

Why Canada and New Zealand venerate our unsung Victorian adventurer

by Jonathan Brocklebank

THE frightened horse's kick was so powerful that poor James Hector was sent sprawling into the rapids of the river below. His fellow explorers dragged him out and spent hours waiting in the uncharted mountain pass for signs of life.

When none came they assumed the blow to the chest must have killed the young Scot, so they dug a shallow grave and laid him to rest.

But just as they were about to shovel the soil over him, 23-year-old Hector regained consciousness and gave a wink - his eyelids being the only part of his body he could move.

Almost 150 years later, Kicking Horse Pass in the Canadian Rockies is home to one of the country's key railways, while Kicking Horse River is one of the world's top white water rafting destinations. And it is not too far from Hector Mount and Hector Lake.

But while the exploits of the Scottish geologist turned explorer are immortalised in Canada and even in New Zealand, in Scotland few have a clue who Sir James Hector was.

Even the Royal Society of Edinburgh, where Sir James was a fellow, seems hazy about him. 'We have the bare facts of his life,' said Stuart Brown after looking him up. 'But there is nothing here to celebrate his achievements.'

A century after his death, that could be about to change. A 30lb boulder from Kicking Horse Pass recently began an 8,000-mile journey to Wellington where it will go on display at the New Zealand National Museum - which was founded by Sir James Hector.

And Scotland has been offered its own Kicking Horse Pass boulder in memory of the explorer his home country has singularly failed to recognise.

A permanent display for Sir James is also being planned on completion of refurbishment at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

FOR years, however, Hector's family were astonished at how little recognition Scotland paid to a native son whose achievements in science and exploration made him a household name overseas.

His great-grandson, Peter Hector, recently met Canada's High Commissioner, Dr Penny Reedie, in New Zealand to finalise details of getting the boulder to New Zealand to mark the 100th anniversary today of Sir James's death on November 6, 1907.

He said: 'We are all very proud of my great-grandfather. When family members visited Canada, we were treated like royalty.'

'New Zealand is finally giving him the recognition he deserves. But when I wrote to people in Scotland asking for help in putting together his biography, no one replied.'

James Hector was born in Edinburgh to a middle-class family, which was friendly with author Sir Walter Scott.

At 14, young James started working in his father's law office as an actuary but his real passion was for geology. During his teens he walked all over the country, as far afield as Staffa and Ben Hope in Sutherland, studying rock formations.

But medicine was the only university route into a scientific career. So Hector attended Edinburgh University and graduated as a doctor, working at one point with chloroform pioneer James Young Simpson.

However, a year after he finished his degree an opportunity for adventure presented itself.

Sir Rodérick Murchison, director-general of the Geologi-



The hero Scot of Kicking Horse Pass



Stamina: Sir James Hector

berries until James shot grouse and caught fish.' Two years later, the explorer returned to Britain where he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. But before long he got a job in New Zealand on the promise of 'more adventure'.

He spent three years exploring gold country in Otago province and the rest of his life in the country where he was recognised as one of its most eminent scientists.

He married Georgiana Monro, daughter of the Speaker of the New Zealand parliament, and together they had nine children.

Great-grandson Peter added: 'He was a man of huge influence but he was rather forceful and could upset some people.'

The New Zealand Herald called him 'the irascible Scotsman with the passion for accuracy'.

It was his passion for science and the natural world which led him to found New Zealand's first national museum. He also became Chancellor of New Zealand University and in 1886 was knighted by Queen Victoria.

A catalogue of tributes to Sir James is planned to mark today's 100th anniversary of his death at the age of 73, including the opening of a historic park at the site of his former home, Ratanui.

AND in Golden, the nearest town to Kicking Horse pass, Mayor Jim Doyle said: 'This is a wonderful story and I am excited to help. The people of Canada and New Zealand are in the debt of this Scotsman.'

'If the Edinburgh museum wants a Kicking Horse boulder for its new exhibit, I will be delighted to help.'

But Sir James Hector's story ends unhappily. Forty five years after the drama which gave Kicking Horse Pass its name, Sir James accepted an invitation from the Canadian Pacific railroad to revisit the scene.

He travelled with his 26-year-old son Douglas. But during their trip Douglas came down with appendicitis and died.

'My great-grandfather returned to New Zealand a shattered man,' said Peter Hector.

He died four years later.



M&S Car Insurance

A move in the right direction

- UK and European Breakdown Cover as standard, covering you not the car
- Guaranteed car hire for up to 14 days after an accident, fire or theft
- Keycare, giving you up to £1,000 towards new keys, locks and locksmith services
- £100,000 Motor Legal Protection cover to help you claim for any uninsured loss

For Car Insurance that gives you a bit more M&S, visit www.marksandspencer.com/carinsurance

Or call **0800 107 1796**

Lines are open 8am - 9pm Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm Saturday

YOUR M&S

The 10% online discount applies to standard premiums, and does not apply to discounted premiums that may occasionally be available through other channels. Marks and Spencer Financial Services plc, a wholly owned subsidiary of HSBC Bank plc. Registered in England No. 1772585. Registered Office: Kings Meadow, Chester CH99 9PB. Authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Terms, conditions, exclusions and limitations apply and a copy of the full policy wording and complaints procedure is available on request. Our calls are recorded. Marks & Spencer, Marks & Spencer Money and Your M&S are registered trademarks of Marks and Spencer plc and are used under licence. © Marks and Spencer Financial Services plc 2007. All rights reserved. AC7915