

# Aglooka Advisor

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[www.johnraesociety.com](http://www.johnraesociety.com)



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Colin R Bullen

Cover Illustration of '*Clestrain through the Inukshuk*'  
is reproduced courtesy of the Orkney artist Iris Heddle

## A Word from our President



Dear members,

What a violent winter we had! The storms certainly took their toll on The Hall of Clestrain. Asbestos sheet flew off, revealing a weakness in the wooden ties holding the rafters to the tops of the walls. It was tremendous good fortune for us that Paddy Casey was working on Ivan and Jean's farm. He came to the rescue and boldly went where no builder had been for decades. As a gift to JRS he and his team secured and made safe the building in the most difficult of conditions. Our hearty thanks go to him.

The Education Boxes are now being used in the schools. It has been an amazing task preparing them. The pupils are so keen to learn about John Rae, and it is a thrill that they can do this by touching reproduction artefacts associated with him and the Inuit.

We have had several generous donations to the Society, which we are so grateful for. They are always a huge boost to the projects we undertake. Now we have our own large tent for shows and events. It will be a great boost. We christen it this year at The Dounby Show and The Vintage Show: If

members wish to hire it from us for functions that would be excellent.

Last week we gathered in some splendid prizes for our annual Lottery. Don't be surprised if you get a duffle of tickets through the post.

We will be having The Blue Door Charity shop from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> August for a week. All contributions will be gratefully received before the 8th at Fursbreck Pottery, Harray KW16 2JR... 01856 771 419... [fursbreck@btinternet.com](mailto:fursbreck@btinternet.com) or at The Blue Door during that week. If you would like to volunteer to help with the shows or the Blue door, please do get in touch.

*We are already looking forward to our next Newsletter, when we hope to reveal more future plans.*

All good wishes,

Andrew Appleby

## Commemorative Plaque to John Rae Unveiled at Clestrain



The unveiling of a 'National Commemorative Plaque' dedicated to John Rae took place in glorious autumn sunshine at Clestrain on 30th September last year - the 202nd anniversary of his birth.

The plaque was awarded thanks to the efforts of former trustee Josh Gourlay, who had submitted



the nomination to Historic Scotland on behalf of the Society. In early July Trustees Colin Bullen and Davie Reid met with Gavin Douglas, Regional Works Manager and the local Historic Scotland team to decide how best to display the bronze plaque.

Normally the placing of a plaque is straightforward and involves simply mounting it on the former birthplace, or residence, of the person being recognised. However, the present condition of the Hall of Clestrain meant another approach seemed more appropriate. The early discussions produced the inspired possibility of setting the plaque on an Orkney standing stone to be erected in a prominent position in front of the Hall. With the help of

Heddle Hill quarry in Finstown a very promising stone was identified.

And so to the day itself. President Andrew Appleby welcomed everyone and expressed delight in introducing Mrs Jean Craigie of Clestrain to unveil the plaque. In doing so it was revealed that the stone had been given a further tribute to Rae's achievements with the scribing and polishing of the route of the Northwest Passage on the top of the stone. The effect is quite stunning and a tribute to the work of the local team with particular mention due to local apprentice Robbie Macvie.

Jim Chalmers followed the unveiling with a powerful reading of Harvey Johnston's poem '*Rae in the Abbey*' and invited everyone to join a toast to John Rae. Refreshments were served and all enjoyed the opportunity to view the new addition to the wonderful setting of Clestrain.



One day we all hope to see the stone relocated closer to a fully restored Hall...

# Paddle of a Lifetime on the Missinaibi River

by  
Bruce Davey

I have idolized John Rae since reading Chapter 15 in Peter Newman's book *Company of Adventurers*. For years I have expounded on his exploits in the Canadian North to anyone who would listen (and many who wouldn't)! So imagine my surprise when in 2009 my wife Mary discovered through her genealogical research that John Rae was her great great grand uncle, and not mine!!

Mary and her cousin Jane Hamilton attended the JohnRae200 Conference in Stromness in September 2013. They returned in 2014 to participate in John Rae's commemorative service at Westminster Abbey. I always said that I would like to honour John Rae by travelling in his footsteps in Northern Canada. Actually it was paddle strokes rather than footsteps that I hoped to duplicate.

