

SCOTS heritage

Words Peter Ranscombe

The wanderer

HAVING BEEN REJECTED TO LEAD AN EXPEDITION TO AFRICA, ROYAL NAVY OFFICER CAPTAIN JOHN DUNDAS COCHRANE WALKED FROM FRANCE TO SIBERIA IN THE 1820s, FINDING LOVE AND ADVENTURE ALONG THE WAY

On the road between St Petersburg and Moscow, a Scottish naval officer sat down on a milestone to have a smoke. His name was Captain John Dundas Cochrane and his mammoth journey on foot from Dieppe in France through Europe and Siberia to Okhotsk in Eastern Russia was about to take a turn for the worse.

As Cochrane lit up his tobacco, he was suddenly grabbed from behind by a pair of robbers, one brandishing an iron bar while the other wielded a musket, complete with a sharp bayonet. He was forced off the road and into the forest, where his assailants made him strip off his clothes before tying him to a tree. As the thieves rifled through his possessions, Cochrane feared the musket was about to be brought into play to cut short his epic journey and end his life.

Cochrane was no stranger to tough scrapes. Born in 1793, he was the grandson of Thomas Cochrane, the 8th Earl of Dundonald, and the illegitimate son of Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone, who was thrown out of the House of Commons for his part in the 1814 stock market fraud.

Pictured: Cochrane returns from his epic Russian trek.

At the age of ten, Cochrane followed the family tradition of entering the navy and served aboard men-o'-war for the next ten years.

Sailing in the navy prepared Cochrane for the adventures that were to come. Like many of his fellow seamen, he was left without a posting once the Napoleonic Wars had ended and so he applied to the Admiralty to lead an expedition to Africa to search



Right - Image courtesy of Look and Learn.



for the source of the Niger River.

After his application was turned down – and with no sign of a further naval commission on the horizon – Cochrane set out on his own journey in 1820, aiming to walk across Europe and Asia and then traverse the Bering Strait into America.

His walk led him along hundreds of miles from Dieppe in France, through the German states and Eastern Europe and into Russia. With permission secured from Tsar Alexander II, he had been planning to reach the furthestmost eastern and northern extremities of the Russian Empire – when his journey was brought to an abrupt halt in the forest.

Yet Cochrane's fears for his life were eased after his assailants fed him with black bread and gave him rum to drink before finally abandoning him tied to the tree. A local boy heard his calls for help and freed him, leaving Cochrane to survey the possessions that the thieves had left behind.

After taking his trousers, shirts, stockings and shoes – along with his spectacles, watch, compass, thermometer, pocket sextant and 160 roubles – the robbers had left him with just a jacket and two flannel waistcoats. Cochrane's Scots heritage kicked

in and he fashioned a kilt for himself.

'I made "forward" the order of the day; having first with the remnant of my apparel rigged my-

self à l'Ecossoise, I resumed my route,' Cochrane recounted in his *A Pedestrian Journey Through Russia And Siberian Tartary To The Frontiers of China, The Frozen Sea And Kamchatka*, which is now freely

available on the internet.

'I had still left me a blue jacket, a flannel waistcoat, and a spare one, which I tied round my waist in such a manner that it reached down to the knees:

my empty knapsack was restored to its old place, and I trotted on with even a merry heart.'

Cochrane came across a group of soldiers, who provided him with food. But he refused offers of clothing, instead preferring to continue on his journey. The soldiers'

General put him in a carriage to take him to the nearest railway station but, after a few miles, Cochrane found it uncomfortably cold and so opted to walk instead. His journey took him to Novgorod, where the governor gave him a shirt and trousers before feeding him.

Yet being robbed and tied to a tree wasn't the only drama to affect Cochrane on his travels.

