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On Wrangel Land. Wreckage Found on the Beach-Condition of the Soil. Improbability of Any Landing Having Been Made by Captain DeLong. Difficulties Which Beset the Corwin-Narrow Escape from the Ice. (Special Correspondence of the Bulletin.) ... Steamer Corwin, Off Point Barrow, Alaska, August 17, 1881.

John Muir

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ON WRANGEL LAND.

Wreckage Found on the Beach—Condition of the Soil.

Improbability of Any Landing Having Been Made by Captain De Long.

Difficulties Which Beoct the Corwin—How Escape from the Ice.

[Special Correspondence of the Bulletin.]

With the arrival of the revenue cutter Thomas Corwin we have received a batch of interesting correspondence relative to the memorable cruise just finished from the Bulletin's special correspondent, John Muir, who accompanied the expedition in search of the missing whalers and the Jeannette. The date of these letters is here-with presented. The remainder will follow in the order of their writing.

STEARNS CORWIN, OFF POINT BARROW, ALASKA, August 11, 1881.

The Corwin made a very short stay on Wrangel Land, only about two hours, because of the condition of the ice, which was threatening to shut us up; and because it seemed improbable that a prolonged search in the region about our landing point could in any way advance the main object of the expedition. A considerable stretch of the coast where we landed was surrounded closely with ice, and the boat could not reach it. We therefore anchored in a bay and explored a mile or two of the left bank of the river, a gently-sloping dune beach from the river, and a stretch of smooth beach at its mouth, while a party of officers, after scoring a chart, depositing records in it, and sealing the flag on the edge of the ice, (sailing the ocean, went northeastward along the shore of this headland a distance of three or four miles, searching carefully for traces of the Jeannette explorers, and of any native inhabitants that might chance to be in the country; these all were presumably recalled, and a way forced back through ten miles of heavy drift-ice to open water.

WRECKAGE FOUND ON WRANGEL LAND.

On the shore we found the skeletons of a large bow-head whale, an oak barrel stove, a piece of a boot made about seven feet long and four inches in diameter, a double Kysack paddle with both blades broken, and a small quantity of driftwood. Every article was heavily scorched and apparently knowing that they had long been exposed to the action of waves and ice.

LAME-FISH, BUT NO SIGNS OF HUMAN SATE.

Back on the hills and along the river bank the tracks of geese, harlequins, foxes, and bears were seen, but no trace whatever of human beings, though the mouths of a river would of all others be just the place to find them if the country were inhabited or had been visited by Europeans within a decade or two. Not a sign of the driftwood seems to have been carried over or across any way, though, from the appearance of the damage done to the trees, it is quite likely that the storm which had swept over these waters drifted over them, this never, open portion of the shore in about the only place in the neighborhood where driftwood could come to rest on a beach and be easily accessible to natives or others while traveling along the coast either on the ice or land, and where they also would find a good camp ground and water. A low pile of logs a few yards back from high woody shore, with low ground about it, were any traveler passing this way would naturally choose to camp, has the surface of the slates covered with gray, brown, and yellow mold instead of snow, showing that this was one of those storms had been favorable for many a year. Again, instead of snow, thin, gray, and yellow mold covering the ground, there were only a few boulders, showing that the surface of the driftwood had been perfectly cleared of vegetation. Other thickets of blackberry bushes, willows, and grass, were also seen, showing that the area where the party had landed had been an excellent one for a few years. It appears, therefore, than this portion of the country is inhabited, and that it has not been visited by the Jeannette explorers.

CAPTAIN DE LONG'S PLANS.

Captian De Long in a letter to his wife, written at sea, August 11, 1880, said that he proposed to proceed north by the way of the east coast of Wrangel Land, touching at Herald Island, where he intended to cut a fur and seal records, those landing on Wrangel Land and leaving records on the east coast, under a series of entries twenty-five miles apart. In another letter, dated July 17, 1880, he said:—"In the event of disaster to the ship, we shall retreat upon the Siberian settlements, or on the natives around East Cape, and wait for a chance to get back to our depot at St. Michael's. If a delay comes up our money for subsistence would be insufficient, and we should have to make our way from the east coast to our depot. We have a couple of men in the ship who will make a thorough exploration of Wrangel Land and on Herald Island. If I find that we are in a really good position, we shall retreat upon the Siberians, or get back to East Cape. If not, we shall make our way back to St. Michael's, we have a couple of months' provisions here. We shall leave our depot at Wrangel Land, and not attempt to make up the delay which we have in our attempt to proceed north. I shall try to push through into the Arctic by way of the east coast of Greenland, if we are far enough north, and if we are far south, then by way of Motille Bay and Labrador Sound."