That opportunity presented itself through Jim Leslie, a friend in my local hiking group. Jim is an experienced paddler from Ontario who now lives in Nova Scotia. When he approached me to see if I would be interested in a trip on the Missinaibi River, one of Canada's heritage rivers in northern Ontario, it took me about three seconds to answer! John Rae's travels on the Missinaibi are documented in Ken McGoogan's book *Fatal Passage*. He likely travelled it many times as it was the main route from the Hudson's Bay Company post at Moose Factory to Lake Superior and points west.

Four of us, Tony Nette, Peter Wallace, Jim Leslie and myself left Nova Scotia in late August 2015 for a three day drive to the starting point at Mattice, Ontario. We spent our first night in Montreal at the home of our daughter Kate, John Rae's great, great, great, grandniece. The next day Ewan Porter and his son Greg joined us in North Bay, Ontario, with a trailer load of canoes and all the provisions for the ten-day trip on the river.

On August 31st we launched at kilometer 320 on the Missinaibi River in the village of Mattice. We ran rapids with storied names like Rock Island and Black Feather. At Kettle Falls we pulled out to camp on the portage trail. As I reflected that night on our

first day on the river I had a strong sense of John Rae in that wild environment.



*First set of rapids*

Bright and early the next morning we pushed off again. An almost perfect day was interrupted by an upset at the last 'swift' before Thunderhouse Falls. Tony and I had picked a route guarded by a 'sleeper' rock around which our canoe became wedged. We salvaged our gear but had to leave the canoe overnight. Returning the next day, Greg and Jim skilfully pried the canoe off the rock. As Peter later said we had "turned a disaster into an incident!" Fortunately the canoe's resilient Royalex material popped back into shape and we were able to continue, and with greater respect for the power of the water. Imagine the damage that might have occurred if the canoe had been birch bark and cedar. John Rae would have had to affect repairs on the spot.



*Tony Nette and Bruce Davey, Black Feather Rapids*

We spent two nights camping at Thunderhouse Falls. Here the river narrows from several hundred meters wide to 2.5 meters and starts its drop off the Canadian Shield to the Hudson Bay Lowlands.





***Thunderhouse Falls***

We decided to lay over a day to enjoy our surroundings. Having rescued the canoe before lunch, the rest of the day was dedicated to exploration, swimming and fishing. The exposed rock formations, highlighted by Conjuring House Rock, were spectacular. After portaging our canoes, we paddled back to the lip of the falls, and jumped in to float back in the current, our canoes tethered to us! In the late afternoon, as the designated fisher of the trip I fished opposite Conjuring House Rock and was rewarded with a bass and a walleye.



***Swimming tethered to canoes below Thunderhouse Falls***

Leaving Thunderhouse Falls, we faced the Long Portage past Hells Gate, a three- kilometer slog. It started and finished with a steep climb and a steep descent but with level ground between the two. Greg, the youngest member of our crew, emulated the feats of John Rae and the voyageurs by running the portage several times with canoes and heavy packs on his back.

On the trail we were rewarded with Peter's discovery of chanterelle mushrooms. Tony and I filled two bags with these culinary treasures, and Ewan and Greg enhanced a few of our meals with them. Besides providing us with wholesome meals,

Ewan and Greg baked carrot cake, lemon pie and cinnamon buns on site in the umbrella shaped portable oven, just a bit tastier than traditional bannock!

The guide book mentions that coming up river the Voyageurs started the portage at Hells Gate and continued for 18 kilometers past Thunderhouse Falls. I was thankful to be going down river! The river flattens out after Hells Gate followed by a lot of flat water paddling broken up by swifts through gravel bars. Camping at river mouths, I found the fishing very productive and was able to supply us with several meals of walleye and bass.

