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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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TWO MONUMENTS IN ARCTIC CANADA

BY

D. JENNESS

Of the many monuments erected by the explorers of the early nineteenth century in the Arctic regions of Canada only a small number have ever come under the notice of later travellers. The Southern Party of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, during its two years' sojourn in the region around Coronation gulf, encountered two ancient landmarks, one near cape Krusenstern at the western entrance to the gulf, the other on the south shore of the gulf, between Port Epworth and Gray's bay. Both were photographed by Dr. R. M. Anderson, to whom I am indebted for the present illustrations, as well as for most of the details concerning their structural features.

The monument on the west side of cape Krusenstern was a low conical cairn of flat dolomite slabs piled very roughly on top of one another. Its diameter at the base was about three feet, and its height perhaps three feet six inches. A casual traveller might easily have mistaken it for one of the Eskimo meat-caches that are so numerous in the district, but the stones at the bottom were too small and ill-jointed to keep out predatory animals and the centre of the pile was not hollow but solid. Undoubtedly it was the work of white men, and although no records were found within it, we can hardly be wrong in assigning it to Sir John Richardson's party in 1848. Indeed, Richardson actually mentions the erection of a monument in this very place, for he says in his journal:—

"We remained all the 30th (August) in an encampment, watching the ice outside, or making excursions across the cape (Krusenstern) to examine the sea in various directions. Some small lanes of water were visible, and the ice was moved to and fro by the flood and ebb, but no channel was discovered by which we could hope to make any progress towards the Coppermine River. The wind continued in the east-north-east quarter, and the weather was very chilling. *We employed the men in erecting a column of stone near the tents.*"¹

The second monument seen by the expedition, that near Port Epworth, was much more imposing than Richardson's. Its site was a level platform about ten feet above the sea, on a low promontory that was almost severed from the mainland by bays on either side. The monument itself was an elongated, cone-shaped structure about four feet wide at the base and twelve feet high, neatly built of flattish slabs of limestone and sandstone, interspersed here and there with diabase and granite. Surmounting it was a stone cross formed by a single horizontal slab of limestone three feet in length, with a vertical slab, also of limestone, projecting rather less than a foot above

¹ Richardson, Sir John, *Arctic Searching Expedition*, London, 1851, Vol. I, p. 296.

THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

it. Altogether it made a very striking landmark, which could be seen from several miles off shore.

There can be no question of the Eskimos erecting such a monument, and the only travellers who had passed along this coast prior to 1915 were Franklin in 1821, Dease and Simpson in 1838 and 1839, Rae in 1849 and Hanbury in 1902. Hanbury need not be considered in this connection, because he was not in the habit of erecting landmarks along his route. In the narratives of the other explorers



Cairn of Sir John Richardson near Cape Krusenstern, N. W. Territories, erected August 30, 1848. (Photo by Dr. R. M. Anderson in 1915.)

the only mention of a monument on the south shore of Coronation gulf is an indirect statement by Simpson. In the description of his second journey with Dease in 1839 there is the following remark:—

“Emerging from the Coppermine on the 3rd of July, our first day’s progress was only five miles, the first week’s but twenty, and it was the 18th before we could attain Cape Barrow. Just as we had effected a landing through the ice, an enormous mass of rock fell, with a loud crash, from one of the opposite islands, several miles distant. I seized upon this otherwise trivial incident as a happy omen to rally the spirits of our Indian companions, which were depressed by an evil dream that had visited one of them. He saw, in his vision, flames issuing from the mouth of a *rude monumental figure of stones, erected by our people at a place where the ice detained us several days.* . . .”¹

¹ Simpson, Thomas, *Narrative of the Discoveries on the North Shore of America*, London, 1843. p. 354.

ANNUAL REPORT, 1923

It is strange that Simpson does not give the latitude and longitude of the place, as he does of three other monuments erected by his party farther east. But the silence of the other explorers, and the fact that this is the only landmark known to exist between the Coppermine river and cape Barrow, make it reasonably certain that Simpson's "monumental figure" is this striking cross, which has withstood unharmed the ravages of nearly a century.

A rather amusing corollary to this account may perhaps be of interest. When Dr. Anderson, with the geologist and topographers of his party, landed at this spot in the autumn of 1915, they left their record on a short board which they wedged in a crevice near the top of Simpson's pillar. In the February following, while travelling through the same region with a half-breed boy and one or two other companions, I camped in the vicinity of the monument, and was greatly elated to find so splendid a piece of firewood on this barren and desolate coast. The inscriptions, obscured by the encrusted snow, remained unnoticed, and this record of our comrades' visit, I regret to say, went to cook our evening meal. Its fate should be a warning to future travellers in the Arctic to make their monuments of something less valuable, and less perishable, than wood.
