

Captain John Palliser

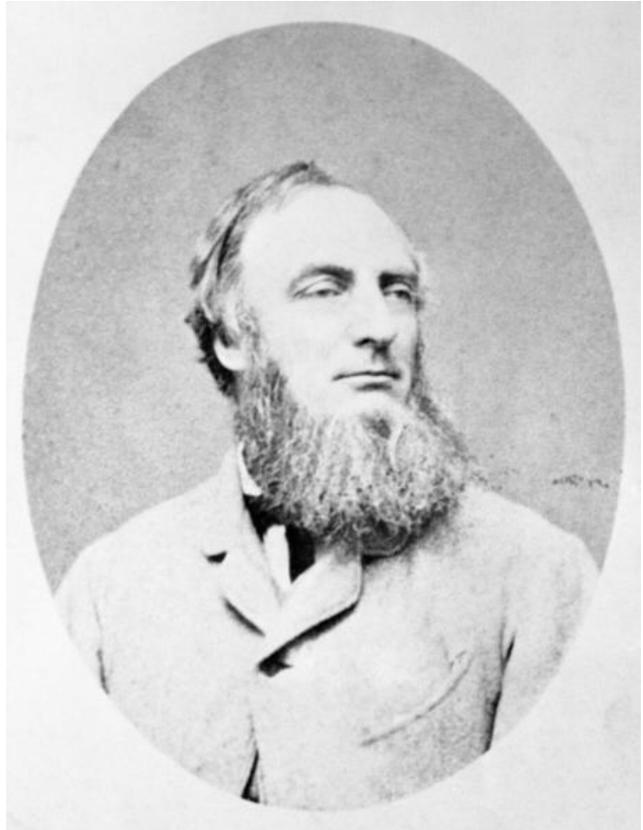
Where could a gentleman with a love of adventure satisfy his curiosity in the mid-1800s? Why, Western Canada!

Captain John Palliser, geographer and civil servant, discerned that a keen interest in travel and hunting could be supported by scientific study. So, in 1856, Palliser proposed that he mount an expedition to explore the southern prairies.

Palliser's timing was perfect. Because there was concern about the West becoming American, the British Royal Society offered Palliser £5,000 if he would provide an objective report on the West's potential for agriculture and settlement.

Palliser's conclusions proved both right and wrong. He did see that the fescue grasslands were subject to drought. He did not believe that a railroad could be built across the country. He forecasted the decline of the buffalo and the drastic consequences for the First Nations people.

Ultimately, Palliser is best known for his description of Palliser's Triangle, a stretch of southern prairie that drought calls home.



Captain John Palliser
Glenbow Archives NB-29-1

The Palliser Expedition

The Palliser Expedition's mandate was to map the West, recording details of flora, fauna, geology, and climate. But because he was more adventurer than scientist, Captain John Palliser was accompanied by four scientific experts.

Dr. James Hector was a medical graduate who acted as geologist and naturalist. John William Sullivan was a schoolteacher who served as astronomical observer and secretary. Eugene Bourgeau was a botanist who collected field specimens. Lieutenant Thomas Blakiston made magnetic observations.

Together they contributed to the expedition's data and to Palliser's report. Although their work took a long time to complete, the expedition met its objectives. The report would later serve as a guide for other officials, immigration agents and railroad builders, including Sir Sandford Fleming (who surveyed the route for the Canadian Pacific Railway) and the newly minted North-West Mounted Police on their trek west.

Born: January 29, 1817 – Died: August 18, 1887

Additional Resources

- **Dictionary of Canadian Biography**
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/palliser_john_11E.html

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>