Wildlife sightings were frequent. Rounding almost every bend we flushed Canada Geese. Sandhill Cranes 'gronked' us on our way many times. We were treated to a cow moose and calf swimming across the river in front of our flotilla. The wet sand of the Pivabiskau and the Opatatika deltas revealed that wolves had been night visitors to our campsites. We discovered fossils near our campsite on the gravel bar at Opatatika. Peter, the geologist in our group, could identify them and place them in a geological and historical context for us. Tony, the big game biologist among us, spotted a bear, and identified otter tracks.



***Bruce Davey, fishing at the mouth of the Pivabiskau River***

Weather is always a factor on these trips but for us it was unusually favorable. With the exception of a one-hour downpour on our next to last day, it was dry and the temperatures were 25 to 30 Celsius every day. Better still, the insects that so often plague travellers in the north, were absent. The air was clear, the water was clean, and the night skies were spectacular, especially the night we saw the aurora borealis at Bell Bay.



### ***Paddling at Bell Bay***

On our last night we camped on Mike Island across from the train bridge at Moose River Crossing, 70 kilometers short of Moosonee and Moose Factory. The next day we loaded the canoes and our gear into a boxcar on the Via Rail "Polar Bear Express" train, and boarded ourselves for the trip to Fraserdale where Jim had arranged to have our cars waiting for us.



### ***Island below Opasatika river***



### ***Loading canoes and gear at whistle stop, Moose River Crossing***

We travelled downstream in 10 days only a portion of a route that John Rae must have travelled regularly in both directions. His skills, stamina and determination are legendary. My experience on this

river left me with a greater admiration for my hero, and with gratitude for my fellow paddlers.



***Ewan Porter, Greg Porter, Tony Nette, Bruce Davey, Peter Wallace, Jim Leslie***

*Bruce Davey*

### ***Editor's Note:***

The Missinaibi River flows north east from Missinaibi Lake, north of Chapteau and empties into Moose River which drains into James Bay. The river's name means "pictured waters" in the Cree language which is thought to refer to the pictographs found on rock faces along the river.

The stretch which Bruce and his friends tackled from Mattice to Moosonee is 190 miles in length.



## The Making of an Arctic Explorer

In a recent contact with the Hudson's Bay company Archives in Manitoba we were able to obtain a high resolution copy of a map showing "Rae's Discoveries: Admiralty Sketch". The map was produced during Rae's first Arctic expedition of 1846-1847 when he was the first explorer to spend a winter above the Arctic Circle while living off the land. The complete map shows dates on his route from 17th March to 2 June 1847 and shows Committee Bay and Pelly Bay and names islands, points and lakes along the coast.

Here we have reproduced a section of the map (opposite) and matched the record up with text from "The Arctic Journals of John Rae". The area is put in context in the map of Nunavut below.

Rae had a dozen men with him including Orcadians Corrigan and Flett, French Canadians, a Cree Indian and two Inuit, Ouligbuck father and son. In preparation for the winter of 1846-7 they built a stone house at Repulse Bay – which they named Fort Hope.

