

HMS Trincomalee supporting The Arctic Search 1854



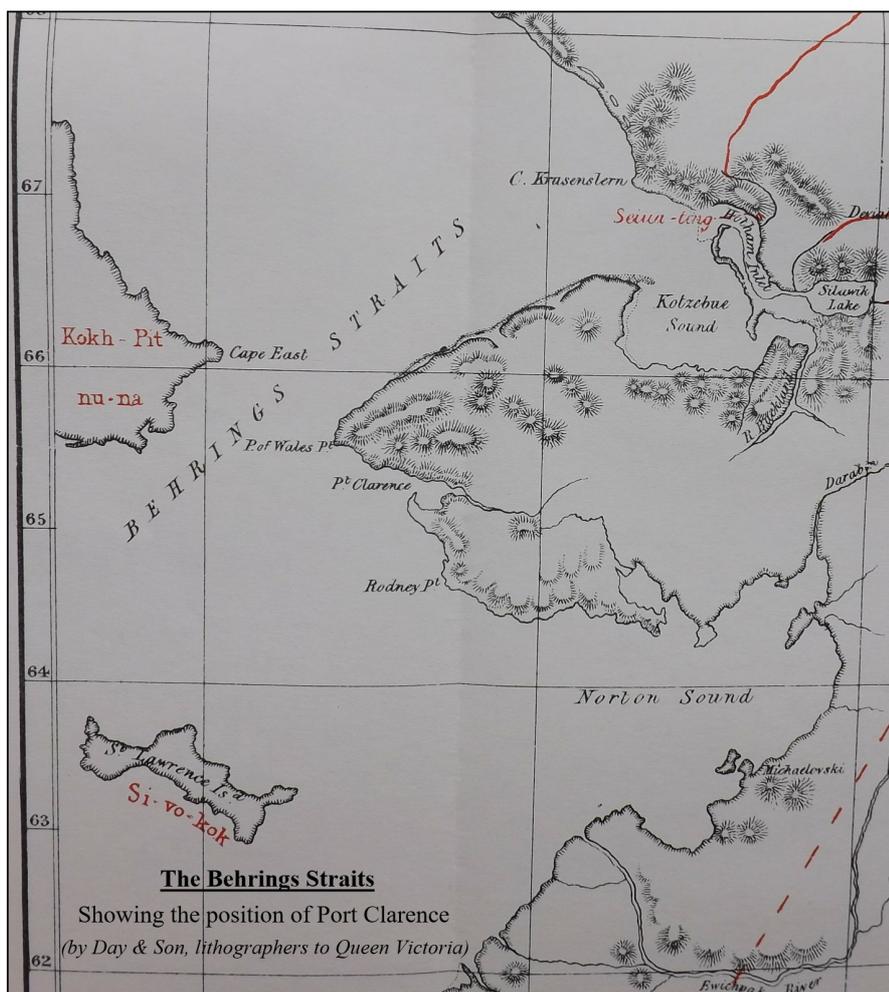
From The Morning Post, Thursday November 9 1854:

