

First inland expedition between the Fraser River and Burrard Inlet

When the *Colony of British Columbia* was proclaimed on the 19th November 1858, few Europeans had set foot beyond the Fraser River delta. The first inland expedition between the Fraser River and Burrard Inlet took place, in part, up the Brunette River to Burnaby Lake and along a three-mile stretch of Still Creek. The expedition served to determine the closest approach between Queensborough (New Westminster) and Burrard Inlet, as well as the most suitable overland route from Queensborough to Burrard Inlet. Documentation of this journey is outlined in the letter below from Lt. G.S. Blake, R.M.A. (Royal Marine Artillery), to Colonel R.C. Moody, R.E.:

Royal Marine Camp, Queenborough [*sic.*— this was the spelling of the day]
25 April, 1859

To His Excellency
Colonel Moody
Commanding
Royal Engineers

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that according to your order, I proceeded last Monday [18th April 1859] in charge of an exploration expedition consisting of Captain [George] Bazalgette, R.M. [Royal Marine], one Private, R.M., and three Indians with rations for five days for the purpose of ascertaining the relative position of Burrard Inlet with regard to Queenborough [*sic.*].

The route I pursued for the purpose of affecting this was by the small River Brunette to Burnaby Lake, making the latter my Head Quarters.

The distance from Queenborough to the lake [Burnaby Lake] I ascertained to be by the River [Brunette River] about 6 miles [9.6 km]. The river is exceedingly tortuous in its course, and its stage at the time that I proceeded up it was very low, but perfectly navigable for small canoes; the portages, owing to the fallen timber, are numerous; but these obstacles might easily be removed.

The Lake is two miles and a half in length [4 km] by one in breadth [1.6 km] and the deepest part that I could find, I sounded at two fathoms [12 ft. = 3.6 metres], its entire shores are also very swampy — its bearing is N.70 W. from where the Brunette running to the Fraser flows out of it — and is about N.70 W. of Queenborough. On the second day I despatched [*sic.*] Captain Bazalgette, R.M., to reconnoiter the head of the lake [Burnaby Lake] and he discovered a river [Still Creek] which he followed-up on a Westerly course for 3 miles [4.8 km].

This river [Still Creek] runs into a lake [Burnaby Lake] but with an almost imperceptible motion, it is also much deeper than any other part of the latter that I sounded. Its average depth being three fathoms [18 ft. = 5.5 metres], it also winds in small turns of every fifty or sixty yards [45–55 metres] but its general bearing is West, its shores are swampy and covered with alder, its general appearance might be likened to a Canal.

On the same day [19th April 1859] I started with an Indian and two days provisions and took a course due North from the eastern point of the lake over a Mountain [Burnaby Mountain] 600 feet [183 metres] above the level of the sea — covered with dense forest — on reaching the summit I found Burrard's Inlet to be immediately beneath it on the opposite side branching-off into two arms the Southern-most one of which bore to the eastward [Port Moody Arm] and appeared to terminate within a short distance. The Northern most one [Indian Arm] hugging the base of the opposite high range of mountains was shut-out from any observation. The mountain [Burnaby Mountain] I ascended had an exceedingly steep descent to the Northward the breadth of the inlet was at the broadest part two miles [3.2 km]: observing on this occasion that the mountain a short distance from where I had crossed it terminated abruptly to the Eastward and that a comparatively cleared valley about a mile in width [1.6 km] skirted it in the direction of the Inlet [Burrard Inlet], I devoted my third day to endeavouring to find out the nearest and most direct point from the latter to Queenborough and by returning about a mile and a quarter [2 km] down the river Brunette from the Lake [Burnaby Lake], I entered the valley and found it lead over a perfectly level and nearly

cleared country direct to the termination of the Southernmost branch of the inlet [Port Moody Arm] the distance from River [Brunette River] to the latter being about two and a half miles [4 km] and I compute the distance that exists between that part of the river [Brunette River] and Queenborough to be about three miles [4.8 km] in a direct line this would make the nearest point of the Inlet [Burrard Inlet] five and a half miles [8.8 km] from Queenborough.

On the fourth day I tried to get up the River [Still Creek] at the head of the Lake [Burnaby Lake] further than Captain Bazalgette had been but after three miles [4.8 km] the snags were so numerous from the fallen trees that I found the labour of getting the canoe over too great to proceed much further than he had already been, the depth of the River [Still Creek] continued the same at this point — it also flows through a perfectly unbroken valley which heads due West to Burrard Inlet. From the head of the Lake [Burnaby Lake] and the distance across the former I should say to be about eight miles [12.9 km].

I have the Honour to be,
Sir,
Your Most Obedient Servant,

G.S. Blake
Lt., R.M.A. [Royal Marine Artillery]

Captain George Bazalgette, R.M.L.I. (Royal Marine Light Infantry)

On November 27th, 1858, Captain Bazalgette, six officers (Captain Thomas Magin, Lieutenants; G.L. Owen, R.P. Henry, G.L. Blake, E.C. Sparshott, and H.T.M. Cooper), and 80 men were transferred to British Columbia. They made the voyage in the *HMS Tribune* under the command of Geoffrey Phipps Hornby. The men of the BC contingent were all volunteers probably lured to the colonies for the extra colonial pay. The trip to BC was a disaster. It took 33 days just to reach Nagasaki Japan, where they spend 17 days refitting. Another six weeks were required to cross the Pacific and arrive at Esquimalt Harbour.

Upon arrival the Marines were moved to land bases and assigned duties under the direction of Colonel R.C. Moody of the Royal Engineers.

In the colonies the Marines assumed the duty of guarding the road building activities, training the militia, and garrisoning San Juan Island.

Having arrived in British Columbia with the Volunteer Marines from China, Captain Bazalgette, through Major Magin RMLI, was the commander of the Marine Detachment, they both found himself under the overall command of Colonel R.C. Moody, commanding the RE *Columbia Detachment*. Colonel Moody, as Commander of Land Forces, initially used the RMLI officers in the Colony for reconnaissance missions. Bazalgette was sent-out with a Royal Marine Artillery Officer, Lt. Blake, who also worked as Moody's *Aide-de-camp* until the official arrival of the *Columbia Detachment*.



Captain George Bazalgette, RMLI
(BCA B-00934)