



1881-07-02

Letter from [John Muir] to [Louie Strentzel Muir], 1881 Jul 2.

John Muir

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Between Plover Bay & St Lawrence Island
8.45 P.M. July 27 1881.

my beloved wife,

After leaving St Michaels on the 22^d June where I last wrote you we went again into the Arctic ocean to Tapkan 12 ms N.W. of Cape Serdige to seek the search party that we left on the edge of the ice pack opposite Kolinschin Island. & were so fortunate as to find them there having gone as far as the condition of the ice seemed to them safe, & after they had reached the fountain head of all the stories we had heard concerning the lost Whaler Vigilance & determined them to be in the main true. At Cape Wankarem they found three Tchukis who said that last year when the ice was just beginning to grow & when the sun did not rise they were out seal hunting three or four miles from shore when they saw a broken ship in the drift ice wh they boarded & found some dead men in the cabin & a good many articles of one sort & another wh they took home & wh they showed to our party. This evidence reveals the fate of at least one of the ships we are seeking.

Our party when they saw us came out to the edge of the ice, wh extended about 3 miles from shore, & after a good deal of difficulty reached the steamer. The north wind was blowing hard sending huge black swells & crashing waves against the jagged grinding edge of the pack with terrible uproar making it impossible to for us to reach them with a boat

we succeeded however ⁽²³⁾ in throwing a line to them
wh they made fast to a skin boat that they
had pushed over the ice from the shore & getting
into it they were dragged over the stony edge
of ice waves & water waves & soon got safely
aboard. Leaving the tent provisions & dogs & sleds
at the Indian village, to be picked up some other
time. Then we sailed southward again to take
our interpreter Ichuchi Joe to his home wh we
reached two hours ago. Now we are steering for
St Michael again intending to land for a few
hours on the north side of St Lawrence Island
on the way. At St Michael we will write our
letters, wh will be carried to S. F. by the Alaska
Com. Co's Steamer St Paul, take on more
provision & then sail north again along the
American shore, spending some time in Kotzebue
Sound, perhaps exploring some of the rivers that
flow into it & then pushing on around Cape Point
Barrow & out into the Ocean northward as we
can, our movements being always determined
by the position & movements of the ice-pack.
Before making a final effort in August or
September to reach Wrangel Land in search of
traces of the Jeannette we will return yet once
more to St Michael for Coal & provisions wh we
have stored there in case we should be com-
pelled to pass a winter north of Behring Strait

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² ⁽³³⁾
The season however is so favorable that we
have sanguine hopes of finding an open way
to Wrangel Land & returning to our homes in October.

The Jeannette has not been seen nor any of
her crew on the Asiatic Coast as far west as
Cape Jakan, & I have no hopes of the vessel
ever escaping from the ice but her crew, in
case they saved their provisions may yet be
alive, though it is strange that they did not
come over the ice in the spring. Possibly
they may have reached the American Coast
if so they will be found this summer.

Our vessel is in perfect condition & our
Captain is very cautious, & will not take
any considerable chances of being caught
in the north pack.

How long it seems since I left home, & yet
according to the Almanac it will not be two
months until the day after tomorrow. I have
seen so much & gone so far & the nightless
days are so strangely joined it seems more
than a year. And yet how short a time is the
busy month at home among the fire & the
work. My wee lass will be big & bright now
& by the time I can get her again in my arms

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she will be afraid of my heart. I have a great quantity of ivory dolls & toys - ducks, bears, seals walrus etc for her to play with, & some soft white furs to make a little robe for her carriage. But it is a sore hard thing to be out of sight of her so long & of the same but still sorer & harder not to hear. Perhaps not one word until I reach San Francisco. You however will hear often. I sent lots of letters by a schooner from Gonoluska, one from St Paul Island a lot by a the returning whaler Tom Pope one on the 21, I think, from St Michael & this again will go from St Michael. Then we will have a good many more opportunities by the other whalers.

This is a lovely cool clear bright day & the mountains along the Coast of Asia stand in glorious array telling the grand old story of their birth beneath the sculpturing ice of the Glacial period, but the snow still lingers here & there down to the water's edge & a little beyond the mouth of Behring Strait the vast mysterious icefield of the North stretches away beneath dark stormy sky for thousands of miles. I landed on E. Cape yesterday & found unmistakable evidence of the passage over it of a rigid ice-sheet

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from the north, a fact which is exceedingly telling here. Similar traces I have already seen on the Diomedes & on St Lawrence Island along its entire length, & on 300 or 400 miles of the Coast of Asia, & also about St Michael. Showing clearly that Behring's Sea was once only a glacial lake, & that Asia & America have been separated by the mechanical action of this grand frost flow. The south side of the Aleutian Chain of Islands was during the glacial period the boundary of the Pacific Ocean & Asia & America were one.

My health is so good now that I never notice it. I climbed a mountain at E Cape yesterday about 3000 feet high a mile through snow knee deep & never felt fatigue my cheeks tingling in the north wind. My cheeks are red now & I eat all sorts of greasy stuff in heavy bulk. I wish I could make out a list of all the fish flesh & fowl, & puddings & gravies I have eaten for Grandmother's study. I have a great quantity of material in my

notebooks already ⁵⁻⁶⁵ Lots of sketches
Glacier Mtns, Indians, Indian towns etc
So you may be sure I have been busy
If I could only hear a word from
I then from that home in the Californian
hills I would be the happiest & patientest
man in all Hyperborea.

I am alone in the cabin the engine is grinding
away making the Camp that is never lighted
now rattle, & the joints creak everywhere
& the good Corvino is grinding empty over
smooth blue water about half way to St Lawrence
Island. & now I must to bed! But before I go
I reach my arms towards you & pray God
to keep you all.. Good night.

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