THE ARCTIC SEARCH

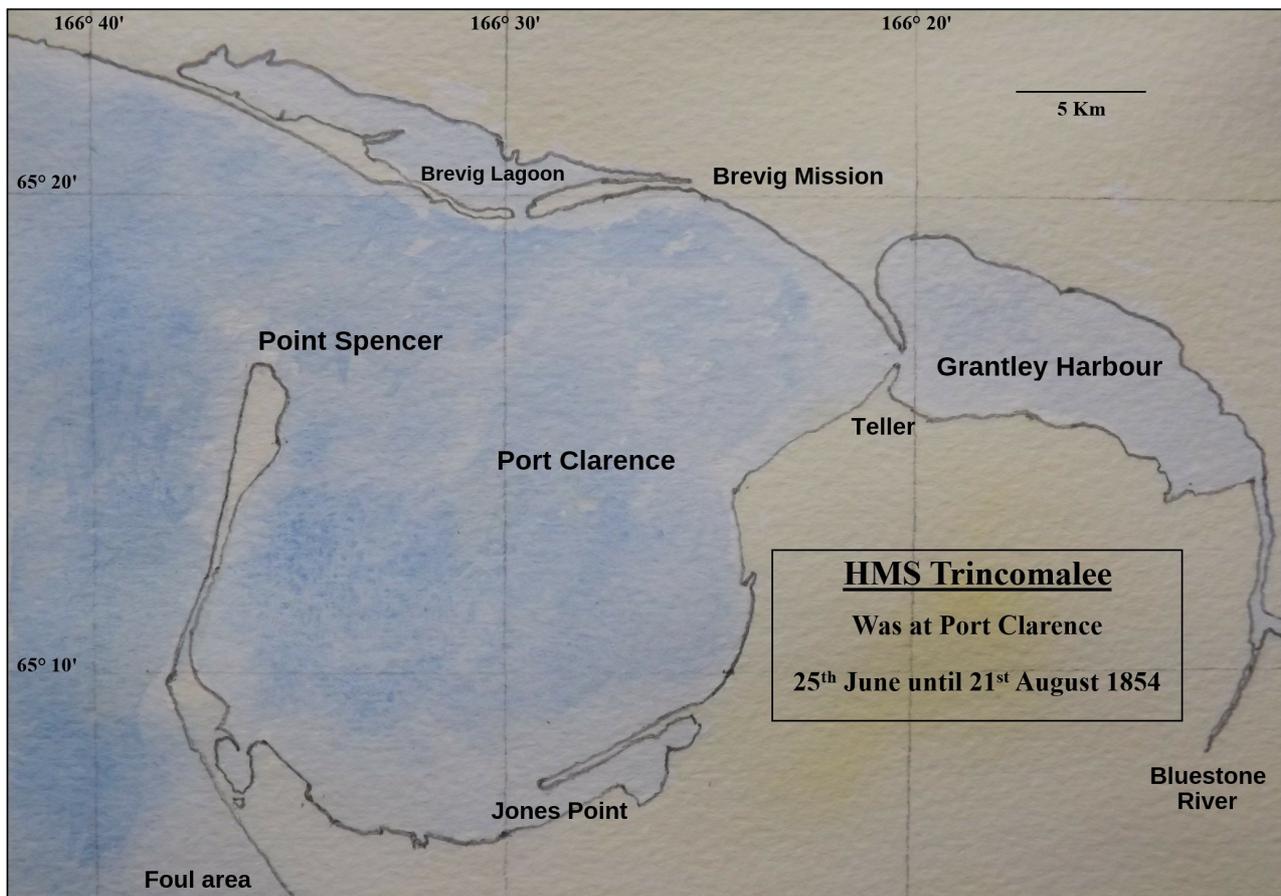
The following letter has been received at the Admiralty from Captain Houstoun,
R.N.:-

H.M.S. Trincomalee, San Francisco,
Sept. 20, 1854

SIR,- I have the honour to inform you that in obedience in the orders of my Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, directing the Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific to dispatch a sloop of his squadron to reach Port Clarence "at the opening of the season, viz. The 25th of June," her Majesty's ship under my command arrived in that port on that day. We found the Rattlesnake there, all well. Commander Trollope's arrangements for wintering in Port Clarence, instead of Grantley Harbour, had been most successful.



The four live cattle and 25 pigs, with vegetables (potatoes, onions and pumpkins), which we got at Honolulu, reached in the best condition. The fodder for the cattle being nearly expended, I recommended Commander Trollope to use them for his ship, reserving the pigs for the Plover; this was attended to.



The Rattlesnake made a trip to Port Spencer for a supply of drift wood for the house which their Lordships have directed to be built on the Spit of Grantley Harbour. On her return we gave her all the assistance she required, viz., watering her, making good her defects, and exchanging officers and men; and on the 15th of July she sailed hoping to be of some use in assisting the Plover.

