The expedition now ventured onto the Arctic Ocean, this time in strong boats provisioned for three months instead of, as previously, in birchbark canoes with inadequate supplies. The contrast to 1821 must have felt profound to all who had partaken in that disastrous journey. Sails helped push *Lion* and *Reliance*, with Franklin and Back respectively as skippers, along the winding braided western channel of the Mackenzie River. Usually the men slept under an awning of sails in or near the boats; the officers occupied tents and always posted a sentry. Whenever they came to a prominent point, Franklin left a visible hoard of gifts. On midstream islands they observed lobsticks - Eskimo signals made of trees with the lower branches lopped off leaving only a bushy tuft on top. Soon they were shrouded in fog, which typically clings to the Arctic coast. Whenever they lit a fire ashore to warm a brew of pemmican, the permafrost under the fire thawed creating a muddy morass.

On 7 July *Lion* and *Reliance* passed a large Eskimo camp situated on an island, but because the water was so shallow they had to stand a mile offshore. Augustus shouted greetings to the Eskimos in their own language, which is common across the Arctic. Three old chiefs launched kayaks, paddled out towards the boats, and stopped within speaking distance.

The Eskimos first asked if the visitors were friends. Augustus reassured them they were, and invited them repeatedly to come closer so as to accept presents. He explained that the White Men’s purpose was to discover if the channel was deep enough for the passage of large ships, which would bring to the Eskimos all sorts of gifts. At this news the three chiefs whooped with joy and offered to barter their knives, and also the ornaments piercing their cheeks and encircling their arms.

The river was soon alive with a flotilla approaching from every direction. Franklin stopped counting after seventy-three kayaks and five umiaks (larger boats holding six to eight women each, plus children). Their occupants crowded round the boats offering to barter their bows and arrows, and spears, which had so far remained hidden in their kayaks.
During the ensuing pandemonium Franklin and Back enquired about the coastline ahead, but with exciting trade afoot the Eskimos were in no mood for such mundane discussion.

The atmosphere was becoming fraught among the growing crowd of Eskimos, who now completely surrounded the expedition boats. The tide was ebbing, and Franklin ordered his men to put to sea so they could escape if necessary. At which point *Lion* ran aground on a sandbar, so Back passed a rope from *Reliance* to pull her off. The Eskimos helped drag her free but warned the officers that the whole bay was equally shallow.

During this manoeuvre one of *Lion*’s oars accidentally upset an Eskimo paddler, who fell headfirst into the mud and nearly drowned. The crew quickly pulled him out and put him into their own boat while they emptied the water out of his kayak. Augustus noticed him shivering with cold, so wrapped him in his own greatcoat. Realizing that *Lion* was full of trade goods, the Eskimo demanded everything he laid eyes on, and became angry when refused. Franklin ordered all gear to be stowed out of sight, including a furled Union Jack, which the man evidently fancied. Meanwhile one of *Lion*’s crew reported that the Eskimo was hiding under his shirt a pistol stolen from Back. Having been detected, the Eskimo jumped into the water, taking with him Augustus’ greatcoat and the pistol.

The tide was ebbing fast and several young Eskimo men waded out in the now knee-deep water. They surrounded the boats and stole anything they could grab, even trying to cut buttons off the sailors’ uniforms. Franklin ordered ashore two chiefs who were sitting in *Lion*, on the pretext that the expedition had to leave in order to meet a ship which would return with many more goods for barter. At first the chiefs seemed pleased and invited the officers to land so as to carry on further business. They then jumped out of the boat and ran up the beach to tell their companions about possible forthcoming riches.

Once free of the shoal, the sailors dragged *Reliance* and *Lion* towards the
beach. Three large Eskimos jumped on board *Lion*; one sat on either side of Franklin, a third in front of him. They seized Franklin’s wrists and pinned his arms so he could reach neither his gun nor his dagger. Many of their armed fellows surrounded the two boats and pilfered anything they could find, handing the loot back to women on the beach. Back and his crew on *Reliance* tried amicably to stop them but were overpowered by greater numbers. One chief drove away the marauders, who cut the anchor buttons off Franklin’s waistcoat and carried off his writing desk and a cloak.

Meanwhile *Lion*’s crew sat on the canvas cargo cover and beat off with their rifle butts the prying hands of Eskimos, who this treatment barely bothered. Franklin, released from bondage, went ashore with Augustus to try to calm the situation. But Duncan, the coxswain, recalled his boss when a horde of knife-brandishing Eskimos renewed stealing from *Lion*, passing trophies back to their companions. Duncan tied the box of astronomical instruments to his leg so, if the Eskimos wanted them, they would have to drag him away too. Franklin was worried lest they lose the oars or masts, guns, ammunition and knives - any of which would be disastrous to their onward journey. Finally several Eskimos jumped aboard and tried to disarm the crew. Back persuaded the chief to drive the intruders off *Reliance* and to go to Franklin’s aid on *Lion*. (pp. 185-187)...The Eskimos were about to seize Franklin’s gun, when Back ordered his crew to take aim. The intruders panicked, fled up the beach, and hid behind a pile of driftwood. This afforded both crews an opportunity to refloat the boats and row away. Despite this prolonged standoff, and the duress of it, the British officers remained restrained and did not fire a shot. Had they done so the Eskimos would eventually have overwhelmed, and undoubtedly slaughtered, all of the party.

The Eskimos meanwhile jumped into their kayaks in pursuit, but backpaddled when Augustus shouted to them that Franklin would shoot the first man who came within range. During this fracas, which lasted well into the evening, the Eskimos took the mess canteen, kettles, a tent, blankets, and shoes, and the jib sails, as well as some gifts, which they would have received anyway. The
chief, having returned the stolen writing desk and cloak, returned and sat on Back’s knees repeating to his fellow Eskimos the warning ‘Tiara (peace)’.

A quarter mile beyond the point the boats grounded again. In case of another attack, the crew lashed the gunwales together side-by-side and sat, guns cocked, waiting to be refloated by the rising tide. Some Eskimos came down to the beach and invited Augustus ashore for a discussion. He accepted, but chided them for their bad behaviour and warned them that the British crew would fire if they were attacked again - and next time their guns would kill. Franklin ordered the Eskimos to return the large kettle and the tent as a show of goodwill. This done, Augustus joined them in some wild dancing and singing. But several valuable stolen articles were still missing, particularly a kettle of gum, which was badly needed to repair boats along the treeless coast.

A few crewmen went ashore to build a fire and make hot chocolate, which they offered to some curious Eskimos, who promptly spat it out. By midnight a rising tide refloated the boats so the men could haul them to a safe spot six miles along the beach. The officers posted watch while the exhausted men slept till nearly midday. Then they began repairing sails and rigging damaged in the ruckus. Back noticed ‘the horizon darkened by canoes’ of another band of Eskimos paddling towards them, so he ordered the boats to be launched into the comparatively safety of deep water.

The leading kayaker held out the kettle, and called out that, in exchange for gifts, he would return these and other stolen goods following behind with the women. Not trusting the Eskimos, Franklin told Augustus to order them to stay away. But they came on regardless, so Franklin fired a warning shot across the bow of the leading kayak, whereupon they all turned round and returned to their camp. Thus ended an anxious day - perhaps the most eventful of the whole expedition - of which Augustus was the undisputed hero. (pp. 188-189)