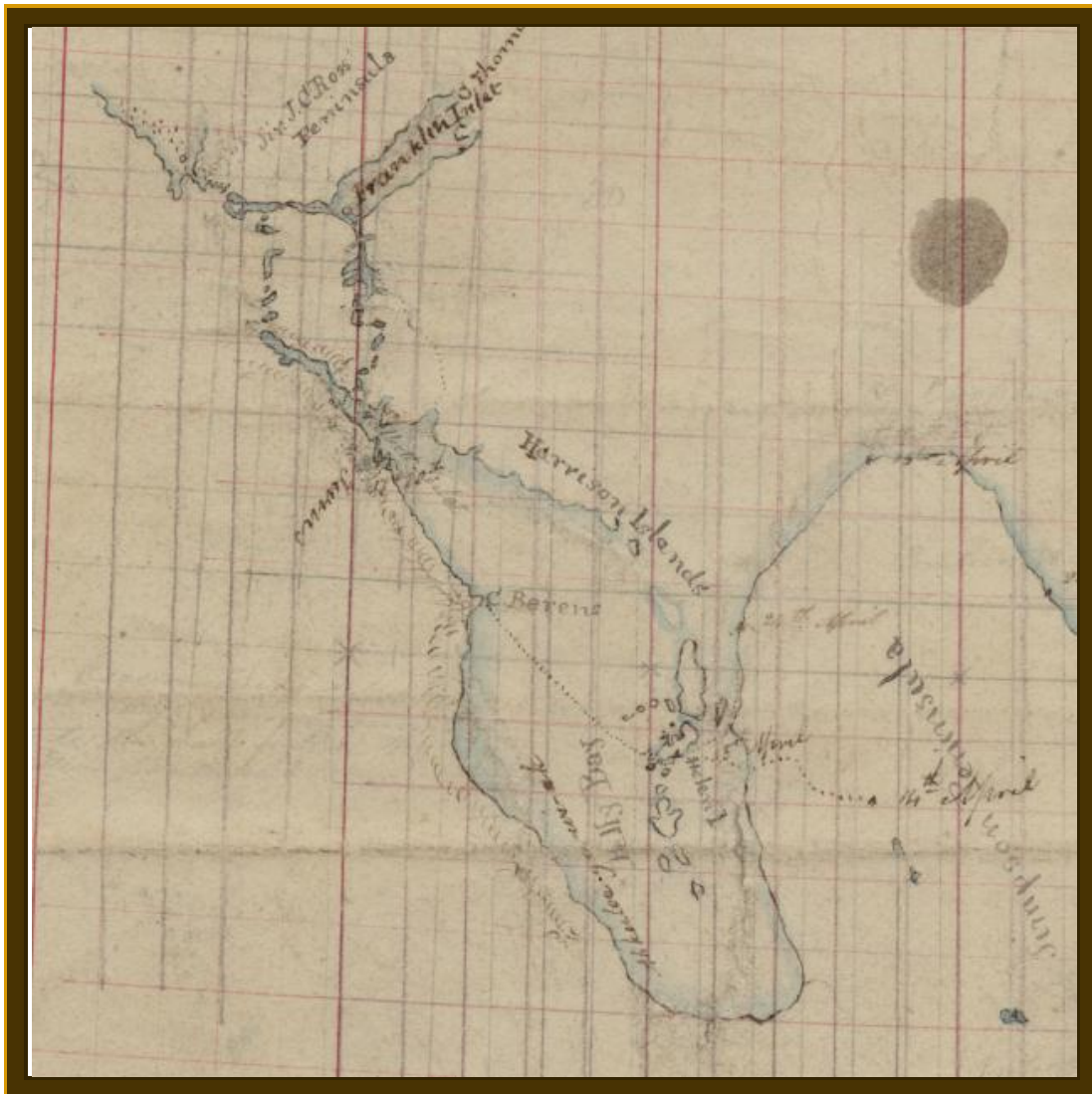


The following extract is taken from "The Arctic Journals of John Rae", selected and introduced by Ken McGoogan.



*"When about to make a tour round the bay, I learned from one of the natives that a complete view of its shores could be obtained from the summit of the island on which we were. I found also that a chart which he made of the bay agreed very closely with one drawn by the natives of Repulse Bay, who had visited the place. The evening being beautifully clear, I took with me the Esquimaux, one of the men, and the interpreter to the highest point of the island, from which I obtained a distinct view of the whole bay, except a small portion immediately under the sun. The shores were high and regular in their outline, and being, in most places, to a certain extent denuded of snow, they were much more clearly seen than could have been expected. The bay appeared to extend 16 or 18 miles slightly to the east of south, and was about 11 miles wide near its head. Its surface was studded with a number of dark-coloured rocky islands. The highest of these was the one on which we were staying, and was found by measurement to be 730 feet above the level of the sea. It was called Helen Island, whilst the group to which it belonged was named after Benjamin Harrison, Esq. one of the Directors of the HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY. The Esquimaux pointed out the direction in which two rivers near the head of the bay lay. These rivers, of which I took the bearings by compass, were said to be of no great size, and frozen to the bottom in winter. The bay was honoured with the name of Sir John H. Pelly, Bart., Governor of the Company.*