On that day Mr. Kellard, our carpenter, with eight of his crew, and other artificers, landed to work at the house, during the absence of Mr. Oliver, the carpenter, and the artificers of the Rattlesnake.

On the 17th I started, accompanied by Mr. Norway, the master, and other officers, with our gig and second cutter and their crews, and a baidar with an Indian guide, to go up the river Age-e-puk and elsewhere, on a discovery and surveying trip. We were not fortunate, although away 14 days. We had such very bad weather that we did not get more than 50 miles from the ship, and whenever we particularly wanted the sun, it did not show. The sea which gets up in Grantley Harbour and also in the lake before you enter the river, is a very trying one for boats.

We observed in all directions coal. We were successful in our sport, so far as grouse, ptarmigan, and plover, but only saw two deer; we shot a few hares also. We returned to the Spit-house in the night of the 31st of July, and very early on the 1st were surprised and delighted at the arrival of the Plover (she had seen nothing of the Rattlesnake). Her commander, officers and men generally were in the best health; they had experienced the most severe winter, which was concluded by the ice entirely disappearing days before it usually commences even to move. I gave Commander Maguire a copy of their Lordships' orders. After due deliberation, he determined to return to Point Barrow for another winter. I concurred with him. It is undoubtably possible that the Enterprise may fall back on Point Barrow, we know that it is an open season thereabouts. It may be on the Atlantic side.

Commander Maguire and every one of the officers of the Plover were perfectly satisfied with the state of their ship as to her capability of returning; she makes no water, and although it is true she has some bad timbers, her 3½ inches of doubling is perfectly sound, as are her many strengthening pieces. We then commenced victualling and storing her, supplying the places of such men as were invalided or desirous of leaving, and making good her defects; these were entirely blacksmiths, and confined to the wear of her heating apparatus, funnels, forge, &c. The provisions we gave her were of the very best description, especially Hogarth's preserved meats, and the very superior bread made for H.M. Ships on this station by Mr. Walker, the contractor at Valparaiso. During all the time the Plover was at Port Clarence her crew were on fresh provisions, and they took away six very large hogs, with potatoes, onions, &c. It was not until Saturday, the 12th, that the Rattlesnake returned. I had been more than unusually anxious for her, for she had all the Plover's letters. I then arranged with Commanders Maguire and Trollope that Saturday, the 19th, should be the day of departure – that is, for the Trincomalee and Plover. I thought we could afford that time for writing letters and relaxation, and change, so necessary, especially for the Plover's crew, after their long isolation; and on that morning we both started. The wind was favourable for the Plover, and so it remained the next day, and I have every reason to think she made good progress, and I calculate that she would get into her winter quarters easier and earlier than in either of the preceding years.

