The Arctic Medal 1875-1876 is the second medal in the British series of awards for polar exploration. Awarded to only two expeditions, it represented a renewal of British interest in arctic exploration after a near-20 year absence from the field.

British involvement in arctic exploration in the early nineteenth century had culminated with the disastrous Belcher expedition of 1852, in which the ships Assistance, Intrepid, Pioneer, Investigator, and Resolute had to be abandoned in the ice. After this staggering loss, England was understandably reluctant to consider further expenditure in the arctic regions. Time and pride have a way of changing opinions. During the nearly 20 years England had withdrawn from the arctic, successful expeditions had been carried out by Austria, Germany, and the United States. These expeditions were an affront to the prestige of England, who until that time had been foremost in arctic exploration. British unwillingness to take a back seat to other countries is evident in a letter from Benjamin Disraeli, dated 17 November 1874, which states "Her Majesty's Government has determined to lose no time in organizing a suitable expedition to explore the region of the North Pole." This resurgence of interest in the arctic was to give rise to the Nares Expedition of 1875-1876 and the Young Expedition of 1876.

Nares Expedition of 1875-1876:
On 15 April 1875 two ships, HMS Alert, a steam sloop of 751 tons burden and 100 horsepower, and HMS Discovery (formerly Bloodhound, a steam whaler out of Dundee) of 556 tons burden and 96 horsepower, were commissioned for the Arctic Expedition of 1875-1876 to be commanded by Captain George S. Nares.

The expedition departed Portsmouth Harbor on 29 May 1875. The ships were accompanied by Valorous, a store-ship carrying extra supplies, which were transferred upon arrival at Disco Harbor, Greenland, on 6 July. Immediately prior to departure on 17 July, 24 Greenland sled dogs were loaded, provided by the Danish Government.

At 1:30 AM on 24 July the ships ran into the first of the intermittent pack ice that was to be with them for the duration of the voyage. Emergency supplies were cached at Cape Isabella, Cape Morton, and Cape Schott, as the ships worked their way north between Greenland and Ellesmere Island. Discovery was found to be the better suited ship for ice navigation, due to her more pointed bows and narrower beam, on several occasions having to extract the blunt nosed Alert from the ice.

On 25 August the ships reached Lady Franklin Sound, where in a protected area Discovery was prepared to winter over. Lt. Wyatt Rawson, and 6 men to form an additional sledger party, were transferred to Alert, which continued north through the Robeson Channel into the Arctic Ocean. On 16 September the polar ice cap was encountered, barring further progress north. To this time the theory of an ice-free Arctic Ocean had been in favor. Following the coast of Ellesmere Island west, Alert put in for the winter at Floeberg.
HMS DISCOVERY BEING PREPARED TO WINTER OVER IN LADY FRANKLIN SOUND.
HMS ALERT IN BACKGROUND.
Beach, Latitude 82°27' North. This was the farthest north achieved by ship to this time.

The weeks preceding winter were used by the crews of both ships to set up supply depots for the next year's expeditions. One depot laying expedition lead by Captain Markham of Alert departed the ship on 24 September and returned on 14 October. On the 24 men on the journey, 8 were severely frost-bitten, of whom 3 required amputation.

With the coming of arctic winter activities were held to a minimum, and those carried out were very close to the relative safety of the ships. The temperature reached 73.7° below zero during the 1875-1876 winter. Most of the time was spent in preparation for the sledging journeys of the coming spring.

Spring sledging began on 3 April 1876 with the departure from Alert of the Northern Party under Captain Markham and Lieutenant Parr. Equipped with two boats mounted on sledges, and rations for 70 days, they were to force their way north over the ice cap to the North Pole, if possible. A Western Party departed at the same time; under Lieutenant Aldrich they were to explore the coast of Ellesmere Island as far as possible. From Discovery the Greenland Party, commanded by Lieutenant Beaumont, was to cross the frozen surface of Robeson Channel and explore north along the Greenland coast. A Western Party, under Lieutenant Archer was to explore inland along Lady Franklin Sound and Archer Fjord as far as possible. By 23 April all parties had departed; the ships were occupied by only a few officers and invalids in their care.

On 3 May some of the early returning support parties reached the ships with symptoms of scurvy. This was alarming, because if these shorter journeys were affected, the longer journeys would be in very great danger. On 8 June Lieutenant Parr from the Northern Party returned to Alert with word that nearly the entire Northern Party was incapacitated. The party had been able to penetrate to 83°20' North before being forced back because of illness within the party. Captain Markham and Lieutenant Parr, assisted by the few men who could walk, had brought the invalids as far as Cape Henry, some thirty miles from Alert. The party was unable to travel further, so Lieutenant Parr volunteered to continue alone to get assistance. Travelling alone with only a pack of rations and an alpine stock he covered the thirty miles over the ice in only 24 hours.

Captain Nares led the relief party himself, arriving only 50 hours after Lieutenant Parr had left to get assistance. One member of the party, George Porter, a gunner, had died, but the remainder were returned to Alert without further loss of life.

Having seen the condition of the Northern Party, Captain Nares immediately dispatched a relief party to search for the Western Party. The relief was successful, finding the party the day after they had collapsed, unable to travel on on their own. The Western Party had mapped over 220 miles of unexplored coastline.

On 31 July, with all sledging parties from Alert in, Captain Nares ordered Alert to make way south to rejoin Discovery. Alert reached Lady Franklin Sound on 10 August.

On 12 July Lieutenant Fulford returned to Discovery with word that scurvy had affected the Greenland Party as well. Charles W. Paul, able seaman, and James T. Hand had died on the expedition and most