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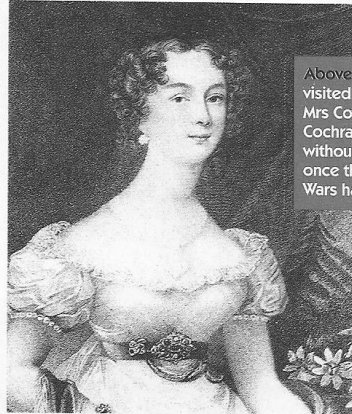
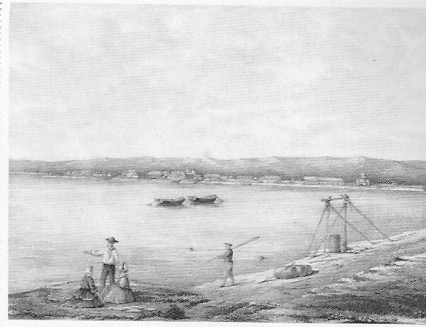
Left: Captain John Dundas Cochrane in his uniform.
Right: Tsar Alexander II granted Cochrane permission to travel through Russia.

'Just before he was robbed, Cochrane had bumped into one of his father's former slaves on his journey,' explains novelist Andrew Drummond, who featured the captain as one of the characters in his novel *Novgorod*. 'Later, when he'd finally got across to the eastern side of Siberia, he and his guides fell into a frozen river and, after they'd hauled themselves out, they decided to light a fire, but set the forest alight. So there they were with their frozen limbs, trying desperately to put out a forest fire.'

While much of Cochrane's thousands of miles were covered on foot, he did resort to riding on horseback after crossing the Urals and being confronted with deep snow. With a Cossack and a local guide assigned to him by a governor of one of the Russian regions, he continued his journey across Siberia, making him the first European man to cross many large swathes of the vast and remote area.

His travels eventually took him to Okhotsk in 1821, from where he caught a boat ride to the remote peninsula of Kamchatka, which lies to the north of Japan. He spent 11 months exploring the area and fell in love with Ksenia Ivanovna Logino-va, a 15-year-old girl who was raised in the household of Pyotr Ivanovich Rikord, the governor.

Cochrane and Ksenia were married before he took his young bride all the way back across Russia and Europe to London in 1823, making most of the return journey on horseback. Ksenia is only ever referred to as 'Mrs Cochrane' in the explorer's book, but Drummond was able to



Above: Cochrane visited Okhotsk. Left: Mrs Cochrane. Below: Cochrane was left without a posting once the Napoleonic Wars had ended.





identify her using records from Kamchatka.

Cochrane settled down to write his memoirs in two volumes but – despite his travelogue turning into a love story after meeting Ksenia – travelling was still in his blood because he then ventured to South America on his own in 1824. He returned to London a year later, when he published a third edition of his *Pedestrian Journey*, complete with a new preface in which he enters into a fierce argument with the *Quarterly Review*, a journal that had published a review of his book in his absence.

Leaving Ksenia behind again, Cochrane returned to South America to work in the mining industry, but he contracted fever shortly after arriving on the continent and died in Columbia in 1825. Ksenia returned to Russia, where she later married Arctic explorer Pyotr Anjou.

For Drummond, part of the attraction of writing about Cochrane was his heritage.

'He comes from this enormous family of extraordinary Cochrane,' he says. 'There was his cousin, Admiral Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald, who was a British naval hero but was then disgraced during the Great Stock Exchange Fraud of 1814 along with John Dundas's father, Andrew

Cochrane-Johnstone. The other Cochrane I love is John's cousin, Charles Stuart Cochrane, who spent time with Simon Bolivar in South America. A wholly remarkable family.'

While Cochrane's adventures may not be taught

in schools alongside those of missionary David Livingstone and other famous Scottish explorers, Drummond thinks the captain's tales are worthy of attention.

'He was quite extraordinary,' says Drummond. 'What really struck me was all these adventures were treated as being

normal by John.

There was no sense of great excitement about it, he just seemed to say that these are the kind of things that happen to you when you're an explorer. He absolutely did not make a fuss about anything at all.

'He didn't actually uncover a land that nobody knew

about before, but he deserves more publicity because of the character he was,' argues Drummond. 'After being turned down to lead an expedition to Africa, he turned round and walked across Russia instead. You've got to admire him for that.'

After being turned down to lead an expedition to Africa, he turned round and said he would walk across Russia and America instead

Above: The governor of Novgorod gave Cochrane a shirt and trousers after he was mugged in a forest outside the Russian city.