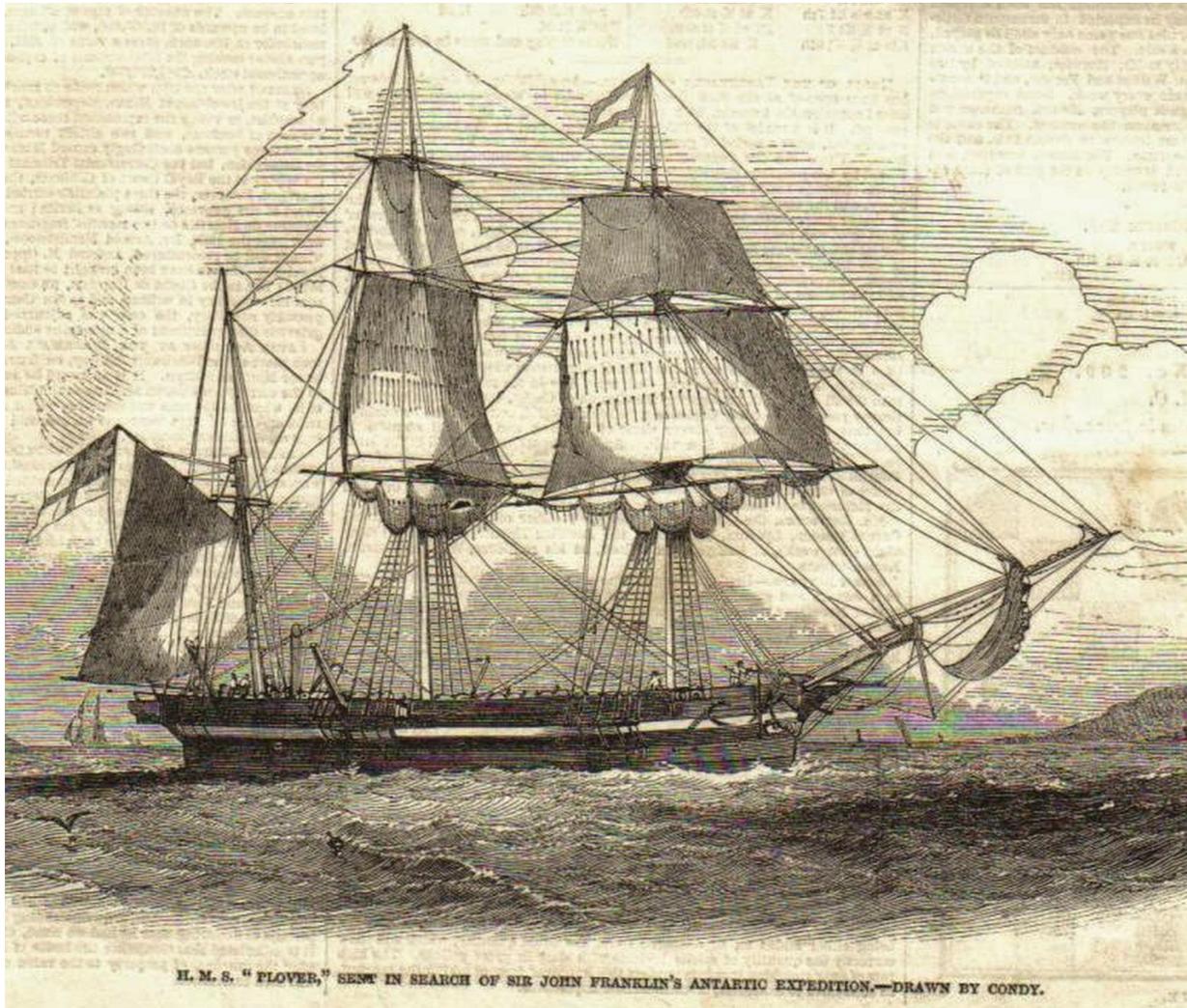
As the wind was contrary for us, after going a few miles down the bay, we anchored, getting away with a north-westerly wind early on the morning of the 21st., and arrived in this port on Monday, the 18th instant.

Lieut. Moore, invalided from the Rattlesnake, and Mr. Gordon, mate, returning home from the Plover, being desirous of getting to England with all dispatch, I have given them permission to go via Panama, and take advantage of their doing so to forward in their charge this letter and all the Arctic dispatches we have. Mr. Gordon's long service in the Plover in the Arctic Seas, especially the two last years, wintering at Port Barrow, have given him great opportunities of acquiring much valuable information and great experience, which he has not failed to profit by, and their Lordships may depend upon his opinions and statements. He has generally been an active participator in all extra and detached and difficult services. - I have the honour to be, sir, your most obedient servant,

(Signed) WALLACE HOUSTOUN, Captain.