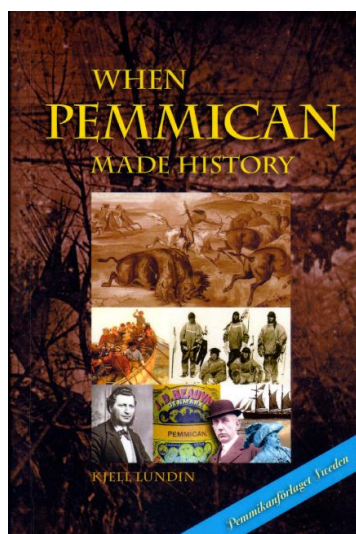
*The morning of the 24th was as beautiful as could be desired, with the thermometer at -15 degrees. There was a gentle air from the east, and the horizon being very clear, I again obtained a fine view of the bay."*



**Extract from "Rae's Discoveries Admiralty Sketch" (HBCA G.1/177) from his first Arctic Expedition 1846-47. Reproduced, courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.**

# Book Review: When Pemmican Made History

By Kjell Lundin



*This wonderful account of the Pemmican industry and history is a must read for all those interested in Polar Exploration and the cultures of the Arctic, Taiga and Tundra.*

*Written so interestingly with terrific anecdotes on the subject, I found this book GRIPPING!*

*The recipes and methods of creating this food treasure are splendid. The note that juniper berries are flavouring and a preservative as well, interested me greatly. The ways of drying and grinding the buffalo meat, or caribou, made me think of Orkney's great past. The stone tools and querns would have been perfect for preparing pemmican. With our vast resource of cattle, descended from the European Auroch, this comestible would answer most of the meat storage problems put forward by archaeologists.*

*The history of the Fur Trade, the beaver hats and travel are fascinating: Tales of beaver hats going worldwide on the heads of kings, presidents, potentates and those chasing the heights of fashion are spellbinding. I do pity the beaver, though and it's near extinction. The politically encouraged extermination of the buffalo is tragically moving:*

*Encouraged by The Senate to starve and contain the Indian populations is desperately poignant.*

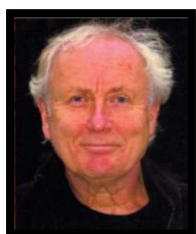
*There is so much in this book to learn and digest, that it needs two or three reads. There are multiple sides to it illustrating the cultures and histories of so many places, including of course Hudson Bay Company and many Orcadian characters.*

*'When Pemmican Made History' is a factual book, with many calculations, statistics, recipes and accounts, beautifully, humorously and strikingly put together.*

*Andrew Appleby*

*A fascinating book for anyone with a passion for the golden age of exploration and intrepid adventurers. Kjell brings a new appreciation to their glorious feats - and links them by telling the truly remarkable role played out by his title subject. The respective chapters on Franklin and Rae are entitled "The Man Who Ate His Boots" and "Journey into the Unknown and the High Cost of Truth". While both carried pemmican Franklin's was made in Hungary of "substandard raw materials.. in tins sealed with lead". On Rae's 1846/47 expedition his crew set off in two York boats carrying three months rations of pemmican, six muskets and fishing nets for a fifteen-month journey. Their courses were set - the rest as they say is history...*

*Colin R Bullen*



Kjell Lundin, born 1947. Swedish graphic designer and information consultant with a strong interest in history and food. In 2001 he was awarded the Swedish Academy of Verbo-Visual information's Lidman Prize for his "verbovisual effort with pictures and design, explaining the Nobel prizes in Physics and Chemical to a worldwide audience".

When Pemmican Made History ISBN 978-91-639-0420-2



## The John Rae Sea Chest & Archive

In the last JRS Newsletter we reported on our progress towards completing our first educational project for schools – a collection of books, pictures, maps and artefacts – ‘The John Rae Sea Chest’.



The box itself was expertly crafted by Rankine Firth – in the style of an Orkney ‘Kist’ – and would have been similar to sea chests and trunks in which voyagers to the likes of the Hudson Bay might have packed their belongings.

