Flag Report
Rob Tymstra and Les Trager

In September, 2011, Rob Tymstra FI ‘94, carrying Explorers Club Flag #25, led the second part of a reconnaissance exploration to find Henry Hudson’s wintering site of 1610-1611. Earlier, in July, 2011, Les Trager, MR ‘01, in the plane of Jeff Clark, MN ‘88, had conducted an aerial photographic survey of the same area.

Background

While it is well known that Henry Hudson’s winter camp of 1610-1611 was in the eastern part of lower James Bay, this campsite has never been found. Comparing maps generated from NASA radar taken from satellites with the descriptions of the lower James Bay area by Abacuk Prickett, one of Hudson’s surviving crew, and Thomas James’ description of Charlton Island, James Bay, in 1631, Les Trager concluded that the land in this area of James Bay had risen approximately five meters over the past 400 years. (Most archaeologists believe that the rise has only been 2 to 2 ½ meters during this time). Plotting Prickett’s description of the area where Hudson camped for the winter of 1610-11, on the radar generated maps, Trager believed that the location of this camp could be determined. Based on these maps, Trager and Tymstra decided to organize an expedition to see if this location could be found. Probably the reason the camp has never been found is because the land has changed considerably over the past 400 years due to the rise in the land from isostatic rebound. This rebound is caused by the melting of the glacier 12,000 years ago and the rising of the land after the release of the glacier’s weight.

Aerial Survey

In July, 2011, Les Trager, Jeff Clark, and Guy Bennett conducted an aerial survey of the area where Hudson was believed to have camped and the northern part of Charlton Island. Guy Bennett rigged the Cessna 182 with digital visual range and thermal FLIR cameras. Several passes were made over Charlton Island and areas south of Mount Sherrick on the nearby Quebec mainland. Several terabytes of data were captured on hard drives and this data is still being analyzed. The team members are experimenting with methods of sharing the large amounts of data with web-based programs such as Microsoft ICE.

Second Expedition

In September, the ground team, consisting of Guy Bennett, Paul Carter, Malcolm Lawson, and Rob Tymstra, drove from southern Ontario up to the Cree village of Waskaganish, in Northern Quebec. The village, formerly known as Fort Rupert, the first post established by the Hudson Bay Company in 1670, is located on Rupert Bay, a lobe on the southeast corner of James Bay. The team chartered a 25’ freighter canoe, piloted by Cree native Ernest Blueboy, and motored some 70 km across the frigid open waters of James Bay to Charlton Island where they spent eight days exploring. A mere twenty years after the Hudson mutiny, Thomas James (for whom the bay is named) and the crew of the Henrietta Maria also found themselves trapped for the winter in the same vicinity of the bay. James sunk his ship off the northeast end of Charlton
Island to avoid getting it crushed by ice and refloated it the following spring, making it back to England to tell his tale of survival against impossible odds. It was hoped that finding James’ winter camp would help to establish the rate of isostatic rebound. While nothing definitive was discovered, the team was able to compare ground terrain to the aerial images. The team concluded that the large pond existing today about 3.5 kilometers inland was once the inner harbor described by James in 1631.

The expedition finished with a few days of exploration in the forest south of Mount Sherrick on the Quebec mainland, one of the possible Hudson crew wintering sites. The ground searches were of a reconnaissance nature, inspecting the terrain from the ground, partly to get a feel for what habitats and ground cover they were up against. The expedition was unable to land near the site which the radar maps indicated for the location of Hudson's camp. Due to difficult terrain and the short time remaining for the expedition, the expedition was unable to reach this target area.

The team kept a log of birds on Charlton Island, tallying 73 species including a rare Thayer’s Gull, a first record for the James Bay islands. Results will be sent to the Northwest Territories/Nunavut ornithological database and to the town of Waskaganish. Among the many trip highlights were fabulous Northern Lights displays, abundant blueberries, seals, belugas, and a beaver that enjoyed taking strolls on the beach at low tide. Good timing was also had in Waskaganish as the expedition’s visit coincided with the annual Whitefish harvest on the Rupert River.

Conclusion and Future Plans

The search for Hudson is a challenging one as the trail is 400 years old and few artifacts were left behind. It’s hoped that detailed aerial photography in the visual and infrared ranges might help to spot some anomalies such as cairns, burial mounds, or outlines of wintering cabins. The second expedition showed the type of terrain to be anticipated. The group hopes to be able to raise sufficient funding to conduct a full scale archaeological expedition to locate Hudson’s camp during the late summer of 2012.

Birds found on Charlton Island (with highest daily total)

Common Loon 2
American White Pelican (skull found on beach)
Double-crested Cormorant 9
Great Blue Heron 2
Snow Goose (blue) 1
Canada Goose 150
Brant 600
Tundra Swan 1
American Black Duck 30
Mallard 12
Green-winged Teal 9
Greater Scaup 40
Common Eider 3
White-winged Scoter 1
Black Scoter 100
Common Goldeneye 10
Common Merganser 5
Red-breasted Merganser 150
Bald Eagle 1
Northern Harrier 2
Sharp-shinned Hawk 4
Northern Goshawk 1
Red-tailed Hawk 1
Rough-legged Hawk 2
Osprey 1
Merlin 2
Gyrfalcon 1
Peregrine Falcon 1
Spruce Grouse 1
Sandhill Crane 2
Black-bellied Plover 60
American Golden Plover 4
Semipalmated Plover 30
Greater Yellowlegs 20
Lesser Yellowlegs 2
Ruddy Turnstone 45
Sanderling 200
Semipalmated Sandpiper 200
White-rumped Sandpiper 4
Pectoral Sandpiper 1
Dunlin 400
Common Snipe 2
Bonaparte's Gull 5
Ring-billed Gull 1
Herring Gull 50
Thayer's Gull 1
Great Black-backed Gull 3
Arctic Tern 20
Black Guillemot 2
Hairy Woodpecker 1
Northern Flicker 1
Gray Jay 10
Common Raven 2
Horned Lark 220
Boreal Chickadee 6
Red-breasted Nuthatch 1
Brown Creeper 1
Winter Wren 1
Golden-crowned Kinglet 3
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2
American Robin 5
American Pipit 100
Orange-crowned Warbler 1
Yellow Warbler 1
Yellow-rumped Warbler 6
Palm Warbler 4
Savannah Sparrow 10
Song Sparrow 4
Swamp Sparrow 3
White-throated Sparrow 5
Dark-eyed Junco 12
Lapland Longspur 20
Rusty Blackbird 9