat Gwich'in history.

The stories and quotes, shown in a different text colour, combined with a vast number of illustrations, make for a pleasant read. In their attempt to bring four generations together in one volume, the authors allow enough room for Gwich'in voices. Indeed, the book reveals “an exquisite patchwork quilt” (p. xxxvii) from a predominantly Van Tat Gwich'in perspective. Unfortunately, the pattern of the quilt becomes repetitive and incoherent at times. The contextualization of historical events and significant places is repeated in several parts. Four of the six depicted maps are almost identical in showing historically significant places (caribou