We are especially grateful to the Hudson Bay Company Heritage Services in Toronto who sent us a magnificent box across the Atlantic which contained several image boards, HBC Flag, beaver pelt,



The contents were collected by the Society over the course of a year. Items of clothing were some of the first items gathered – including several made for the John Rae production “Long Strides” which was a major event in the 2013 St. Magnus Festival. John Rae was of course played in that production by JRS Trustee Jim



HBC blanket capote and doctors medical bag. We were also in touch with HBC Archives in Winnipeg who were able to provide copies of maps drawn by Rae and several photos.

The articles, books, maps and artefacts help tell the story which one apparently ordinary Orcadian had in the remote Northwest

Territories of Canada.



Chalmers. Also generously donated from the production were a model of an Inuit long pipe (a calumet), a woman’s knife and a pair of replica snowshoes.

Snowshoes were key to John Rae’s expeditions in the Arctic and having the replica snowshoes we decided to build the box around them. Fittingly they also determined the size of the box we eventually asked Rankine Firth to build – we wanted to house the snowshoes in the lid so they would be the first items seen as the chest was opened.

Inside the main compartment are three smaller boxes holding books and pictures which are lifted out to reveal the larger items such as clothing, a genuine beaver pelt, doctor’s medical bag and a paddle. Rankine also later made us an excellent pair of snow goggles – used to cut out the glare from the sun reflecting off snow and prevents snow blindness.



We would like to thank **Orkney Islands Council** for supporting the project with a funding contribution from their Culture Fund, **The Hamilton Association for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art** and both the Hudson’s Bay Company ‘Heritage’ and ‘Archives’.

## Short Passages

### Our Expanding Art Collection



The John Rae Society is very grateful to some local artists for their generous gifts of artworks to the Society. Firstly, Crispin Worthington for his delightful pen and ink watercolour of The Hall of Clestrain. This was exhibited

at The Pier Arts Centre Christmas Exhibition last year and he delighted us by offering his work for the benefit of JRS. We have his kind permission to reproduce it as a print run and create cards from it if we wish. Thank you Crispin.



Joan Holdsworth, glass officianado of Ootertoon, graciously gave us her Stromness Open Windows square plate. This interprets in coloured amalgamated glass, the

Northwest Passage with the ice floes and islands which bind it. We are sure Dr. John Rae would recognise the abstract use of silicas and copper to represent the living geography of where he famously explored.



The Harry Potter, Andrew Appleby, who happens to be President of JRS has presented the society with his stele of the lost Sir John Franklin with John Rae with helpless sympathy looks on through ice and time.

Remains of silver cutlery and cannibalism with an icebound ship are poignant reminders of Franklin's personal and public tragedy.

It is proposed that these works will be displayed at The Dounby Show and The Vintage Show in a special wee exhibition.

### Events

**Blue Door Charity Shop** – from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August the Society will be in the Blue Door, Victoria Street, Kirkwall to raise funds – please bring along anything which we could sell, or pass items to a Trustee. Opening hours are 9:30am to 4pm.

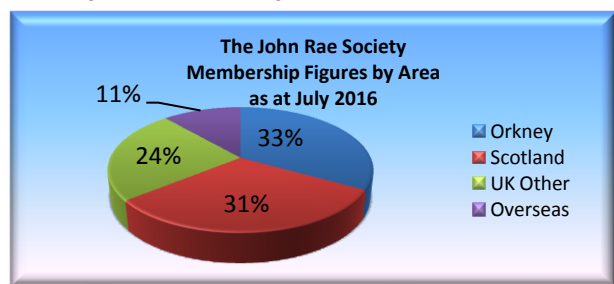
The **Dounby Show** is on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August - come along and visit our new JRS tent when we will launch the 2016 Christmas Lottery Tickets, have displays, food for sale and lots more - or even help out on the stand!

The **Vintage Rally** follows on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August at the Auction Mart, Kirkwall – see the recently donated artworks relating to John Rae and the Hall of Clestrain. Drop in for a chat and meet the Trustees.

**Orkney International Science Festival 2016** – we are working on plans for the JRS stand for the 'Family Day' on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September at the King Street Halls. Bring the whole family!

**John Rae's Birthday** – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 – we are working on plans – watch this space!

### Society Membership



Members by Area	No.	
Orkney	49	33%
Scotland	46	31%
UK Other	36	24%
Overseas	17	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100%</b>