Does not land on Wrangel Island or Wrangel Land.

While evidently pursuing this plan he was seen.
by the whaler Sea Breeze on the twenty-seventh of September, 1898, about forty miles south of Herald Island, entreating a lead in heavy ice, which probably closed in upon its keel and carried her past Herald Island. Now, the search for the lost vessel and archipelago shows clearly that he did not succeed in landing there, or if a camp had been built on any conspicuous point we could not have failed to find it, as we traveled over it all in good weather. Perhaps, however, the traces of his visit may be found only in the least possible distance. It should be noted that the best chance of finding traces of the expedition is in the open water, and we may have to go farther out than we are wont to do, in order to find the point which he reached. But the point where we landed being the easternmost point of Wrangell Land, it would seem from his plan as well as from known conditions of the ice to be of all others the likeliest place to find traces of the expedition.

In the case of the loss of his vessel and his reaching the land farther up on the coast, he would be likely, in following his plan of retreat, to travel down past this point where the ice is more broken and extends a shorter distance off shore than elsewhere, conditions that seem almost certain to have brought the Columbia to a stand at least. Even should he not have built a camp on the promontory and consequently accessible a point and most likely to be discovered by vessel, he could hardly be so able to pass without leaving some sign on the bank of the river, whether he made efforts to mask his presence or not. In fact the explorers passed their first winter on Wrangell Land, they might either try to cross over the ice or to the summit towards spring from some point to the westward of our vessel, or in case they reached the easternmost cape, near the north extreme of the land, along the coast at any time, or at the south extreme of the land, along the coast in winter, they would probably land in the most favorable point or departure for exploring the coast. It is among these points that he was perhaps most likely to leave some indication by the cairn on the island. He probably found it the most convenient place to leave a mark and to go so as to show that the Jackson expedition either did not reach Wrangell Land at all, or did not make any extended stay there.

Notwithstanding the unprobability of finding any traces of the Columbia, the Corwin would gladly have been to a stranded berg, for a few days at least, during the fine August weather we were enjoying at the time. We had explored and searched various seas east along the coast for sixty miles in opposite directions, and back into the straits, to learn something on the topography, geology and natural history, sea, of the country, and to determine as surely as possible whether the missing explorers had touched this portion of the coast. But in so doing we have risked being shut in, losing the vessel, and losing many slighter party to be stranded. Besides, we might then have prevented from making other attempts farther north in case the sea should leave the shores in that direction, or entering to other vessels that might stand in need of it at the head of this dangerous sea.

The ice south of us was drifting along shore to the southeast with a powerful current at a speed of fifty miles a day, the majestic movement being made strikingly manifest by large bergs that were agreements in water sixty degrees, standing still, whilst the main mass of the pack was getting past them. With so much motion in the ice, the open lane and the strip of open water and cakes through which we had passed our way in coming in, was liable to close at any time, making escape impossible, at least until some change in the winds and currents might result in setting free, and the ice out to sea.

As it was we escaped with difficulty after both engine and hull had been severely tested, the lane by which we entered having almost vanished, and the point where we reached open water is several miles to the northward of our landing place. Had our return been cut off we might then have had no chance of finding the Columbia. We had entered the pack into a vicious gale which lasted all day, and the vessel was at times becalmed and the temperature ten degrees below zero with clear skies. As it was we had a fine long opportunity of exploring the coast on the north and west, during the remaining months of autumn and all the winter, while the vessel might have been made up to the mouth of the river, and by a land-exploration of the head of the Columbia, which was given out next summer, perhaps the ice does not have the open tree of ice at any time once in ten years. The small quantity of driftwood on the beach would seem to indicate open water at times, but it might have been brought in by sailing, tumbled ice, after being held fast and gradually worked in shore after years of change, or by the Columbia herself, when she was stranded, without the occurrence of any perfectly clear explanation of communication with the open part of the sea. Our plan of retreat would then be similar to that proposed by Capt. De Long, in the case of the Jeannette, the loss or the vessel, however, and any work and hardship that might follow would not have been allowed to weigh against any reasonable hope of finding the ice conformed and carrying relief to them. But it was decided that more could be done in all probability towards carrying out the object of the expedition by keeping the Corwin free. Only about half of the wanderings of the summer were spent as yet, this weather was mild, the ice setting, and we had good hopes that the Columbia would be free before the snow of the winter.

We may return, however, to our northward along the eastern shore of Wrangell Land, that has been warned.