The Journal of Rochfort Maguire

The journal kept by Rochfort Maguire, Commander of HMS Plover, mentions the meeting up with HMS Trincomalee at Port Clarence in 1854. The following extracts from this journal illustrate events at the time. HMS Plover passed Point Spencer at 11.30pm on Monday 21st July 1854.



"Tuesday August 1st (1854)

...at 1.45am anchored alongside H. M. Ship Trincomalee and soon afterwards went on board to wait on the Senior officer – who I found was away on a shooting excursion but expected back that day. I went down however to the senior Lieuts cabin who was confined to his bed from illness, and heard much information relative to the changes for the last twelve months. Amongst the most important of these was the discovery of the N.W. passage by Captain McClure in the Investigator, and the review of the fleet at Spithead by Her Majesty. War was not actually declared with Russia, but it seemed inevitable, and our fleet & army had been organised for Vigorous measures. ...

...I visited the Trincomalee again about 9.30. I found Captain Houstoun on board and was received by him, with much kindness. I had known him a little some years previously. I received my orders from him for the ensuing year & found it was left discretionary with me as to whether I returned again to Point Barrow for the winter or went to the Southward. Captain Houstoun determining previous to our doing the former, to have the Ship surveyed – And as I considered it was desirable for the Plover to return to the North. The survey on which Captain Houstoun placed himself was ordered for the next day ..

Wednesday August 2nd

... Captain Houstoun and the officers of H.M.S. Trincomalee came on board to survey the Ship, leaving again at noon ... On board the Trincomalee in the evening I heard from Captain Houstoun the decision of the surveying officers which was unfavourable to our proceeding to the North. But on my representing the favourable season we had for making the passage he consented to consider the thing over ...

Thursday August 3rd

... On going on board the Trincomalee this morning I found Captain Houstoun quite prepared to accede to my proposition of returning again to Point Barrow ...

Friday August 4th

A commencement was made in our preparation today for returning to Point Barrow – Captain Houstoun came on board to muster the Ship's Company and to offer to all those who wished to leave the Arctic regions, the option of doing so. Three seamen, one Steward an (invalid) and the Serjeant of Marines availed themselves of this offer, and their places will be taken by Volunteers from the Trincomalee. Our demands for provisions having been sent in and approved of – the Trincomalee commenced putting them on board, and our own boat was employed bringing on board coals from the Shore. ...

... on the spit between Port Clarence and Grantley harbour, there has been a fine & commodious house erected by Commander Trollope of the Rattlesnake, in compliance with orders from the Admiralty, it is constructed of driftwood which they have here in great abundance ... they have also in the vicinity quite a minature dock yards, with a black smith's shop, carpenters' sheds etc. etc.. And the Trincomalee having taken charge of the premises during the absence of the Rattlesnake, her boats were hauled up for repair, and the number of people employed about makes quite a busy and bustling scene, pleased to look on when contrasted with the slow moving Esquimaux encamped in the neighbourhood. The Trincomalee brought up a large supply of live stock including two bullocks and several pigs – the former were killed soon after arrival, & consumed by the Rattlesnake, but several of the latter were housed for our use on shore ...

Saturday August 5th

... I paid a visit to the Shore in company with Captain Houstoun, to inspect the house and the establishment on the spit. We found several Esquimaux lounging about the seamen of the Trincomalee who were at work at the boats ... The old decked boat of the Herald, called the Owen, left hauled up there two years ago, has been removed to the present establishment on the Spit, and forms a house for the carpenters of the Trincomalee now

working on the house to live in.

Friday August 18th

... At 9 pm I had finished my letters both public & private & went on board H.M.S. Trincomalee accompanied by Commander Trollope to deliver them, and take leave of our kind & Senior Officer Captain Houston – who was ready to receive us, and after remaining with him a short time we took our leave & returned on board.”



Scrimshaw depicting HMS Trincomalee at Port Clarence

**QD056: Originally appeared in the “Quarterdeck” magazine
Ref: 2017 Issue 1 (Spring) pages 4 to 10**